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**Pluralism, Immanence, Affect:
William Connolly's Political Philosophy**

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**Pluralism, Immanence, Affect:
William Connolly's Political Philosophy**

Suzanne Gallant

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the MA degree in Political Science

School of Political Studies
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Abstract

This thesis presents a synthetic and exegetical survey of William Connolly's writings over the past decade. The most important concepts in Connolly's political philosophy are explained in detail: identity formation through difference, resentment in late modernity, and the importance of *affect* for thought processes related to ethical and political judgment. Connolly's focus on the psychological and existential dimension of politics, and his serious engagement with the notion of *difference*, lead him to propose *deep pluralism* as a model for politics and ethics. This is based on his assessment of the positive dynamics at play in late modernity. Deep pluralism centres on the cultivation of an *ethos of engagement*, a distinctive sensibility which promotes the exercise of relational modesty, forbearance and generosity in our exchanges with others. Connolly's pioneering work on affect, immanence, culture, pluralism, fundamentalism and resentment show the value of his alternative framing of contemporary issues for political analysis.

*This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Bernard and Evangeline,
who have always given me a soft spot to land on.*

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Introduction

We are weighed down, every moment, by the conception and the sensation of Time. And there are but two means of escaping and forgetting this nightmare: pleasure and work. Pleasure consumes us. Work strengthens us. Let us choose.¹

The pleasure we derive from the representation of the present is due, not only to the beauty it can be clothed in, but also to its essential quality of being the present.²

To be just, that is to say, to justify its existence, criticism should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view, but a point of view that opens up the widest horizons.³

These passages from 19th century French poet Charles Baudelaire, the diagnostician of early modern capitalist society, express a bold affirmation of contingency, and a commitment to articulating the prevailing pressures and challenges of his society. His writings sought to reject the romantic notion of the timeless harmonies enveloping man in nature outside of his social context, and instead strived to represent the *dissonances* of early modern life. His work is thus characterized by a deep and existential *resonance*, which has secured his place as a transformative figure between romanticism and modernism/modernity.⁴

Few contemporary authors embody the 'present moment' with such resonance and sonority. Within political theory, this may be due to theorists splitting off into smaller communities characterized by numerous distinct readings of history and the present, and hermetically/hermeneutically sealed debates. One

¹ Charles Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare* (written c. 1865), published in *Intimate Journals*, sct. 111 (1887), trans. by Christopher Isherwood (1930), rev. by Don Bachardy (1989).

² Charles Baudelaire, repr. in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, ed. P.E. Charvet (1972), "The Painter of Modern Life," sect. 1, published in *L'Art Romantique* (1869).

³ Charles Baudelaire, repr. in *The Mirror of Art*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (1955). "Salon of 1846," sct. 1, published in *Curiosités Esthétiques* (1868).

⁴ For an illuminating essay that understands Baudelaire's work as a de-coding of modernity and thus as a transformative gesture in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the work of the philosopher in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, see Eugene W. Holland, "A Schizoanalytic Reading of Baudelaire: The Modernist as Postmodernist", *Postmodern Culture*, Vol. 4, No.1, September 1993.

important exception to this trend is William E. Connolly's contribution to political theory. Connolly's work attends to the concerns of many such theoretical communities, all the while transgressing the disciplinary borders that distinguish them. That is, he speaks not to specific literatures (liberalism, communitarianism, republicanism, continental thought, poststructuralism) but to the *questions* that are central to them. As such, Connolly has established himself as a key interlocutor in a number of wide-ranging contemporary debates, as well as one of the most penetrating and insightful diagnosticians of our age. This last point resides in the fact that Connolly's appeal turns partially on how well his work permits his readers to both understand and cope with the ambiguity, fast-paced changes, proliferation of identities and other accelerating pressures particular to late modern life. Thus, although always working from a position of contingency, Connolly 'opens up the widest horizons', echoing in a way the sentiments of the decadent poet.

Justification

This thesis will be concerned with a synthetic and exegetical work of William Connolly's writings over the ten years. I submit that there are four principal reasons for this endeavor. First, as of yet, there is no global interpretation of Connolly's work, of what it means and how it fits together.⁵ This fact belies Connolly's importance to political theory. From his role as a crucial interlocutor in contemporary theory, to his work as editor of *Political Theory* for over a decade, to his participation in seminal debates such as that which took place with Charles Taylor over the signification of the Nietzschean tradition, William Connolly is an important author in his own right.

⁵ The only work which comes close to a global interpretation of Connolly is Stephen White's 2000 book *Sustaining Affirmation – The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, in which he devotes a chapter to Connolly's perspective. White's account of Connolly, though insightful at times, remains partial and slightly dated as the fullest articulation of central concepts such as deep pluralism, micropolitical self-artistry and affect were to appear only in publications subsequent to 2000, namely in *Neuropolitics* (2002) and *Pluralism* (2005).

Second, Connolly has been, at times, badly misinterpreted and misunderstood. Various charges laid against him include "worshipping" ambiguity as an idol⁶, of being more apologetic than critical of distributions of power relations⁷, of fetishizing "new, provocative theory" instead of being concerned with politics per se⁸, and of affirming amoral sources which point toward a fascination with "the negation of life, with death and suffering".⁹ Whether these misrepresentations are due to Connolly's alternative method and style or to the density of his texts, it seems evident that a number of clarifications are in order.

Third, Connolly's work helps us to frame questions of political theory in an alternative manner. He participates in what he calls the countertradition in political and moral theory, spanning from Epicurus, Lucretius, and Spinoza, through Hume, Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze, which represent a dissenting point of view on questions such as the role of nature for political theory in comparison to more mainstream and entrenched approaches. At a minimum then, many of Connolly's insights may thus provide us with an interesting position from which to *triangulate* certain debates, for example the liberal-communitarian debate, by moving and arguing in the spaces *between* these contending views. More importantly, however, Connolly rearticulates, reaffirms and pushes forward this countertradition in light of contemporary social and political realities, and, in a similar vein, offers a good example of a poststructuralist/postmodernist theory which applies itself to contemporary politics.

Finally, Connolly's thinking is important on a variety of specific issues, including his engagement with affect and the visceral in politics, his expansion of the definition and significance of culture and faith for politics, his concern for

⁶ Stephen Schneck, "Connolly's Postmodern Liberalism", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Spring 1989): 281-290.

⁷ John R. Wallach, "Review of *Ethos of Pluralization*", *Political Theory*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (December 1997): 886-893.

⁸ Wallach, *Ibid.*, and Leslie Paul Thiele, "Review of *Identity/Difference*", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (September 1992): 777-778.

⁹ Charles Taylor, "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment", paper presented to Castelgandolfo Colloquium VII (August 1996): 9, and "Spirituality of Life and its Shadow", *Compass*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1996): 4.

theorizing politics within a framework that responds to the contemporary demands of pluralism, flux and adaptability, as well as his engagement with micropolitics, that is the slow and subtle molecular-like motion of the numerous components which make up political perception, popular opinion, 'public moods', feelings of affinity, etc. I will elaborate more fully on these points in the literature review in Chapter 1.

Objectives

My thesis will thus aim, first, to give a global and relatively systematic interpretation of Connolly's main concepts, concerns, diagnoses, and recommendations. Second, I will attempt to clarify and correct some of the more problematic and damning misinterpretations of his work. And third, I will locate, interpret, evaluate and apply his thought on a number of different issues and thus show the value of his framing of contemporary issues for political analysis. This last point merits further consideration here.

Consider Connolly's engagement with the notion of affect. For him, thinking seriously about affect and the visceral in politics forces political theory to ask questions in different ways: questioning the affective elements of politics adds a certain 'micropolitical' dimension to the already established 'macropolitical' landscape. Take the following illustration: a staunch advocate of women's reproductive rights is confronted with an image of a flinching, bloody, aborted fetus; he/she is subsequently overwhelmed by a bout of gut-wrenching nausea which lasts several minutes. This is neither an insignificant encounter, nor an isolated incident: feelings of attraction and repulsion can either intensify or undermine what we think on a conscious (rational) level. Visceral reactions such as these operate on an 'infrasensible' level of politics, that is, they represent particular impulses in the brain which maneuver below the level of consciousness and thus may not be approached or affected *directly*, but rather are more receptive to rhetorical devices and visual stimuli as seen in religious appeals. This in turn demands an answer to the question: how are we to interpret the intensity and influence of visceral reactions

such as disgust on our ethical sensibilities? Its importance for politics, and indeed for political philosophy, resides in the fact that systems of belief such as homophobia, racism, sexism, etc., are able to take advantage of these impulses by working on the visceral register of subjectivity in heightening the alienating sense of 'otherness'.

Connolly's notion of culture is equally interesting in its capacity and potential for enriching the way in which theorists look at the questions surrounding it. Collapsing the categories of faith, creed, ethnic or linguistic membership into a more broad and expansive view of what constitutes culture, Connolly addresses how a whole range of diverse affinities, dispositions, sensibilities and even systematic discriminations cut across traditional lines of commonality. This unusual way of conceptualizing identity as constructed through adherence to culture thus involves the possibility of there existing a large array of competing identities within a single subject, which are negotiated through time, and which may include affinities as strange and diverse as consumption patterns (vegetarianism, slow food movement), child-rearing philosophies, professional cultures such as 'corporate culture', or internet gaming communities. For Connolly, this would point to an interlayering of culture within individuals, but also horizontal and dynamic connections *between* different cultures. Attachment and loyalties would thus appear to be too multidimensional and ambiguous to be grasped fully by generalized conceptions of culture found in more classical models of political theory, such as in Rousseau (*la volonté générale*) and in Rawls (the overlapping consensus).

While more elaboration on these points is forthcoming, these examples already paint a picture of how Connolly's alternative framing of political questions may de-stabilize established philosophical problems (ethics and culture in these cases) by making new connections among their components, and realigning their concepts into new constellations. In following Deleuze and Guattari's notion of doing philosophy¹⁰, I maintain that this manner of alternatively framing (or

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1991), especially chapters 1 & 2.

transforming) political theory will impact and enhance our ability to accurately *describe* political reality and put forth viable *prescriptive* answers in response to them.

Method

My method in providing a global interpretation of Connolly's work will be based on a close, intertextual reading, what could be called a 'quasi-hermeneutical' analysis. This intertextual approach will better articulate certain aspects of Connolly's thought which I feel are unclear in sole reference to the author himself. As such, I will augment portions of my discussion of Connolly by relying on specific concepts found in Nietzsche and Deleuze, whom Connolly also uses, and by adding examples of my own where need be. I feel that these added expositions will help in presenting a fuller and more systematic account of Connolly's work, and thus will ensure a more 'satisfying' experience for the reader.

My use of intertextuality is not limited to explicit linkages made with other important texts, however. In remaining consistent with Connolly's poststructuralist ontology of immanence (discussed in Chapter 2), I have attempted to remain conscious of the intertextuality of my own reading and rereading of Connolly's texts. The ramifications that an immanentist position have for my method are that (a) I do not pretend to be able to provide a masterful interpretation of the author; and (b) I do not assume that my presentation of Connolly is unquestionable. This results from the problematic, fleeting position of the subject/reader in poststructuralist thought; since all meaning is in reference only to other texts in a web of signification, my own understanding has no potential to grasp 'perfect authenticity' or make decisive claims about exactly what the author 'really means'. Instead, my own enunciations reproduce the web of signification with slight variations depending on my own intertextual position. Thus the 'quasi-hermeneutical' terminology, with which I attempt to underscore the fact that no deep interpretation of a text is

possible, but I still may be able to tease out and communicate a certain intersubjective meaning.

Outline

My thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will consist of a literature review of contemporary political theory and will further justify and anchor William Connolly as an important and interesting author with whom to engage with in the course of this thesis. The second chapter will attempt to give an overview of Connolly's conception of the self, including processes of thought and identity formation, the role of affect, culture, community, and a brief introduction to what it means to work within a framework of immanence, all in the goal of laying the ontological groundwork for further understanding his view on contemporary political realities. The third chapter will deal with Connolly's diagnosis of contemporary politics and will thus address his main concerns/worries, what he views as the causes of these concerns, as well as what he believes to be the 'potentials of modernity', i.e. the hopeful, positive elements contained within late modernity. The final chapter will look at Connolly's prescriptive answers, his perspective on morality and ethics for current politics, and his 'ideal' view on pluralism. I will conclude the thesis by discussing a handful of critiques of Connolly's work that I feel are particularly poignant.

Chapter 1 – Situating Connolly: Framing, Triangulation, Key Questions

As stated in the introduction, one of my contentions concerning the value in looking at William Connolly's work is the way in which he helps us frame political theory questions in an alternative manner, thereby providing a position from which to triangulate certain established debates. I also mentioned that his work is important for examining a variety of specific issues, ranging from his notions of affect and culture through the acceleration of contemporary life and micropolitics. This introductory chapter will be concerned with further justifying and elaborating these claims through a brief review of contending literature in contemporary political theory. The following will thus elaborate more on the aforementioned key issues with which this thesis will be concerned; discuss the thoughts of a variety of key interlocutors on the given issues; provide a summary critique of them drawn from my own work and that of Connolly's; and finally give a brief preview of how Connolly's alternative approach to these same questions is insightful, interesting and potentially invaluable. I will proceed thematically, beginning with and spending the most time on the key issue of affect, being the most foreign concept to mainstream political theory in the series of issues I will be examining, as well as one of the most important threads flowing through my thesis.

1.1 – Affect

The theme of affect and the visceral has recently surfaced as an area of great interest for political theory. The limits of reason-centric thinking has been made evident, for one, through the existence of media-driven hype concerned with the affective dimensions of politics, highlighted in the same-sex marriage debate in this country or in the recent 2005 'right-to-life/right-to-die' struggle surrounding the Terri Shiavo case in the US. Moreover, the recent polarization of politics in the US, as well as the tremendous success of the political Right in that country has

emphasized the effectiveness of emotion-based appeals, evident in such political themes as the need to protect traditional family values, the necessary return to a (nostalgic and wholesome) golden-age, as well as the advocacy surrounding capital-punishment. In other words, the 'rules of the game' in contemporary times have clearly changed in favor of the magnetism of images and of attendant 'irrational consequence', and much in our western society (particularly 'political marketing') now rests upon the ability to move people by means other than rational dialogue or soundly constructed arguments. Newsroom editors, political strategists and corporate marketers alike are highly aware of, and have stood to gain from, the knowledge of what it means to 'strike a chord', i.e. to resonate with a person or group of persons on a deep, unconscious level and to effectively 'tap into' an imaginative (and often irrational) ideal. It remains to be seen how affect is dealt with by political theory, namely if and how it modifies conceptions of the subject, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Taking affect into account requires us to ask questions such as how powerful visceral feelings such as disgust, shame, the yearning for something lost, fear, anxiety, and desire impact our theorization of the political subject, his/her motivations and participation in public life.

Rawlsian Liberalism, Communitarian, and Martha Nussbaum's Views on Affect

John Rawls' stance on affect and the visceral is articulated mostly via his conception of the subject, and of the subject's place within a system of justice viewed as fairness. Over the course of his work, Rawls has exhibited two positions in regards to affect. In his early work, the veil of ignorance largely ignores the importance of affect, but in his later writings, Rawls attempts to take something like affect and the visceral realm into account, but nonetheless ends up making little room for them within his notion of public reason. John Rawls' early work contends that humans under the 'Veil of Ignorance', a fictive assembly of rational and impartial persons (which Rawls does not reduce to Hobbesian self-interest), would unanimously adopt certain principles of justice if their reasoning were based on general considerations,

i.e. with each contractor having no knowledge of her material position or potential faculties, talents, etc.¹¹ Although commentators may disagree about the value of this approach, one thing is clear: the visceral plays little to no role in this perspective. In his later work Rawls replaces his earlier comprehensive system of justice with the notion of the 'overlapping consensus'. This works as a basic set of political ideas whose validity extends only as far as the living consensus that supports it, and is meant to fit within any and all 'reasonable' comprehensive philosophical/moral doctrines or faiths. The potential for universal internalization and expression of the overlapping consensus is meant to allow for the smooth functioning of a pluralistic society. The stability or grounding of this view of justice requires that each individual citizen deems it rational to support, and willingly accepts it.¹² Here Rawls acknowledges that this support is dependent upon a historically informed/specific notion of public culture and reason.¹³ As such, an attempt is made here to understand reason as culturally/historically constituted and contingent, and to allow for a diversity of privately held beliefs and doctrines to be subsumed under the heading of public reason: "citizens affirm the ideal of public reason, not as a result of political compromise, as in a *modus vivendi*, but from within their own reasonable doctrines"¹⁴.

Charles Taylor, who is widely seen as affiliated to communitarian thought, has worked on the notion of emotion-based appeals in relation to his conception of morality and ethics. In keeping with a classical view of nature as inaugurated by Aristotle, later consolidated by Aquinas, and reformulated in various ways by Kant, Hegel and Merleau-Ponty, Taylor advances an organic and harmonious view of the process of thought and rationality where emotions play a significant role. For him, all persons share strong common emotional-moral responses such as disgust and admiration when placed in certain similar situations. Such responses tend to point

¹¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971): 128.

¹² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): lecture IV.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 218.

toward a common trend towards the moral and ethical life since they participate in a larger framework of imperative moral judgment to which we are attuned. Thus, since all persons can recognize moral responses when they occur, and since Taylor thinks that they are designed to be strong and moving, all persons can potentially access the greater moral sense that transcends or binds us all together. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor identifies these emotive responses as epiphanies, which are often triggered by art (especially Romantic art), though by no means limited to art, and they are evidence of the essential link between our sensitive faculties and an objective realm of morality:

We are now in an age in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through this part of personal resonance. This is true not only of epiphanic art but of the efforts, in philosophy, in criticism, which attempt the same search [...] The great epiphanic work actually can put us in contact with the sources it taps. It can *realize* the contact.¹⁵

Martha Nussbaum's blend of Aristotelian cosmopolitanism, feminism and neo-Rawlsian theory make her one of the more prominent moral theorists in contemporary theoretical dialogues. Of the authors reviewed so far, she strives the most directly to include affect or emotions in her political theory. One of her recent works, dedicated almost entirely to making this point, argues that our emotional lives have a highly discriminating rational life of their own, and that an acceptable theory of ethics must first possess an adequate theory of emotions.¹⁶ For Nussbaum, this involves retracing the cultural and historical sources of emotions. Emotions, in her view, are to be understood as 'eudaimonistic' tools that help us grow and develop to our full capacities. This is achieved through their pointing to the unresolved knots in our subjective and intersubjective personal histories which may hinder our development toward full realization as ethical beings.¹⁷ For

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self – The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989): 512.

¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) : 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.30-32.

Nussbaum, any noncognitive processes that may *seem* to exist within us at times – objectless emotions such as generalized depression or lethargy, not feeling ‘hooked-up’ to our emotions, or the feeling of being pushed around by an ‘external or amoral source of energy’ – are actually due to some element in our past, be it a troubling event in early life or an ancestral burden passed down through generations, that we do not fully comprehend.¹⁸ As such, “the understanding of any single emotion is incomplete unless its narrative history is grasped and studied for the light it sheds on the present response”.¹⁹ In other words, emotions are structured like a life narrative whose essential meaning may be uncovered and revealed through a developmental approach.

Critiques of Liberal, Communitarian and Martha Nussbaum's Views on Affect

The main problem with Rawls and Rawlsian liberalism's perspective on affect and emotions is that too little room is made for them. While it is clear, especially in the later Rawls, that there is space for such concepts as contingency, he also quickly squeezes out the prospect for affect in his notion of public reason. This is because he appears to assume that our ideas, our normative stances and our ‘civic identities’ are constituted a priori by conscious, rational means alone. Rawls thus risks downplaying or underestimating the role of forces of persuasion, domination, upbringing, community attachments and specific life experiences in the constitution of the subject, and indeed its repercussions for intersubjective experiences (which is a crucial element in Rawls' overlapping consensus). Moreover, the danger here is that Rawls oversimplifies the cognitive process by which ‘rationality’ comes about. How would his account of the subject, for example, help us explain the undeniable visceral force that permeated throughout and very much impacted the 2004 US Presidential Elections? In this case, voting intentions were not contingent on either candidate's capacity for reason, reflection and critical judgment (which are all,

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.78-79.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

interestingly enough, pillars of the democratic process itself). The results were rather indicative of the precedence of another type of voter concern: that is to say, for the average American, it all came down to a gut feeling as to which candidate was the most likeable, faithful and reliable person.

As for Taylor, while I am inclined to agree with him on several points regarding the affective dimension, he does tend to encourage his readers to view emotions as biological. That is, if emotions serve a functional, natural purpose, then they are *essentially naturalized*, and more specifically in the case of Taylor, feelings are naturalized *as* moral feelings. This equating of emotions with moral feelings may render Taylor unable to critically assess the historical contexts and the potentially negative and destructive face of affects that are socially constructed via, for example, Western-centric, patriarchic and racist settings, both historically and contemporaneously. For instance, how would Taylor account for the feelings of disgust that many people feel, and often vociferously express, when a panhandler or homeless person stops them on the street to ask for money or change?

Finally, Martha Nussbaum's case for the inclusion of emotion in political theory is laudable and at times compelling, however, the *way* in which she engages with emotion, i.e. *how* she goes about including emotions can be problematic. In refusing to reduce emotions to bodily processes, and thereby explicitly refuting the term 'affect' altogether and any role for biology²⁰, she argues for a perspective that places nothing outside of rational cognition.²¹ As such, Nussbaum refuses all conceptualizations of emotions outside of a strict rationalist framework, admitting that doing so would be methodologically difficult and may induce argumentative fallacies.²² While she may be right about it being tricky to engage with and properly conceptualize biological affects, such as a racing heart, sweaty palms, as well as noncognitive affects, such as generalized depression or anxiety, her reasons for avoiding such theorization are neither convincing nor sufficient. Moreover, despite

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25, 61n.

²¹ Ibid., pp.64-66.

²² Ibid., 61n.

the fact that emotions may potentially originate from the same source, Nussbaum underestimates how emotions may also have diverse sets of triggers, such as the contexts and complexities which are the very stuff of contemporary politics. Thus it would seem that Nussbaum's approach to a singular emotive and developmental theory is not subtle enough to come to grips with the complex and multifaceted aspects of contemporary ethical issues.

Connolly's Take on Affect

William Connolly's take on affect stems from a Nietzschean-inspired model of the subject which does not view the mind and body as distinctly split. While also basing himself on recent neuroscience research, he argues for the interlayering of biological processes, other noncognitive processes and conscious, rational thought. He thus views the process of thinking as highly decentered. His theory largely refutes the commonly held 'upright' character of rationality, and instead works to complexify our understanding of thought itself, of its relationship to subjectivity and intersubjectivity. I will reserve further elaboration on this question for section 2.1 of the thesis. Suffice it to say for now that his perspective on affect also brings him to question the role of micropolitics or 'techniques' for political theory, which I will address in section 1.5.

1.2 – Culture

Given increasing international immigration trends, and the pluralization of identity of this globalized era, cultural difference has become an important aspect of life. Contemporary political theory has had to progressively include an account of culture in its models and conceptions in order to remain relevant to current politics. Among others, theorists have asked themselves the following questions: how does culture impact individual citizen-subjects?; given a culturally diverse society, is a public

culture possible to achieve?; how can we inspire collective action given such a plurality of identities?; how should politics deal with various cultural demands?

Rawlsian Liberalism and Communitarian Views on Culture

John Rawls in his later writings and Rawlsian liberalism have been mostly concerned with theorizing a system of justice which is neutral on questions of religion and culture and their competing demands. In attempting to find grounding for a consensus on the basic structure of society, this strand of liberalism wants to establish only what is *minimally* necessary to the constitutional ordering of a just society of equal citizens.²³ As such, its hopes are to give the maximum amount of freedom for its citizens to choose and live by whatever 'reasonable' doctrine they see fit. Liberalism and pluralism are thus thought to be able to coexist. As previously discussed, this agreement of basic structures is arrived at by means of an overlapping consensus, which is itself made possible by the fact that citizens reflect an implicit 'public reason' that gives them the "moral power to have a conception of the good"²⁴. Moreover, this public moral identity is irrespective of one's private, cultural, and religious beliefs since society's conception of the person is that of equal citizenship, which itself reflects a "deeper aim and commitment" than that of any particular, private belief.²⁵

The communitarian notion of culture has largely been developed as a response to the critique of the reductionist account of the self found in liberalism. As such, communitarians such as Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel are adamant critics of the 'unencumbered self' that liberalism puts forth, that is, the vision of a self which is "freed from the sanctions of custom and tradition and inherited status, unbound by moral ties antecedent to choice [and which is thus] installed as a

²³ Rawls, Op. Cit., *Political Liberalism*, pp.xix-xxi; xxviii-xxix.

²⁴ Ibid., p.30.

²⁵ Ibid.

sovereign, cast as the author of the only obligations that constrain"²⁶. Communitarians hold that this ideal version of the self is blind to the psychological and social impacts of community attachments, to race, sex and class, as well as to the cultural and material contexts in which individuals are rooted, which are also determining factors in one's ethical judgments. As such, Rawlsian liberalism "negates identity by forcing people into a homogeneous mold that is untrue to them"²⁷. Hence, communitarians tend to view cultural affiliations and attachments as important and incontrovertible constitutive parts of the self. This "recognition" is thus translated into a larger role for culture within their thinking. In Sandel's thought, this takes the shape of thinking about the *how* of ethical commitments. In other words, if the liberal state is to succeed in securing a scheme of equal rights, and if it cannot legitimately appeal to a sense of common culture or community, it must then find an alternative way to inspire or motivate moral and ethical action. Sandel concludes that Republicanism and civic virtues must be brought back as a public philosophy so that we might make politics meaningful in people's lives.²⁸ For Taylor, on the other hand, this larger role for culture and community attachments means allocating special minority rights in recognition of cultural difference, and in order to accommodate the survival of distinct/different societies. This recognition is usually granted in the form of exceptional group rights such as in the case of aboriginal communities, linguistic minorities (Taylor is in favour of Bill 101 in Quebec), and historically disadvantaged groups.²⁹ According to Taylor then, common societal goals and safeguards to protect special status groups (cultural and other) *can* go hand in hand.

²⁶ Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent – America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996): 12.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, "Politics of Recognition", in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 43.

²⁸ Sandel, Op. Cit., pp.317-351.

²⁹ Taylor, Op. Cit., "Politics of Recognition", pp.58-59.

Critiques of Rawlsian Liberalism and Communitarian Views on Culture

The main difficulties with Rawls' approach to culture have already been, for the most part, expressed in my discussion of the communitarian critique of this strand of liberalism. However, I would like to briefly revisit this critique by articulating it somewhat differently: Rawlsian liberalism not only assumes that we *can* suspend our cultural identities when entering the 'public forum', but also takes for granted that this a desirable thing. For one, the clean separation between private self and public self, the ability to leave one's identity 'in the closet' when engaging with political or ethical questions, appears to be idealistic, overly simplified and ultimately untenable. In addition, this position presupposes that we have nothing to gain from culture (and by extension, our contingent experiences as individuals) when faced with the fundamental questions of justice, equality and morality in society. In relation to these critiques, I am inclined to ask: how would Rawls explain the undeniable energetic impulse of religion in the body politic today? One has only to look at recent electoral trends in the US and the emphasis placed on religious morality in the public sphere to get a sense of the limits of a framework that tries to suspend, or perhaps avoid all together, the impact that our private identities have on our public judgments.

Communitarian thought makes great strides in providing a thicker conception of the self in relation to cultural identity, but nonetheless ends up engaging with culture in a manner which is too highly centered. For Connolly, the encumbered self of communitarianism tends to cling on to a certain conceptual rigidity that risks *overdetermining* the self. Instead of viewing the 'self' and 'culture' as both set within a web of intersubjective meaning which gets negotiated differently through time and in every individual, communitarians tend to understand culture as 'acting upon' the subject in a unidirectional manner (more on this in section 2.1). This also engenders a penchant for viewing culture as 'a problem to be dealt with', as also implied in terms like 'accommodation' and 'tolerance'. To the contrary, Connolly argues that there is an inherent world of richness in the very fact of diversity, and

that this should not be viewed a priori as 'a problem' that we must somehow make an exception for, but instead should represent the point of departure for thinking about politics (more on this in chapter 4).

Connolly's Take on Culture

As opposed to the encumbered self of the communitarians, Connolly posits an 'embedded self', that is, an understanding of at once the culturally constituted nature of being and the layered character of culture itself. This perspective, in a way, engages with the impact of culture on the subject while at the same time preserving a margin of agency within its conception of the subject's identity. It is a view that, if we were to imagine such notions on a continuum, is oddly situated somewhere in the space *between* the autonomous/sovereign liberal self and the encumbered communitarian self. Since I devote an entire section in Chapter 2 to fully explain this notion, I will simply say for the time being that Connolly's conception of culture is one that permits him to expand the borders and criteria of what constitutes culture, thereby allowing him to consider a host of unconventional cultural identities in his theorizations.

1.3 – Acceleration of Contemporary Reality

Increasingly, political theory has been confronted with identity politics – new, emerging identities and their various public demands – as well as with a series of technological innovations which have spawned important thematic sub-fields within the discipline. From the theoretical questions centered around post-humanism, bio-power and the resulting ethical debates surrounding stem-cell research and cloning, to the age of digitalization and cybercommunications and the new forms of community and resistance linked to the global dissemination of the internet, we seem to be caught up in a world of fast-paced changes and mobility. Though

attempting to keep up with all of these changes is enough to make anyone feel dizzy, contemporary political theory is not immune to their effects. Whether they view them in a favourable light or not, theorists have progressively felt the need to give an account of these phenomena in order to remain relevant. Certain lines of questioning include: can we still speak of a universal conception of the subject, and if not, how can political theory overcome the limits of particularity amid such increasing diversity and fragmentation?; is the state withering away under weight of transnational and globalized forces (economic, cultural, social), and if so, can we still speak of a 'public' sphere per se?; should political theory seek to preserve certain status-quo identities, values, institutions or should it embrace fluid conceptions of politics?

Rawlsian Liberalism, Communitarian and Judith Butler's Views on Stasis and Flux

While Rawlsian liberalism and communitarian thought have not explicitly addressed the question of the accelerated tempo of late modern existence, their positions can largely be understood siding with stasis, and the forces of the status quo. Rawls' notion of the overlapping consensus, as discussed earlier, relies on a historically informed and specific instantiation of public culture and reason – the same one, in fact, that allowed democracy to come about in the first place. As such, Rawls has an interest in keeping a static version of what constitutes identity and of what should be the self's relation to the state; if this very instantiation of public culture and public reason were to, down the road, cease to exist in its actual form, the preconditions for the overlapping consensus as put forward by Rawls himself may also perish³⁰.

As for communitarianism, especially in Taylor's thought, there is a sense that engaging with culture is a highly centered process (see the discussion above). In other words, Taylor's recognition and accommodation of distinct cultures tends to

³⁰ Rawls, Op. Cit., *Political Liberalism*, lecture VI.

posit a single, homogenous (central) culture, which is surrounded by multiple satellite minorities, defined by different ethnic, religious or linguistic identities. Working from this position of center and periphery, Taylor's analysis is not necessarily inclined to also consider the multiplication of identities and other changing realities occurring *within* the dominant, central culture, which result from the *ongoing* process of pluralization. Thus his account of the accommodation of difference and of what counts *as* difference seems to rely on a set of criteria that privileges minorities that are well established, and that can be judged to "have cultural value"³¹.

Judith Butler's work on 'performativity theory' engages with themes of fluidity, especially in relation to subjectivity and identity. Her work on gender norms explores how linguistic constructions produce reality via the speech-acts we enunciate and reiterate on a daily basis. For Butler, in constantly reiterating and thus performing social norms and ideologies derived from our surroundings, we enact that very 'reality' as "a kind of persistent impersonation which passes for the real".³² Hence, the act of speaking itself is to be seen as a performance that materializes that which is being said, though this "materialized reality" remains a social construct. Thus we may believe that our identities and actions are products of our autonomy or self-will, while in fact they are retroactively constructed through our enactments of hegemonic social norms. This performativity and reproduction of hegemonic norms, however, is not without agency. In the act of signification and resignification, Butler affirms the possibility of *subversive repetition*, i.e. a critical variation on the norm,³³ akin to the possibility of genetic mutation even within pre-discursively determined DNA sequence coding. Hence, she affirms that in a world

³¹ Taylor, Op. Cit., "Politics of Recognition", pp. 62-67. Taylor wants to be able to distinguish between allowing for cultural survival and recognizing the universal worth of all cultures since he wants to draw a line in regard to morality somewhere. As such, he calls for a judgment on the *value* of cultural expression (of others). Though he admits that finding criteria for doing so is difficult, he still thinks that they do exist *in principle*.

³² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990): viii.

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

marked by hegemonic forces of domination, there is a potential for change through subversive performativity.

Critiques of John Rawls, Communitarian and Judith Butler's Views on Stasis and Flux

One of the critiques that Connolly directly reproaches to Rawls is that his system of justice tends to freeze and restrict personhood to its liberal-secular version, arguably leaving little room for as of yet undeveloped modes of being and identity. As such, Rawls invites us to deduce that the reasonableness of the liberal, secular individual is what is most appropriate for the practice of justice.³⁴ Not only does this "thin" version of the self hinder the possibility of a more rich and telling account of self-formation, identity, difference and its implications for political action and judgments on morality, but it also produces what Connolly would call a 'stingy sensibility' toward the politics of becoming. That is, Rawls ignores the importance of occasional disruptive social and cultural movements/events in breaking up and challenging established codes of politics and justice. In posing a self-sufficient model of justice, Rawls privileges the *indispensability of justice* over the "*radical insufficiency of justice to itself*"³⁵, instead of seeing that the two in fact exist in a state of tension. In other words, Rawls wants to fix, limit and freeze his conception of personhood and liberal public space when everything else within it and around it, be it culture, communication, or economics, submits to numerous and frequent transformations. This lack of "wiggle room" within his system of justice is arguably ill suited for accurately diagnosing and prescribing politics in today's world of fast-pace change and flux.

Charles Taylor's view, and similarly the communitarian approach, tend to engage with culture, difference and identity in a manner that is not very sensitive to new, emerging identities. For this reason, it can be said that they do not fully

³⁴ William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

appreciate the density of contemporary identity politics. Communitarianism fails to acknowledge that identity flows *beyond* distinctions of ethnicity, religion and language and onto other, more “murky” and non-traditional categories of identity. These categories are as different and diverse as affinities in the domains of sexuality, sensuality, dietary habits, child-rearing practices, consumption patterns, leisure activities and hobbies; in ignoring these, communitarianism’s framework for thinking about politics can be interpreted as overly rigid. It is unclear, for instance, how Taylor and others would deal with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transvestite identities. Or, more poignantly, how does judging the ‘cultural value’ of lesser-known differences, of types of identities that are new or haven’t even come be, figure into Taylor’s framework? Here Connolly would note that an understanding more appropriate to the flux of contemporary reality would view pluralism not as a fixed set of criteria or cultural borders, but as a process of pluralization, the outcome of which being never completely discernible.

Judith Butler’s work on performativity and the potential for subversion within it highlights very well the manner in which change may occur at the level of subjectivity and identity. Her framework thus lends itself very well to taking into account and examining the tension between stasis and flux for instance. However, it could be said that while her view acknowledges the contingent and socially constructed aspects of subjectivity, it does not put this into relation with the also contingent and shifting character of technological development, economic transformations, and the mutations occurring within ‘nature’ itself, such as climate change. In other words, Butler’s work offers an interesting if not invaluable look at the microcosmic dimension of subversion, but tends to ignore the macrocosmic picture, and the relationship between these two levels of analysis. I would be interested in questioning, for example, the relationship between the general tendency toward acceleration of tempo in late modern life and the perceived multiplication of subversive identities and cultural change happening on a large scale.

Connolly's Take on Stasis and Flux

Connolly's perspective on pluralism tends to view diversity and change from a process-oriented framework (as opposed to outcome-oriented), whereby pluralization means making room for yet unforeseen identities and occasional disruptive movements within one's conception of politics. Working from a stance that privileges an immanentist framework for political theory, Connolly posits that at once culture, biology, nature and self are open-ended systems (more on this in section 2.4). For this reason, Connolly argues that as theorists we must cultivate a critical responsiveness to the movement of difference in order to enable ourselves to recompose or modify social standards if so required, and in order to provide us with the "suppleness of mind" to deal with the sometimes new and surprising events which can unfold in the aftermath (more on this in Chapter 4).

1.4 – Micropolitics

From neighbourhood gossip, to casual chatting at the office cooler, barbershop, local pub, family diner table, church group or community association, a myriad of opinions, impressions, affects and resonances are exchanged and intersubjectively negotiated. In the same way, the posture, tone, intensity, facial expressions and positioning of the hands of an interlocutor can convey a lot without ever being expressly articulated, and can influence our judgments about the person or about what is being said. That is to say that many quotidian elements below our field of conscious perception do slow work upon us and help shape our explicit, conscious opinions. The significance of this is that many micropolitical elements emanating from numerous innocuous and obscure sites hook up to the 'infrastructure' of macropolitics. Not unrelated to affect, many political campaigns, especially televised ones, play on the register of micropolitics: for instance, without explicitly expressing

that an opponent is effeminate, a commercial can nonetheless convey that very message by stating that he/she is 'soft on crime', of having no backbone when it comes to war, of being a tree-hugging environmentalist. Perhaps a picture of the candidate meeting with a group of gay constituents will be selected to be in the background while these messages blare through. This tactic may be successful on some, and not upon others: it depends on the numerous other micropolitical components that one encounters and the degree of critical reflexivity one regularly applies. Micropolitics is thus the slow, subtle molecular-like motion of the composition and recomposition of the numerous components which make up political perception, popular opinion, 'public moods', feelings of affinity, etc., both on an individual and collective basis. As such, some lines of micropolitical questioning include: what are some of the micropolitical tactics being deployed in contemporary politics?; to what extent are they effective and why?; what does an analysis of micropolitics tell us about political action and politics in general?; can we cultivate certain micropolitical techniques for positive, or affirmative ends?

Deliberative Democracy and Judith Butler's Views on Micropolitics

Another widely debated variety of liberalism in recent years is deliberative democracy, which holds that it is possible to diminish conflict and increase the accommodation of differences through public deliberation. Something micropolitical occurs, according to proponents of this view, when one engages in meaningful debate since the process has affective and emotional consequences for its participants. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson believe that by giving 'acceptable reasons' as the grounding for the laws we endorse as citizens or representatives, the resulting disagreements (if consensus between all parties is not possible) will be more 'respectable' than if we forego the deliberative exercise. As such, "deliberation cannot make incompatible values compatible, but it can help participants recognize the moral merit in their opponents' claims when those claims

have merit”³⁶. For deliberative democratic theory, it is by appealing to a middle ground of rationality, defined as the advancing of reasoned or moral arguments, that we can *potentially* accommodate all conflicting points of view. Moreover, by stipulating that the deliberative exercise will render disagreements more respectable, even if no consensus prevails, the authors are indeed stating that, somehow, against all ‘rational odds’, political subjects tend to feel linked or ethically obliged to respectfully accept their political Other given that they have actively engaged with them in a meaningful debate. Akin to toleration, the resulting feelings of mutual respect, according to deliberative democrats, are “a form of agreeing to disagree”³⁷. However, “mutual respect demands more than toleration. It requires a favourable attitude toward, and constructive interaction with, the persons with whom one disagrees”.³⁸ It is the fact that such an affirmative by-product can ensue from deliberation, that it can be worthwhile to pursue such an exercise regardless of the idealistic nature of its primary objective (consensus among all parties).

As discussed in section 1.3, Butler’s concept of performativity stipulates that our subjection to social norms and codes is an internal, self-definitional process whereby hegemonic power dynamics participate in the constitution of the self while at the same time being constituted by the self. As such, in repeating normalized behaviours or roles, for example, we may also introduce a slight (or micro) variation on the norm, thereby effectively subverting it. Such micro-work on our self-identification is significant since the norms and symbolic codes that regulate society are socially constructed and thus intersubjectively understood. The more people subvert straight identity as the only legitimate sexual affiliation, the more straight identity will lose its essential meaning *as dogma* in the intersubjective web of norms. Cynthia Weber highlights a good example of such subversive micro work in

³⁶ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004): 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a 1998 article entitled "Performative States".³⁹ She applies Butler's performativity theory to analyze a two-page ad for the magazine *Men's Health* in the Business Section of the *New York Times* which features a 'provocative' photograph of African-American artist and cross-dresser RuPaul "wearing a pair of fishnet tights, and a zippered-front, two-tone leotard...[and] the colours of the US flag".⁴⁰ Under his photograph appear a series of titles: 'Boxers of Briefs?' ; 'Habits you Picked up from Your Dad' ; 'The New Definition of Manhood' ; and the magazine's trademark slogan 'Tons of useful stuff for regular guys'. At first glance, it is difficult to see "how this image of a cross dressed, racially marginalised male as an ideal of healthy – even patriotic – American manhood would be enticing enough to the readership of the *New York Times* Business Section to sell issues of 'Men's Health'".⁴¹ After all, "there seems to be little that the upwardly mobile, predominantly white, heterosexual male readership of the Business Section has in common with RuPaul".⁴² However, by coming to understand subjectivity as performativity and as 'persistent impersonation' as Butler does (whether one is impersonating someone of the same sex or gender, of the other sex or gender or oneself), we can begin to grasp where this advertisement strategy comes from: "'Being' a subject then – especially a 'regular' subject – entails a lot of hard work, both because it is impossible to simply 'be' an identity and because what counts as 'regular' is always changing".⁴³ The businessmen readership then, without necessarily identifying with RuPaul per se, nonetheless can identify with what he represents, i.e. the laying to bear of the performativity of subjectivity itself, in particular masculine subjectivity, and perhaps overall of the artificiality of the sex/gender categories. Arguably, such subversive advertisements are successful because of the micropolitical flows and negotiations which take place within our fluid subjectivities, and which are also at the same time the object of intersubjective transactions/dialogues.

³⁹ Cynthia Weber, "Performative States", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1998): 77-96. The ad in question was featured in the *New York Times*, April 1st 1996, p. C7.

⁴⁰ Weber, Op. Cit., p. 77.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp.77-78.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 79.

Critiques of Deliberative Democracy and Judith Butler's Views on Micropolitics

Though Gutmann & Thompson *do* acknowledge the micropolitical aspects of deliberation, such elements of their thought are very much undertheorized. The affective and emotional consequence of feeling ethically bound to our interlocutors and the resulting feeling of mutual respect to which deliberative democrats refer *does* seem to be driving at something intuitively important; yet no account or explanation of this odd, purportedly spontaneous occurrence is given. Perhaps the authors' preoccupation with the provision of only 'rational arguments', satisfying their criteria of 'moral reasonableness', as rules for deliberation has limited what they can say in this regard.⁴⁴ One thing seems clear, however: this production of respect across stark differences cannot be accounted for by reason alone. Some work on thinking about the affective/emotional dimensions of politics may be necessary in this case. Similarly, I think that Gutmann and Thompson's tendency to undertheorize the micropolitical aspects of their framework render them less sensitive to some of the dynamics of difference at play in deliberation. Notably, the authors want to restrict the possibility of employing religious arguments in deliberation under the grounds that appealing to the authority of God or the Bible "close[s] off any possibility of publicly assessing or interpreting the content of the claims put forward by the authority".⁴⁵ This setting aside and exclusion of all religious controversy from the exercise of public deliberation will obviously not find much traction among many religious individuals and groups. Perhaps more importantly, it also means that deliberative democracy is precluded from even attempting to help mend the points of disagreement separating religious and secular peoples, which is arguably one of the most important social and political problems in contemporary times. This area of conflict is where something like deliberative democracy may be needed the most. And for those that would invoke the

⁴⁴ See Gutmann and Thompson, Op. Cit., "Principles of Preclusion", pp.66-78.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.72.

importance of the separation of Church and State, I would respond that though Gutmann and Thompson feel that the institutions of government should be more deliberative, their theory is by no means limited to those instances of official power. Deliberative democracy is often meant to be applied to a wide range of political and civic associations including "corporations and labour unions, professional and residential associations, and even families and friendship circles"⁴⁶. Moreover, many proponents of deliberative democracy believe that this model of politics is more viable on a small scale than on a large scale. And finally, the success and recent proliferation of interfaith groups is evidence that discussion, exchanges, and the promotion of respect between individuals who profess vastly different spiritual and religious outlooks are indeed possible and worthwhile.⁴⁷

Butler's account of micropolitical dynamics is certainly not undertheorized; in fact, it may be slightly overtheorized or at the very least, too highly concentrated in scope. In other words, while performativity theory and the idea of subversion of identity contained within it are illuminating on a number of fronts, namely political agency, Butler does not equip us with a more general theory of the workings of perception, images, emotions, and of how these elements blend together to formulate conscious thought. While it may not be her intention to provide a systematic, all-encompassing account of politics, a more general framework that would help us better situate these questions within more global considerations of politics would be an invaluable part of a robust theory of micropolitics.

Connolly's Take on Micropolitics

Connolly's perspective on micropolitics is largely informed by his conception of affect, and of an affectively layered understanding of the self as discussed in section 1.1. As such, Connolly wants to examine the subterranean elements circulating

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.32.

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive list of interfaith groups operating in North America, see "Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance", http://www.religioustolerance.org/tol_loca1.htm, consulted on November 21, 2006.

between individual sensibilities, public perception and political engagement, arguing that these elements play an important role in the shaping of various faiths, identities and political creeds. In particular, Connolly advocates an ethical strategy which involves micropolitical work on the self: a kind of experiential self-artistry that helps recraft vengeful, resentful, jealous, anxious and other 'stingy' feelings and attitudes that have become entrenched in the self (more on this in chapter 4).

In this chapter, I situated Connolly's thought in regards to some of the leading authors in contemporary political theory. Though providing only a brief exegesis of his work on a variety of key themes and questions, I showed Connolly's contribution to be not only interesting and engaging, but at times uniquely insightful as well as pertinent to current politics. The following chapters will revisit these themes in greater length and put forward a global interpretation of Connolly's writings. I will begin with an analysis of Connolly's overall framework for looking at politics, his view on the nature of the subject, intersubjectivity and community – what could be called his 'ontology'.

Chapter 2 – 'Ontological' Framework: Immanence and the Interlayering of the Self, Culture and Nature

This chapter will be concerned with laying the groundwork for understanding Connolly's views on politics, ethics and morality. I will thus present an analysis of some of the basic elements of Connolly's worldview or 'ontology' in the hopes that it will allow for a better overall comprehension of his thought. Although Connolly rarely addresses the question of his own ontology directly, and in spite of the fact that his postmodern sensibilities may even lead him to reject the term 'ontology' altogether, the various components which inform his thought can nevertheless be said to constitute a coherent and consistent set. Since Connolly does not resort to traditional ontological and metaphysical foundations, his thought may strike many readers as difficult, unusual or suspicious. But in Connolly's case, the lack of a strong and centred foundation from which to proceed does *not* amount to an inability to affirm a certain substratum for thinking about politics. Perhaps it is, as Stephen White terms it, more a question of a 'weak ontology' than of the absence of ontology, whereby 'weak ontology' refers to an approach that asserts commitments to fundamentals while at the same time recognizing and addressing their historical and essentially contestable nature.⁴⁸ This formulation, however, may still be too forceful – but if in Connolly's case, we cannot speak of ontology or of 'weak ontology', then how should we characterize the principles informing his theoretical framework? Simply put, I think that Connolly understands these basic components of his thought as passing "an elemental test of fidelity to the world", and that it is this criterion, overall, that he views as most significant.⁴⁹

In this chapter I will present what I perceive to be the key elements of Connolly's philosophical framework. I will begin by addressing the 'simplest denominator' of Connolly's worldview, namely his view of the self; I will build onto his view of the self through an assessment of the nature of intersubjectivity,

⁴⁸ Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation – The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 2005): 10.

followed by an account of his perspective on community. Finally, with all of these components in place, I will then end the chapter by examining what may be described as his model of inspiration, that is to say his commitment for theorizing politics from an immanentist perspective.

2.1 – The Nature of the Self

Embedded, Culturally Layered Self

While the standard Rawlsian version of subjectivity has put forth a self that is able to separate her private identity from her public identity, and while the communitarian critique of Rawlsian liberalism has put forward the model of the 'encumbered self', William Connolly has instead opted for an 'embedded self'. Rawlsian liberalism assumes that individuals are able to leave their religious, cultural and other contextual particularities at home when entering the public realm, effectively splitting the private 'cultural' self from the rational and moral figure of the autonomous public self. In attempting to correct this reductionist perspective of the unencumbered self central to liberal theory, communitarians such as Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel have stressed the psychological and social impacts of community or cultural attachments as determining factors in one's forming of ethical judgment and political positioning. For Connolly, though communitarians make great strides in providing a richer, more complex account of the constitution of the self in comparison to Rawlsian liberalism, there remains a conceptual rigidity which risks artificially over-determining the self. Connolly holds that communitarians engage with cultural density in a manner that is too highly centred. For instance, while for Taylor and Sandel the aim of better understanding modern subjectivities is directly linked to the aim of fashioning a moral authority appropriate to these subjectivities, Connolly does not believe that a single moral authority can govern all

subjects. His approach to understanding the self is thus fundamentally decentered from the outset. As I will show, Connolly's 'embedded self' not only highlights the culturally constituted nature of being, but also the layered nature of culture itself. In this section I will address Connolly's view of the subject by outlining, first, how culture is seen to impact the self; second, how the self-culture relationship is inseparable from embodied experience; third, how a layered conception of culture helps to call attention to a whole set of cultural rituals and practices which habitually do not register on the radar of political theory, and finally, I will flesh out one such practice, the act of viewing films.

For Connolly, the interaction between culture and the self (and its 'ontological' implications) are not to be understood merely as culture acting upon the self in a 'unidirectional' manner, e.g. a centred, rational subject meets a powerful 'particularist force' which complexifies, decenters and determines it in a specific manner. To begin with, the relationship between the self and culture is much more dynamic. Second, culture is never a stand-alone elemental constituent of the self, it is always *already mixed into the self*. In other words, culture and the biological organism that is the 'self' exist together in a continuous network of sorts, thereby constituting a zone of indiscernibility where neither the subject nor the community/context/culture exist as a definitive separate entity. This line of thinking denotes that Connolly understands the subject as corporeal, as being *embodied* (I will explain this in great length in the following section).

But what is Connolly saying here besides the fact that culture and the self are mutually constitutive or intersubjectively constituted? After all, intersubjectivity is not a new concept in cultural theory or in philosophy of language. The point here is that culture is not an abstract thought to which we adhere. Culture is inseparable from embodied experience because it is at once composed and consolidated through the subject/body, through enacting habits, rituals, embodied dispositions and sensibilities. "Many cultural theorists speak of the body. But many who do so continue to reduce [cultural] ritual to a mechanism through which beliefs are

represented⁵⁰ and thus understand ritual to symbolize something already there and not as participating in the composition of the beliefs themselves. Thus for Connolly "it is not sufficient to say that culture consists of a 'symbolic realm'"⁵¹. Furthermore, the component of culture as "embodiment in repetitive practices [...] help[s] constitute the dispositions, sensibilities and ethos through which meaning is lived [and] intellectual beliefs are settled."⁵² The enacting of a cultural ritual is thus set upon the backdrop of several registers of the self that can negotiate, with every repetition, either a variation or consolidation (or both) of that very ritual, of its meaning to us, of our sensibility toward it, etc., with significant subjective variations depending on the individual. Hence culture for Connolly does not simply (over)determine the subject, it oscillates in a perpetual conversation with the self/body.

Moreover, another interesting consequence of Connolly's view of the self is that his unique angle for analyzing the self-culture dynamic highlights a whole series of cultural rituals and practices that normally fall below the register of political theory. Viewing culture as layered and as embodied experience allows the inclusion of rituals of everyday life or what we may call minor practices such as family rituals, "neighborhood gossip, classroom routine, dormitory and urban apartment living, occupational disciplines, professional practices, individual exercises, films and TV dramas"⁵³, etc. Each one of these rituals of everyday life helps constitute our relational selves and represents the very makeup of our culturally layered identities. Consider the experience of watching a film such as *Transamerica* in which the protagonist is a transgendered person. Rawlsian liberalism, given its tendency to separate the private self from the public self, would not consider viewing film as being relevant to our understanding of the 'public self' nor to politics writ large. Since the state must remain neutral in regards to the particular goods of its citizens,

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.57.

⁵¹ William Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota Press, 2002): 63.

⁵² Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p.56.

⁵³ Ibid., p.65.

political theory, in turn, does not concern itself with the processes involved in the shaping of individual views, opinions or inclinations. What matters most is the overall amalgamation of individual commitment to a morality or public reason which supersedes any particularistic penchant or perspective.

The communitarian version of the encumbered self, on the other hand, would tend to take the moral implications of the film more seriously. For Sandel, the moral content of such a film would tend to be pertinent, but only to the degree that it would help bolster a public philosophy which seeks to render politics relevant for individuals. Taylor, in all likelihood, would ultimately want to judge the value of the cultural expression being put forward by the film in order to determine its place within the sources of modern morality, and if deemed to be external to these sources, determine whether or not it warrants accommodation.

Connolly's attention to minor cultural practices means that for him, far more than for liberals or communitarians, the viewing of film is an important activity which demonstrates the complex linkages between politics, culture and subjectivity. The combination of images, sound and dialogue impacts on the self's understanding of and sensibility toward what is being shown on the screen. In viewing *Transamerica*, for example, the viewer could be put off at first by what she perceives to be a deviant form of gender. Then, at about half way through the film, the viewer is surprised by the level of panic and anxiety she feels when the protagonist experiences a harsh form of discrimination in a given scene. During the remainder of the film, the viewer slowly and hesitantly acclimatizes herself to feeling empathy toward the transgendered protagonist. The point is not that political films have moral impacts on viewers, who either accept or refuse the cultural content to which they are confronted. The themes presented in a given film will have varying effects on different subjects, according to how they individually respond to the film's substratum of style, sound, mood, or to whether they find the dialogues or actors' performances convincing. Rather, the point is that viewing films, with or without overt political intention behind them, is a direct subjective *experience* of negotiating for oneself the meaning of a given cultural expression. The meaning and the extent

of the impact can also change as subjectivity becomes intersubjectivity in the event of, for example, discussing a film with friends over a beer, or later checking reviews and blog entries on the internet to see what has been already said of the film (I shall discuss this further in section 2.3). For Connolly, the relational work that we do on ourselves when viewing films, though seemingly minor in impact, is thus at once significant (politically, in this case) and revealing as to the changing dynamics of an embodied subjectivity which negotiates her sensibilities and attitudes with the world around her. Much of this work of subjective oscillation takes place during the daily drudgery of things we take for granted, or 'minor practices', including the viewing of films, but also conversations over family dinners and the experience of living in university and college dormitories.

To summarize, Connolly's understanding of the embedded subject neither ignores culture's role in the constitution of the subject, nor predetermines its impact on the subject. Connolly's self is one that is firmly situated in her surroundings and context, while not being essentially moulded by these factors. As such, Connolly's subject could arguably be said to be located somewhere *between* the autonomous figure of the liberal self and the encumbered communitarian self. Since culture and self here are understood as forming a continuous and open-ended network of mutual influence and negotiation, a whole series of minor cultural practices is brought to the forefront. The next section of this chapter will further explore the 'nature' of Connolly's embedded self by drawing attention to its meaning as 'embodied'.

Visceral Register of Being

I mentioned earlier that Connolly's view of the subject is necessarily an embodied one and that experience is always embedded. But exactly what role does the body play in relation to the self? How does this help us better understand and theorize subjectivity? And what justification is given to support the claim that the self is embodied? I will show in this section that Connolly seeks to (1) challenge the

assumption of the body as not being relevant to conceptions of the self and ontology more generally, and that (2) he wants to re-imagine the view of the body by linking it closely to the mind in a 'brain-body network'. I will begin by giving a broad account of some of the suppositions which fail to take the body seriously; I will then explore at length Connolly's utilization of recent neuroscientific research to shore up his conception of the linkages between mind and body; and finally, I turn to Connolly's deployment of Nietzsche for further substantiation, as well as what he thinks are the consequences of the brain-body network for political theory's conception of subjectivity.

What is the role of the body in ontological understandings? Much of classical and even contemporary political theory has shown itself reticent to engage with conceptions of the body, labelling this endeavour as either irrelevant or dangerous in its potential for reduction to biological essentialism. For this dominant strand of thought, important concepts such as reason, deliberation, rights and ethical imperatives proceed from higher brain functions, i.e. where the seat of human reason and intellect are located. This upright characterization of the self is thus very dismissive of bodily functions, instincts and passions, biological reactions, intuition, feelings and emotions, etc. Even if these are undeniably constitutive of the self, the human intellect is generally thought to be able to overcome or at the very least to mediate and manage such 'superficialities'. For Rawls, as seen in the previous chapter, notions of the visceral are thought to be subsumed under the concept of 'public reason', whereas for Martha Nussbaum emotions are products of reason and have nothing to do with the biological organism per se. Charles Taylor views emotions as biological, but tends to essentialize them as a function of moral epiphanies to which we can all be attuned to. These manners of looking at the subject shortchange what Connolly calls the 'visceral register of being'. For him, visceral reactions such as disgust and elation have a profound influence on one's process of thinking and evaluating. These corporeal intensities operate on an infrasensible register of the self that is not always directly known or accessible to reason. Hence for Connolly an account of the many 'irrational' elements of our

bodily reactions such as attraction and repulsion is required in order to formulate a more accurate depiction of the self.

An original element in Connolly's approach to theorizing the body in relation to the self is his engagement with recent neuroscientific and cognitive science research. Most theorists, philosophers, even linguists and philosophers of the mind more specifically, often don't find it relevant or necessary to consult this type of data when advancing assumptions on the nature and functioning of thinking and emotions, etc. Connolly is quick to remind us, however, that developments in science and philosophy have often occurred in parallel or in tandem in a given period of time and that it may be somewhat irresponsible to talk theoretically of concepts such as reason and the intellect without ever having looked at what is being said 'on the ground' by specialists whose research involves an operationalization of these notions in a material and concrete way. However, there exists no more consensus in the neuroscientific community than in the political theory community, and no 'hard facts' can be lifted above all critical scrutiny and contestation. But for Connolly there are a certain number of resources in science at the moment that prove to be very relevant for political theory and that may help formulate a more persuasive argument in favour of reorganizing our way of thinking the body-brain relationship.

So what does science tell us about the body? For one, the discovery of the amygdala, a small almond shaped nodule, suggests a great deal about the complexity of thinking. Though far less complex in linguistic capacity than the brain system, this simple cortical complex has the lightning-fast function of communicating intense feelings of fear, anxiety, alertness and disgust to other centers in the body when responding to specific circumstances/events: "Thinking itself is mixed into these intensities, some of which are felt and others of which move below the level of explicit feeling. [These] fast, imperceptible units [...] bear a family resemblance not only to atoms but to the electrical fields that carry thinking. As the neuroscientist Tor Nørretranders says in his review of recent brain research,

'A stimulus can be so short that we never become conscious of it but react to it nevertheless.'"⁵⁴

The crude processing ability of the amygdala is an emergency function that produces *infraperceptions*, percepts that are extremely quick and which act without visual imagery (as visual imagery formation is usually associated with the higher brain functions). The relatively slow process of image formation would often not be quick enough to give you time to react, for example, to a driving emergency where you need to steer out of the way of a large animal that has suddenly decided to cross the road on which you are travelling. The image usually forms a *half second later* (at which time you establish that you are still alive). This half second delay is observable in everyday situations: "When you place your hand over a hot stove, your hand recoils before you experience a feeling of pain, even though you tend to interpret the recoil as if it were caused by the feeling that followed it." But this is only a retrospective interpretation of events as the half-second delay reveals that "incomprehensible quantities of unconscious calculation" are processed during this short time, i.e. from the time you receive the sensory information and the determination of emotion, perception and judgment⁵⁵. In other words, your interpretation of the recoil as being caused by pain is erroneous. The decision to remove your hand from the stove actually occurs *before* the onset of sensing the heat. Indeed, this type of research shakes up the linear conceptions of causality in neuroscience and also suggests that "consciousness is itself pre-organized and moved to some extent by modes of thinking below its reach."⁵⁶

But these lightning-fast infraperceptions are not limited to the amygdala, nor to the context of averting dangerous situations. The ensemble of these speedy, unconscious proto-thoughts is what Connolly and others generally call affect-imbued intensities or simply 'affect'. Antonio Damasio, a cognitive theorist, has studied perception and the famous half-second delay during which time much of the

⁵⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 81.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

preliminary work of perceiving and judging takes place. Damasio had a patient with "ventromedial prefrontal damage", which impaired his ability to use "somatic markers", i.e. "affect-imbued markers appropriate to contextual decision making"⁵⁷ which are a combination of past experiences, gut feelings/intuition, socially-ingrained knowledge, etc. The patient still retained all his abilities for analysis, but without access to these affective markers, his behaviour according to Damasio "is a good example of the limits of pure reason". The patient was sadly reduced to weigh and reason through every encounter in the manner of the ideal-typical subject employed by rational-choice theory. The following passage quoted in Connolly illustrates well this oddity (in case this did not immediately strike the reader as tragic):

His affect/judgment impairment served him well when he was negotiating an icy patch of road one night. Other drivers had to override a socially ingrained instinct to slam on their brakes as their cars slid on the ice, but, in the absence of panic-stricken impulse, our hero calmly and deliberately steered his car over the icy patch [...] Things got tougher, however, when he was asked to select one of two dates to return to the clinic: "For the better part of a half-hour, the patient enumerated reasons for and against each of the two dates: previous engagements, proximity to other engagements, possible meteorological conditions [...] Just as calmly as he had driven over the ice...he was now walking us through a tiresome cost-benefit analysis, and endless outlining and fruitless comparison of options and possible consequences. It took enormous discipline to listen to all of this without pounding on the table and telling him to stop, but we finally did tell him, quietly, that he should come on the second of the alternative dates...He simply said, "That's fine."⁵⁸

The affect-imbued markers, which are (once more) deployed in the very first seconds before conscious decision-making comes into the picture, normally help narrow down options to a reasonable minimum. As shown in this example, affect not only serves a strictly biological purpose, but it also enriches thinking, judgment and perception by folding culture, nature and gut feelings into their processes.

At this point, the reader may be asking herself why Connolly chooses to engage with neuroscience and cognitive theory when he is trying to make a point

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.34-35.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.34; the quoted portion was cited by Connolly from Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon, 1994): 194.

about the body. For one, Connolly doesn't see a dichotomy between consciousness/brain/mind/intellect on the one hand and the body on the other; it would be more accurate to say that they co-exist almost symbiotically. Damasio's patient had a *bodily* injury that altered his capacity to think through any given situation. This injury was incurred to a portion of the brain, which remains by all definitions a biological organ, and thus this example highlights the necessary link between the 'integrity' of the body and 'integrity' of the mind as we tend to perceive it. Secondly, both the research on the amygdala and Damasio's findings point to an interlayering of biological processes, speedy unconscious reactions and conscious (intelligent) thoughts. In other words, to complexify our conception of the nature and functioning of the brain/mind, which is almost always represented as the seat of reason and intelligence, by showing that its processes are always mixed in with nature/biology (as well as with culture/the social as shown in the previous section) is in fact the same as stating that the mind is embodied. Perhaps the pertinence of this statement is best illustrated by what one prominent neuroscientist had this to say of his recent review of research within his discipline:

The last couple of decades...there has been a tendency to move from a rational, abstract, culture-free, centralized, non-biological, ahistorical, unemotional, asocial and disembodied view of the mind towards a view which sees the mind as situated, de-centralized, real-time constrained, everyday experience oriented, culture-dependent, contextualized, and closely related to biological principles – in one word, embodied.⁵⁹

But while science has much to say on the embodied self and provides support and justification for it, the concept is neither new nor limited to this discipline. A tradition of philosophers, ranging from Lucretius to Epicurus to Spinoza, Bergson, Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari has tended to theorize the mind/body as a network or as a symbiosis of sorts. In particular, Connolly's reading of Nietzsche allows us to see this seminal author in a new light; no longer is Nietzsche seen as a biological essentialist. Not only do his notions of affect and the

⁵⁹ Rafael Nuñez, cited in Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p.81.

visceral link-up nicely with what's being done today on the forefront of neuroscience, but they also prove to be invaluable for contemporary projects within political theory such as Connolly's. The following section will explore how Connolly uses Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of affect and the body to further justify his view of the embodied self and of the brain-body network.

Nietzsche's notion of 'affect' and the visceral is situated on a somewhat 'lower' layer of being and can be said to be broadly organized linguistically, though it can be too coarse a message for conscious processes to pick up, decipher and inspect. Affect thus points to the interlayering of conscious and unconscious processes of the mind/body. In other words, for Nietzsche, affect works in tandem with (formal) linguistic expression in that not everything can have verbal expression, e.g. the yet unknowable. Connolly joins in Nietzsche's appraisal of thinking as the bouncing "of magical bumps and charges across several registers [and of] proto-thoughts [undergoing] significant modification and refinement when bumped into a complex linguistic network of contrasts"⁶⁰. Thinking hence includes a series of visceral modes of evaluation in Nietzschean thought. These in turn constitute what Connolly calls an "infrasensible subtext from which conscious thoughts, feelings and discursive judgments draw part of their substance"⁶¹. For Connolly, to appreciate these visceral modes of appraisal is also to be more attentive to

the role that stuttering, gurgles, smirks, guffaws, tears, timbres of the voice, facial expression, posture, and hand movements play in linguistic expression. Such eye movements, rhythms, gestures, and nonconceptual sounds attached to speech sometimes point to the subterranean elements on the edge of thought that do not now find verbal expression. They point to the excess of affect over the context or expression even as they add texture and density to expression.⁶²

According to Connolly, to take seriously this added 'density of expression' in fact reveals affect's often contagious nature. Beyond Nietzsche's appraisal of thinking as vertical negotiations, i.e. the higher and lower registers (the conscious and the

⁶⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 27.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 74

unconscious) communicating and mutually influencing one another, Connolly believes that affect can also flow horizontally 'across bodies'. Think for example of deeply heated conversations where anger, revenge or even inspiration flow rampantly. Part of the message being communicated is certainly the formal content, but part of it is also what is unsaid but still understood. Such intensities are communicated and captured through our bodies, "by the timbre of our voices, looks, hits, caresses, gestures, the bunching of muscles in the neck, and flushes of the skin"⁶³. Such infectious affect pervades our daily interactions and conversations at the family dinner table, at the neighborhood pub, in academic seminars, in townhall style public meetings, etc.

Furthermore, what is interesting in Nietzsche is that he celebrates this 'lower' register of the self: he believes that *without* affect, thinking would be in fact much less creative. Affect points to the very *mobility* in thinking, its natural volatility and to its role in expressing things that are located in the very margins of thought itself, i.e. in translating the "outside of thought" into thought.⁶⁴ Because affect is not completely under the control of consciousness, it also escapes being fully regulated by consciousness and hence, its innovative abilities. Thus for Nietzsche, it is also important to note the *compositional* and *creative* elements in thinking as opposed to simply privileging its *representational* elements. Connolly is adamant in defending the creative potential of the "play of affect": "It is through the play of affect – partly *within* the orbit of feeling, intention, and consciousness and partly *below* their thresholds – that the creative element of thinking finds its most energetic impetus and possibility."⁶⁵ Since thinking is always already under way by the time you are actively and consciously attempting to formulate a thought, and since affect is not entirely regulated by the 'agents of thought', flows of affect sometime exceed the known terms of discourse, narrative, logic and expression. According to Connolly, this excess of affect is connected to the bubbling up of new thoughts, to *becoming*,

⁶³ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 75.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

to the volatility and creativity of life itself (this will be further explained in section 2.4).

Connolly does, however, recognize affect's 'wild card' status. It is evident that engaging with such volatile infrasensible processes involves a certain element of risk, uncertainty, or 'wildness in the will' as Arendt would put it: "True, the visceral is a dangerous site of politics. But all sites are. And there is never a vacuum in this domain"⁶⁶. Furthermore, attentiveness to affect does not mean evacuating reason from the ontological picture. In fact, as I will show in a later section, Connolly, following Nietzsche, believes that we can practice techniques of self-artistry where consciousness and reason work experimentally to 'educate' affect-imbued dispositions that exist below the intellectual register. The point here is that language and reason are important components of thinking, identity and the constitution of the self, but that they cannot provide a full picture of these processes.

Thus Connolly's engagement with the visceral register, affect, and the brain-body network helps us better understand subjectivity. Equipped with such enriching and complexifying descriptive notions of the self, we are in a better position to map 'a geology of the subject'. With better tools to conceptualize the subject, we in turn gain the ability to better conceptualize ethics, the social and politics. Notably, the concept of affect and the visceral dimension of the self, as I will show in Chapter 3 & 4, greatly enrich Connolly's ability to approach contemporary questions of ethics and morality. However, before we can undertake such issues, and in continuing with our discussion of Connolly's 'ontological' framework, we must first explore his perspective on the nature of intersubjectivity. The following section will thus be concerned with the relation between self and Other in Connolly's thought, and the process of identity formation that underscores it.

⁶⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 14.

2.2 – Nature of Intersubjectivity/Process of Identity Formation

We already know through our exploration of the embedded self that subjectivity is always relational in Connolly's view. Recall that the self is permanently imbricated in a contextual relationship with, most notably, biology and culture. What has not been addressed, however, is how Connolly views the interaction between the subject and *other subjects*. While authors such as Taylor and Sandel acknowledge the importance of the inter-relationship between individuals in society and also recognize the impact that identity can have on collective action, neither of them give a specific account of *how* subjectivities interact with one another or of how identity comes to be in the first place. On the other hand, Judith Butler does articulate a strong and convincing theory of the reproduction of identity through performativity, as seen in the first chapter. However, as her focus tends to centre on the signification and resignification of identities that are subjected to hegemonic social norms, her theory lacks a broader discussion of intersubjectivity; Butler thus avoids discussing the dynamics that govern the self-Other relationship and of how these dynamics relate back to a conception of the subject itself. Connolly is consequently of use here, as he provides a theory of intersubjectivity which is at once robust in its explications of how the self-Other dynamic works, while also providing enough conceptual background to link his theory with the nature of community (as we shall see in the next section), and to politics writ large (which will be addressed in Chapter 3). This section will thus be concerned with explaining Connolly's notion of intersubjectivity. I will discuss how identity is contingent upon difference, and how a paradoxical drive to diminish difference is manifest within identity itself. As such, I will show that in Connolly's framework, intersubjectivity is inextricably linked to identity/difference formations.

According to Connolly, identity is at once ubiquitous in late modern life and premised on contingent formations. That is not to say that some of these contingencies are not *deeply* and more or less permanently entrenched or that they

are somehow not as important, valued, or influential because of their contingent character. But a notion of contingent identity formation does say that any number of given contingencies could have been otherwise given the time and place of birth, the mixtures of tradition or religion into which one is born, the various child-rearing practices, the specific life experiences or traumas, and the dramatic public events that shape our lives. Further, "to confess a particular identity is also to belong to difference"⁶⁷. In other words, identity is always *relational* and thus depends on the common constituencies with which we associate and which others associate/designate to us – as a white, female, atheist, middle-class, heterosexual, Canadian for example. These aspects of our identity are further elucidated by opposition to what we are *not*, e.g. a set of differences that work to crystallize these identifying features – person of colour, male, theist, lower or 'working' class, homosexual, and American to follow the above example. Without these (socially recognized) differences, identity characteristics would have little or no social and symbolic meaning. To be 'Canadian' would lose all its sense if no other national affiliation existed. Hence, series of differences 'coexist' in order for identity to be: "differences provide...the shadings and contrasts that animate [identity]"⁶⁸.

However, the notion is complicated, for Connolly by what he calls 'the drive to diminish difference'. Paradoxically, though difference is what permits/enables identity, the pursuit of identity contains a propensity for reducing, if not eliminating difference altogether. This is also where the construction of Otherness comes into play.

The initial tendency is to describe the differences on which you depend in a way that gives privilege or priority to you. Jews, said Kant, are legalistic; that definition allowed him to define Kantian-Christian morality as a more spiritual orientation to duties and rights. Atheists, said Tocqueville, are restless, egoistic, and amoral, lacking the spiritual source of morality upon which stability, trustworthiness, and care for others are anchored. That definition

⁶⁷ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox – Expanded Edition* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): xiv.

⁶⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 144.

allowed him to honor the American passion to exclude professed atheists from public office.⁶⁹

Thus for Connolly there exists a temptation or drive within the dynamic of identity to mark constitutive differences as abnormal, deviant or immoral. However, this paradox is neither deterministic nor a "formal paradox of logic": it is a *social* paradox that is susceptible to being negotiated⁷⁰, a structural temptation stemming from the imperatives of social organization. It operates as a need for certainty, wholeness and reassurance in our identities. This tendency acts "to congeal established identities into fixed forms, thought and lived as if their structure expressed the true order of things"⁷¹. And this is accomplished by marginalizing or even shutting out the differences that help constitute said identities. This propensity therefore effectively attempts to deny the very diversity that fundamentally defines identity in the first place. "The paradoxical element circulating through relations of identity/difference, then, is that every identity needs a set of differences through which to define itself, while its imagination of wholeness can also translate that affirmative condition of possibility into a primordial threat"⁷². For Connolly, the point is not that others don't ever really pose a threat to your identity, but rather that some dangers to your identity are products of an imagination of wholeness that is never achievable.

In a later section, I will examine more fully the social causes of this 'quest for wholeness' in Connolly's work, as well as explore its political dangers and possible remedies. Suffice it to say for now that relational traits in identity/difference formations emphasize the collective and interdependent nature of the construction of the self and its (necessary) indebtedness to difference itself. In spite of the dangers of translating difference into otherness, identity cannot be foregone. That would be neither desirable nor possible, thinks Connolly. The desires, capabilities and graces contained within the possibilities of identity are numerous and manifold—

⁶⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, p. xiv.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. xv.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁷² Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p.144.

the challenge is thus to discover a way in which to enjoy these without succumbing to the desire for fullness and self-certainty.

Equipped with an understanding of Connolly's view of the embedded, affect-imbued self, and the process of identity/difference formation which characterizes intersubjectivity, I shall now turn to a broader discussion of the 'nature' of community and of the primary features of 'collective existence'.

2.3 – Nature of Community/Collectivity

The nature of the *vivre-ensemble* in Connolly's various works is best articulated via his notion of *deep pluralism* and is in fact a central concept that undercuts his thinking on numerous topics. Important elements of this notion, such as the interlayering of culture, the brain-body network and the construction of the self through identity/difference dynamics, have already been discussed in previous sections. I will now attempt to further elucidate these conceptions in exploring more thoroughly the idea of community in Connolly's thought. Since I am mostly looking to set groundwork notions for further discussion in Chapters 3 & 4 of my thesis, I will present a 'raw' or stripped picture of community, reserving discussion of the *politics* of community (specific shape/role of the state, ethics, social/political dangers, etc.) for later sections. I will proceed by, first, contrasting Connolly's view of community to that of Rawlsian liberalism and communitarian thought; secondly, explaining how Connolly's expansive notion of community allows for the consideration of non-traditional and newly emerging categories of affinity; thirdly, exploring how membership to a community does not exclude multiple other memberships; and finally, briefly examining how Connolly's take on community permits us to consider the multiple possible lines of connection between various affinities.

What role does the concept of community play in liberal and communitarian thought? For the dominant strains in liberalism, namely Rawlsian liberalism, community is somewhat of a second order consideration. Individuals are largely mediated by a public, neutral centre that encompasses a set of (formal) procedural rules. In this optic, our personal selves and our public selves are distinguished neatly in order to create/theorize a public centre where everyone is free to interact, debate and legislate unencumbered by the heavy hand of private considerations such as religious creed. Liberalism thus assumes that such cultural identities can be left 'at home', i.e. suspended, when entering public forums. They also believe that such suspension of private beliefs is desirable. Communitarians, by contrast, understand community affiliations and attachments as important and incontrovertibly constitutive parts of the self. This 'recognition' is thus translated into a larger role for community within their thinking. For someone like Charles Taylor, more specifically, a community should at times strive to allocate special minority rights in recognition of this series of 'differences', usually in the form of exceptional group rights such as in the case of aboriginal communities, linguistic and ethnic minorities, etc. Connolly's position in this regard is that both liberalism and communitarianism fail to perceive and engage with the *density* of cultural linkages which make up communities, and thus that they tend to privilege established identities and traditional articulations of community over new emerging identities and more fluid visions of culture.

So what does a Connolly-esque picture of community look like? Connolly's perspective on community is that of a pluralist culture of many *interdependent constituencies divided upon multiple dimensions*. The term 'constituency' is preferred over community since it is meant to expand the definition of what is considered 'culture'. Beyond the traditional understanding of culture as a distinct linguistic or 'ethnic' group, Connolly wants to also include a whole range of diverse affinities, dispositions, sensibilities and even systematic discriminations that cut across these commonly considered lines of commonality. The result is that we can speak of cultures and communities as different and diverse as ecologists,

communities of artists, the internet 'gaming community', individuals who adhere to a certain philosophy of child rearing, a culture of corporate professionals, people living with physical disabilities, knitting clubs, the GLBT community, and so on. By extension, Connolly's perspective also allows us to consider 'bi' identities, such as bisexuality, biracialism, bilingualism, binationalism (identifying oneself as both Canadian and American for example). These new hybrid identities, which are arguably becoming more and more a fact of life for many individuals, have often been labelled as illegitimate due to the 'transgressions' that they imply within identity/difference dynamics. How can someone feel an affinity to both the English speaking and francophone cultures within Canada while traditionally, the differences between the two is what defined each group? Though trickier to define, such hybrid identities *are* a reality for many. As such, Connolly maintains that an accurate and up-to-date account of what constitutes community must strive to include so-called non-traditional categories of affinity.

Moreover, Connolly insists that these sets of 'identities' are not mutually exclusive; in fact, the point is that any one person can be a member of multiple communities at any one time. And though the attachment and loyalty to our constituencies may differ greatly in degree (for instance, my belonging to a linguistic minority has more impact on my life than my vegetarian lifestyle), Connolly would caution us not to ignore the role of these so-called 'minor constituencies', as banal as some of them may seem (the gaming community, for one). Hence, intersubjectivity is not only limited to how we negotiate our identity and personhood within a given community of individuals, but is also about how we negotiate our diverse sets of affinities, identifying dispositions and sensibilities *within ourselves* and *over time*. Consider the following scenario: a person's persistent lifestyle choice to be a vegetarian may, with time, slowly lead her to becoming more conscious and in tune with her body, what its needs are, and the connection between what she consumes and her state of mind. And perhaps over time, this new sensitivity and awareness of the body-mind connectedness may lead her to explore Buddhist meditative practices that emphasize mindfulness and stress reduction techniques.

Down the road, her experiences in meditation circles and the increasing sense of being suited to a meditative sensibility may contribute to further her disengagement with the formal teachings of her catholic upbringing, which were once a pivotal part of her personhood. This example highlights well the fact that regardless of whether this "coding" of personhood is conscious, unconscious, or a bit of both, its dynamic is one that is continually shifting.

The point is also that a notion of intersubjectivity that takes seriously these multiple dimensions of difference, identity and personhood also must make room for how constituencies *interact with one another*. What are the horizontal connections between ecologist thinking, anti/alter-globalisation movements and the 'Raging Grannies and their Daughters' groups? Or more ominously, how is it that Republican Party membership, Christian evangelicalism and belief in 'cowboy style capitalism', as Connolly puts it, intersect so smoothly? Numerous lines of connection open up when we take a step back and look at just how dense and complex our continual processes of self-formation/revision/consolidation are. And attention to these many connections reveals their *interdependent* dimension, each constituency contributing a piece of a larger puzzle of identity which is negotiated over time.

In sum, Connolly's notion of community opts for a view of identity/affiliation/personhood that is diffused and dynamic, and that is sensitive to a host of non-traditional memberships and dispositions. For him, no one culture occupies a centre from which we can then deduce a circumscribing series of minority communities: attachments are too multifaceted and constitutively ambiguous in nature for a 'generalizing concept' to grasp fully. Whereas the Rawlsian model is far too formal an idea to be able to seize the density of culture & identity, the communitarian model is too precise, static and centred to respond to the multidimensional pluralism of culture and its changing dynamics over time. Thus, Connolly's idea of culturally constituted identity that is negotiated and changing with time is not only receptive to heretofore-unacknowledged constituencies (see above list), but is also open to the "politics of becoming", i.e. to

the “diverse possibilities of being that may turn out to be acceptable or admirable” in a not-too-distant future, after enough social and political tension “presses them into being”⁷³ (I will explain this further in section 4.2). In order to round off my discussion of the key philosophical components of Connolly’s framework, the next section will explore one final attribute of Connolly’s approach, namely his dedication to working within the ‘immanentist field’.

2.4 – An Immanentist Approach

As seen in the previous sections of this chapter, the notion of complex intermeshing of diverse dimensions in the constitution of the subject, of intersubjectivity, and of community is a prevalent theme throughout Connolly’s work. But what does this intricate ‘network approach’ amount to in terms of Connolly’s overall framework? How does it link up to a broader logic that applies to political theory? For one, Connolly’s ‘interlayered’ approach is not limited to the subject, community or to the social as a whole. In fact, Connolly’s take on the ‘ontology’ of the subject is *informed* by his even larger stance on nature. For Connolly, nature is multilayered, at once biological, cultural, and material, and is an open-ended system. Or put otherwise, nature eludes all attempts at systematization. It thus can be said that Connolly thinks within a framework of *immanence*. Here he follows Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze in participating in what he calls the ‘countertradition’ of political and moral philosophy. In this section, I will briefly elucidate some of the main features of immanentist thinking in the hopes that better situating Connolly’s work within his models of inspiration will help deepen and crystallize the reader’s comprehension of his ‘worldview’ or metaphysic. I will proceed by first discussing the concept of immanence in relation to what may be described as its ‘Other’, that is, the notion of transcendence; second, I will

⁷³ Ibid., p .69.

attempt to further explore the consequences of such an anti-systematic approach by evaluating its application, most notably, in the discipline of physics and chemistry; and finally, I will examine how immanentists view 'paradox' and what it means for political theory.

Immanence is best explained in terms of opposition to transcendent or theological models of explanation. The transcendental field typically posits a articulation of universal moral law, ethics, justice, freedom, liberty, truth, good, evil, authenticity, progress or the divine order above the realm of human and worldly activities. Literally and also figuratively (because imagery helps here), these values, orientations and dictates are given from above, or from beyond the range of worldly interferences or contingencies in such a way that they are at once certain, eternal, authoritative and unchanging. Though they originate from a locus that surpasses all human senses (the suprasensible) and intervention, they are knowable either via human reason, scripture/divine manifestations/miracles or for instance by 'discovering' a universal structure of language or morality, etc. One of the advantages of subscribing to a transcendental field is that human actions can be commanded, ordered and oriented with certainty and absolute confidence.

The immanent field, by contrast, does not posit such certainties or unchanging laws/dictates. Proponents of immanence advance open-ended systems of explanations and feel that more authoritative, closed theories "invest theory, explanation, and interpretation with more certainty and sufficiency than they warrant. They express the hubris of theory in a world too complexly intermeshed to fit the strictures of either law-like explanation or deep interpretation"⁷⁴. Further, distinguishing between theological or transcendental models and the immanent model does *not* oppose faith and faithlessness; rather, "it is better articulated as the difference between a positive belief in transcendence over the world and a positive belief in the immanence of the world."⁷⁵ Or better yet, immanence takes the transcendental field and modifies it (without repudiating it) – the transcendental

⁷⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 16.

⁷⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, pp.46-47.

remains a field that is below or above appearance (Deleuze calls it the *infrasensible*), *but it is not unquestionable, unchanging or morally authoritative*. Immanentists assert a set of premises while at the same time treating them as contestable. For these basic assertions are anti-systematic in nature:

They carry within them the expectation that no theoretical system will ever be complete; that every explanation will periodically meet surprise; that each identity is to a considerable extent an entrenched, contingent formation situated at the tense nexus between the self-identification of its participants and modes of recognition institutionally bestowed upon it; that a formation typically contains internal resistances or remainders; and that it might be otherwise if some of these balances shift.⁷⁶

The Deleuzian imagery of the difference between the rhizomatic and the arboreal may be of some use here. The transcendental is equivalent to arboreal imagery, i.e. an upright, hierarchical form of organization with deep roots that emphasizes its vertical and highly ordered nature. (Try visualizing a tall, free-standing tree). The rhizome (a type of plant, such as ginger, with roots mangled to such a degree that any point could be conceivably connected to any other) represents the immanent field and highlights the horizontal and decentralized form of organization akin to a network, with no discernible command centre. (It helps to think of grass, which is an organism that grows all over but which has no deep roots, spreading horizontally when the wind carries its seeds). Though the immanent field appears more mysterious, unordered and perhaps worrisome than the transcendental, it is not that the "whole world consists of chance...[nor is it chaotic], but rather that something always escapes"⁷⁷, what the American philosopher William James calls 'litter'. The world always exceeds all systems of explanation, be it figured through a natural volatility or incompleteness. This does not mean, however, that efforts to produce theories of explanation that we cannot bring forth theories of explanation. But to do so, for an immanentist such as Connolly, involves a certain posture of modesty, i.e. advancing a formulation while

⁷⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 73.

knowing that it will never be lifted above contestability and critical scrutiny, nor will it be able to encompass or be applied to all of reality. The passage of time and intervening change may very well displace or disprove a given theory.

Given these anti-systematic attributes of contestability, uncertainty and 'escape', what does an ensemble of (contestable) immanentist theories in a given discipline look like? The best concrete example comes from chemistry and physics, specifically from the Nobel Prize winning research of Ilya Prigogine and his collaborator Isabelle Stengers. Prigogine and Stengers' work shakes up the conventional regulative ideal of the physical laws of nature, i.e. the universal laws of dynamics which purport that every trajectory is reversible and determinist because of its indifference to time, and because "any possible evolution within the system is defined as equivalent to any other – each [being] a particular expression of the universal laws of dynamics".⁷⁸ Add to this that the succession of equivalents can be switched around without affecting the final outcome. In short (and it is important to retain this if nothing else), the classical view advances a necessary law-like and universal pattern of nature and its dynamics. Prigogine and Stengers' research shakes up this view: their conclusions point to an "intermediate position", *a system of explanation that resides somewhere "between the two alienating images of a deterministic world and an arbitrary world of pure chance"*⁷⁹.

More specifically, Stengers and Prigogine's work is on disequilibrium theory, pertaining to physical systems that are fluctuating, "unstable" or "far from equilibrium":

*Not all systems are in disequilibrium. A system in equilibrium is such that its dynamics are more or less maintained despite environmental changes. A human population is in equilibrium if it remains stable throughout fluctuations in the rates at which people have sex, gather food, encounter disease-producing micro-organisms, and so on. However, at far-from equilibrium states, which abound in the world, molecules begin to act as "singularities", the exact behavior of which cannot be predicted. They start to move in exquisite response to each other and to tiny alterations in their parameters.*⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 56.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.55.

What they have observed, in fact, is that molecules in far from equilibrium systems have a certain internal element of unpredictability, that they go through periods of being susceptible or open to outside factors and pass through irreversible trajectories⁸¹. The ability to surprise the observer, the creative and novelty producing elements of these systems is how and where new structures and possibilities come into existence. This disequilibrium, or more aptly far-from equilibrium, theory is not a repudiation of the classical view, nor are its features so volatile and unpredictable that they are no longer 'recognizable as a system'. In fact the instability dimension can, over time, bring into play new possibilities that "can also morph into a new state of *order*". There is therefore a certain kind of *retrospective* intelligence discernible in the movement of these unpredictable "singularities": "unstable systems set conditions of possibility, then, for emergent orders"⁸². Hence, it is clear for Prigogine and Stengers that in regard to systems in disequilibrium, calculable "trajectory is not an adequate physical concept"⁸³. Of course, a number of processes in disequilibrium theory elude the authors. For instance, they don't know where this dimension of unpredictability emanates from – it could be from the world itself, from human limitations of capacities to observe and calculate, or from an inherent perceptive disconnect between us and the world.

What characterizes Prigogine and Stengers' research as proceeding from the immanent field is then, first, the focus on the relational dimension of science and the acknowledgement of a 'zone of uncertainty'. Connolly best summarizes the full extent of this conclusion: "science is neither [...] an outsider's discovery of nature nor [...] a set of processes to which we must bring eternal categories unsusceptible to modification, but [...] a shifting and dissonant 'dialogue' between human assemblages and nonhuman assemblages"⁸⁴. Second, their engagement with immanent concepts is evident in the way in which they *deal with* their discernment

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p.56.

⁸³ Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984): 13.

⁸⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 58.

of the infinite number of processes that eludes them and the unpredictability factor. Instead of interpreting these as 'exceptions to the rule' or declaring a state of 'paradox' (a reflex prevalent in both science and social philosophy when faced with anomalies or dysfunctions that contradict or undermine established laws/rules/principles), Prigogine and Stengers see these as "*signs* of a world whose subtle powers of multiple causality may exceed our best approximations of it"⁸⁵. What this ultimately means is that even the most sophisticated laws of nature function as 'loose approximations' or 'incomplete summaries'. Even evolutionary biologists encounter gaps in the record which point to an uncertainty and "out of which new things sometimes ferment"⁸⁶.

I would like to address one other dimension of immanentist lines of thinking that links up nicely with the above discussion of *the ways of engaging and coming to terms with what eludes us* as thinkers, theoreticians, scientists, etc. One prevalent critique of immanence (which usually labels it 'negative metaphysics') goes something like this: "All such attempts to detranscendentalize reason continue to get entangled in the prior conceptual decisions of transcendental philosophy, decisions in which they remain trapped"⁸⁷. In other words, immanence is always entangled in the coils of paradox⁸⁸. For Deleuze and Nietzsche, paradox should not cause anxiety or panic – it is a sign that points to *fugitive elements* in the world and to a reservoir of not-yet-know (creative) possibilities. The anxiety and desolation that it causes in so many philosophers and thinkers in fact reveals their (over)dedication to a classical Kantian notion of thinking as upright, and of recognition and common sense as apodictic. The act of philosophy for Deleuze is primarily concerned with creating new concepts and thinking is located on the field

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

⁸⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, trans. William Hohengarten (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992): 36.

⁸⁸ The specific critique here concerns Habermasian linguistic presupposition of possible consensus and the need for immanentists (here Deleuze in particular) to use norms and rules of discourse to go about thinking, while also presupposing that unpredictable changes may occur in the rules being utilized, while making use of them (which for Habermas are presupposed as fixed from the get-go). I do not wish to enter into the details of this debate (though extremely stimulating indeed) since it is sufficient for me to demonstrate the accusation of immanence being trapped in coils of paradox.

of immanence which sometimes gives way to paradox. This encounter with paradox must be welcomed and indicates the limits of thought at that precise conjecture as well as the 'stumbling onto' the very forefront of thought itself:

Philosophy is revealed not by good sense but by paradox. Paradox is the pathos or passion of philosophy. There are several kinds [...], all of which are opposed to [...] good sense and common sense. Subjectively, paradox breaks up the common exercise of the faculties and places each before its own limit [...] At the same time, however, paradox communicates to the broken faculties [...], aligning them along a volcanic line which allows one to ignite the other, leaping from one limit to the next. Objectively, paradox displays the element that cannot be totalized within a common element, along with the difference that cannot be equalized or cancelled at the direction of good sense. It is correct to say that the only refutation of paradoxes lies in good sense and common sense themselves, but on condition that they are already allowed everything: the role of judge as well as that of party to the case.⁸⁹

Thus the manner in which we come to terms with paradox and contradictions seems to be more determining than if we simply acknowledge the existence of paradox. An immanent framework that allows for contestability, unpredictability, volatility and change within its system also draws inspiration from that which is at times unsettling or even undermining to one's project/aims/principles. In fact, for Connolly and others, thinking and theorizing draws its strength from this very attunement to the unexpected challenges of paradox, anomalies, small fluctuations with large consequences, to the human limitation for spelling out initial conditions accurately, and to the modesty that drives it.

Connolly's commitment to a framework that allows for contestability, unpredictability, and volatility compels him to formulate many of his key concepts and prescriptive answers for politics in a distinctively presumptive style. That is, he never claims his work to be beyond scrutiny or questionability, and he is also inclined to leave room for uncertainty and future yet-unforeseen issues within his conceptualizations. As such, though his 'ontology' as presented in this chapter may

⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 227-228.

not seem as systematic or 'tight' as one might expect (or long for), readers should be aware that this is precisely Connolly's intention. Furthermore, the strength and persuasiveness of this approach will become more evident as we further progress through his thought, and as the nuances and richness of his engagement with political problems become more apparent in the following chapters. In the following chapters I will explore Connolly's diagnosis of contemporary politics, explaining what most troubles him, what most inspires him, and paying attention to the cautious optimism that underscores his view on the potential for ethics in late modern life.

Chapter 3 – Current State of Politics: Fundamentalism, Existential Resentment and the Pleasures of Diversity

In section 2.2, I explained Connolly's view of the dynamics of contingent identity formation, its relational ties to difference, the paradoxical drive to diminish difference, and the construction of otherness. Identity is constituted through a perceived distinction or divergence from a series of competing/alternative identities (what we are *not*). Put simply, identity is constructed via difference. For Connolly, identity and difference are thus interdependent components within a larger dynamic of personhood. However, I also briefly mentioned that within this interlocking dynamic there often exists a drive to certainty and purity, a tendency that seeks to erase constitutive differences by transforming them into 'Otherness'. What I did not explicitly mention is that in Connolly's view, this process of identity formation is very unstable. In fact, Connolly worries *a lot* about this instability, which can be seen in contemporary drives to wholeness and revenge, the deep existential resentment of the masses, the practices of resorting to stereotypes and subsequent scapegoating, as well as exclusionary nationalism. For Connolly, these examples are all subsidiaries of late modern drives toward fundamentalism and represent some of the most important dangers of our age. However, in spite of this apparently pessimistic diagnostic, Connolly remains hopeful: many positive possibilities can be seen to emerge from the tendency toward pluralization. In the following chapter, I will outline first some of the forms of fundamentalism at work in the contemporary age; second, the philosophical, existential and affective underpinnings of these dangers; and third the potentials of late modernity, thus ending the chapter on a more positive note while also prefiguring the final chapter, which will deal with Connolly's positive prescriptions for contemporary politics.

3.1 – Dangers of Late Modernity Part 1: Contemporary Forms of Fundamentalism

William Connolly's primary concern for the contemporary political is what he calls the *politics of evil*. The politics of evil has two components. First, it emerges with a perceived threat to the certitude and purity of a 'hegemonic identity', often in the form of an encounter with an identity which destabilizes the said 'hegemonic identity'. The second part of the politics of evil appears as a 'solution' to the difference which threatened the hegemonic identity in the first place: threatening identities are determined as loci or "sites of evil (or one of its many surrogates)"⁹⁰, and political tactics are deployed to assure the certainty of the original, 'hegemonic identity', resulting in a politically legitimized "dogmatization of identity"⁹¹. For Connolly, these solutions are largely manifested in various forms of contemporary fundamentalism, a theme with which he engages consistently throughout his writings. As we shall see in this section, "a fundamentalist is an American dogmatist who is proud of it."⁹² In this section, I will examine Connolly's descriptive diagnosis of a select number of fundamentalist drives. I will begin by giving an account of contemporary forms of scapegoating in America; I will then discuss how for Connolly, this may then develop into an instantiation of exclusionary nationalism; and finally, I will briefly address Connolly's view of the fundamentalist drives contained within currents of liberalism today.

Scapegoating

The politics of evil is perhaps at its most prevalent in the active scapegoating of minority constituencies and other susceptible groups. Connolly speaks of this phenomenon within U.S. society in particular, but much of what is said could

⁹⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, p.ix.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. x.

⁹² William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 105.

potentially be generalizable to Canada, Europe, and other parts of the world. Scapegoating, the malicious singling out of certain communities in order to blame them for any and all ills of society, is often triggered by the growing uncertainty that comes with the acceleration of the pace of life and cultural/technological changes in late modern times – such as the growing number of new forms of identity and techno-biological innovations that put into question the inviolability of the human body (more on this in section 3.2). The resulting feelings of resentment are regularly projected or combined with religious and nationalist drives, working to identify vulnerable constituencies as “paradigmatic enemies of territorial culture, traditional morality, unified politics, and Christian civilization”⁹³. Via rhetorical political devices, media discourses and the like, the overdetermined negative stereotypical attributes of the scapegoat can quickly acquire the status of received knowledge. The following list should ring familiar:

The atheist, the postmodernist, the gay, the prostitute, the Jew, the media, the nomadic Indian, and the Gypsy have all been defined as paradigmatic agents of restlessness, nomadism, superficial fashion, immorality, and danger by defenders of close integration among political territory, religious unity, and moral monism.⁹⁴

Add to this the non-European immigrant, the illegal-alien, the ‘welfare freeloader’, the drug-user, the drug-dealer, the hippie, the criminal, and you’ve round up the usual suspects, responsible for the decay of society at large. What is more, each group identified on the list is “marked by its rhetorical association with the others on that list”, and thus the most harshly blamed group, e.g. criminals and drug dealers, “place stains of suspicion upon everything said and done by others associated with them”⁹⁵. Hence the ‘postmodernist/deconstructionist academic’ (who is also probably atheistic) who does work on the socio-economics of poverty and its links to crime is seen an ‘apologist of crime’ is looked upon with much suspicion.

⁹³ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 147

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.147-148.

⁹⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 102.

These techniques of scapegoating work well because they set clean lines of demarcation: "the 'American people' value America; the amoral elements devalue it"⁹⁶. These clean and overly-simplistic categories have a lot of sway and appeal in a increasingly complicated, heterogeneous world that threatens hegemonic identities. That is, they are 'easy categories' that help to make pointing the finger an effortless and quick job. For Connolly, they represent a type of insignia that permits everyone to decide 'who belongs where'. And they are the defining traits of the 'culture wars' engulfing the U.S. at the moment, pitting "American values" against the corruption of culture by liberal artists, intellectuals and journalists.⁹⁷

These clean demarcations can also be seen at work, for example, in the question of the place of alcohol in North American society. Connolly explains how discussions about alcohol almost never take place within the larger context of drugs in America. Alcohol is thus always clearly marked as a non-drug. It is marked as a non-drug because it is associated with working class white males and unmarked minorities, while illicit drugs are typically associated with cultural elites, black ghetto dwellers and so on⁹⁸. The artificial disconnect between alcohol (and tobacco for that matter) and drugs is the very thing that sustains the culture wars. Because there could potentially be many useful and insightful connections (for policy-makers, etc.) to be made between drugs, alcohol and tobacco such as the social and psychosocial roots of addiction, rehabilitation techniques/strategies, etc. Similarly, this impetus for clean separations prevents any association between poverty (including the causes of poverty) and drug use. They thus muddle important and inconvenient elements of reality in service of a fundamentalist drive for perpetuating a dangerous 'blame-game', one that seeks to secure dominant identities from numerous perceived threats.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ One of the principal crusaders of the culture wars is William Bennett. See for example his book *The De-Valuing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children*, (New York: Touchstone Publications, 1994). For discussion and commentary on William Bennett, see Connolly's chapter "Freelancing the Nation" in *Why I Am Not a Secularist*.

⁹⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit. *Why I am Not a Secularist*, p. 103

Exclusionary Nationalism

The politics of evil via scapegoating and culture wars is also noticeably at work in the variants of exclusionary nationalism in contemporary politics. The idea of the nation as indispensable to democratic politics is still a widely held belief. And though the last third of the twentieth century has proven that the nation-state is not a universalizable mode of being – the increase and predominance of civil wars and cultural wars as opposed to wars between 'nation-states', as well as the number of refugees around the world are but two indications of this⁹⁹ – the hopes and aspirations of the nation-state remain firmly intertwined with the idea of democracy. However, the current conditions of nationhood are arguably unstable at best. Connolly believes that the many obstructions to nationhood, heightened notably by the effects of globalization, constrain the nation to adopt a defensive or reactionary approach. Decentralizing and heterogeneous processes, including "the acceleration of tempo in the domains of capital investments, military practice, cultural communication, identity formation, population migrations, tourism [...] disease transmission [which can] stimulate the experience of historically contingent elements in those ethnic, religious, gender, sexual, linguistic, and moral identities that inhabit [us]"¹⁰⁰, make it impossible to realize the nation in the present tense. The nation is thus "something that *has been or will be but never is at any actually existing moment*"¹⁰¹ in the sense that it must always reactualize, re-invent or adapt itself in response to the distinctive features of the new and always changing dynamics of global realities. Nonetheless, Connolly notes that as the obstructions to

⁹⁹ Connolly here further makes the (obvious but important) point that in late modern times, there is simply not enough contiguous land for every people to "secure a politically organized strip of territory for itself alone"; he wittily adds to this that "for every 'people' to 'own' a land, and consolidate a state, you would have to erect huge multilevel garages on the face of the earth, stacking territories so there would be enough bounded land for each people. Many would not receive much sun."

Pluralism, p.29.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

the nation increase, the attempts to construct or restore the nation become intensified and more ruthless in nature¹⁰².

Globalization, for instance, does not mean the end of the nation as an aspiration. Rather, it foments drives by constituencies injured by global market pressures to reinstate the image of the nation to compensate for those losses. The problem is that these compensations typically involve blaming vulnerable constituencies outside the imagined parameters of nationhood for the loss of jobs and so on, when these very effects are generated by global capital forces that must be met by state, regional, and global counterorganizations of labour, consumer groups, environmental organizations, and the like.¹⁰³

Hence, for example, the blaming of women, minorities and immigrants for the loss of good working-class employment.

According to Connolly, one major impediment to which nationhood has had to adapt is that given patterns of immigration over the last thirty years, integration within the nation can no longer be explicitly premised on race or birthplace. Thus the unifying mission of the nation must now promote itself via more abstract principles, such as spiritual and/or moral beliefs and goals. This new orientation to nationhood usually speaks to the 'common sense' ideas of morality that are already entrenched in dominant constituencies or identities. Evidently, this also means that a number of citizens fall outside of these parameters, including many of the groups already identified in the above discussion on scapegoating. Common sense in America, for instance, involves accepting individual responsibility for your own fate, belief in the free market, obedience to a Christian god, dedication to 'family values' and normal, natural sexuality, loyalty to all those who defend the spirit of the nation, resistance to the welfare state and "identification with the military as ultimate guarantor of the nation"¹⁰⁴. The ceaseless pronouncing of the phrase 'the American people' is a good example of this recourse to common sense: "it speaks at once to a general yearning for identity between individual and nation and conveys

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

the idea that a diverse host of individuals, perhaps even a majority, fall outside of this essential unity"¹⁰⁵. The phrase in question also points to the *duress* that the traditional unifying features of language, ethnicity and religion are being subjected to and the constitutive lack of a 'unifying centre' that characterizes renationalization today. Since the 'empirical average' in America today is fundamentally much more diverse than what is implied by the norms of common sense alluded to above,

[...] the spirituality of a nation of *regular individuals* is maintained by political invocations of a putative past when unity was present; by the repetitive exhibition of contemporary policies, ethical codes, and styles of living that deviate from the spiritual norm; and by the threat that the culture will die a horrible death unless it reinstates this fictive past.¹⁰⁶

The nostalgic yearning for a return to a wholesome past and the extent to which this strategy encounters popular approval is a testament to the forgetfulness and short memory of any nation. How quickly we would like to forget our sexist, racist and colonial heritage and the arbitrary violence that upheld it! Furthermore, what is suggested in a return to the (fictive) values of the past would require massive social (re)engineering, a system of harsh punishments and on the whole, a series of exclusionary and assimilationist measures that are perhaps doomed to fail in their objectives¹⁰⁷. One would at least hope that the contemporary diversity of (North)American society ensures this. But that doesn't stop people like William Connolly from worrying about the exclusionary, anti-pluralistic sentiments that are deployed in such attempts. For in the meantime, the marking of devalued constituencies, the discourse of 'normality and deviance' and the correction or elimination of behaviours/groups that 'err' continues to fuel resentment and drives to fundamentalism. The damage that they inflict will only be truly discernible in retrospect, for Connolly agrees with Hannah Arendt's deep suspicion of political models of organization that are centred on ideas of the general will or rational consensus, of sovereignty or of the nation. "These ideals, [Arendt] insists, engender

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.107-108.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

a politics that suffocates diversity and drowns the capacity for political action in concert. [...] For today to appeal to one universal moral source to justify governance over a plurality of people is to ensure that a whole series of constituencies will be assaulted, suppressed or excluded"¹⁰⁸. Exclusionary nationalism is but one reflection of this dynamic.

Liberalism and Fundamentalism

Connolly submits that one of the reasons why liberalism is a consistent target of fundamentalist thinking is that liberalism itself contributes to the production of exaggerated hegemonic certainties that it fights against. American liberalism, in not acknowledging many of the biases from which it proceeds often likes to construe itself as 'objective' or 'neutral'.¹⁰⁹ Influential liberal authors like John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin, in claiming to provide a neutral framework for politics in which no conception of the good is privileged over another, attempting to circumvent religious conflict, fail to recognize the very partisanship upon which this position rests.¹¹⁰ As such, Connolly holds that their struggle against what they perceive to be "narrow religious intolerance" may induce "blind spots with respect to itself."¹¹¹ Liberalism tends to forget that its assumptions about "procedure, reason, and neutrality are highly congenial [to those liberals] who endorse individual rights and who believe there is a universal matrix of procedural reason drawing together people who diverge at other levels in their conceptions of the good life", but not so congenial to a number of groups that contest several of these liberal tenets. In other words, evangelical Christians, Orthodox Jews, Marxists, Aboriginal Peoples, postmodernists, and even secular communitarians are told they must leave their 'personal' and 'private' beliefs in the closet when entering the public realm, while Rawls, Dworkin

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.178-179.

¹⁰⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 124.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of Rawls's version of neutral state, see Chapter 1 of this thesis; for Ronald Dworkin's similar view, see his article "Liberalism", in *Public and Private Morality*, ed. Stuart Hampshire (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹¹¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 4.

and others like them “are allowed to bring several suitcases with them”.¹¹² Connolly thus contends that the attempt to force a ‘liberal creed’ upon others, as well as the fact that many liberals remain deaf to accusations of bias and dishonesty raised against them, only works to fuel and deepen the “fundamentalist temper” in America today.¹¹³

Clearly, all of us have strains of fundamentalism running through us. Connolly readily admits that he as much as anybody is not immune to this, and that he deploys much energy to counter this fact (more on this in section 3.3). But why this desire to preserve certainty and purity? And is there a common thread that can help explain this drive to fundamentalism? By drawing on various philosophical, existential and affective resources, the following section will concern itself with answering that very question, and thus further our discussion of Connolly’s diagnosis of the dangers of late modernity.

3.2 – Dangers of Late Modernity, Part II: Resentment, Revenge and Resonance Machines

The dogmatization of hegemonic identity and deployment of the politics of evil, the scapegoating of vulnerable constituencies in the name of culture wars and the oppressive assimilationist tactics of exclusionary nationalism paint a very harsh but real picture of some important elements in our late modern (Western) context. But these political realities and their complex social roots still leave the political theorist with many pressing questions. Why is identity not sustainable in ambiguity or uncertainty? Why this quest for wholeness and why is it felt so intensely? The following section will attempt to deal with such lines of questioning by drawing on more philosophical/existential resources as well as on evidence stemming from our discussion of the visceral/affective realm. While Connolly asserts that there is no

¹¹² Connolly, Op. Cit., *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 124

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.124-125.

'one' satisfying answer to these questions, we may still, however, identify various possible explanations, as well as numerous factors that tend to increase the risk of slipping into the politics of evil. As such, I will proceed by firstly explaining how looking at the history of ideas, namely through Nietzsche, permits us to understand the desire to blame and the propensity for resentment in genealogical terms; secondly, by further developing the conception of resentment as discussed in Connolly, its specific triggers and how it is experienced in modern life; thirdly, analyzing more fully the drive to wholeness, what it is and how it is manifested; fourthly, looking at how an intensification of contingency in late modern times foments further anxiety; fifthly, developing the notion of revenge as a corollary of resentment and using contemporary forms of punishment as examples; and finally discussing affect as a 'resonance machine' and how particular affective assemblages increase our vulnerability to the quest for wholeness.

A Nietzschean Account of the Social Origin of Blame

Nietzsche claims that the propensity for wanting to blame others for a perceived injustice or suffering and the quest for wholeness that ensues can be explained through taking a close look at the history of ideas which have helped shape Western culture. Connolly agrees with Nietzsche in that the search for purity and certainty is likely *partly* natural, but that it is above all else our own philosophical tradition and foundations that intensify it to the extent that it defines the tradition itself. In particular, Nietzsche argues that the conditions in which the tradition of Socratic reason came about in Ancient Greece are illuminating in this respect.¹¹⁴ The pre-Socratic social order in Greece, typified by its great tragic myths, was a world in which the pleasant, gratifying and ordered side of life (as represented by Apollo) as well as the disordered and suffering parts of life (as represented by Dionysius) were

¹¹⁴ The following discussion on Nietzsche's reading of the tradition of Socratic reason is primarily informed by Paul Saurette, "'I Mistrust all Systematizers and Avoid Them': Nietzsche, Arendt the Crisis of the Will to Order in International Relations Theory", in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.25, No.1 (1996): 1-28.

at once accepted and believed to be unavoidable facets of human existence. Thus themes of ambiguity and uncertainty were part and parcel of daily life in the pre-Socratic era.

However, it came to be that the sustaining force of the tragic myths gradually faltered. Increasingly, the foundational myths could no longer inspire the self-restraint and moderation upon which the social order was maintained. Greek thought thus succumbed to decadence. Anarchist and excessive tendencies were rampant and threatened survival even as the search for a new existential meaning that would help abate the tragedy of life persisted. Enter Socrates. According to Nietzsche, Socrates

saw *behind* his aristocratic Athenians [...] The same kind of degeneration was everywhere silently preparing itself: the old Athens was coming to an end – And Socrates understood that the world had need of him – his expedient, his cure and his personal art of self preservation.¹¹⁵

Socrates' remedy? Renounce the Dionysian experience of chaos, contingency and the instinctual upon which tragedy was founded, and instead withdraw into the Apollonian order of Socratic reason. For Nietzsche, Socrates observed a generalized longing for stability and for a kind of guarantee which his intellectual framework could provide: "rationality was divined as a *saviour* [...] The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thought throws itself at rationality betrays a state of emergency: one was in peril, one had only one choice: either to perish, or be *absurdly rational*..."¹¹⁶

Thus we see a dichotomy in Socratic thought *between* Apollonian and Dionysian existence, with the Apollonian, ordered perfection of the forms taking precedence over the Dionysian, random and chaotic character of lived experience. For the pre-Socratics, life was a dialectical process between Apollo and Dionysus, order and chaos, rather than a dichotomous and hierarchical one. It is this

¹¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990): "Problem of Socrates", section 9, emphasis in original.

¹¹⁶ Nietzsche, Op. Cit., "Problem of Socrates", section 10, emphasis in original.

dialectical conception that Nietzsche wants to recapture; the problem, of course, is that the Socratic tradition of reason has dominated Western thought and has in fact been perfected in modern life. This desire for order, or drive to wholeness, ultimately betrays the reality of lived experience: the chaotic/contingent will never be completely subsumed under the auspices of a globalizing order. The propensity for this escape of experience from order leads to an inherent inconsistency between the internalized expectations of reality and the experience of reality itself. The result is what Nietzsche titles *ressentiment*: an affective backlash which inspires the desire to seek out the responsible party for this dissonance.

Resentment

Connolly pursues Nietzsche's exploration of *ressentiment* to help explain the quest for wholeness, the drive to blame others and the dangers stemming from the instability of identity in late modern times. There are many different modes of *ressentiment* or resentment. I will not attempt an extensive or categorical list of the diverse sorts of resentment, though such an undertaking could be interesting. Instead I will give an approximate and summary idea of how resentment comes about and of how it is experienced in late modern life.

Generalized or existential resentment resembles the experience or reaction to a perceived injustice or suffering of some sort, the object of which is not precisely known or fixed, coupled with feelings of great hostility¹¹⁷. Moreover, existential resentment is imperceptible to the extent that it 'floats' from object to object. It is *one way* in which we might react to such feelings, and thus even though it may seem like a 'natural' reaction, resentment is neither necessary nor essential in nature. However, it does hold many advantages: it is easier than problem-solving, it doesn't require lengthy introspective examination and it doesn't involve questioning one's identity or putting an element of one's identity at risk.

¹¹⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, p.22-23.

For Connolly, resentment finds expression today in a variety of practices, "ranging from drug use [to] litigiousness, 'mindless violence', teenage suicide, and high divorce rates to tax evasion and 'work according to rule'"¹¹⁸. Generalized resentment is also manifest in the deep hostility of certain persons living in 'relative independence' toward the complaints of persons living in conditions of dependence. Politically, this is represented in the resentful discourse that many entertain toward "third world countries, convicted criminals, mental patients, welfare claimants, affirmative action candidates, coddled athletes, minorities, teenagers, illegal aliens, and privileged college students"¹¹⁹. The general tenor of the resentment is a targeting of these constituencies due to their appearing to benefit from some institutional privilege; if this is the case, they should not have the right to complain about their conditions. This type of discourse can easily blend into vilification and scapegoating, as seen in section 3.1. For Connolly, it is when the anxieties and insecurities of life and of identity become too psychically demanding that a fomenting of resentment wins out. Other competing identities, for instance, which deviate from our own espoused models, are often the targets of generalized resentment. Scapegoating and the quest for wholeness are thus intimately linked to resentment. It could be that the abundance of these competing identities, deemed *deviant* from the putative majority's standard, may ultimately point to an absence of a "final model" of identity from which to evaluate "good and bad copies"¹²⁰. Here, the desire for purity and wholeness not only becomes the treatment of your identity/identities as the ideal copy of the final model, but also requires a hostile treatment of every 'alter-identity' as a bad copy. We can easily observe this tendency to want to secure the privileged standing of our identities in the tendency to define competing ones as deviant or bad in the spheres of nationhood, gender-performance, sensual affiliation, religious faith, and so forth.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 141.

Other more specific formulations of existential resentment are worth mentioning here. For both Nietzsche and Connolly, resentment against the limited capacity to know wields many potentially reactive dangers, including tight conceptions of truth, and notably in academia, the drive to dogmatic systematicity and stingy moral ideals. Incessant resentment against “the flesh”, the obdurate fact of death and even the “vulnerability to disorganization” are aggrieved expressions “against the very conditions of possibility for life”, i.e. human existence itself, and have proven to engender “closed practices of identity, restrictive judgments of normality, and cruel systems of punishment”¹²¹.

While Nietzsche believed that every individual didn’t necessarily battle with resentment in the same way, Connolly feels that the intensification of anxieties and uncertainties in late modern times, not to mention the tendency of pluralization of identities, leaves us *particularly vulnerable* to existential resentment, its corollaries, and the dangers identified in part 2.1. As such, Connolly also believes that existential resentment can inhabit any individual, any faith, creed or institution. This may be due to the fact that nobody has yet been able to formulate an adequate response to “mortality, time and undeserved suffering” – not Epicurus, Buddha, Kant, Levinas or Nietzsche himself.¹²² For this reason, Connolly himself also personally battles with resentment from time to time. However, while this threat pervades everyone and all creeds, it is pertinent to bring forth one last nuance: it is not *all* grievances, critical energies and specific resentments that require our counter-measures, but rather the ossified disposition to generalized *ressentiment*.

Quest for Wholeness

For Connolly, the quest for wholeness is often awoken by the encounter with the uncanny, and the queasiness that may ensue. It is often activated by the

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹²² William Connolly, “The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine”, *Political Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (2005): 881.

uncertainties that circulate around us, and our incapacity or lack of experience in dealing with them. Though we may acknowledge in a very basic way that we live among diversity and that all identities have an equal claim to legitimacy, we still make choices based on what we think is 'better' for us. There is a sense that the way in which we choose to conduct our lives, set on the backdrop of where we are from, how we were raised, etc., is somehow the best means for conducting any possible life, the best choice that could be made by anyone, given any circumstances. Thus there is a danger that the best overall choice for one single individual will morph into a 'superior' identity, a 'true' identity that is in line with some model that we espouse. Models of authenticity, financial success, civicism and religious models such as that of the good Christian give reason and impetus to the things we do and reward us with a due sense of accomplishment. However, when we tend to relate excessively with the models that inspire us by obsessively placing them at the core of our identity structure, the desire for perfection, completeness and wholeness may ensue.

The imagination of wholeness can attach itself anywhere. In the canon of Western political theory, this imaginary is discernible in Augustine's plea for unity of the individual will (to be approximated only if and as the divided will becomes obedient to the will of God) and in his dim memory of a time of human wholeness before the first sin; in Rousseau's imagination of a general will that is "constant, unalterable and pure"; in Hegel's aspiration to a realized State. In contemporary life it readily becomes attached to ideals of a rational consensus, maternal versions of feminism, images of the nation, fundamentalist presentations of religion, and [...] some models of the "regular individual".¹²³

Thus Connolly acknowledges that there can be a destructive tendency that governs our way of relating to our models of inspiration, premised on purity and wholeness. Put otherwise, "the drive to wholeness [...] becomes most destructive when you both obsessively interpret the cultural identity you participate in to be the best available copy of the true model and place that model above the threshold of

¹²³ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 141.

legitimate interrogation in politics"¹²⁴. Such an obsession is often triggered reactively when identity meets uncertainty, in the form of something or someone that threatens that particular identity's sustainability or integrity. Though this by no means exhausts all avenues of explanation, it is clear that for Connolly an *insecurity of identity* may lie at the heart of the dangers of yearning for wholeness. Does this mean that there is something *essential* in the identity formation process which makes us vulnerable to feelings of insecurity? In Connolly this is both unclear and not necessarily an 'answerable' question a priori. But Connolly does believe that the accelerating uncertainties of late modern life have a hand in *heightening* this effect and in creating a specific existential posture or attitude that is *receptive* to or that invites such insecurities in identity.

Intensification of Uncertainty

How does this receptivity to insecurities in identity work? For Connolly, if the existential posture of modernity is to be understood as a "close alignment between the identity the self seeks to realize and socially available possibilities of formation [as well as], a shared sense of *confidence in the world we are building*", then late modernity is the time when these expectations have become "permanently unsettled"¹²⁵. Three accelerating uncertainties are particularly worth mentioning here: first, an "intensification of the experience of owing one's life and destiny to world-historical, national, and local-bureaucratic forces". A good example of this is that now, lives are structured around the exigencies of the labour market, and the building of a career is the primary goal of most young people; correspondingly, baby boomers must prepare for retirement, enabling others to take their place in the labour market, whether they feel ready for this step or not. Second, "a decline in the confidence many constituencies have in the probable future to which they find

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, pp. 25-26.

themselves contributing in daily life"¹²⁶, for instance, the sense that cycling to work everyday, making responsible consumer choices and reusing and recycling all the materials I can *cannot* help evade the environmental catastrophe that awaits me and future generations. And third, a growing sense that the nation-state seems unable or unequipped to deal with the new globalized sets of urgent issues that threaten our survival such as the availability of natural resources, the menace of nuclear war, the increase in intense and aggressive ethnic and national identities, and the degradation of the environment.¹²⁷

Since a shared confidence in the world we are building may have been, for many, a source of pride and of consolation about 'the end that awaits us' (for example, "maybe those we raised will remember us with pride; maybe a future generation will remember and respect the effort and sacrifices of the present one"), the late modern erosion of this collective confidence may signify the loss of an important coping mechanism¹²⁸. Hence, there is less the sense that the sacrifice of losing one's job to a Third World factory that employs mostly women and children due to deterritorialization of labour will result in a greater good, overall and in the long term. Similarly, it would not be hard to imagine a soldier fighting in a 'dubious war' becoming quickly disillusioned, cynical, and resentful.

When one begins to feel uncertainty and anxiety about the world, the institutions that are supposed to protect us, or the capacity for collective action, one begins to feel that *anything given might also be taken away*.

A stock market can crash; a technical education can become obsolete; a liberal education can become irrelevant; a normal standard of family life can become abnormal; an avenue of mobility can become closed; a standard or merit can be reconstituted; the principles of self-respect can be modified; a hilarious sense of humor can be redefined as sickness; a previous pattern of affection can be redefined as illicit.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.19-20.

¹²⁷ I am indebted here to Stephen White's formulation of the uncertainties of late modernity (according to Connolly) in *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*, Op. Cit.

¹²⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, p. 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

Omnipresent contingencies and the fragility and feeling of dependency that this implies can easily translate itself into a “floating resentment against [life’s] requirements and contingencies”¹³⁰ as discussed in the previous section. Moreover, resentment, according to Connolly, is specifically noticeable in the visceral and affective tone of contemporary politics. This is not to say that politics had never before been subjected to emotional appeals and other affective dimensions; such techniques have always been employed to some extent or another. But for reasons alluded to above, it would seem that a *heightened degree* of hostile viscosity is spilling over into mainstream political phenomena.

The Drive to Punish as Visceral Satisfaction

When all of this floating generalized resentment, anxiety and feelings of uncertainty are not met with an appropriate process of conscious self-reflection, venting becomes one easy mechanism with which to cope. According to basic principles of psychology and psychoanalysis (which we need not expound here), when we don’t cope well enough with pressures that threaten our identity, our livelihood, our future, or our ‘self’ writ large, these pressures must be evacuated from psychic life in one manner or another. In these circumstances, an unconscious defence mechanism of the mind may activate a redirection or displacement of the affect from an object felt to be dangerous to a more ‘acceptable’ substitute. Connolly believes that the pervasive desire for revenge and punishment in modern society may be explored, in part, through a ubiquitous need for visceral satisfaction.

When looking at contemporary forms of punishment via the judicial system, a striking aporia meets the eye: the practice of punishment rarely secures its official ends of increased security, diminished crime through deterrence, or the rehabilitation of offenders. All the supporting evidence in the world has thus far failed to stir up any kind of official reaction, whether it be outrage or substantial

¹³⁰ Ibid.

inquiry into the matter on the part of the courts, policemen, politicians, media and the public.¹³¹ It would not be hard to argue that we could stand to gain immensely by acquiring further insight into the nature of crime, especially violent acts, and their relationship to law, law-enforcement and society at large for instance. Better policy formulations could be one obvious benefit. But for Connolly, this oddity isn't *so* odd after all. It's not so much that contemporary practices of punishment fail to secure their official objectives, but that they "serve an unofficial end of visceral satisfaction of the public; giving them the satisfaction of revenge as a result of their outrage"¹³². Hence, in providing *immediate gratification* by punishing and injuring "the other who violated your body, spouse, lover, property, or identity", a decision is made to stop all further inquiry.¹³³ There is also a sense that this type of visceral satisfaction enables the victim to distance himself/herself or even conquer the fear of uncertainty that comes with violent injury. Thus 'the system' can be seen as extremely successful in affective terms, despite its official shortcomings.

The stopping of all inquiry is, according to Connolly, what consolidates the element of revenge.¹³⁴ When a judge, jury, the media or the public is called to analyze/evaluate/judge a criminal offence, there is more often than not a *fundamental asymmetry* between the experiences of the offender and the perspective of the audience who must judge. Having to imagine ourselves in the offender's shoes will often result in feelings of *astonishment*, *shock*, and *incomprehensibility*, a set of visceral reactions not dissimilar to the ones observed in the encounter with the uncanny. Nietzsche, the 'consummate diagnostician of revenge', reminds us that none of us knows his or her "degree of inflammability" without ever being subjected to circumstances of "extreme pressure", e.g. "a spouse who flaunts infidelity, repeated and authoritative humiliation, subjection to torture, the call by a loved one to avenge a terrible assault, the wanton murder of

¹³¹ Connolly, Op. Cit. *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 48.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

your child".¹³⁵ And in fact, many of us will never know such extreme pressures. But when we are called upon to judge those that have been in these situations and other types of systematic suffering, there is an asymmetry in perspective and in lived experience that separates us and the criminal offenders. Nietzsche further thinks that our perspective is shaped by our "paltry little circumstances" (paltry in comparison to the accused in this case), though we like to pretend that it is not, and we judge in consequence or we "assume that [the accused] too face[ed] only paltry little circumstances".¹³⁶ The resulting factors are best articulated by Nietzsche himself:

The criminal, who is aware of all the circumstances attending his case, fails to find his deed as extraordinary and incomprehensible as his judges and censors do; his punishment, however, is meted out in according with precisely the degree of *astonishment* the latter feel when they regard the incomprehensible nature of his deed.¹³⁷

Indeed, the significance of this is the astonishment factor. As with many other visceral/affective responses that are not subsequently met with reflexivity, all introspection or inquiry is precluded. For Connolly, astonishment can thus work to *heighten the alienating sense of otherness* that we feel when brought face to face with some 'evil deed'. It is, in a sense, like experiencing a *lack of distance* between us and the incomprehensible other, as though there is not enough distance for us to feel secure.

The desire to punish crystallizes at that point where the shocking, vicious character of a case blocks inquiry into its conditions, repressing examination of uncertainties and ambiguities pervading the very concepts through which it is judged. *Where astonishment terminates inquiry, the element of revenge is consolidated.*¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, as quoted in Connolly, Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Contemporary American society abounds with examples of the drive to punish as visceral satisfaction. The death penalty and assisted suicide debate are prime illustrations in this case. Connolly submits that the vehement opposition to assisted suicide in American society at times conveys an existential resentment against "the obdurate fact of death", whereas advocating the death penalty for murderers evinces, "at a visceral level, the wish to push the very thought of the death of the innocent as far away as possible"¹³⁹. Thinking about these two controversial debates under these lenses tends to reveal an unconscious desire for presenting death as *punishment* and thereby pulling it away from death as an incontrovertible life *event*¹⁴⁰. It would not come as a surprise that "two of the most eligible constituencies upon whom to project existential resentment for the obdurate fact of death, then, are those who 'deserve to die' and those who insist upon 'the right to die'".¹⁴¹

Of course, this is but one possible interpretation, and it is far from certain. There is evidently much more to the death penalty and assisted suicide debates than displaced contempt. It may even be that such intensive proto-thoughts are not subject to precise interpretation. But what is pertinent about utilizing affective concepts such as resentment and the drive to punish for understanding politics, according to Connolly, is that visceral dispositions have a hand in *infiltrating* and *inflecting* political opinions, priorities, and creeds, and that without a basic understanding of these imbrications, we can't possibly begin to grasp contemporary political realities.¹⁴²

Affect as Resonance Machine

In his more recent work, Connolly has articulated some of his worries around contemporary fundamentalism as stemming from what he calls 'axiomatic resonance

¹³⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit. *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 133.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Connolly, Op. Cit., "Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine", p. 872.

machines'. Here he pushes his thought on the role of affective dispositions in politics even further. For him, visceral and affective dispositions towards life are seen to work to *consolidate, modify* or *intensify* given doctrines and faiths which participate in the *ethos* infused within political creeds. Thus he worries that particular affective assemblages increase the likelihood of succumbing to resentment and the quest for wholeness.

By shifting our attention to the *ethos* infused in political creeds, Connolly believes that we are able to appreciate in new ways, for instance, the alliance between 'cowboy capitalism' and the Christian evangelical movement in the US, two of the most outspoken constituencies when it comes to exclusionary nationalism, scapegoating and culture wars. Ideology, social history, economic interests and other avenues of explanation have thus far failed to expound the intense connection between these two groups – these classical models of explanation don't quite fit the bill, nor do others like them¹⁴³. Using these models, it seems that too many stark differences distinguish these constituencies from one another. Rather, Connolly thinks that we should be looking at the *affinities of identity* which cut across these credos, and which work to shore up an *assemblage of interests*. As opposed to traditional views of causal linkage, the assemblage hypothesis holds causation to be the result of a *resonance* between elements that fuse together at a given time: "here causality, as relations of dependence between separate factors, morphs into energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements *fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other*"¹⁴⁴.

What is significant here is the need for us to understand what "draws two major constituencies into one theo-econopolitical machine"¹⁴⁵. Perhaps it is the existential aggressiveness of those suffused with economic greed that *resounds* with the concept of a vengeful God and the imperious demands of that God. Perhaps

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 870.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 878.

not. It might be difficult to hit the nail exactly on its head. But Connolly insists that it is imperative for us to see how "neither party in the machine ever declares the ugliest existential investments that inspire it and, second, how this silence itself is politically potent"¹⁴⁶. Affect as resonance in this case does its most effective work via the tones and intensities of its spokespersons and via the selection of their enemies. In other words, much is *expressed* without ever being *articulated*. Connolly's description of the structure of Robert Schumann's *Humoreske* (1838), as reported by Frank Ankersmit helps make the point: "There are three staves. The upper is played with the right hand, the lower with the left. But the melody in the middle is not played. Rather, it is heard by the listener because of its location between the upper and lower hands. Here is what Ankersmit and Charles Rosen, the historian of music he draws upon, say:

Put differently, the melody...will be *listened to* by the listener, without actually being *heard* by him. Hence what one listens to...is the echo of an unperformed melody; it is both interior and inward, a double sense calculated by the composer...It has...its existence only through the echo."¹⁴⁷

The result may be something that's more than the sum of its parts and thus by this token, something that is also very elusive in nature.

Hence the drive to revenge in the evangelical-capitalist axiomatic is somewhat of an 'unsung melody'. It is hard to put a finger on it, as it is unclear what its sources are. The resonance of resentment "reverberates back and forth between its leaders and followers, until it becomes uncertain who directs and who sings the chorus"¹⁴⁸. Connolly illustrates this by using some examples from the Bush/Kerry 2004 election campaign:

Early in the 2004 presidential campaign the George W. Bush entourage sped around a NASCAR track in front of 100,000 fans. He emerged from the only SUV in the entourage to an incredible roar of approval. The crowd responded to the SUV as a symbol of disdain for womanly ecologists, safety advocates,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 879.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

supporters of fuel economy, weak-willed pluralists, and internationalists. Bush played upon the symbol and drew energy from the crowd's acclamation of it.¹⁴⁹

These resentments coalesce in the same highly effective resonance machine, mixing together in demarcating similar targets to be vilified: the gay, the effete, the ecologist, women who strive for equal salaries, 'welfarists', internationalists and so on. A perceived moral weakness, selfishness, corruption or relativism is what bound these targets together. These act like electric charges that reverberate continuously to *incite* and *heighten* such perceptions and dispositions in everyday patterns of "identity, interest, and judgments of entitlement"¹⁵⁰. It encourages an intense form of coding of experience, working below the register of explicit consciousness to foment and amplify the organization of perception.

Of course, not everyone is duped all the time by this kind of coding. Connolly acknowledges that many who receive these messages are predisposed to them through their specific sensibilities and orientations to life. Playing to core audiences and forgetting about the rest is one of the strengths of such resonance machines (and is also one of the reasons such phenomena appear absurd or alien to those not at all predisposed, like many of my colleagues in academia). However, Connolly also believes that the drive to existential revenge, via other possible assemblages, can inhabit any faith, creed or institution as discussed earlier. But while resentment is pervasive, Connolly, as Nietzsche saw in the pre-Socratic era, also discerns many positive possibilities within late modern times. In alternate ways of coping with the instability, anxiety and the suffering of life, Connolly remains hopeful, if not cautiously optimistic, about the contemporary potential for politics, morality and ethics.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 878.

3.3 – Potentials of Late Modernity: Deep Pluralism, Affinities and Becomings

In the previous section, I examined some of the existential and visceral causes that Connolly identifies as explanations of the drive to fundamentalism in late modernity. As such, I drew attention to the specific existential postures that leave use vulnerable to extremisms, their intensifying factors, as well as their visceral dimensions via a discussion of resentment, revenge and resonance. However, Connolly believes that the destabilizing effect of having one's identity put into question or threatened doesn't always wield the same results. There is, after all, a positive tendency toward pluralization which is observable on many fronts. The event of encountering the Other, though potentially eliciting feelings of anxiety and insecurity, can also be taken as evidence of the abundance or richness of being. In this section, I will thus examine the positive possibilities contained within late modernity. I will begin by exploring how the encounter with difference can prompt an appreciation for diversity in all things; I will then discuss how this may lead us to become attuned to the 'flux of being', a sort of witnessing of the becoming of all things; finally, I will consider how a receptivity to the movement of becoming may also help us cultivate a sense of connection to the world that effectively cuts across differences.

Gratitude for the Abundance of Being

Connolly claims that the anxiety, the rattling of our being and the insecurity that accompany experience of the uncanny, of encountering difference in a way that is 'too close for comfort', *need* not be experienced as such. After all, anxiety is not always a deterministically negative or self-destructive feeling. Feeling anxious before a performance at an important event or examination for which we are well-prepared, for instance, may be evidence of our sensitive, attentive nature and may point to our earnest concern and care for the impending outcome. It may also

assist us in being more attuned to specific circumstances and opportunities that will help us succeed. For those of us who are not Zen masters, to *not* feel anxious before an important performance would likely signal carelessness, arrogance, indifference or even negligence. Therefore it would seem that the feeling of anxiety is at once limiting and enabling.

For Connolly, with the help of self-understanding and reflection, feelings of anxiety can lead to a kind of presencing of the diverse energies and strange vitalities that abound in the world. That is to say, the encounter with difference can be thought and felt as evidence of the richness of being in the world, of the exhilarating fact of living in a world where there is an abundance of diversity in all things¹⁵¹. Take for example the experience of meeting a new acquaintance at a dinner party who seems to contradict every opinion you express all evening long, making for a relentless match of wits. Upon your return home, you are left feeling not quite as ticked off as you *should* be, and instead recall the events of the evening in your mind with a distinct grin on your face. The initial thrill of discovering a new philosopher who turns your world inside out (though you may decide that she/he is ultimately wrong), or the sexually adventurous roommate whose behaviour makes you delight in questioning the 'normalcy' of your own sexuality, are but a few examples of the odd and powerful attraction we sometimes feel toward difference. Something in these encounters makes us value the uncanny not as in need of mastery or moral categorization, but rather as proof of the richness of being.

Appreciation of the abundance of being is also a humbling reminder that 'the world is not for us' and that there is always an excess of being over identity: the richness of being always *exceeds* us in the sense that it escapes our efforts of categorization and foundation. Thus it is a *fugitive* experience, and "may find more intense expression in some times than others"¹⁵². If we begin to think and feel more actively and purposefully about the world in this manner, thinks Connolly, we can also begin to experience a distinctive gratitude at once on *intellectual* and

¹⁵¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, p. 120; *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 54.

¹⁵² Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 54.

visceral levels. This can take the shape of an affirming of the integral beauty and energy of life, and can blend into an enchantment for the flux of being itself. Following Nietzsche, Connolly's sense of gratitude or reverence is nontheistic:

Nietzsche and Zarathustra tap into this fugitive experience, cultivating *gratitude* for the rich abundance of life. They cultivate gratitude for the surplus and porosity that endows life with mobility. Such a gratitude is "religious" without necessarily being monotheistic.¹⁵³

Hence, this distinct type of reverence is not gratitude *to a subject* (to a God or supreme life-force). Enchantment, Connolly would say, is not limited to theological models. It would be more accurate to say that it is more like being grateful to an undisclosed source of ethical inspiration (more on this later)¹⁵⁴. However, far from being universal, this 'faith' in the abundance of life is *contestable* (see chapter 1 for my discussion of the notion of contestability in Connolly).

Indeed, the active cultivation of such gratitude for the richness of being holds importance for us as a *resource* in times when the contingency of life deals us a bad hand. It can act as a reservoir of positive inspiration. As Connolly sees it, no one can entirely rid themselves of resentment and insecurity stemming from the experience of difference. But he thinks that we can "bear up" against these times by tapping into the richness of life¹⁵⁵.

Politics of Becoming

Gratitude for the abundance of being, as I said, comes from appreciating the fugitive experience of diversity in all things. Learning to cultivate this thought/feeling in fact opens us up to an appreciation of the plurality of culture and

¹⁵³ Ibid., original emphasis.

¹⁵⁴ For more on late modern sites and sources of nontheistic enchantment and the importance of resisting theological monopolization of enchantment see Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Identity/Difference*, pp.81-82; pp.120-21.

many other things. But it also opens us up to the 'flux of being', as Nietzsche would say; in other words, to the dynamics of *becoming* in the world.

A world of becoming is a world where unforeseeable emergent formations

surge into being, such as a new and surprising religious faith, a new source of moral inspiration, a new mode of civilizational warfare, a new cultural identity unsettling an existing constellation of established identities, a new collective good, or the placement of a new right on the existing register of recognized rights.¹⁵⁶

A world of becoming exceeds all attempts at control and mastery because it does not proceed from any given model, nor are its particular outcomes ever discernible from the start. Becoming and being are maintained in a torsion of sorts, whereby 'being' refers to the "crystallizations that persist, even as subterranean forces [of becoming] accumulate within them"¹⁵⁷. It is the creative play between these two forces that dictates our changing reality. By definition, moreover, the final essence of things never materializes because the process of becoming is never settled; there will always be 'another round' of becoming¹⁵⁸.

More concretely, the *politics of becoming* then refers to the process by which new cultural identities are constituted out of unpredictable energies, "suffering, and lines of flight available"¹⁵⁹ to them in a given institutional setting. If a movement of becoming is successful, its cultural identity will pass from a state of purely underground circulation to a state of registering as a more or less publicly accepted and legitimate identity. With time, it might even pass the threshold onto the politics of being as a persisting and established identity¹⁶⁰.

But who initiates the politics of becoming and how do they proceed if they cannot predict the outcome of their own actions? Connolly notes that the politics of becoming often arises when a cultural constituency is marked negatively within a

¹⁵⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 121.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.57. By 'line of flight' here, Connolly means emergent lines of possibility that escape the established constituencies.

¹⁶⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 122.

given institutional constellation. It is the specific suffering and suppression of a group that gives impetus to the movement of becoming. Hence, "under these circumstances it takes a militant, experimental and persistent political movement to open up a new line of flight from culturally induced suffering"¹⁶¹. Here, the given constituency is literally attempting to 'cut out' a liveable space for itself within an oppressive institutional and social framework. Furthermore, the group's "new demand is not derived from a thick set of principles containing it implicitly all along"¹⁶²; rather its members simply do what they do in order to attenuate their suffering. It is an experimental movement in that its initiators often have meaningful and positive impacts without exact or masterful knowledge of what they're doing in any given instance. This point highlights an element of human spontaneity and freedom contained within the movement of becoming, which, as I will explain later, is important to Connolly's perspective on ethics. And lastly, the movement, in order to be successful, must be militant and persistent because by seeking to modify the identity institutionally bestowed upon it, it also tends to unsettle a whole series of identities attached to it in the process. Because being a member of a 'marked' constituency is in fact the same as being a potentially threatening Other, this group or constituency is thus surely "bound up with securing the self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence, or cultural merit of others"¹⁶³. Put simply, the movement "strives to reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity/difference then in place"¹⁶⁴. By engaging the dynamics of identity/difference in such a manner, the initiators of the politics of becoming will be met with much resistance. Only the most resolute movements will have a chance at succeeding.

It may be argued that the politics of becoming are in fact 'riding the wavelength' of a social logic, of the actualization of a principle such as human rights, for instance. Given this, some could characterize it simply as the product of

¹⁶¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 51.

¹⁶² Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 121.

¹⁶³ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

a dialectical logic that is driven by the progressive extension of human freedom and emancipation. For Connolly, such arguments miss the point. Many people celebrate the fruits of the achievements of historically marginalized and oppressed groups such as women, slaves, Aboriginal peoples, homosexuals, Jews, etc. But while these individuals are quick to condemn the historical wrongs incurred to these groups and the people responsible for them, they forget or are blind to how the movement of becoming arises and operates in the present tense. These individuals

[...] treat retrospective interpretations of the politics of becoming as if the interpretations and institutional standing it helped to bring into being were "implicitly" available to participants when things were in motion. They act as if the initiating constituency either exposed *hypocrisy* in the profession of universal rights by the dominant group or prompted a cultural *dialectic* that fills out the logic already implicit in a just society. They reduce the politics of becoming to a social logic. And that attitude ill prepares them to respond to the *next* surprise in the politics of becoming in a reflective and sensitive way.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, we have learned enough from the record of contemporary dialecticians who thought of themselves as being at the forefront of the "last historical moment", such as "Hegel, Marx and Fukuyama to refrain from shouting this presumption out"¹⁶⁶. Moreover, the politics of becoming do not always engender positive results. For instance, the figure of the suicide bomber is transforming our current conception of international politics by attempting to promote his worldview via means that defy and exceed all forms of traditional warfare¹⁶⁷. Connolly would also remind us that to confound the movement of becoming with a social logic is to commit a certain kind of hubris, one that ignores the all too important interlayering of culture, nature and biology.

The politics of becoming [...] is not the only way in which forks in time arise. Biological and climatic evolution, for instance, provide other exemplifications. These modes of becoming, moreover, periodically converge or collide with movements in the politics of becoming. The intensive human use of fossil fuels, for instance, may collide or collude with shifts in climatic development

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.51-52, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁶⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 121.

already under way. Or an emergent virus may fall into the hands of terrorists.¹⁶⁸

As such, the many *modes* of becoming remind us that beyond the domain of human endeavours and the realm of the social, the *world writ large* participates in becoming. Modes of becoming external to the human/social realm *do* have determining impacts on cultural becomings and vice-versa. In short, for Connolly, "the politics of becoming is purposive without being teleological"¹⁶⁹. Undoubtedly this makes for a more complex, even 'messy theory' that theories of social logic prefer to ignore altogether. But for Connolly the idea that social processes follow a logic does not pass the elemental test of fidelity to the world, as seen in chapter 1. Hence, his perspective is one more analogous to a theory of *creative evolution* and the loose play of biology as opposed to theories of *mechanical evolution*. Here the process, not the outcome, is emphasized.

However, to succeed, the movement of the politics of becoming must "extend *from* those who initiate cultural experiments *to* others who respond sensitively to those experiments"¹⁷⁰. Such sensitivity to the movement of difference is already operational to some degree in contemporary society. To cite one example, the demand to pluralize the realm of legitimate sexual and gender identities stemming from gay and lesbian movements once seemed like an impossible objective to many. Though still not a fully accomplished and entrenched set of identities, the diversification of sexual affiliations put forth by gay and lesbian activist communities have been supported by the responsiveness and sensitivity of numerous straights, who have worked tactically on themselves in a critical manner in order to modify the visceral sense that their sexuality is the only normal mode in existence. Here we see that the fostering of an ethos of critical responsiveness to difference is possible, even when the risk of unsettling a part of our identity is at stake. Connolly is hopeful that furthering the development of such an ethos is possible on a large

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁶⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

scale. I will reserve further discussion of this for the following chapter, where I will expound Connolly's discussion of the potential for ethics in late modernity.

Circuits of Connection: Affinities Across Lines of Difference

Tapping into the deep richness of life, understanding the world as a series of becomings, and cultivating an ethos of receptivity to the movement of difference are all promising aspects of late modernity that are, to some extent, already at work in the world. Though many other reactive and dangerous tendencies do exist (see sections 3.1 & 3.2.), an appreciation of the plurality of culture is one example of a positive response to the accelerating uncertainties of late modernity and to the 'permanent unsettling' of our expectations toward the world. It is what Connolly terms *deep pluralism*.

Proponents of deep pluralism not only have an appreciation of diversity, but also *feel an affinity* for the world at large. Such an affinity tends to multiply our circuits of connection beyond "the rationalist division of the world into 'subjects' and 'objects'"¹⁷¹. This connection must be carefully articulated: some affinities are felt immediately, though at different levels of intensity, and some others need to be theorized before they can be felt¹⁷². The point here is to encourage affinities across large differences, such as "circuits between human innovation and apes who invent new cultural activities, circuits between the volatility of a tornado and that of a God who speaks out of a whirlwind, circuits between the rail map of England and the body-brain circuits of human beings [...]"¹⁷³. Connolly here takes Henri Bergson's suggestion that "there is no manifestation of life which does not contain, in a rudimentary state – latent or potential – the essential characters of most other manifestations. The difference is in the proportions"¹⁷⁴. For example, Bergson argues that "there is not a single property of vegetable life that is not found, in

¹⁷¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 88.

¹⁷² Ibid., pp.88-89.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 90.

¹⁷⁴ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover, 1998): 106.

some degree, in certain animals; not a single characteristic feature of the animal that has not been in certain species at certain moments in the vegetable world"¹⁷⁵. In any case, recent DNA research would tend to support this claim from a biological perspective.

Connolly's scintillating account of his encounter with a creative cockroach tells this tale very well:

Take the huge cockroach I found stalking my kitchen one day when I was a visitor at the Australian National University. It felt imperative to eliminate this surprisingly large creature from my living space. When it smelled or saw that I was trying to kill it, it anticipated every move I was about to make in an uncanny way, leaping around in erratic, purposive ways. After what felt like a half-hour of mortal combat, it seemed to be crushed under the magazine I had pounded down on it (in one of my "creative" maneuvers). I lifted up the magazine in anticipatory disgust, expecting to observe a mashed cockroach. But it was not there. Stunned, I looked every which way, sensing at some level that I had now become the hunted one. Just as I was about to give up the search my eye caught a glimmer of brown squeezed into a tiny little crevice between the cupboard counter and the wall. It was barely visible to my crude eye. As soon as my eye touched it, it reinitiated our hand-to-tentacle combat. An instinct of intelligent survival, activated in numerous ways. One I have recognized in myself from time to time in emergency situations – one, indeed, I even felt a trace of during minor combat with that intense, creative bug. An affinity of affect between two diverse beings in a world populated by innumerable such affinities across multiple lines of difference.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, affinities across multiple and sometimes uncanny lines of difference are also "a step toward caring about the larger world that courses through and around us"¹⁷⁷. Cultivating an awareness of the multiple circuits of connections inspires us to acquire a 'cautious solicitude for the world' in that we come to develop an understanding of the energetic uncertainty and creativity that flows through and defines all elements of life. Connolly's deep pluralism is thus a 'feeling-imbued philosophy'. It mixes intellectual insights with a visceral attachment

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

to life and the world, and a Nietzschean inspired affirmation of being, which, Connolly thinks, lays the groundwork “from which commitment to more generous identifications, responsibilities, and connections might be cultivated”¹⁷⁸ and which may help curtail existential resentment. Deep pluralism may thus help us tone-down or outgrow the exclusionary humanism that claims ‘the world was designed for us alone’ – the operative ‘us’ signifying not only the human group as a whole, but certain human groups as defined against Others.

The potentials contained within late modernity as identified by Connolly, including the embracing of diversity and the flux of being, and the cultivating of a sensitivity to the movement of difference, are resources to which we can turn when we feel that the uncertainties and anxieties of life have put our backs against the wall. They are also, as we shall see next, the inspiration and basis for a model of deep pluralism that Connolly espouses. In the following chapter, I will engage with Connolly’s response to the current state of politics via his prescriptive formulations on politics, ethics and morality. There, I will show more explicitly how the positive possibilities contained within contemporary life alluded to above fit into a broader view of politics, including its affective formulations.

¹⁷⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 86.

Chapter 4 – An Ethos of Engagement: Contestability, Sensibility, Pluralism

In previous chapters I have shown Connolly's theoretical and philosophical framework to be one that allows for many non-traditional identities and new emerging identities to register under the purview of political theory. This, in turn, I have argued, also enables Connolly to frame his analysis of politics in a manner that accounts for the unpredictability of late modern experience and thus compels him to formulate political theory in a distinctive presumptive style, which does not assume to be above scrutiny or questionability. This carefully nuanced and open-ended perspective renders his framework less systematic than most, and also tends to paint a picture of the workings of politics as not a static formation, but rather a fluid, network-like formation or assemblage. In addition, his focus on the dynamic and interlayered aspects of thought processes and subjectivity, especially in relation to his treatment of affect, highlights the importance of the 'psychological' dimensions of politics. It is of no surprise then that Connolly's diagnosis of current politics is largely concentrated on the drive to various fundamentalisms and on the psychosocial and existential factors that may account for them. From scapegoating, to exclusionary types of nationalism and culture wars, through to the drive for purity within American liberalism and the visceral desire to punish, Connolly deploys most of his efforts on what he perceives to be the intense coding of the experience of fear and instability and the powerful negative assemblages that this engenders. Moreover, the widescale success of such assemblages point to a severe deficit in our willingness to, or capacity for, engagement with introspection and critical reflexivity. In the final section of the preceding chapter, I gave an initial overview of some of the ways in which Connolly addresses this situation. For him, late modern life also affords many resources with which to better mediate or negotiate within ourselves, both on individual and collective front, the elements that lead us to want to feel whole. Among others things, embracing diversity for its enrichment of life and the affinities we sometimes feel across wide differences are evidence of some of the

positive dynamics at play in contemporary processes of pluralization and the potential that they carry with them.

In this final chapter, I will expand my discussion of the positive dynamics as identified by Connolly into a larger exploration of his view of morality and the possibility for ethics in contemporary life. As such, I will be engaging more directly with the 'prescriptive' elements in Connolly's thought. I will begin by giving a brief descriptive account of Connolly's ideal view of politics, democratic pluralism. I will then turn to an analysis of the kind of perspective on politics required in order to achieve this goal. And lastly, I will address Connolly's ideas on the specific principles and virtues needed to cultivate pluralism within society and within ourselves.

4.1 – Democratic Pluralism as the Ideal of Politics

Connolly's 'ideal' notion of politics, if he were to articulate it in these terms, would not resemble any constitution, or specific type of governing body, or theory of the procedural nation and so forth. Connolly prefers to theorize *democracy*, which by definition overflows the confines of the state, and bleeds into culture, faith, media and numerous other intersubjective practices. As such, Connolly's ideal form of politics is *democratic pluralism*. Beyond mere *toleration* of diversity, democratic pluralism or deep pluralism entails an appreciation and celebration of cultural diversity. As seen in the previous chapter, it involves cultivating affinities across multiple lines of difference and a heightened awareness of the connections which bind not only various peoples together, but also elements of nature, culture and the larger world that courses through us. Moreover, such a pluralism would exist because it would be actively cultivated both on an individual and collective level.

An Assemblage of Minorities

Collective action in such a pluralized society would not proceed from an authoritative centre, or from a single set of moral principles. In a pluralistic democracy as envisaged by Connolly, every constituency draws inspiration and strength from *different* sources. If we think back to how liberalism and communitarianism engaged with pluralism, it is easy to discern the unique openness of Connolly's perspective. Rawls would have us agree to a social contract arrived at by means of an overlapping consensus, whereby individuals must leave their private faiths at home in order to engage in a 'reasonable' public forum. Charles Taylor's view of democracy is one that tends to proceed from a dominant, homogenous authoritative centre which draws its inspiration from a single moral source, while also allowing for multiple satellite minorities to gravitate around the given centre. For Connolly, however, "no constituency would be allowed to represent authoritatively the single source from which all others must draw in public life"¹⁷⁹. Thus, there would not be a cultural centre surrounded by satellite minorities, nor would public culture be reduced to an abstract mode of deliberation or dialogue; rather, *each group in society would constitute a minority*. Collective action would proceed from an *assemblage of intersecting interests and minorities*. It is important to recall that Connolly's multidimensional vision of culture, as discussed in the first chapter of the thesis (section 2.3), is one that seeks to include a whole range of affinities and dispositions, thereby expanding the traditional notion of culture.

Public culture inside and outside the state [would be] constituted by multiple *minorities*, divided along more numerous lines of religion, linguistic habit, economic interest, irreligion, ethnicity, sensuality, gender performances, and moral sources of inspiration.¹⁸⁰

In expanding the notion of culture and in taking difference seriously as the point of departure for thinking politics, contemporary society and culture become best

¹⁷⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 92

reflected by a notion of an assemblage of minorities rather than any concept that pretends to a single public good. Such a decentred and diffused approach could also effectively contribute to constrain the desire for wholeness and certainty within individual identities: given everyone's status as a minority, no one group, faith or creed could hope to legitimately impose their views upon all others. To occupy the centre as both Rawls and Taylor implicitly prescribe is, after all, to nourish "reciprocal recipes of dogmatism discernible in and around us"¹⁸¹ which risk slipping into the fundamentalist drives identified in the previous chapter. What is more, such an assemblage of minorities is, in a sense, "the overlapping consensus of John Rawls *reworked*".¹⁸² The various groups do "share overlapping commitments to each other and to a set of procedures". But this formula is significantly reworked as first, the constituencies bring "selective dimensions of their religious, ethnic, sensual, gender, and moral sensibilities into public engagements whenever the issue makes it pertinent to do so".¹⁸³ Democratic pluralism thus restores the "link between practice and belief that had been artificially severed" by secularist authors such as Rawls, and effectively negates even *the possibility* of bracketing out faith when participating in politics.¹⁸⁴ Second, a significant feature is added to the mix: the constituencies negotiate a public *ethos* between themselves, one that sets the tone for debate, struggle and settlement.

4.2 – The Insufficiency of Philosophical Models

In order to achieve this democratic pluralism, Connolly argues that we do *not* need another systematic procedural or philosophical plan. Rather, Connolly emphasizes the importance of *ethos*, defined as "the characteristic spirit or underlying sentiment of a culture or community", over *ethics*, "a set of moral principles governing a

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 64.

specific culture, group or form of conduct”¹⁸⁵. In this section, I will further explain what kind of ethos Connolly envisages. Following that, I will explore the advantages of advocating an ethos over a system of ethics. And lastly, I will outline why the sensibility with which we infuse political theory is as important as the argumentation that sustains it.

An Ethos of Engagement

The ethos of engagement, as advanced by Connolly, is what different parties negotiate as the tone or sensibility that will mediate and guide their cultural relations. Simply put, this ethos helps to sidestep the development of resentment and thus enables (though in no way *guarantees*) communication and dealings between competing constituencies.¹⁸⁶ In a certain sense, it is not dissimilar to the objective of mutual respect put forth by deliberative democrats. However, Connolly, as distinguished from Gutmann and Thompson for instance, develops a clear idea as to what, in the process of deliberation, might enable such a production of respect.

Two of the principal characteristics of the ethos of engagement are the exercise of *presumptive generosity* and *forbearance* toward fellow citizens/interlocutors. In a situation where each minority brings pieces and dimensions of her creed into the public forum, individuals must approach public debate with a presumption which is favourable to difference until proven wrong. This does *not* mean that you will, in the end, be convinced by differing positions; however, it does mean that it is necessary to give the competing ideas a fair trial.¹⁸⁷ Exercising forbearance, on the other hand, means that you ignore those minor differences that are not essential to the issue at hand. For example, in a bilingual university department faculty meeting, you let slide or do not challenge your interlocutor’s grammar mistakes since she is making a sustained effort to address

¹⁸⁵ *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.0.1)*. Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006, 10 Oct. 2006.

¹⁸⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p.160-161.

¹⁸⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 64.

you in your mother tongue, her second language. But why this emphasis on an ethos? And how is an ethos different from a model of ethics?

Ethos vs. Ethics

According to Connolly, philosophical systems and its ethical models are *insufficient* to a democratic pluralist society. In keeping with his notion of affect, he believes that ethical and political commitments are constituted not only out of sound principles or arguments, but also out of “models of inspiration and attraction”¹⁸⁸, a mix that isn’t well known in most ethical frameworks. As such, contrary to Connolly’s ethos of engagement, models of ethics often take for granted the complex psychological dimensions of political commitment and obligation (more on this in the next section). Furthermore, since the ethos is crafted from diverse materials and deployed in different ways depending on the constituency and context, it is an outlook which does not presume incontestability. As previously discussed, Rawls’ overlapping consensus depends on the bracketing out of faith and other private creeds when entering into the public realm. This is a somewhat of an unworldly criterion for a system of justice, and one that tends to be blind to accusations of bias. Connolly worries that such incontestable theoretical systems often contain within them a drive to purity not unlike the fundamentalisms examined in the previous chapter. Connolly thus thinks that the flexibility afforded by an ethos is more resilient, susceptible to modification (when circumstances require it), and has a greater chance of succeeding in such a diverse and divided world.

In addition, while a model of ethic is usually dependant on its power to *convince* or *sway* individuals and groups of the moral precepts it puts forth via dialogue, argumentation, and other reasoned means, it harbours a presumption of cultural homogeneity. Especially in the case of the models which attempt to establish a universal or globalized model of obligation, there is a tendency to ignore

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

the diversity of contexts, culture, affective reactions in the goal of creating a definite moral imperative which cuts across all creeds and cultures. As seen in the Chapter 2, while Rawl's system of justice gives a reductionist account of subjectivity and of culture, Taylor, on the other hand, in wanting to fashion a moral authority appropriate to all subjectivities tends to overdetermine the subject. Though laudable in their intentions, such communitarian models of ethics provide such a problematic account of culture that it becomes difficult to see how they expect to compel all constituencies of the superiority of their moral order. Put otherwise, "they make claims that exceed the power of the arguments they advance"¹⁸⁹. By taking this into account and by putting aside or suspending the aspiration to a universal code of citizen-obligation, Connolly is free to think the question of morality otherwise. In the next section, I will examine Connolly's take on the 'how' of obligation, i.e. how does one not only *agree* with an ethos, but also come to *internalize* its principles to such a degree that it may inspire concrete actions?

Sensibility vs. Argumentation

Connolly makes use of his concept of the interlayering between reason and affect to highlight the importance of the *sensibility* that is infused in our models of obligation. This is true not only of the philosopher who develops such models, but also in the relationship between the reader/adherent/believer and the model so developed. Drawing from the American philosopher William James, and in contrast to views on ethics, Connolly's ethos argues for the connection between the sensibility of a philosopher and the type of philosophy espoused. Connolly does not tend to essentialize nor universalize the influence of sensibility, in contrast for instance, with Charles Taylor's view on the role of emotions in moral theory. While for Taylor, emotive responses point to the greater moral sense that binds us all together, Connolly's sensibility is more contextualized and is seen as a social construct. Thus for Connolly, it is not that sensibility determines philosophy, but more that it can

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

inflect it. Argumentation and evidence are still important and necessary, but "argumentation alone seldom suffices to lodge or dislodge faith", creed, or a system of ethics.¹⁹⁰ Philosophers pour their "hopes, fears and anxieties, as they have developed through [their] respective biographies, into [the] arguments and conclusions" they advance.¹⁹¹ Hence Connolly's fears surrounding fundamentalism and his hopes concerning the pluralization of identities in contemporary times contribute a great deal in shaping the way he engages with political theory. The prelude to his latest book, for instance, tells the story of some of the people present throughout his childhood who were pluralists (without necessarily knowing so at the time) and of the impression they left on him. Had Connolly's early experiences not included such positive engagements with difference, and had he, to the contrary, been exposed to systematic and violent clashes stemming from competing identities, his work today might not take on such an optimistic tone. Similarly, individuals that read Connolly and tend to adopt his views are likely individuals, in one shape or form, somewhat predisposed to his perspective because of their sensibilities and outlook on life, politics and culture.

The point here is not that we should deconstruct biographical details of theorists in order to better understand them, their work, and their adherents, hermeneutically speaking. The point is rather that though ideas may be formulated in a clear and (hypothetically) universally accessible manner, the tone or sensibility that is infused in these ideas influences whether the reader will be convinced or not, perhaps as much as the substance behind the ideas does. The sensibility with which an author presents an idea works affectively on us, whether we are explicitly conscious of it or not. As discussed in the preceding chapter, a sensibility can *resonate* very strongly with our identities and aspirations without our being distinctly aware of it. After all, it "is hard to see what "argument alone" would look like since

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 71.

it is interwoven with affect and does its work in conjunction with a series of images, feelings, memories and desires that it touches"¹⁹².

The significance of this argument is that a set of moral precepts as in a system of ethics, be it as reasonable, inclusive, and ideal as possible, is not in itself enough to found and maintain ethical commitments. Attention to this exigency also opens up the possibility that the ethos or sensibility that permeates morality should play a larger role in our theorizations of and prescriptions for ethics in contemporary society. The point here is not for political theory to be able to better 'sell' competing models of obligation to existing constituents or to a 'core audience'. If indeed the tone and affective dimensions of morality are as important as Connolly claims, then *the key to inspiring collective action resides in promoting a sensibility susceptible to infiltrating the range of differences that characterize late modern times*. For Connolly, the cultivation of an ethos of engagement presents itself as a viable alternative to more formal and incontestable models of ethics, and it does so in a way that avoids the fomenting of a drive to fundamentalism. The following section will thus address more explicitly what principles and virtues are required in order to bring about the ethos of engagement and Connolly's vision of democratic pluralism.

4.3 – Principles and Virtues of Deep Pluralism

For Connolly, if deep pluralism and an ethos of engagement are to have any chance at success, they must first shore up support from a reservoir of principles, civic virtues and micropolitical techniques. Since the multidimensional nature of an ethos can also come to signify something more or less irregular or haphazard, and since the structures of inequality within which its negotiations are set may in themselves "engender surprising and unexpected injuries", compensatory principles, techniques

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 46.

and virtues, are essential.¹⁹³ They are important since “they lend an ethical dimension to the experience of identity, the practice of faith, the promotion of self-interest, and the engagements of politics”.¹⁹⁴ They do so *without taking the politics out of ethics*, while at the same time *honouring the diverse moral sources* of groups in a pluralistic society. In this section I will explore two principles required to bring about deep pluralism and the ethos of engagement: a decentred perspective and a view that legitimizes the contestability of identity. I will then turn to a discussion of the actions necessary to inspire an ethos of engagement, which Connolly identifies as the cultivation of micropolitical techniques. And finally, I will explore the two civic virtues that Connolly puts forth, those of agonistic respect and critical responsiveness.

A Decentred Perspective

What grounding does such an ethos of engagement have? In order for it to be successful on a large scale, would such an ethos not presuppose the same cultural homogeneity than systems of formal ethics? The answer to both these questions lies in the fact that for Connolly, such an ethos of engagement does not have a single, definite anchor. It draws support from a variety of resources, deploys itself differently depending on the context and constituency, and inspires individuals and groups in diverse ways. In stark contrast to formal models of ethics, the ethos advanced by Connolly “draws strength from its lack of purity”¹⁹⁵. It is in this sense, that the ethos of engagement is fundamentally *decentred* and rests on contestable foundations. One of its strongest premises is thus that “we do not need external or certain foundations to act ethically [and that] the dissolution of foundations does not automatically dissolve ethics: *it does so only for those who cannot be ethical without being ordered to do so*”¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹³ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 161.

¹⁹⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 160.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 55, my emphasis.

Far from premising a universal discourse ethic, the ethos of engagement envisioned by Connolly bases itself on concrete sets of everyday motivations. Connolly does not pretend that 'obligation just happens', or that the cultivation of such a sensibility is not a difficult thing, but he does argue that there are numerous incentives specific to the precarious context of late modern life which may provide powerful mobilizing impetuses:

Each set of participants draws upon a different mix of principles, practices, desires, and incentives to foster the general ethos. Support is grounded partly in care for the late modern desire to ensure that you do not become a minority persecuted by others, partly in an interest to protect the survival of democracy under the distinctive conditions of late modern life, partly in recognition of the embedded character of your own faith as well as that of others, partly in specific injunctions to love, generosity, charity, or hospitality that help to compose specific faith practices, partly in a desire to avoid participation in otherwise unnecessary modes of violence fomented by calls to national unity, and most of all in a distinctive compound of these motives and habituations that varies in texture from case to case.¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, what is advantageous as well as attractive about such an ethos is its resiliency. In advancing a multidimensional model that is "less tight, unified, formal and complete than [most other] conceptions of public life"¹⁹⁸, Connolly's ethos leaves room for contingent modifications and exhibits a pliability that is well suited to a world characterized by difference. Notably in this model, our 'private selves' are not separated from our 'public selves' – in fact they *cannot* be – and thus there is no pretension to rise above partisanship, faith, creed, or individual interests. Every individual is understood to be drawing from her faith, life experiences and interests because identity is necessarily embedded and culturally layered (see section 2.1). Hence, in the absence of a rigid account of the exact deployment, source of inspiration and certain outcome of such an ethos, Connolly is conceptualizing an open ended system of ethics which avoids homogeneous notions of culture, static and pro status-quo formulations. At the same time, Connolly manages to *seriously engage* with difference, taking it as *the point of departure* for thinking about

¹⁹⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁸ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 160.

pluralism and ethics. Not only does this hinder the quest for wholeness, but also, for Connolly, anything less would not have a decent shot at success in our diverse and divided world and would not pass 'an elemental test of fidelity to the world'.

The Legitimate Contestability of Identity

While formal models of ethics strive to *accommodate* difference, Connolly's notion of ethos instead takes difference as *the point of departure* for thinking about morality and politics. For to theorize a pluralistic society is to engage the concept of difference wholeheartedly as well as pushing it to its logical conclusion: what this means is coming to terms with the necessary contestability of one's faith, identity, and beliefs. The significance of this statement for the ethos Connolly seeks to put forward is twofold. One, it implies that the political theorist must come to accept the porous nature of the models she advances; and two, striving to cultivate an ethos of engagement also means, more broadly in scope, facing up to the inevitable and legitimate questioning of one's identity by others.

For Connolly, an 'elemental test of fidelity to the world' shows us that arguments that we make are *always* ultimately porous and uncertain (see section 2.4). As such, Connolly thinks that philosophy itself is pluralistic in that "a plurality of fundamental views can reasonably contend for priority at any single time"¹⁹⁹. After all, it only takes a "canvassing [of] the variety of philosophies in the history of western and eastern thought, and the variety of credible views that still persists" today to realize that it is unlikely that "any specific combination of evidence and argument will suffice to reduce the number of defensible philosophical faiths to one"²⁰⁰. This in turn entails that as a political philosopher, one must first hold a relational modesty about the claims one makes. It means admitting that one's philosophy, ethics or beliefs are "profoundly and legitimately *contestable* to

¹⁹⁹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 71.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

others".²⁰¹ Failure to do so, as highlighted in the previous chapter, can result in a dangerous aggravation of the fundamentalist and hegemonic certainties that many in philosophy and political theory battle against.

Moreover, the element of contestability inherent to such a multidimensional model signifies that the ethos of engagement via its work in enabling cultural relations also serves a function in attenuating the drive to wholeness. Here it is useful to recall Connolly's argument regarding 'tapping into the richness of life', as highlighted in section 3.3: one positive response to the uncertainty of contemporary life is to cultivate an appreciation for diversity, which may also blend into the multiplication of affinities one feels across lines of difference (e.g. the uncanny affinity between Connolly and the creative cockroach). The essence of this statement for politics and ethics is contained within the following question: What were to happen if two groups on opposite sides of a divided issue were to pursue connections across bifurcations, e.g. between atheism and theism?²⁰² For instance, "what if many on each side of such a divide can identify a little atheist or theist periodically peeking through their dominant investments of faith?"²⁰³ Connolly thinks that coming to terms with the legitimate contestability of one's faith, combined with a pursuit of oblique connections across difference can lead, for one, to a critical engagement with one's *internal counterpart*, an encounter that helps to moderate how the self is presented to its *external counterpart*, inculcating relational modesty. Put otherwise, "when such crossings are explored without resentment, they can evolve into reciprocal commitment to inject generosity and forbearance" into public dealings, negotiations and settlements.²⁰⁴ Such an enabling of the ethos of engagement thus allows for a more dense and generous encounter to take place:

You now exercise forbearance toward adversaries who help to crystallize your spiritual identity even while deflating claims some advance to completeness. You invite them to reciprocate. You might do so, partly from attachment to

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 124.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.125.

the ambiguity of being, partly through appreciation of the role distance between you and others plays in opening space for new candidates to lobby for a place on the cultural register of being, partly out of respect for the way the periodic introduction of new identities broadens your own experience of relational interdependence, partly out of gratitude toward the difference *of* the other in helping you to crystallize what you are, partly through encountering traces of the other *in* your identity, and partly out of a prudence in a world in which you seldom know now which allies you will need in the future.²⁰⁵

Of course, working towards this means putting one's identity 'at risk' so to speak. And it also means doing so without any guarantee of the subsequent results. It is Connolly's hope that "these motives, incentives, interests and ideals amplify each other, engendering a pluralist resonance machine" capable of fostering a positive ethos of pluralization²⁰⁶. But if commitment to fostering such an ethos 'doesn't just happen' and if it poses a significant risk to identity, what may we rely on for support/help? One of the positive sources of inspiration which may be of help here, as discussed in section 2.3., is a *protean care for the world*, a feeling that emanates from the cultivation of an awareness of the multiple circuits of connection in the world. In Connolly, another such aid may be the active work on the micropolitical and affective layers of the self.

Techniques of Cultivation as Self-Artistry

For Connolly, while the ambiguity at the heart of identity sets the stage for the dangers that I identified earlier, it also "provides significant resources to struggle against them" in the form of self-artistry.²⁰⁷ Blending Nietzsche's 'self-artistry', Foucault's 'tactics of the self' and Deleuze's 'micropolitics', Connolly argues for a relational arts of the self as an ethical strategy or technique. The "soul craft" involved here is gentle, modest, experimental and set in the "distinctive materializations already in place"²⁰⁸. It is not, as some critics insist, about fostering

²⁰⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 160.

²⁰⁶ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 67.

²⁰⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 145.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

a self-indulgent, hedonistic self. Nor is it about uncovering an essential or authentic self underneath the sediments of constructed identity or creating a new self entirely by oneself. Rather, "the goal is to work demurely on a relational self *that has already been formed*, recrafting vengeful, anxious, or stingy contingencies that have become entrenched and forging them into a distinctive form you can admire without having to treat it" as the only pure, true and universal identity in existence²⁰⁹. Its objectives are, in a sense, akin to Buddhist principles which help relax the need for our identity to be sanctified and which can assist us in coming to terms with the demand to grasp "a central coordinator not available for grabbing"²¹⁰. In other words, such relational self-artistry works to *desanctify selective elements in your own identity*.²¹¹ Thus, "it is to become a being who rises above the twin evils of *ressentiment* and transcendental egoism"²¹².

More concretely then, self-artistry is to come to terms with the constituting elements of your identity, without feeling resentful towards the world for your incapacity to modify some deeply instilled contingency, which you find unattractive, or for your inability to find a perfect model of life that would elevate you to wholeness. It is to admit the contestability and contingency of your beliefs. As discussed earlier, the occasion for practicing such self-artistry often arises when a (surprising) new movement disturbs or disrupts established ideas on a subject matter.

Suppose for example that you firmly believe that death will come when God or the course of nature claims you. A new political movement begins advocating for the right to doctor-assisted deaths in extreme cases of suffering. This movement profoundly disturbs you. You agree with critics of this movement that the concerned doctors have a great disrespect for the inviolability of life.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.145-146, my emphasis.

²¹⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 93.

²¹¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 146.

²¹² Ibid., p. 150.

But later, when the shock of the new demand wears away a little, your concern for the suffering of the dying in a world of high-tech medical care opens a window to exploration of other possibilities. *One part of your subjectivity now begins to work on other parts.* In this case your concern for those who writhe in agony as they approach death may work on contestable assumptions about divinity or nature already burned into your being. But how to proceed? Cautiously. Perhaps you attend a film in which the prolonged suffering of a dying person becomes palpable. Or you talk with friends who have gone through this arduous experience with parents who pleaded for help to end their suffering...Through the conjunction of these diverse modalities of intervention, changes in the thinking behind your thoughts may now begin to form...Or perhaps you still find your previous conception of nature to be persuasive...You continue to affirm, say, a teleological conception of nature in which the meaning of death is set, but now you acknowledge how this judgment may be more contestable than you had previously appreciated. And you begin to feel this uncertainty more intensely as a conflict within yourself. You even begin to wonder whether your previous refusal to allow others to die as they determine (when such determinations are possible) might have contained a desire to preserve a reassuring interpretation of the wholeness of nature even more than a concern for their dignity or well-being. What was heretofore nonnegotiable may now gradually become rethinkable.²¹³

Hence such self-artistry proceeds when an individual works artfully on herself for the benefit of fostering critical responsiveness and not merely as "reformation of an old pile of arguments".²¹⁴ According to Connolly, this is done through a careful work of oscillation between diverse registers of your subjectivity, permitting some zones to infiltrate into others as you move back and forth: you work "now on thought-imbued feelings, then on thought-imbued intensities below the reach of feeling, now on received images of death and suffering, again on intensive memories of suffering", and finally on more intellectual/conscious registers such as "entrenched concepts of divinity, identity, ethics and nature"²¹⁵. Conscious, reflexive thought now becomes engaged at numerous levels, some of which may become more mobile or flexible "partly because a set of intensive proto-thoughts

²¹³ Ibid., pp.146-147.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

behind them have been nudged"²¹⁶. As I showed earlier, Connolly considers that thinking occurs on several registers at once, and each is intertwined with intensities and feelings that inflect it. Thus, to engage with and alter certain aspects of thinking also entails, to a certain extent, a modification of the general sensibility in which it is framed.²¹⁷ Moreover, to change one's sensibility means according more importance to minor feelings, sensations, thoughts and impressions than previously allotted.

However, Connolly is also quick to stress that there is no guarantee that these techniques will give such positive results. It is an experimental practice and thus we do not control the process in its entirety. Connolly notes that this is at once disturbing, and inciteful. Furthermore, to choose *not to* experiment under these grounds means that we would have even *less control* over the modalities of subjectivity and intersubjectivity already lodged within us. Proceeding with caution then, we must review "the effects of previous experiments before going on"²¹⁸.

Tactics to modify the infrasensible register of subjectivity and intersubjectivity must be experimental because, since you seldom know exactly how the initial feeling became installed and since you typically lack direct control over the triggering scripts in the amygdala, stomach, and elsewhere, you don't quite know in advance how the tactics you adopt will act upon the existing shape and intensity of your sensibility.²¹⁹

Micropolitical self-artistry, together with the principles of contestability of identity and the decentred perspective discussed earlier, will help curtail, thinks Connolly, existential resentment and its corollaries. While these techniques of the self are an individual practice that take many forms and whose content and impact can differ from person to person, Connolly also identifies the requirement of cultivating collective civic virtues appropriate to deep pluralism. Though very different from the demanding, potentially coercive and/or unitary virtues put forth by Rousseau and

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 183.

Tocqueville to which we are accustomed, Connolly's pluralist civic virtues are nevertheless poignant and persuasive.

Agonistic Respect

Agonistic respect is what qualifies the relationship between partisans of constituencies already registering on the scope of 'established identity' (I will deal with identities engaged in the process of becoming in the next section). In this sense, it helps to understand agonistic respect as a "kissing cousin of liberal tolerance"²²⁰. However, it diverges from the notion of tolerance in that it is not "bestowed upon minorities by a putative majority occupying the authoritative centre", i.e. the image of the white Anglophonic male "tolerating" other ethnic or cultural minorities within his neighbourhood or country.²²¹ To this effect, Connolly aptly remarks that "people seldom enjoy being tolerated that much, since it carries the *onus of being at the mercy of a putative majority* that often construes its own position to be beyond question".²²² Concurrent with his view of an assemblage of minorities, Connolly thus stresses the need to 'finely slice' and diffuse the public centre, so that each constituency draws respect "from different sources for different constituencies".²²³ I have already reviewed a number of potential such sources in the previous section, including gratitude to difference for helping you crystallize *your* identity, prudence in not knowing who you will need as allies in the future, desire to avoid becoming a minority persecuted by others, desire to avoid unnecessary modes of violence stemming from calls to unity, and recognition of the embedded character of faith and creed. As such, groups can continue to value their identities, faiths, etc., *as universal in value or in the abstract*, but now fold into them a relational modesty proceeding from the *impossibility of its practical universality*. Again, the pursuit of such an ethos is built on the premise that "*between* a fundamental image

²²⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 123.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., my emphasis.

²²³ Ibid.

of the world as either created or uncreated and a specific ethico-political stance resides a *sensibility* that colors how that creed is expressed and portrayed to others".²²⁴

This relation of tolerance is 'agonistic' because there is literally *agony* in having your own identity put into question by others. (Connolly does not want to deny this part of the deal, since his is a feeling-imbued philosophy which doesn't pretend to be above biological/cultural/emotive responses). In absorbing this agony, there is always something in one's identity that is placed at risk. But something is also acquired in return:

You sacrifice the demand for the unquestioned hegemony of your faith to curtail the occasions when its very defence calls upon you to impose otherwise unnecessary violence or suffering on others. You accentuate a dimension of your faith: its call to tolerance unless it is subjected to intolerable provocation. You do so, however, by recomposing *what counts* as an intolerable provocation to your faith.²²⁵

Furthermore, this type of respect is 'agonistic' since it implies folding "agonistic contestation of others into the respect that you convey toward them", whereby the word *agon* is derived from the Greek for 'contest'.²²⁶ In this sense, though respect counts for a lot in the relationship between constituencies, a combative spirit remains firmly lodged in its crux. In other words, there is still room for arguing, testing, challenging and contesting others' creeds. The 'content' of public engagement continues to be logic, reasoned arguments, etc., but it is the *sensibility* with which it is infused that changes in Connolly's model. This will involve tactical work on the affective layers of one's being and thus will require cultivation as seen in the previous section. Of course, such a program is never fully achieved: cultivation should be understood as a process. Hence "old flames of anathematization [are bound to] periodically flare up again, and new and unexpected movements of faith [and identity] by others will arise to pose the issue

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

all over again in surprising terms"²²⁷. But as Connolly points out, such is life in a society that is pluralistic in composition at any one time, and over time. Yet by the same token, it may even be possible that "on occasion [...] contenders [will be] compelled by events to band together more adamantly" such as in the struggle to limit, for example, a movement toward exclusionary nationalism.²²⁸

While models that are explicitly based on tolerance and accommodation tend to present what is perceived to be the 'dominant culture' as both superior and above scrutiny, Connolly's decentred perspective takes cultural difference to be the norm from which we must proceed. Connolly thereby relaxes the pressures of homogenization associated with more centred models (such as that of Taylor's – see section 1.2) and is arguably a more apt reflection of contemporary pluralistic democracies. However, Academic critics or pessimists will remark that many will refuse and dismiss such an ethos, citing the atomization of late modern society among other things. Granted, while contemporary collective social action or change is hard to conceive of in conditions where either a cultural referent, moral source or vision of the good is being imposed from above, Connolly's model, let us recall, neither attempts this nor does it deploy itself in a manner that ignores the challenges of atomization or individualization: the "idea is not to rise either to one ecumenical faith or to a practice of reason [or identity] located entirely above faith, but to forge a positive ethos of public engagement between alternative faiths". Clearly, admits Connolly, the difficulties are great, *but the contemporary need is also great:*

If the cultural *need* for such an ethos is high, if much violence within and between states is traceable to the tenacity of these differences, and if the late modern time is one in which most territorial regimes find themselves populated by partisans of different faiths, creeds, and philosophies, then public intellectuals should lead the way in setting the example, rather than decrying the refusal of others to follow one that they have not yet instantiated sufficiently in their own practices [...] Those who invoke pessimism to refuse the pursuit do not take sufficient measure of the contemporary need.²²⁹

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

²²⁹ Ibid., pp.47-48.

Critical Responsiveness

The second pluralist civic virtue advanced by Connolly is that of critical responsiveness. Irreducible to agonistic respect, critical responsiveness pertains to those identities, creeds and faiths that are still undergoing the process of becoming (and thus are not encoded on the register of legitimate identity). As alluded to in section 2.3, critical responsiveness takes the shape 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".²³⁰ It is, in this sense, sensitivity to the movement of difference. As with agonistic respect, critical responsiveness involves working on the micropolitical dimensions of our selves, especially in order to better negotiate certain negative visceral responses. Critical responsiveness is not all that new or radical an idea; it is consonant with the "creative receptivity that Bergson, James, Nietzsche, and the Dalai Lama, in different ways, find so critical to ethico-political life"²³¹. The cultivation of such a virtue is so important for Connolly because, as discussed in the very first chapter, identity is (paradoxically) constructed through difference, and thus when a new identity forges a place on the register of recognized identities, the whole register shifts or is modified to some extent: "new terms of contrast and similarity" now make themselves available to the "play of identity".²³² An ethos which promotes critical responsiveness will better equip us to recompose principles and social codes as required, and will also provide us with the 'suppleness of mind' to deal with the sometimes new and surprising events which can unfold in the aftermath of such change.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 127.

²³² Ibid., p. 126.

Critical responsiveness is already at work to some degree in our contemporary societies. For example, in section 3.3, I discussed the tactical work that many straights have undertaken in attempting to change the visceral monopoly that their sexual and gender identity has on legitimacy. Another powerful example is the recent proliferation of interfaith groups, especially in the wake of the events of September 11th, 2001. At the outset, these would seem like unlikely occurrences; yet they *do* occur some of time. Perhaps we have a positive dynamic already in place within the tendency to pluralize identities to thank for that. In any case, here's how Connolly explains this process of critical responsiveness more specifically:

Suppose you find it incumbent to modify some aspect of the visceral sensibility that has grown up in you like tropical underbrush. Perhaps you had taken your own sexual desire to monopolize the natural field. Or had felt instinctively that your religious creed, so radiant to you, is binding on everyone. Your initial response to a new movement in the domain of creed or sexuality may be to attack it as unnatural, to protect the security of your visceral identity. How could people screw like that?, you ask, feeling tremors of uncertainty course through your own sexual identity. How could an existential *faith* be nontheistic?, you ask, resisting the creation of any space in between monotheistic faith and rationalistic orientations that purport to eschew faith altogether. But another voice in you worries about the indignity or suffering imposed on others by such patterns of insistence. Now the cultivation of critical responsiveness begins. It proceeds in conjunction with the exposure to a larger micropolitics. The outcome is uncertain. But it may alter part of the context in which judgments are formed and negotiations are pursued. It may engender a shift in criteria of judgment, justice, identity, or legitimacy.²³³

One possible objection to the spirit of critical responsiveness is the practical impossibility as well as the undesirability of conceding to the demands of *all* movements of becoming. Of course, this is a valid charge. However, Connolly stresses that it is a *critical* endeavour and that all demands cannot and should not be met. But here the thorny question of criteria of selection arises: "the question of ethics with respect to the politics of becoming is this: Which sort of suffering is most

²³³ Ibid., p. 127.

worthy of responsiveness at a particular historical moment"?²³⁴ For we have to take into account at least two levels of specific suffering: first, the suffering brought about by the distress and the disturbance of those disrupted by the politics of becoming; and second, the suffering imposed by the established codes, norms, identities upon those within the movement of difference. The answer for Connolly is that pre-existing codes of judgment, morality and of obedience will not entirely suffice. Thus, "some elements in the existing code itself must be modified if space is to be opened for something new to emerge"²³⁵. In other words, we are dealing with the oscillation or torsion between the forces of being and becoming, as discussed in chapter 2. Connolly makes this point very well:

In a pluralizing culture two interdependent dimensions of ethics are poised in tension: the *obligation* to abide by the existing practice of justice and morality and *cultivation* of an ethos of critical responsiveness to the movement of difference. Without a moral code, the regularity of judgment expected by existing constituencies would be lost. But a congealed code also poses dumb, arbitrary barriers to the politics of becoming. This closure and clumsiness is what Nietzsche calls the "immorality of morality". While a moral code is indispensable to social regulation, judgment, and coordination, it is also too crude, blunt, and blind an authority to carry out these functions sensitively and automatically, particularly when new and surprising modes of suffering are encountered. An ethos of critical responsiveness, when active, navigates between these constitutive, interdependent, and discordant dimensions of ethical life.²³⁶

But how can the cultivation of a critical responsiveness to the movement of difference, one might ask, have an impact on what is decided in the courts? After all, much of what is meant by the 'demands' of the politics of becoming is official state recognition (and protection) in the form of rights? At this juncture, Connolly again would emphasize the micropolitics of the issue. "The multitude", to borrow Hardt and Negri's concept, "imperfectly infused with specific traditions, comes to the fore in a democratic regime".²³⁷ It is that intersubjective mix which "helps to set the

²³⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 57.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

²³⁶ Ibid., pp.58-59.

²³⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 141.

ethos in which official sovereignty is set".²³⁸ In this sense, so called 'objective and scholarly' readings and interpretations put forth by the courts are far from immune to collective sentiment:

A thick context of the *thinkable* and *unthinkable*, the habitually *expected* and the *impermissible*, the politically *acceptable* and the *morally outrageous*, enters into authoritative readings of constitutional texts and irresistible acts of sovereign power.²³⁹

In other words, a public ethos *sets the tone or range* within which the courts may manoeuvre. They would rather pretend that it is not so. But take, for instance, some 'macropolitical' projects – allowing gays in the military, granting the right to doctor-assisted suicide, converting our industries to using renewable energy resources – as Connolly notes "none of these proposals, enunciated by a court, a parliament, or executive decree, is either likely to be made or to get very far unless and until *micropolitical receptivity* to it has been nurtured across several registers and constituencies".²⁴⁰ Much of the preparation for such macropolitical enactments thus occurs at the molecular level, i.e. via micropolitical negotiations of an ethos. All this is to say that a public ethos can go a long way, and that we should not discount the micropolitics that inhabit the subterranean circulation between public sensibilities and legitimacy given the presumed universal importance of authoritative and sovereign acts of power.

Yet in advocating for the cultivation of a sensitivity to the movement of difference, is Connolly not de facto siding more on the side of the politics of becoming than on the side of the politics of being? Is he not privileging new identities over established ones? If so, how is this fair and consistent with the ethico-political concerns of a pluralistic society? In this respect, Connolly offers a persuasive argument:

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

²⁴⁰ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 149, my emphasis.

In contemporary U.S. culture the operational answer often precedes the question. Here, entrenched codes of morality and normality weigh in heavily on the side of being, stasis, and stability *without even acknowledging that the scales are tipped that way*. And this is probably true more generally as well. To attend to the politics of becoming is to modify the cultural balance between being and becoming without attempting the impossible, self-defeating task of dissolving solid formations altogether.²⁴¹

Put otherwise, the answer is 'yes', Connolly privileges the politics of becoming over the politics of being. But we can reasonably deduce from the above explanation that helping to tip the scale a little more toward becoming is also understood as a way of ensuring that the scale is more equitably balanced, and that the most severe instantiations of suffering will at least receive a fighting chance to have their demands heard. In this sense, it is neither inconsistent nor surprising that the 'protean care for the world' which Connolly wishes to inspire also signifies attending to the vulnerable in society.

In this final chapter, I provided an analysis of Connolly's prescriptive view of contemporary politics. Largely deployed as a strategy to help curtail the dangers of fundamentalism as explored in Chapter 3, Connolly's vision of a democratic pluralism is one in which difference in culture, religion or identity is taken to be the norm. In this outlook, society is thus composed of an assemblage of minorities with no authoritative or moral centre. Negotiations between various minorities are mediated by an ethos of engagement which sets the tone for debate between interlocutors as proceeding from a presumption of generosity and forbearance. In emphasizing his preference for the cultivation of an ethos or sensibility, Connolly highlights the limits of formal systems of ethics. As such, attention to the affective dimensions of subjectivity evinces the notion that argument alone is not sufficient for the founding and maintaining of ethical commitments. Moreover, a decentred approach focusing on the contestability of identity, promoting the strength and resiliency of Connolly's anti-systematic model, helps to shore up support for the ethos of engagement. This ethos is largely internalised via individual techniques of

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 57.

micropolitical self-artistry whose goal it is to help recraft or tone down the vengeful, anxious or 'stingy' dimensions of the self through a gentle soulcraft or artful work on oneself. Finally, in order to achieve a deeply pluralized society, Connolly also believes it necessary to cultivate specific civic virtues. The virtue of agonistic respect asserts that democratic debates must involve a measure of combative spirit in the arguing and challenging of others' positions/beliefs, but that this must be done with a deep sense of respect that goes beyond mere tolerance, folding in a relational modesty about the universal applicability of one's own beliefs and creeds. Critical responsiveness, on the other hand, is the cultivation of a sensitivity toward new emerging identities which sometimes requires a subsequent promotion of the recomposition of social codes and norms in light of these new identities. I will conclude this thesis in the next section by assessing some of the most poignant critiques of Connolly's work and evaluate the feasibility of his prescriptive ideas in the late modern context of atomization and perceived disintegration of the social linkages necessary for collective change.

Conclusion

I will conclude this thesis by addressing some of the most important and challenging critiques of Connolly's work. The opportunity to review such critiques will also afford me a chance to further clarify some particularly difficult aspects of Connolly's thought. I will begin by assessing the critique of Connolly's thought that frames him as an apologist for capitalism. I will then focus my attention on whether Connolly's prescriptive project of micropolitical self-artistry is feasible as collective action. Finally, I will address whether techniques of the self can actually aid in circumventing or diminishing feelings of resentment.

Connolly has been accused of being more apologetic than critical of power distributions in society.²⁴² This line of critique is often levelled against strands of poststructuralist thinking, and is articulated around the concern for what is perceived as a tacit or explicit approbation of capitalism. For example, in that fact that Connolly does not advocate the dissolution of the capitalist system, his approach can be seen as a 'gentle political struggle', i.e. one that would rather see slight modifications brought to the current system than attempt to imagine and participate in the emergence of a new socio-economic formation altogether. In such a critique, following the lines of the classic argument of Herbert Marcuse, Connolly is understood as a critic of liberalism while firmly entrenched in a liberal perspective.²⁴³ According to this assessment, Connolly would be characterized as a proponent of 'liberal slack' or of a 'liberalism plus', that is, of liberalism with more room for ambiguity, and thus by the same token a promoter of capitalism and unequal power distributions.

While this critique does in some ways ring true – Connolly would likely accept being regarded as someone who works *within* liberalism in order to transform it – it nonetheless gives a false impression of the motivations and

²⁴² John R. Wallach, "Review of *Ethos of Pluralization*", *Political Theory*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (December 1997): 886-893.

²⁴³ See Herbert Marcuse, Robert Paul Wolff and Barrington Moore, Jr, *The Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

grounding of Connolly's endeavour and presupposes a dichotomous view of the struggle against power distributions. Though Connolly fashions his ideal of deep pluralism specifically within a democratic (and implicitly capitalist) society, it is important to note that his 'ontological framework' points to a particular, if not strange or unique, understanding of socio-economic and political *change*. One's views on the *how* of social change thus tend to determine one's strategic orientation toward, for instance, political activism and other contestatory/critical activities.

As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, Connolly's immanentist worldview considers nature itself to be an interlayered, network-like 'system' that is always open-ended. As such, Connolly's approach tends to be anti-systematic as it argues that the natural volatility of the world means that something always 'escapes'. This does not, however, signify that reality is chaotic or random and that we may do nothing about it: unequal distributions of power, alienating political and economic institutions, and exclusionary social norms are very real and do cause much suffering and despair. However, Connolly understands these as *contingent formations* in the sense that they are formations which typically contain "internal resistances or remainders; and that it might be otherwise if some of these balances shift"²⁴⁴. The emphasis on the term 'contingent' here does *not* mean 'temporary and thus unimportant or insignificant'; rather, it implies that there is a zone of instability or uncertainty which circulates through authoritative and oppressive formations/assemblages and that a shifting of some of the balances of this nexus may engender a range of modifications/transformations, some slight, some significant. It is an account of the *how* of socio-political and economic change that is "littered, layered, and complex"²⁴⁵, based on an oscillation or torsion between the forces of being and becoming. For Connolly, *there is nothing external to this tense nexus*: no overriding design, logic of the movement of social processes, or causal explanation, and no model of historical realization (be it material or ideal).²⁴⁶ As

²⁴⁴ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 41.

²⁴⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 141.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

such, the appeal to transcendental logic or universal morality by numerous activist struggles for positive change, and the eschatological gesture that they imply, get it wrong according to Connolly. These perspectives oversimplify the dense materiality of culture and the imbricated nature of politics, biology, the social, etc., and thus fail 'an elemental test of fidelity to the world'. As such, they also run the chance of producing tight conceptions of truth, dogmatic moral ideals and other potential offshoots of resentment.

Hence, if capitalism or 'Empire' is to be understood as the all-encompassing 'system' or assemblage of our age, Connolly can be said to be neither in favour of nor against capitalism/Empire. If I were to push Connolly's thought even further, I would say that since one cannot be external to our contingent reality nor speak *in the name of* an external value/source/logic (those who do so confound something universal for something contingent in his opinion), the only possibility for intervening is from *within*. Indeed, if we accept his ontological premises, his thought is consistent in this regard. As a result, the all-encompassing reality of capitalism or Empire, in his view, is characterized by both the presence of alienating, law-like structures that limit, impose and cause pain, *as well as* an inherent openness, porosity, and an attendant potential for change. The tendency to represent capitalism or Empire as a closed system of domination and as an edifice that 'we must bring down' reminds Connolly of that

delicious scene in *The Life of Brian*, when the revolutionary leader against Rome asks a leading question to his comrades huddled together in the catacombs, "What have the Romans ever done for us?" "Well, they built the aqueducts," blurts out one member huddling with him. "Yes, but besides the aqueducts, what have the Romans ever done for us?" "An education system," another mole shouts. We return much later to a laundry list of Roman accomplishments, reviewed in precise order by the meticulous leader followed by the refrain, "Besides the aqueducts, education system, peace," etc., etc..."What have the Romans *ever* done for us?"²⁴⁷

The point is not to renounce to or forgo vigorous critiques of Empire at every level of organization, but to consider, before determining one's strategic blueprint of

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

action, "What has Empire done for many of the values that you seek to advance?"²⁴⁸ I would surmise that a laundry list of accomplishments, including human rights and 'universal' suffrage, would be the result. This may help better explain Connolly's strategic angle and prescriptive recommendations such as deep pluralism, the ethos of engagement, critical responsiveness and micropolitical self-artistry (more on this later), all of which struggle against inequality in power distributions in their own distinctive way. Some may accuse Connolly of not being radical enough, but I would argue that to take his perspective seriously is also to throw into question the "wisdom of huddling in a corner waiting for the "multitude" [or inherent contradictions or oppressed classes/peoples or transcending logic] to bring the edifice down."²⁴⁹ In Connolly's regard, then, the work of critical energies is to "track and challenge [Empire's loose world assemblage] at numerous points in efforts to twist its uncertain and porous structure in more positive directions."²⁵⁰

If the question concerning Connolly's endorsement of capitalism and its nefarious content can be addressed and rebutted with relative ease, this next line of critique, as we shall see, is not so simply dismissed. With the increasing individualization and atomization of society, there are doubts as to whether a vision like Connolly's, who's prescriptive stance for politics is mostly deployed on an individual basis, can garner the wide-ranging collective support or impact required in order to twist 'the structure into more positive directions'. Can we realistically expect the ethos of engagement to 'catch-on' enough to evince actual social change? To what extent will the exercise of careful introspection and techniques of the self be successful beyond the individual person who practices it? Similarly, does Connolly not advocate something too abstract to be applicable to a wide audience?

For one, I deem Connolly's argument for the multiplication of community/collective linkages beyond the traditional scope of things as persuasive. Though many academics allege the improbability of contemporary collective action,

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

citing the deterioration of the traditional sites of the inculcation of political ideas and moral obligations/values, Connolly draws attention to new instantiations of such linkages namely through new technologies and new emerging identities. Second, I believe that it is helpful to think of the micropolitical work advanced by Connolly in Deleuzian terms, "as a cultural collectivization and politicization of arts of the self"²⁵¹. Here, micropolitics thus refers to an assemblage of individual techniques, whether applied or functioning within a small group, large constituency or constellation of interdependent peoples. In this context, collective action is understood to proceed from a rhizomatic style assemblage of individual practices of arts of the self, working together in *resonance*. Critics of such an immanentist view of politics, in particular cultural unitarians, insist "that the organization of political action in concert would be impossible in a rhizomatic culture", preferring to reserve the possibilities of political and social change for more hierarchical and centralized processes.²⁵² Connolly cannot definitively disprove such contending theories but points out that such critics "might learn a few things by examining how their own brains work", referring of course to the affectively layered, intensive and decentralized processes of thought itself.²⁵³

That being said, Connolly's practice of micropolitical self-artistry, far from being merely 'abstract', contains a number of compulsory concrete actions concurrent with the pluralist values put forth in this thesis: (1) exposing the deep cultural roots of intense resentment, and the kind of politics that tend to project this onto vulnerable groups/faiths; (2) educating ourselves and others to transform this existential resentment into more positive affirmations; (3) focusing on, via political movements, the social and economic factors that sow the seeds of resentment within a democratic culture; (4) individual experimentation that helps us to understand and foster the relation between technique and thought.²⁵⁴ I surmise that the first three points require no further clarification as I have dealt with them

²⁵¹ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 108.

²⁵² Connolly, Op.Cit., *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, p. 176.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.135-136.

sufficiently in previous sections/chapters. I will thus turn my focus to this last element regarding individual experimentation.

In his recent work, Connolly further develops the link between technique and thought in a more concrete manner in the hopes of constructing a persuasive argument for the pertinence and feasibility of relational self-artistry. The following is a list of techniques of the self, "both gross and subtle", that pervade everyday life and "by which thinking is altered in its direction, speed, intensity or sensibility"²⁵⁵:

- You listen to Mozart while reading a philosophical text, in order to relax your mind and sharpen its acuity or reception.
- You go for a slow run after having struggled with a paradox or quandary that perplexes you.
- You expose yourself to an image that, against your considered intention, has disturbed you in the past, while listening to the music of the Talking Heads as you soak in the bathtub and imagine how mellow it would be to dive into crystal-blue water off a Caribbean beach.
- You cultivate more expansive powers of reflection and persuasion by giving talks in public settings. On some such occasions you express in public one or two views you have previously stated only in the shower.
- You reach a conclusion after reconsidering familiar arguments and evidence in a mood that has shifted significantly from the last time you engaged the issue.
- You go dancing to music that inspires and energizes you after hearing very disappointing news.
- You minimize encounters for a time with associates whose dispositions are saturated with existential rage or resentment.²⁵⁶

Though some of these examples may seem trivial or inconsequential, they nevertheless represent the work that we can do upon ourselves to shift certain moods slightly away from resentment. Many of us may already be practicing some such techniques without being explicitly conscious of it. Furthermore, the minimal and subtle shifts are sometimes much more important than we would like to acknowledge as I have shown throughout this thesis on many different levels. Other affirmative examples of micropolitics in action is the relational work that we do on ourselves and that is "abetted by films and TV dramatizations that combine

²⁵⁵ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Neuropolitics*, p. 100.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 102-103.

image, voice, sound, and rhythm to work on the visceral register of being"²⁵⁷. As Connolly notes, "it is through such passive syntheses of sensory experience that our sensual orientations were composed in the first place"²⁵⁸. The popularity of TV shows such as *Northern Exposure*, *Six Feet Under*, *Queer As Folk*, *The L Word* and *Big Love*, are current examples of how complex and highly politicized micropolitical issues oscillate back and forth, are negotiated intersubjectively, and of how they can "open people viscerally to the risks and pleasures of diversity"²⁵⁹.

Having thus addressed the main thrusts of Connolly's critics, I would like to address one final critique of Connolly's work which is not unrelated to the preceding line of questioning: while the call for the cultivation of generosity, agonistic respect, forbearance, and appreciation for diversity and flux seems appealing in principle, one is left wondering as to what extent does it actually *work*? That is, can it really help us diminish the drive to wholeness and existential resentment? Is micropolitical self-artistry not simply a new form of self-administered psychotherapy whose message is fundamentally reducible to 'let's all relax', and is this effective? Although this last question is perhaps an unfair caricature, I think it clearly articulates an important point.

Although it should be obvious that I cannot offer an empirically decisive endorsement of Connolly's positive political project; however, there are resources within Connolly's thought, and subjective explorations that are available to every reader, which have the potential to address such critique. Connolly himself does not shy away from the fact that his is an 'existential philosophy' and that reading his work is a type of therapeutic subjective exercise. It is in this sense that Connolly's diagnosis of contemporary politics helps us articulate and come to terms with the uncertainties and anxieties of late modern life, and provides a framework or perspective which is at once flexible and hopeful in its celebration of pluralism.

²⁵⁷ Connolly, Op. Cit., *Pluralism*, p. 31.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, Connolly's focus on affect and the psychological dimension of politics – both for diagnostic and prescriptive orientations – echoes Judith Butler's poignant observation that "part of what is so oppressive about social forms [of domination] is the psychic difficulties they produce".²⁶⁰ The late modern prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders would tend to confirm this viewpoint. And though Connolly does not directly engage with these types of 'psychic difficulties', I would not discount the possibility of further deepening the link between his techniques of the self and the practice of therapy, shamanism, etc. At the very least, following Butler and Connolly, as well as Foucault, William James, and Nietzsche before them, it would seem apparent that there is a great need for engaging with the psychic realm of politics, as difficult, complex and uncertain an endeavour as it is – and I believe that Connolly's 'existential philosophy' does this very well. What is more, we have seen the impact that slight shifts in the balance of current assemblages can have on the overall system as tense nexuses of being and becoming are negotiated through time. If we take Connolly seriously on this point, it is not much of a stretch to affirm (in fact it would be consistent) that modest work on the self and small realignments of entrenched dynamics on the subjective realm could also link up with larger intersubjective dynamics and twist porous structures toward more positive directions.

Regardless of these explanations, Connolly's cross-spectrum political strategy of self-artistry inspires more or less confidence in the general reader. Perhaps inspiring confidence will remain impossible, given the ambiguous nature of subjectivity emphasised here and the 'experimental' facets of such work on the self. Or perhaps a slightly altered formulation or some additional components to this strategy may be necessary in order to engender the positive resonance machine that Connolly seeks to create. It would seem that though Connolly's diagnosis of the affective and existential elements of scapegoating, of the intense coding of anxieties, of exclusionary nationalism, etc., is at once illuminating and holds deep

²⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, preface to the new edition (New York: Routledge, 1999): xxv.

resonance, something tells me that the late modern self would be suspicious of the prescriptive dimension of his work. To a late modern subject, Connolly's seems a somewhat facile answer: it is as if these positive currents of micropolitical self artistry are right under our nose, and more importantly, are conveniently *already under way*. All that needs to be done by the late modern self is to celebrate the diversity of contemporary reality. Perhaps this is merely the projection of the conceit of one student of political philosophy, but I have come to expect no easy answers from my study of politics.

However, to accord such a significant role to self-artistry, especially given the increasing velocitization and continuing importance of institutionalized discipline in society, is to reaffirm Foucault's optimism:

There's an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't be better. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than of inevitable anthropological constants...*You know, to say that we are much more recent than we think, is to place at the disposal of the work that we can do on ourselves the greatest share of what is presented to us as inaccessible.*²⁶¹

Connolly shares in this style of optimism; his optimism would not enjoin us to simply celebrate contemporary reality as it is – but nor he claim that there is nothing in contemporary reality that is not positive. Connolly's distinctive strength is in identifying the nuanced nature of contemporary reality, and thus where this reality has the potential for positive change.

²⁶¹ FOUCAULT, Michel, "Practicing Criticism", in Lawrence Kritzman, ed., *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, trans., Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988): 156, my emphasis.

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