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Institutions In/Cognito:

The Political Constitution of Agency

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PhD in Sociology

The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Esje Stapleton, declare that this thesis is composed by me and that all the work herein is my own, unless explicitly attributed to others. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Sarah Jane Stapleton, 29th March, 2018

Abstract

Operating at the boundaries of philosophy of mind, cognitive science, politics and social theory, this thesis aims to develop an interdisciplinary model of the relationship between agency and structure. This thesis explores the question of why the agency/structure argument in the social sciences has not yet been resolved and argues for an interdisciplinary model of agency to be utilised by social theory. In the wake of poststructuralism there has been a gravitation back towards characterising the terms of this debate in more strongly dichotomous terms, arguing for the autonomy of agency in particular as a natural kind. This trend can be seen most clearly in Archer's analytical dualism within the morphogenetic theory of social elaboration, where the desire for the clarity of dualist terms has become tangled with claims to ontology. I suggest that this tendency is not limited to social theory, but is characteristic of the neoliberal political environment from which such theory is being produced, understood and utilised.

Understanding the way in which our political and social context influences the ways in which we may understand or conceptualise a problem such as this, establishing the logical intuition and methods which we use to do this kind of deductive reasoning, is key for both performing the philosophical task of engaging in the agency-structure debate, but is thoroughly interrelated with how we need to conceptualise that relationship itself. It is both the method and the content, the 'how' and the 'what', of investigating the relationship between external social structures and the feeling of autonomous authorship and choice.

I argue that the political value system inherent to neoliberal and economic logics, which prioritise and naturalise individuality and autonomous, internal agentic capacity, works to make the experience of agency appear inevitable and universal. This thesis engages with the assumptions that underpin this illusion, looking to philosophy of mind in order to etch out a framework for understanding agency. This framework has two necessary components. Firstly, that it acknowledges the experience of agency as real, and that as a way-of-being-in-the-world it is necessary to continue to explore how individuals experience agency in their environments. Secondly, and most importantly, that this 'realism' about agency, does not inevitably indicate that agency has an ontological and epistemological reality that transcends the particular social and political contexts in which it makes sense. The thesis explores how the fundamental components of agency, intelligence and cognition are produced in the interrelationships between a subject and their physical, social and political environment. The argument presented is that deliberative consciousness and self-awareness emerge as a response to, and as an effect of, complex social interaction.

In contrast to Archer's conception of the *sui generis*, causal efficacy of reflexive agency, this thesis argues that smooth, embodied, coping with the environment is the preferred mode of interacting with the world. By critically engaging with the idea that those studying social dynamics should conceptualize agency as internal and inherent the thesis explores and critiques the prevalent use of the term 'agency' within social theory, arguing that an explicit engagement with *what agency is* is an understudied but fundamental and necessary philosophical task within sociology. A strong position is proposed that social institutions not only precede the self-aware, experience of choice and autonomy, but actively produce it. This proposition stands in opposition to dualistic notions of agency and structure as they are conceived by critical realism. This has widespread political implications in a field that often assumes agency to be an intrinsic part of human nature that stands outside of socialisation. This goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that in order to understand the experience of agency within our particular contexts and how it manifests as a force for social change, social theory must engage critically with philosophy of consciousness.

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Introduction

Getting hold of the difficulty deep down is what is hard. Because it is grasped near the surface it simply retains the difficulty it was. It has to be pulled by the roots; and that involves our beginning to think in a new way. The change is as decisive as, for example, that from the alchemical to the chemical way of thinking. The new way of thinking is what is so hard to establish. Once the new way of thinking has been established, the old problems vanish; indeed, they become hard to recapture. For they go with our way of expressing ourselves.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980: 48)

The term 'agency' holds a prominent place in the social sciences. It is used to describe capacities for social change, to account for and describe resistance to social norms, and is held to be one of the most defining social characteristics of human beings. It is also a staple of sociology, a discipline founded on the observation that social forms emerge and operate outside of the direct control of its participants. Agency functions as a caveat, alleviating the fear of determinism stemming from the observation of these trends, and providing an explanatory function as to why individuals and social groups can, sometimes, effectively intervene in social discourse to make real discursive change.

But agency is also more than this. The term is used to describe a quality that is possessed by an individual, that can be used against or towards social discourse at any point. Agency has phenomenological components, it is felt that we can and do make choices for ourselves and for others both in great feats of resistance, or in small everyday sacrifices. It is the basis of ethics, the ability to choose one way or another, to consider the ethical repercussions of our decisions and choose accordingly. But agency, in the social sciences, is also how we describe ourselves – not just as subjects but as agents. The ability to choose and to act consciously and independently from influence is a primary marker of our humanity, and agency's innate separability to and from social structures is fundamental to this.

While so much rests upon our concept of agency, there are many questions about it that remain unanswered: what agency really is, how we can define it, what composes it, where it is located, and why, crucially, if we always exist within a state of agency, are humans so susceptible to social discourse, institutions and structuring socialisation? This thesis proposes that these questions remain unanswered because of a failure from the social sciences to adequately define and analyse this experience of agency, and in doing so assuming that as a phenomenon it emerges outside of and prior to culture and the social environment.

Just as David Chalmers (1996) identified the division between body and consciousness as the 'hard problem' of philosophy of mind, the social sciences have been attempting to tackle their own 'hard problem': that between agency and structure. Discussion of these problems, the dualisms between mind and body, agency and social structures, has become entangled in debates whereby one side of those dualisms is held to have more power over and above the other. As these debates continue, we can observe that the meaning of the terms 'mind', 'body', 'agency' and 'structure' are changing. In the hard problem of consciousness, authors who are involved in what is known as the extended and embodied schools of philosophy of mind such as Clark (1997), Thompson (2007), and Di Paolo (2005), show that our understanding of mind is becoming more embodied, and our understanding of body becoming more 'mindful'. This has also occurred to some extent within the agency/structure debate, with theorists such as Judith Butler (1990a, 1990b, 1993b, 2011) and Pierre Bourdieu (1998a, 1998b, 1990) arguing for the enabling power of social structures: stating that those structures are involved in creating the very subject positions from which we experience them. However, something strange has been happening in the social sciences. Agency and structure as a divided dichotomy is becoming reasserted as a strong and clear reality, with (as we will discuss in detail in chapters one and two) agency being argued to be the holder of power over and above the structures of society.

As I have written this thesis, however, it has become increasingly apparent that dualisms between mind-body and agency-structure are not only thoroughly intertwined, but that they are deeply involved in our language, our culture, our social norms and our ways of conceptualising possibilities (at least from a Western academic perspective). As a result, this thesis has become framed by the difficult process of attempting to identify, locate and question the underlying, entangled systems of meaning that make those dualisms seem intuitive, unquestionable and natural.

This has meant attempting to envisage what Wittgenstein above calls "a new way of thinking": proposing that the agency/structure divide cannot be solved by pitting one side against the other, but that the dualism is insufficient as a way of dividing the processes that go into creating our possibilities for action. Arguing for this involves attempting to pull up the idea of agency that neoliberalism relies upon "by the roots" (to use Wittgenstein's term): to understand why a conception of mind, consciousness and agency as *sui generis* phenomena that are analytically and ontologically separable from their embodiment and their environment is so anxiously defended in increasingly dominant strains of social theory.

These 'roots' of agency, I argue, are irrevocably bound to an understanding of mind as disembodied and as unique to humans (not just in form, but in type), and an understanding

of the body as structural, static and automatic. This conceptual foundation, I argue, does not reflect contemporary theories of the brain and of consciousness. The approach which I propose involves re-orienting our perspectives of ourselves within the social sciences, arguing that a real working understanding of agency as a conscious, embodied phenomena with a particular role to play in our dealing with the complexity of our worlds is essential in order to move forward from the agency/structure dilemma. I want to make the case that the physical and epistemological or conceptual skills that a subject internalises are thoroughly involved in the types of opportunities for action that are afforded to them, and the way in which they may go about negotiating those opportunities. This means putting forward the strong argument that the sense of agency itself is thoroughly intersectional: that the experience of acting, the experience of control and the affordances which arise for a particular subject are constituted from, and arise out of, the particular socio-political framework within which a subject exists. This means rejecting a claim such as Archer's that agency is an inherent, politically-neutral capacity for objective, free action.

The very idea that the nature and terms of theoretical positions are shaped by the socio-political context in which they are formed poses a fundamental problem for research and theorising. Such research of course, does not happen in a socio-cultural vacuum, but within rich, complex, intersectional socio-cultural and political frameworks: not all of which may be visible to the researcher but that none-the-less affect the way in which their research is done. As a result, all research is positional, contextual and informed by the culture, political context and epistemological paradigm in which it is constructed. This is not necessarily a problem which can be fixed as such, Haraway among others for example point out the unattainability of a 'God's eye view' which would allow researchers, theorists and scientists access to a perfectly objective scientific method untainted by culture and politics (Haraway, D. 1988). However, as I go about attempting to unpick the relationship between neoliberal discourse and the experience of autonomous decision-making, it is worth bearing in mind that this effort is itself being made from within a neoliberal system, and that as a theorist I am also embodied, contextualised, and socialised within the systems that I am attempting to negotiate. This means that the claims that I am making about the form and content of agency are inevitably shaped as much by my own context as the claims of those that I critique within this thesis, and there must be an ongoing effort to identify latent assumptions that underlie these claims as they are developed.

The structure of my treatment runs as follows. The thesis is divided into three parts, each comprised of two chapters. The first part of the thesis outlines the background of the structure/agency debate in the social sciences and locates it within a particular paradigm: that of neoliberalism. This part argues that the return to a dualism between agency and

structure that we are seeing in social theory, as characterised by the work of Archer, is related to the naturalisation of ideologies of autonomy, individualism, possession and ownership that are encouraged through neoliberal logics. I propose that Archer's tendency to view agency and reflexivity as synonymous with the mind in general feeds in to her extrapolation that the particular experiences of agency she describes are universal. I argue that this encourages an approach to action which is insufficient to account for the myriad ways our bodies and minds act in relation to, and through, physical and conceptual schemas that are often taken for granted. I explain that this approach generates a one-dimensional and hyper-reflexive view of action, where agentic deliberation is seen to be the sole mediator between the subject and the world.

In the second part of the thesis, I suggest that this is a problem that may be alleviated by looking to relevant theories in philosophy of mind. This part, comprised of chapters three and four, details my primary concerns with Archer's morphogenetic hypothesis of social elaboration and identifies the premises on which it is based. Focussing on issues of emergence and capacity, I look to the ways in which a subject comes to experience a sense of authorship, control and ownership over action, finding that these experiences are not always present in the moment of action, but are sometimes retroactively applied. This leads me to consider Dreyfus's account of skilled-coping, which, based on a Heideggerian approach to phenomenology, suggests that the subject tends towards internalization when acquiring skills. I draw this premise together with the work of Wolpert and Andy Clark, among others, to look at the processes involved in ongoing action with the world: arguing that pre-reflexive prediction, rather than explicit rationalization, is key to ongoing context-sensitive action.

Part three then goes on to apply these models to the social and political sciences, returning to Archer's model of the reflexive internal conversation, which she describes as the mediator between subject and effective action. I bring this into conversation with the argument I have been developing in the two preceding chapters, arguing that beliefs about the world, which underlie our ongoing prediction, are not purely about the physical world but also about what we can expect from the social world as well. Drawing on Gallagher's concept of mental institutions, I argue that because social beliefs underlie our pre-reflexive predictions and expectations about the world, as well as our affordances for action, that the experience of agency is constructed through the structural environment with which it then goes on to interact with. It is in the final chapter of part three, and of the thesis, that I go on to look at why skilled-coping, if applicable to the social realm, may break down as frequently as to encourage the intuition that our minds are near-continually in a state of reflexivity (an intuition that in part one of the thesis, I argue Archer has). I look to the complexity of the structural processes which may be involved in subjectivication, noting that while theorists

such as Archer treat structures as relatively monolithic, there are multiple structural demands composing and imposing-on any one subject, at any one time.

These multiple structural discourses create dissonance, contradiction and disruption. Recalling the discussion of skilled coping in part two, where such dissonance was seen to disrupt the flow of skilled-coping, catalyzing the intervention of reflexive and deliberative states of mind, I propose that the same process may be at work here in the social realm. I identify that there are two key initiators of such disruption in the social world: 1) internal dissonance between contradictory social roles or exposure to difference, and 2) structural precarity. Arguing, along with Butler and Athanasiou, that precarity is characteristic of neoliberalism, I conclude with the suggestion that both increased frequency and intensity of modes of reflexivity are caused by neoliberalism and, furthermore, that the increase of the experience of these modes may be a causal factor in the increasing prominence of dualist views that I introduced in chapter one: views that take the agentic, rational, deliberative state as pre-social and primary.

Although Archer herself would not consider my objections accurate as she holds an analytical dualism rather than an ontological dualism, I argue that her very position of analytical dualism rests on foundations that imply ontological dualism, and so consideration of her position in light of this is important. It is also important to note that I engage with what I believe are two distinct streams of thought in Archer - the early and late, with late defined as post-2015. The early streams of thought, those which she is most renowned for, I believe still have enormous influence in sociology. It is these arguments and hypotheses that I engage with in the first five chapters. In the final chapter I draw in some key elements from Archer's later work, and consider them in relation to the arguments that I have been making against her earlier work. Importantly, I make the case that even in this later work which focuses more heavily on social influence, she retains the key ontological assumptions that are present in the morphogenetic hypothesis.

The topics undertaken in this thesis are large, and the work presented should be viewed as an initial exercise in demonstrating the relevance of these philosophical debates to sociological theory, rather than as an attempt at a conclusive solution. My key objective within the following pages is to show that there are assumptions about the nature of agency that are retained in contemporary social theory, and that these assumptions can be usefully assessed through an interdisciplinary collaboration with philosophers of action, skill, and consciousness. There are several questions that arise out of this investigation that I will touch on in the conclusion, such as how a concern with how agency is conceptualised may affect the way in which practical sociology can be usefully carried out in the quantitative and qualitative research which social theory is both based upon and aims to inform. The final

pages will therefore propose scope for future research, both in further investigating and developing the work presented here, and in how the ideas raised in the following pages may be utilised in other areas of sociology.

PART ONE

“Here, then, is the problematic around which the entire history of sociological analysis could be written: the problematic of human agency.”

(Dawe, 1978: 379)

Chapter One - The Structure/Agency Debate

Introduction

Theories of agency are theories of action, intention and control. They attempt to discern what is arguably the core of human experience: a person's experience of control over their own bodies and actions within the world. Typically, ideas of how this control comes to be, what it looks like and the way in which it works, are posed against external constraints: facts and patterns in the social and physical world that form the context within which action occurs and that allow some types of action while dissuading others. These external factors, the shape they take and to what extent they limit and/or enable action by humans constitute theories of what sociologists refer to as 'structure'. This chapter offers a brief introduction to the structure/agency debate within the social sciences. The debate concerns whether it is the structural affordances of the physical and social environment or the intrinsic agentic capacity of actors that primarily dictates action. Even in this overt simplification of what is a fiercely contested, extensive, and interdisciplinary debate, the dispute concerns a definitive aspect of human experience: the ability to direct and control our actions in accordance with consciously held beliefs.

The structure/agency debate is wide-ranging, but three important aspects of sociological concern with agency are as follows: (1) the phenomenological experience of agency; (2) the question of how agency relates to existential free will; and (3) the valuing of narratives of agency in society. The phenomenological experience, or 'feeling' of agency, is what philosophers of mind might call its qualia – the 'what it is like' to feel like one has the ability to recognise, choose and act of one's own volition. There are also more existential aspects to agency, its relationship to the complex and long running debate on free will and whether humans can be said to possess it or even whether it can be said to exist at all – or whether the idea of it and the experience of having it is merely a remnant of deeply held religious ideologies of the soul. Also, and importantly, there is an aspect to agency and the discussions that surround it that is often overlooked but always underlies its theorisation, which is value. The emotional weight that we place on being able to attribute freedom of action and control over action to humans, and to see it as an intrinsic quality, speaks to what theorists care about in their vision of what makes us human. The value we place on freedom of action influences the discourses that we associate it with, the assumptions that may lie behind theorisation, and the language that is used in the study of its attributes.

This background on the structure/agency debate is an important place to begin because, as it progresses, this thesis will put forward the argument that the logic with which sociologists

have defined the parameters of the debate is itself politically informed by the dominant paradigms (the distinct sets of concepts and ontologies that are taken to be true) of the time and culture within which the debate occurs. This means that the aspects of agency that are either raised as subjects of debate, seen as problems, or taken as axiomatic, are related to wider sociological discourses. For example, in chapter two I will propose the possibility that the qualia, the phenomenological feeling of what it is like to feel free and agentic within the world, may be at least partially shaped by the particular narratives of agency that are favoured by neoliberal discourses. This will introduce the idea that our feeling of what it is like to be human, even on the level of what Heidegger calls Dasein, may be influenced and molded by our political context (i.e. in effect, by structure).

Finding a unifying stratagem to combine both experience of autonomous action with evidence of the role of social institutions, the 'feeling' of being, and the relationship between perception, prediction and action is a formidable task, and is one that we'll return to in the latter chapters of this thesis. Before returning to the problem of unification we will first look at the ways that action and intention are described in sociology and philosophy. I will look at how key theorists and schools of thought approach these concepts, breaking down the components of action, intention, reaction and the experience of choice in an environment to their most basic properties and considering the effects of increased complexity and the roles of emergent properties that result from it. The purpose of this chapter, however, is to look at what the debate primarily entails in the sociological discipline, describing why it is important that we show how the debate has unfolded over time and between the disciplines of sociology and philosophy of mind.

The broader basis of the structure-agency debate which I will set forth in this chapter will enable a further in-depth analysis later in the thesis of the approaches of other theorists who have identified this gap under slightly different terms (with resultantly different implications). It will also set up my alternative to standard structure/agency approaches that will include both an analysis of organisation and a politicized approach to the body and mind in such a way as they are proposed as fully integrated and inseparable when approaching the study of human experience and enaction of agency.

In order to prepare the foundation for these larger arguments I will first explain what the agency/structure debate is in section one, and what the four main positions towards it entail in section two. This will be followed by the third section in which I will draw out a problem that underlies all of these approaches. I will do this through examining the work of one notable theorist, Margaret Archer, whose work has been associated with an emphasis on the role of and capacity of agency, and will be followed by a critique of her arguments. This will provide the foundation for the next chapter, which will discuss the role of the contemporary

political/economic context of neoliberalism in the way in which we experience ourselves as actors, and how that in turn affects the way in which we approach the idea of intrinsic agentic capability and what it looks like. Firstly, however, I will describe what the agency/structure debate is, and what it entails.

1.1.1. Agency and Structure: debates and stalemates

In the introduction to the thesis we saw that the term 'the agency structure debate' refers to a long-standing disagreement between schools of thought within the social sciences. This disagreement concerns whether it is the socialising power of patterns of social arrangements or the autonomous action of individuals within society that is the primary influence on human behaviour. Accounts of the interactions between the determining and enabling character of structure, social institutions, culture and social roles have been present in sociological discourse since its emergence (Durkheim, 1897; Weber, 1930).

Through these accounts, a variety of dualisms -such as emotion/rationality, body/mind, nature/culture as well as structure/agency - are mutually constituted. Both constituting each other as a pair and constituting each other between pairs, the terms defer meaning between each other, reinforcing each other as common sense, natural and, as a result, inevitable (Butler, 1990, 1994; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Flax, 1990; Fraser, 1989; Halberstam 1998; Haraway, 1988, 1991, 1997; Nicholas, 2009; Nicholson, 1990; Seidman, 1996). While the last thirty years has been characterised by an emphasis on the body, as I will come to in chapters four and five, more recently sociological theory has taken a position which prioritises agency over and above structure, whereby this dualism itself and the power of agency over structure is becoming once more treated as intuitive.

As Sztompka points out, there are "considerable dissimilarities" within the European approach to agency and structure, especially on the nature of the agent itself (2014: 9). For example, agency is either understood as a characteristic of the mental processes of the individual or as a causative force that emerges also at the level of collective. For example, theorists such as Touraine see agency as a broader social force which is exhibited also by larger coalitions or organisations. For Touraine, direct and intentional interference with elements of a broader system of relations is evidence of an organizational group's own agency at the level of the whole (1971: 459). However, for theorists such as Bourdieu, Giddens and Archer, agency is understood as Weber proposes, largely in terms of individuals. Weber explains: "*for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectives must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organisation or the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action*" (Weber, 1921 [1968 edition]: 4). The premise for this

definition of agency is however bound up within particular political discourses of individualism, and so it is worth signposting here that while the discourse on agency that we will be discussing here takes it to be internal and individual, that this should not be thought of as either natural or inevitable, and this point will be returned to in the second part of this thesis.

The case for collective agency has become a diverse body of work, and it has offered a great deal to sociological studies of resistance. We will touch briefly again on collective agency in chapter 6 where we approach the organisational conditions for individual agency, but it is individual agency that I am concerned with over the course of this thesis. Specifically, how it is that the experience of possessing agency on an individual level arises and why it does in the way that it does. Such alternative imaginings of agency however are important to touch upon firstly here as a reminder that individual agency is not the only model of agency that exists in the literature, but secondly later on as we approach the complex, difficult and as yet unanswered question of what agency *is* and how it emerges. Not only does an acknowledgement of these different accounts of agency help us remain vigilant against our own assumptions that we may be bringing to the table, but also may not be so different in type and form as they may appear at first.

While we are mapping out the broad approaches to the agency/structure debate, it is important to note that this formulation is overwhelmingly European. The sociological tradition in the U.S. is to define the terms of the debate along the lines of macro-sociological and micro-sociological. While not synonymous, the macro-sociological roughly encapsulates the type of discursive formations that the European schools refer to as structure: the organisational and institutional aspects of society. On the other hand the micro tends to individual factors, interactionism, the subjective constitution of reality, phenomenology, and the internalization of beliefs: topics which surround the experience and nature of agency and its individual and/or small scale enaction (Sztompka, 1994: xii).

While these terms are not entirely interchangeable with their European counterparts (for example, rational choice theory and theories surrounding the subjective constitution of reality can be argued to be on opposing sides of the structure agency debate while both classifying as 'micro' theories), the U.S. version of this binary has shown a similar development from a polemical debate between which side of the binary holds more weight in determining human behaviour towards more integrated and inter-relational approaches (Ritzer, 1981; Sztompka, 1994: 5; Alexander et al. 1987; Gerstein, 1987: 86).

However, agency and the nature of the agent are not the only site of interdisciplinary dispute within the structure/agency debate. Sztompka goes on to point out that there are also

considerable differences on what these theorists mean by the term “structure” when they approach this problem (ibid: 10). Giddens for example, defines structure as “recursively organised sets of rules and resources” (1984: 25) – a definition of the term that contradicts the definition used by the majority of other theorists in the field (Layder 1985). However, his definition of the term ‘system’ as “reproduced relations between actors or collectives, organised as regular social practices” (Giddens 1984: 25) stands in for what is generally termed as structure within sociology.

The conceptualisation of structure has been the subject of a dispute between structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers. Structuralism is the approach in which social processes are conceived of as interrelationships between structural systems. Structural systems are the established patterned relationships between and internal to social groups that organise behaviour, language and one another. These include socio-economic stratifications e.g. the class system, social institutions e.g. binary conceptions of sex and gender, and are conceived of as entities that include but exist outside of their material components and abstract concepts. The post-structural movement that emerged out of structuralism, does not challenge the existence of structures but critiques the binaries, or dichotomies, in which the composition of those structures are conceptualised. It is important to note that many of the theorists that are commonly referred to under the post-structuralist label have rejected that identity, such as Foucault who defines himself rather as a “critic and ontologist” (Megill, 1985).

A major point to bear in mind is that these internal differences show that despite the binary format of the structure/agency debate, and despite the fact that as I will argue throughout this chapter, the theorists involved are all similarly limited by their conception of this problem as a binary problem (regardless of the level of interaction or entanglement that they argue for) – as stated earlier in this section, the terms by which this debate is contested is by no means internally coherent. The terms of the binary themselves, as well as the relationship between those two terms, are the subject of substantial disagreement. However, it is this internal disagreement about and between the terms and the nature of their relationship which inspires the question that this thesis is concerned with: that perhaps we are asking the wrong questions, and using outdated terms to do so.

A useful place to turn when considering the *nature* of the agency/structure question, and considering the impact of the way in which that question is framed, is towards other similar and related problems in other disciplines. The structure/agency dilemma is somewhat related to the mind/body problem of Philosophy of Mind. The mind/body problem concerns the relationship between our mental states such as beliefs, thoughts and emotions and the physical or material states or processes of the body. In both of these (arguably interrelated)

debates, the binary manner in which the argument is titled belies how complex the discussion has been, especially concerning (as we will see in chapters 4 and 6) the definition of the terms they purport to be comparing. These terms themselves have not remained autonomous from the critique that surrounds them. What we mean by 'body', 'mind', 'structure' and 'agency', and the implications of using those words, has changed as the discussion has developed: what we mean by embodiment, for example, differs not only between disciplines and theoretical positions but over time within the same discourse. The terms by which they are defined and the ways in which we make sense of them have been continually re-articulated under the social and political terms in which theorists, as embodied subjects, are embedded. The backlash against structuralism for example (which has often been conflated with determinism due to its perceived emphasis on constraint over the actions of an agent) has resulted in a re-articulation of agency as a strong, inevitable and natural component of what it means to be human. This appearance, or 'intuition' of inevitability is, I will argue, a political effect and not a natural consequence. Applying embodied and enactive philosophy of mind to the structure/agency problem, allows us to unpick assumptions about the mind and body that underlie the structure/agency problem in the social sciences.

1.1.2. The Complexity and Failure of Integrative Accounts

It is clear that the agency/structure debate is complex and multidimensional – involving multiple definitions of the terms being debated. Commonly, the problem of the agency/structure debate is seen as finding a balance on the continuum between full agency and full structure, where the influence and constraints of cultural and social context are adequately accounted for, while avoiding making the subject/agent out to be an uncritical drone, mindlessly reproducing the structural conditions which produce their actions, i.e. cultural or structural 'dopes' (Giddens, A. 1979: 52). However, theorists such as Giddens have questioned the legitimacy of the polar formation of this problem (with agency on the one hand and structure on the other), arguing that the relationship cannot be seen as a nodal point on a continuum between a binary set of independent poles but is tangled, interrelational, and/or mutually constitutive, but furthermore that the span and content of the discussion itself is produced by setting up the question as a binary problem in the first place:

“the notions of action and structure presuppose one another; but that recognition of this dependence, which is a dialectical relation, necessitates a reworking both of a series of concepts linked to each of these terms, and of the terms themselves.”

(Giddens, A. 1979: 53)

Due to the breadth of the agency/structure debate, I will be focusing on some key themes and key relationships that have emerged within it, tracing a broad recurring pattern. This pattern, I propose, is that each approach to the structure/agency debate, regardless of the theorist's definition of the terms or their approach to their relationship, necessarily reaches the limits of its explanatory power by virtue of being bound by the very premise that they are based on: that agency and structure are able to be fully distinguished, even if only analytically, for the purpose of making that argument¹.

First, I will broadly define the approaches that we commonly see emerging in the contemporary agency/structure debate, and draw out the patterns in thought that both unite and limit them. The debate is commonly conceived of as separable into three positions: dominance of agency; dominance of structure, and; integrative. In this way, the approaches to the debate are seen as positions along a continuum between two poles: a) where agency is seen to be the only causative force that is not limited by structure or enculturation in any way, and; b) the full cultural dope whose behaviour is entirely determined by their socio-cultural context, and whose experience of agency is merely an internal illusion. Contemporary debates however do not give much credence to the possibility of either of these positions². Most, if not all, contributions to the debate rather rest in the middle of this spectrum, arguing for the role of both, but in different ways and to different extents: offering different accounts of their method of interaction and relation. As such, the imagery of the debate as being situated as a linear continuum is somewhat misleading. Here, I will discuss some of the approaches to the agency structure debate, separating them by the type of integration or relationship between structure and agency that they propose:

- 1) Dominance of structure: structure is king, what appears to be voluntary is unidentified structure (Durkheim);
- 2) Dominance of agency: agency is king, there are no structures (rational choice theory; Weber when he is being a methodological individualist);
- 3) Analytical Dualism: structure and agency as separable elements relating over time (Archer);
- 4) Dialectical: Structure and agency as interconnected (Giddens); and,
- 5) Intersectional inextricability: structure and agency as fundamentally entangled and co-productive (Butler).

¹ We will at a later stage approach the role that language plays in the ability to conceive of relationships and concepts. However, this will be done within the context of meaning making and the development of the meaningful world in chapter five, where it can be given greater attention.

² This differs from in philosophy of cognitive science where they do give credence to the idea that the sense of agency is an illusion.

These positions are, of course, an oversimplification for the purpose of organising a large and disparate body of work, and contain within them their own philosophical debates. For example, as I will show in the next section of this chapter, theorists such as Archer that are considered here to occupy the second position most clearly, define themselves as pro-dialectical, yet must be clearly defined as a distinct approach given their emphasis on the 'analytical' status of their dualism. Inevitably, there is also considerable overlap between approaches depending on how theorists are defined by themselves and others. Giddens, for example is defined as either holding a strong structural, or first camp, position, or a central-conflationist, fourth position by theorists such as Archer (1988 -1996 edition-: 72). I will examine contentions of positionality between thinkers and their critics as they arise.

This section details how these five approaches to the debate relate to one another despite different philosophical foundations, and draws out the commonalities between them. While I draw extensively on the thinkers most typically associated with a pro-dialectic position, this section will set up the initial argument which is to be drawn out and defended over the course of the thesis: that agency and structure, while real, are dependent upon and co-produced through ideological political contexts articulated by the fifth position. It will also explain why I situate myself within this position and the implications and affordances this position has for contributing to this wider, long-standing debate through offering interesting relationships with work on embodied and embedded cognition.

The development of the five positions of thought towards the agency/structure debate are roughly chronological in emergence in the order stated above. However, contemporary theory still reflects adherence to one over the others. The first camp, dominance of structure, follows the trajectory of the work of Durkheim and Simmel, which laid the foundations of sociology as a discipline. Durkheim's findings in his 1897 monograph *On Suicide* showed that statistical data about human behaviour, even those concerning the most private personal choices, exhibited stability over time. While the decision to take one's own life was seen to be a deeply personal and internal mental matter that would be taken only in response to an individual's feelings, relations and circumstances, the statistical data showed that the quantity of people making that decision was relatively predictable. Durkheim attributed this to the influence of collective factors of integration and regulation upon behavior, factors that he saw as more influential than individual choice on decision-making. He argued therefore that if human behaviour could be predicted demographically, then the groups and institutions, or social facts, which order and organize society were instrumental in determining the behaviour of individual people (1895: 52).

The emphasis on the form and content of external society as being a cultivating force in the development of individual behaviour forms the foundations of Simmel's neo-Kantian

approach to society. In his work *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (Simmel, 1903), Simmel's work can be seen as analysing the structural conditions necessary for certain forms of consciousness to emerge:

*“The eighteenth century may have called for liberation from all the ties which grew up historically in politics, in religion, in morality and in economics in order to permit the original natural virtue of man, which is equal in everyone, to develop without inhibition; ... Nietzsche may have seen the relentless struggle of the individual as the prerequisite for his full development, while socialism found the same thing in the suppression of all competition - **but in each of these the same fundamental motive was at work, namely the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism.**”* (Simmel, 1903: 324; emphasis added).

This motive that Simmel speaks of is seen in real terms as conscious resistance against known repressive forces, acting externally as well as through the process of internalization (the acceptance of societal or cultural norms and values, which Finley Scott explains move from the external realm of the society to the internal workings of the individual mind). In this transition from the external to the internal, they are seen to shape the actions and reasoning of that individual to the terms of that particular society (Scott, J. 1971). It is important to note here that Nietzsche's approach to mind is commonly read to be heavily epiphenomenalist: meaning that he holds that mental states are brought about by particular physical or biological states in the brain, but do not fold back upon those states as to change them. As such, Nietzsche's account of socialisation suggests that it is the changes in physical states which bring about the associated change in mental states and 'ways of thinking', rather than ways of thinking or any individual self, or agent, bringing about the socially-contextual changes in behaviour. Socialisation for Simmel, here appears as an external force, which is at odds with the natural human condition of individuality. The socio-technological apparatus of social systems and organisation appear as adversaries to this natural condition, threatening to 'swallow up' the subject's true self and her capacity for resistance. Resultantly, the more social apparatus is successfully internalised, the lesser the subject's capability for resisting the logics inherent to that apparatus are.

In resistance to the emphasis on the power of social structures and organisation, the second position, 'dominance of agency', stresses the primacy of individual choice over structural constraints. This position makes the case that since those social structures emerge out of the combined behaviour of the autonomous action of individuals, intentional human decisions act upon society in order to change it. This position holds that while social organisation and differentially distributed demographic influences may result in patterns of

behaviour, each individual possesses the ability to critique and overcome any tendencies produced by their social environment. As a result, members of this school, such as Weber and Barth, place a much higher degree of emphasis on rational choice and transactional approaches that hold that conscious intentionality and objectivity are separable from the social environment and act independently upon it³. What this view of social structures and their interaction with the human mind does, in essence, is set up those structures in direct binary opposition to the locus of pure reason, capacity for action, and freedom of choice. In short – in direct opposition to those elements that engender what we call human ‘agency’. This rests upon an assumption of human nature that, as opposed to *tabula rasa*, the blank slate which is imbued with culture from birth, appears more as a *tabula libertatum* – a base state of autonomy and agency which exists prior to any interaction with social structures, institutions and other ‘socio-technological mechanisms’ (to use Simmel’s term: 1971: 324). More clearly, for these theorists, the base state of human nature is the ability for a subject to choose and direct the course of their own action independent from the constraints of their socio-cultural environment – but true to the course of their own autonomous will.⁴

Central to all of these positions is the question of whether it could be possible that this ‘will’ of an individual could exist outside of and prior to those socio-technological environments that set the parameters and affordances for action. Affordances are the possibilities for action which are provided by an environment or the objects, subjects or conceptual frameworks within it. Such affordances are themselves structured by the ecological information (Gibson 1979; 2015; Bruineberg, J. et al. 2018: 2), socio-cultural and political logics and conceptual apparatuses that allow a subject to engage with certain affordances, and inform the way in which they might do so⁵. Simmel warns of the “social-technological mechanism”, which “swallow[s] up” the individual (1971: 324), and the language and patterns of reasoning that ‘flesh out’ desires: giving them meaning and situating them within meaningful contexts. Within the anti-positivist paradigm Simmel, along with theorists such as Adorno and Habermas of the Frankfurt School, sought to understand the emergence of conditions of possibility for social change. The focus on conditions of possibility, a philosophical concept popularized by Kant (see: Meiklejohn, ed. 1990: 235-6), emphasises the necessary frameworks, circumstances and phenomena that need to be in place for another phenomena, such as social change or, as will be explored in this thesis, the experience of autonomous agency, to emerge. This approach insists that phenomena which

³ While Weber takes different approaches at different points in his writing, there is a strand of his work which emphasizes social action where he does make certain remarks which could be seen to position him as a methodological individualist (see for example Weber, 1947: 101-103).

⁴ This will be an important concept later on in the thesis where I will discuss the ways in which the meaningful world and the body (with its feelings and perceptions of that world) are intertwined with mind – and go on to show that these situated and embodied approaches must necessarily include political social context.

⁵ We will return to this in much greater detail in chapters three, four and five where I turn to unfolding sequences of action, skill acquisition and sense of control.

are often seen as being a 'natural kind' (i.e. that they reflect the structure of the biological or physical world as opposed to the interests and actions of human beings), or an effect of unilateral causality, are dependent also upon a complex set of pre-existing phenomena that also produce what form they take, and that these necessary conditions may be hidden underneath a priori assumptions about the components of the natural and social world. Approaches to conditions of possibility have been developed also within continental philosophy, including episteme as defined by Foucault⁶, and Deleuze's critique of the phenomenon/noumenon dichotomy⁷, (the distinction between the realm which the mind and body perceive and the ultimate reality).

The question we are asking is not about absolute freedom, i.e. it is not that a being can conceive of any route of action and bring it to fruition. In all of these approaches, it is taken as a given that any human operates within a system of laws, coercive structures, socialising forces that bear both legal and social 'sanctions' for action that does not adhere to that society's norms. Social sanctions are not to be underestimated. While social norms may develop and change relatively quickly, their power to form and limit the range of action available to a subject is strong. Since such factors function primarily at the level of internalization, a subject we'll touch more upon in relation to situated and embodied mind theories later in the thesis, they act to limit or encourage certain action variables at the level of what a subject a) will conceive of as 'available' to undertake and, importantly, b) often work in more insidious ways through social exclusion and physical threat and fear at the level of the immediate social environment, such that fear or experience of both mental and physical violence are actively involved not just in the decision-making process but mentally in what a subject can conceive of as possible action courses to be undertaken.⁸

The approaches that we have looked at so far have been interested in the relationship between human agency and the social structures in which those humans operate. However in these approaches theorists tend to attribute more causal autonomy and influence to one side of the dichotomy than the other. For example, acknowledging that social structure plays a large role in how humans act but adding the caveat that always there is the opportunity for agency to recognise and overcome those structural constraints i.e. the subject could always

⁶ The grounding a-priori assumption/s which provide the conditions of possibility for the discourses, logics and ways of sense-making that are intuitive within a given paradigm. Foucault describes these assumptions, or collectively accepted truths, as a "strategic apparatus" or field which itself defines the terms by which all other knowledge and action are conceptualised (Foucault, M. 1980: 197).

⁷ For Deleuze, difference "is the noumenon closest to phenomenon", being that by which "the given is given" (Deleuze, G. 1994: 222).

⁸ This psychological limitation of action-possibilities describes the process by which subjugated members of society can both be actively complicit in their own subjugation and actively resist their own liberation from the system that subjugates them. We will return to this limitation of action possibilities in relation to the dual roles of socialisation and development of the 'meaningful world' in part three of the thesis.

have chosen differently. This sets agency up as always 'having the final say' as it were, where - while structural elements are present, agency has an unconstrained capability to intervene in action regardless of the context. The pro-dialectic position attempts to negotiate this problem by proposing that agency and structure relate to one another, changing one another over time⁹.

The pro-dialectic fourth position is most notably characterised by Giddens' Structuration Theory, Berger and Luckmann's theory of reality (1966), Unger's (1987) conception of negative capability, and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977)¹⁰. Theorists that take this position argue against the hierarchical structure of the first and second approaches, however. This position is seen as a reconciliatory position, arguing for the importance of both structural constraint/enablement and individual agency in social organisation. As such, the molding effects of social structures are recognised, including conditions of possibility for social phenomena and the effects of complex forms of intersectional socialisation. This exists simultaneously with the ability of individuals to resist and change the structures and conditions within which they are embedded. The extent to which change of the system can be enacted, however, is relational to the current system in place (i.e. the system is expanded and modified, not overthrown and replaced). Since action and choice from this approach are seen as presented through the affordances of structure, this position (like the first position) is often accused of determinism by second and third position theorists, and I will return to this in the next section of the chapter.

Intersectional inextricability, the fifth position that I detailed in the introduction to this section, is much less clearly bounded as a specific camp of theorists. This position states that neither agency nor structure have dominance over the other in a hierarchical relationship, but that the analogy of an interactional conversation between the two is an inadequate model of the relationship. Rather, theorists that are pooled into this camp, which include Judith Butler and at some points, Bourdieu, are those that hold that agency and structure cannot be separated from one another. They argue that rather, they are so deeply coproduced as to be inextricable. Theorists in this camp are often otherwise defined as third or fourth position theorists, since concessions to this inextricability are often seen as afterthoughts or caveats where the main bulk of work takes agency and structure to be 'analytically' separable.

⁹ I am leaving aside the third position for now, as I will address it in far more detail in the coming section.

¹⁰ As I stated earlier in the chapter, there is often a discrepancy between the position or approach that a theorist sees themselves taking, and that which their critics associate them with. Bourdieu himself sees his approach as dialectical, but it is worth noting that many of his critics, including Archer, associate his work more with a structuralist mentality.

This fifth position emphasises that agency and structure are not so much in a conversation with one another but are inseparable and intrinsically bound to one another. Further, neither agency nor structure hold any ontological status as real outside of the socio-political conditions of their own possibility. While strands of this kind of thinking are observable in the work of theorists that are otherwise said to be positioned as third or fourth position, it is worth suggesting that this is a separable position in itself since it encapsulates a different *way of thinking* about the debate and the terms by which it is set out, organised, and argued. This means that neither social structures and institutions, nor the internal capacity to control, or to experience control of, one's own actions as a bounded, autonomous and cohesive individual, are inevitable and universal features of reality. Rather, this position would maintain that they emerge in accordance with, and bound up within, the features of the social, political, economic, cultural and embodied environment in which those actors are embedded. While the essence of this is found in second position structuralist arguments, this approach argues that agency itself is not ontologically separable from structure, but is an ongoing embodied manifestation of complex interrelationships which are mutable and moulded by broader contexts. This fifth position is identifiable only tentatively, partially or as asides within sociology in the work of third and fourth position theorists such as Giddens and Butler, and tangentially through the work of more radical philosophers, such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari who are not necessarily involved in the agency/structure debate per se, but approach dichotomies or boundaries more generally.

Within all of this is the contemporary popularization of analytical dualism, the position which takes agency and structure to affect one another over time but always at any point be fully analytically separable. There is a problem in this approach however as its claims about mutual affectation and a separatism that it claims to be merely analytical, reproduce the same ontological claims about agency which are found in the second approach that agency has an ontological reality that exists outside of the conditions of its enaction. In the next section I will discuss the work of Archer, a key analytical dualist within sociology, whose morphogenetic approach to the debate draws on theories of emergence and sequential co-development has gained a significant following in the movement to reinstate the role of agency in contemporary social science. Through looking at her work and the contributions it has made to this debate, I will trace out how and why adhering to this dichotomy is not the solution to progressing the debate as Archer maintains, but rather is the linguistic and conceptual barrier to understanding conscious, embodied, and embedded action within the world.

1.1.3. Archer's Morphogenesis and the Problem of Agency

Archer's work is interesting because it is founded upon an ontology of dualism that she

claims is merely an analytic device. For Archer, agency and structure must be able to be fully distinguishable from one another at any one point, even if they interact and change one another over time. At the same time as emphasising this changeability, Archer also claims that agency is fully separable from structure in a way that is incongruent with such dualism being merely analytical. The basis of this is Archer's claim that agency is a *sui generis* (of its own type), emergent (has properties not found in its components or conditions) property that has causal efficacy over its environment. As I will develop in the course of the thesis, this claim in combination with the claim that this property is specific to humans, defines the human condition, is purely located in the experience of reflexivity and is always on hand to critique structure regardless of context, makes this claim an ontological rather than an analytical one.

Archer is based within the critical realist school of thought. This school, which includes theorists such as Elder-Vass and Bhaskar, sees the socialisation of the body and influences of culture and politics as important, but inherently separate to, an agentic and autonomous consciousness that always-already has access to some formulation of free will, regardless of structural constraints or effects of socialisation. In this section I will explain how this position, which I defined as the third position in my outline in the previous section, resurrects a model of the detached pre-social conscious mind, whilst modeling social change as the direct effect of these minds on social structures. In the next chapter I will begin to discuss the parallels the popularization of this approach has with increasing emphasis on individualism under contemporary neoliberalism. Before I do this, I want to give a concise summary of Archer's extensive body of work and draw out some of the inconsistencies within her claims to a dualism which is solely analytical, but which I argue retains the hallmarks of a stronger ontological dualism.

Archer is most well known for her position which she entitles the morphogenetic approach to structure and agency. The morphogenetic approach is an explanatory framework which aims to account for structural change and reproduction over time while retaining a notion of agency that is separable from the conditions of its own enaction. This separability is elaborated as part of Archer's response to earlier social theory, which she argues is subject to "the generic defect of conflation" (Archer, 2000: 307) between structure and agency. Archer understands the disparity between approaches to the structure/agency problem to be caused by an inability to properly theorise relationships which emerge from the interaction of social phenomena. She suggests that this inability leads constructivist and structuralist theorists to place too much emphasis on the role of social and cultural structures in shaping human action, stating that this leads to underestimating the role of the conscious, feeling mind:

“Constructionism thus impoverishes humanity, by subtracting from our human powers and accrediting all of them - selfhood, reflexivity, thought, memory and emotionality - to society's discourse.”

(Archer, M. 2000: 4)

What Archer sees as the imbalance of causal efficacy is either conceptualised as: *downwards conflation* where power is denied to agency, through what she conceives of as too much power granted to structure; *upwards conflation* where too much autonomy is assigned to agency so that the structural context in which agents act is conceived of as largely irrelevant to those acts and the form they take; and *central conflation*. Central conflation describes the idea that structure and agency are co-constitutive – where the form and type of agency able to be enacted is seen to be produced by structural constraints. At the same time those structural constraints are themselves constrained, enabled and shaped by the enactment of agentic individuals in relation to them. Archer claims that this view confuses elements of agency and structure to the detriment of uncovering the practical ways in which they relate to one another. Archer gives the example of the Structuration Theory of Anthony Giddens, which I referred to in the previous section as being a hybrid form of the dialectical relationship, and intersectional inextricability approaches.

Archer insists that the separation between agency and structure is only possible in an analytical sense rather than in an ontological sense, such as that of substance dualism (Archer 1995: 157):

“There is no philosophical dualism because (a) structures are only held to emerge from the activities of people, and because (b) structures only exert any effect when mediated through the activities of people. Structures are ever relational emergent and never reified entities existing without social interaction: the converse would be tenets of dualism.” (Archer, 2000b: 465)

I argue however, that analytic dualism also makes ontological claims, regarding a real separation that sees agency and structure as irreducible, having distinct properties and powers. The following discussion will begin to tease out the problems which I identify within this presumption of capacity for agency as fundamentally separate from structure, the dualism that it entails, and the problems with treating this dualism as analytic when it has ontological implications. Contra her claim, I argue that Archer's dualism is not merely analytical and constructed as a practical means for doing sociology, but rather is an ontological dualism that makes much greater claims about the way in which the world is.

The conception that structural context cannot impact agents without conscious mediation is

necessary for Archer given her conceptualisation of ontology and epistemology, and her dualism between the two. Archer defines ontology outside of the realms of experience, as referring to the independent reality which humans may never have access to¹¹. However, she regards agency as ontologically sui generis in character, and as a result Archer locates autonomous agency as a capacity that exists fully independently of social interaction. By proxy, she defines social interaction as something that is agentially enacted, or that is mediated by agency through a subject that possesses that agency. Therefore, for Archer, while she states that the content of agency is molded by the social environment in which it is embedded, it always must exist absolutely independently from it *in form*, i.e. Archer holds that the ability to make decisions and act upon them is essentially independent from the socio-cultural and political world in which those actions are performed and experienced:

“social realism ... accentuates the importance of emergent properties at the level of both agency and structure, but considers these as proper to the strata in question and therefore distinct from each other and irreducible to one another ... Irreducibility means that the different strata are separable by definition precisely because of the properties and powers which only belong to each of them and whose emergence from one another justifies their differentiation as strata at all.” (Archer, 1995: 14).

Archer states that proponents of multiple or plural ontologies are subject to the epistemological fallacy: mistaking epistemological qualities for ontological ones, mistaking a feeling of knowing for “the state of things”. As such, Archer states, such an ontology is explicitly against certitude: there is an external reality, but humans are limited by their epistemologies and perceptual abilities. It is entirely possible that regardless of technological innovation and further evolution, ‘the truth’ may never be fully accessed, and of course if it was accessed, we could never be entirely sure if this reality was ‘the ultimate reality’. Therefore Archer is caught between the possibility of accessing a reality independent from human perception and epistemology, and the inability of this reality being accessed through the actors that she theorises:

“Our epistemology is about something ontological, i.e. real, and it is imperfect because all human knowledge is fallible. The existence of structural properties and powers is established by the causal criterion, that is in terms of their generative effects. Matters of ontology are not settled by interviewing people about them!”

(Archer, 2000b: 469)

¹¹ Critical Realism (CR) is widely defined by a shared conviction that one can “arrive at the truth of the matter”, and eventually access the reality which is independent of human perception and epistemology (Porpora D, 2007: 195). However, as a fallibilistic approach, CR holds that the path to this understanding is long and difficult, and that mistakes will be made along the way. Archer adheres to this, though she acknowledges that though that in theory it *is possible*, humans may never get there.

As a result Archer argues that analytical dualism is:

'a matter of theoretical necessity if we are to obtain purchase on those processes which are accountable for determinate social changes – that is if we are to advance usable social theories for working investigators'

(Archer 1995: 158).

As a means for sociologists to practically approach the ways in which people experience themselves and their relationship with their physical and social environment, an analytical dualism can be a useful framework. This philosophical approach provides a justification for the analytical tasks undertaken by sociologists and social theorists, which by necessity must involve artificially isolating cultural, political and otherwise structural factors in order to investigate their effects on individuals, and how individuals' interactions with those structural factors in turn reproduce, transform or alter them (I will return to examining the analytical use of dichotomies for practical sociological research in chapter 6). Archer herself stresses that the way that she uses this separation is analytical and useful for practical sociological investigation, but is not a philosophical nor ontological commitment (1988 -1996 edition: xvi), arguably this is one of the central tenets of her argument and one which underpins her entire approach. I argue however that the philosophical commitments that this approach is predicated upon contain assumptions about the nature of agency and what agency *is* in a philosophical sense that are increasingly growing unsustainable in sociological and philosophical theory.

There are several problems involved when treating structure and agency as an analytical dualism in the way that Archer does. These problems, I will show, while particularly exemplified in Archer's notions of duality and ontology, are rooted in a much wider paradigm which underlies the political context in which Archer's work arises – which it will be the purpose of the following chapters to examine. To begin these critical reflections it is useful to situate Archer's commitment to dualism within wider debates in this area. Archer's analytical dualism between structure and agency relies on a notion of agency that necessarily locates reflexivity, the conscious experience of deliberation, as an exclusively mental phenomenon that is not supported or scaffolded by structural components, but merely considers them (i.e. that structure may be theorised, but does not compose the reflexive process). While Archer critiques the concept of a pure voluntarism, conceding that action always occurs within and in relation to the actor's context, her conception of agency remains modelled on a problematic framework of freedom or constraint, and I locate this in a latent anxiety about determinism. Archer sees agency as inherently separate from the structures it interacts with and upon, associating constraint with structure, and freedom with agency. The extremes of

'material and structural' compulsion and 'esoteric and boundless' possibilities of voluntarism, makes it appear as if lived experience has to be, in Sedgwick's terms, either that of freedom or constraint (2003: 13). Part of this is the conception of materiality and structure as constraining and slow to change, in opposition to the reflexive and dynamic qualities which are conceived as qualities of the conscious mind. Indeed, although Archer maps out structure as a continually changing and developing form that relates with human agency over time, her approach to agency places more emphasis on the role of structural constraint as opposed to structural enablement, posing agents (described as the "autonomous possessors of causal powers", 1995: 148) as the only true instigators of change – so that any structural elaboration results only as the consequences, intended or otherwise, of actions by human agents.

Social theory, as well as broader philosophies spanning biology, neuroscience, artificial intelligence and politics, have long been struggling with the various permutations of the dualism between world and mind. As will be drawn out over the course of the thesis, this dualism does not exist in a theoretical and political vacuum. Rather, it only makes sense within a set of social relationships and meanings that at once are articulated in the terms of those dualisms and re-construct them as both natural and inevitable. As such, the dichotomy constructed between body and mind is upheld by the same discourses that make other dichotomies seem inevitable and natural. At the same time, they defer meaning onto them and are supported by them. Such interrelated dichotomies include, but are not limited to: male and female (Butler, J. 1990), cultural and natural (Haraway, D. 1991), free will and determinism (Gill, S. 2008), active and passive (Young, I. 1990, Sedgwick, E. 2003), plasticity and hardwiring (Jordan Young, R. 2010), fluid and static, but most importantly for our purposes, agency and structure (Butler, I. 1990). Much of the work on embodiment and socialisation that challenged the binary divides between mind and body, social world and self (such as the extensive and influential work of Butler and Bourdieu), has argued that the agency/structure division is too simplistic. Reworking and expanding what is considered to be in the realm of the agentic or the structural has affected and been affected by the parallel work in social sciences and philosophy of mind that also rework the concepts of the body and mind.

For Archer there must be an intrinsic property of human rationality which stands sufficiently apart from structure that composes both our identities and the form of our interaction with the world. She draws this separation at the level of the form of the human mind, so that the mind's capabilities, tendencies and conversations with embodied and emotional states are fully formed and bounded before the influence of the structural context, which then informs the content and spectrum with which that mind interacts. Since for Archer this means explaining the human mind as something which is inherent, whilst not necessarily outside of

the process of continued evolution in relation to social technologies (as she states that structural elements may affect the mind's properties over long timescales, 2000: 277), she proposes a model of mind which is composed as readily as any other biological mechanism in any one individual.

In order to do this Archer adopts the biological models of emergence and morphogenesis. In biology, higher-level properties of an emergent system (properties that are not present in the emergent state's base constituents) have causal powers that are specific to that emergent property or state alone: they are *sui generis* or 'of their own kind'. For Archer, what she sees as the inability of social science to properly conceive of both agency and structure as emergent phenomena means that causal autonomy has previously been granted only to one side of the relationship between agency and structure: i.e. that either causal autonomy is denied to agency, and given only to structure (what she terms downwards conflation), or conversely, only awarded to agency while social structure is seen as something which is molded, without causal efficacy of its own (upwards conflation). In Archer's terms: "upwards conflation' makes structure the epiphenomenon of agential activities, and 'downwards conflation renders ... socialised agents the epiphenomena of socio-cultural systems." (Archer, 2000: 307).

In order to navigate the idea that both agency and social structure have causal efficacy, Archer turns to looking at how such efficacy may be produced as an emergent property of the complexity of lived agentic experience and in working social systems where agency and social systems are different kinds of emergent entities, with different types of properties and powers. She does this through adopting the term morphogenesis, which is rooted in the greek 'morphê', meaning shape, and 'genesis', meaning creation. Originally used in developmental biology to describe the process by which differentiated cells are organized, Archer adopts the term to describe her hypothesis about the processes by which both agency and social structures develop their form. This approach appropriates the particular logic of centralised organisational control that is inherent to biological morphogenetic systems. In such systems, such as the formation of embryos, patterns of tissue development are governed by substances known as morphogens - chemical mechanisms that signal to and act upon unspecialized (stem) cells, causing them to differentiate into specialised forms to fit particular purposes within the development of the greater whole (Turing, A. 1952).

Archer appropriates this model to describe how the agentic action of humans affects the structural conditions of their environment, causing them to modify their form over time – a process she refers to as structural elaboration (Archer, 2000: 258). Just as evolution changes the genetic instructions that influence what type of specialised cells morphogens instruct stem cells to develop into over intergenerational (phylogenetic) timescales, Archer

argues that structural conditioning from the environment changes the ways in which social interaction occurs over time (accounting for the understanding that people always act through their social and cultural context). This means that the form of human agentic action changes, so that while agency acts upon both cultural and social structures, changing their form, the process is bi-directional.

In Archer's morphogenetic approach to social theory, individual agency and social and cultural structures¹² exist in different levels, or strata, of social reality, with both having emerged from an interdependent base of processes, but emerging as different novel entities in their own right (Archer, 2000: 87). However, Archer insists that the relationship between the two is, indeed, mutually influential to the extent that agency affects the ways in which structures change over time and that those structures enable and constrain agency in turn. Archer however aims to avoid any claim to co-constitution, by arguing that these relationships occur over substantially different timescales. Under this model, agency in one form that is fully independent of the structure it is embedded in, acts upon that structure or part of it in a linear fashion that causes those structures to change (structural elaboration, see Figure 1). In turn, that changed structural environment changes the possibilities for action, or the incentives and disadvantages of acting in a particular way, making some actions more likely. This means that further actions then go on to further change structure. Social processes are therefore, for Archer, seen to be constituted by a multitude of these linear sequences, which enables Archer to maintain that while agency and structure are interdependent, as a result of their temporal ordering both agency and structure can be disengaged from one another and, at a specific point in time, analysed in isolation.

Figure 1: Morphogenesis and social change

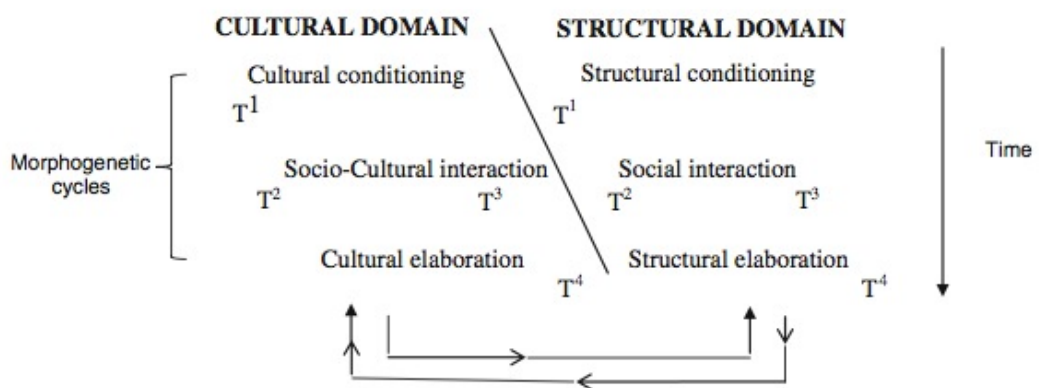


Fig 1. The morphogenetic cycle of cultural and structural conditioning over time.

(Archer, 1995: 323)

¹² Though she focuses far more on social structures, rather than cultural structures.

While Archer states that agency is affected and changed by these developments over time, she means that the types of decisions taken will be changed by the type of choices that are available in a given socio-cultural environment, and those that make sense given the structured interests of the agent in question. This leaves the property of agency, understood here as the capacity for intentional goal-directed action, as itself undetermined by and outside of the influence of social and cultural structure (Porpora, in Archer 2013: 29). It is in this argument that we find that ultimately for Archer while the 'content' of the agentic process is contextualised, the essence of the capacity for agency exists outside of the process of structural elaboration.

This approach has dual limitations. Firstly, While Archer makes claims to historicity, it is at too superficial a level. It takes a particular experience of agency and a particular set of relationships in which that experience makes sense, and characterizes this as a universally applicable state of affairs rather than locating it historically (in the next chapter I will argue that this is a misrecognition of a specific set of historical conditions as universal). Secondly, I would argue that her non-conflationary approach draws a misleadingly strong distinction between the bounds of the internal organism and the affordances of the environment. In chapter four I will show that skill learning and internalised conceptual skill sets directly affect the types of non-aware choices we make and what choices are available for us to consider, and I will argue that we can better understand human agency by attending to these skillful yet non-reflexive interactions. By contrast, for Archer, any complication and conflation of agency, as a stand-alone internal capacity with structural conditions whether they be material or social, threatens the boundary between objectivity and subjectivity as ontologically distinct:

“Arguments “against transcendence” protest that the interplay between the objective and the subjective can only be occluded by the attempt to transcend the difference between the two. Those who are “for transcendence” are denying that objectivity and subjectivity refer to two causal powers that are irreducibly different in kind and make relatively autonomous contributions to social outcomes”

(Archer, 2003: 1-2).

Here, Archer is not only arguing that there is an ontological difference between objectivity and subjectivity, but that structure and agency also have a different ontological character. So that while “structure and agency themselves *emerge, intertwine and redefine one another*” (Archer, 1996: 76), they are always analytically separate, i.e. current structural forms cannot *compose* or *constitute* the agentic capacity as a causal power. This power must always be autonomous from those structural attributes that may, however, a) influence the type of

action which is chosen by the possessor of that autonomous causal power, b) may have influence in the effects of that power being exerted (i.e. unintended consequences), and even c) provide the component properties that result in the emergence of the autonomous causal power as a *sui generis* property, but cannot be contained within or be a component part of that emergent property.

As Akram (2012) argues, since Archer's later work centralises reflexivity as a defining characteristic of agency (a concept that will be addressed in more detail later in the chapter), the topic of how much reflexivity can be assumed to reside solely in the realm of the conscious, the consciously accessible and the unconstrained by structure, is vital. Akram's critique of what she terms Archer's over reliance "on a notion of reflexivity ... [that] neglects the role of the unconscious and habit in agency" (2012: 48), highlights an assumption that underlies both her work and Archer's. Both theorists consider reflexivity to be located solely in the realm of, not just consciousness, but a particular form of self-aware, abstract consciousness which Wheeler refers to as "offline intelligence" (2005: 142)¹³. Here, agency is conceived of as a purely reflexive property, where reflexivity is taken to be the primary and continuous mode of human engagement with the world.

Archer's notion of reflexivity, however, by conflating it with higher forms of self-aware consciousness and deliberative agency, assumes that these characteristics emerge simultaneously, in totality, at the point of higher reasoning. As we will explore in much greater detail later in the thesis, particularly in chapters three and four, certain features that Archer bundles in with this faculty of higher reasoning under her conception of agency, are drawn out, expanded or extended versions of much more widely shared features of cognition in general. One such example that is worth highlighting here is the relationship between reflexivity and self-awareness. Archer implicitly assumes that reflexivity and self-awareness arise together, themselves as characteristics of 'agency', which for Zahavi would render all other forms of phenomenal consciousness which do not necessarily exhibit a complex understanding and recognition of selfhood, as being problematically 'subject-less'. Under such an approach, termed the *no-ownership* view, mental states which arise in organisms without concepts of self, are "not states or properties of anyone, but mental events which simply occur" (Strawson, 1959: 95). Since mental states are always relative to and oriented through the organism who is experiencing them, theorists such as Zahavi suggest that some features of self-awareness are necessarily present prior to reflexivity on both an ontogenetic and phylogenetic timescale.

¹³ Offline refers to a representation process which is decoupled from ongoing activity and immersive skilled prediction/action/reaction processes. I will return to this in far greater detail in chapters four and five where I look at attention and self-awareness in action, but it is worth noting here as we begin to talk about consciousness.

For Zahavi, kinesthetic self-awareness precedes representational self awareness in the sense that being able to recognise an image of oneself as oneself (such as in the mirror test, as described in greater detail on page 76) would not be possible without first having a well-developed sense of proprioceptive ownership over the movements of our bodies in space and over time: i.e. that it is our bodies that are moving, and that they are moving in a particular way (Zahavi, D. 1999: 178-9). Ownership then, along with a sense of authorship over the actions a body is taking, provide the basis for the emergence of higher forms of self-aware reflexivity in the form of a pre-reflexive self-awareness that already displays the qualities of sense-of-ownership and sense-of-authorship that are core definitive features of agentic action.

For Zahavi, this pre-reflective self-awareness is the key to any such ownership of action that would qualify it as agentic. Furthermore, in contrast to Archer, for whom any types of self-awareness and agency are irreducibly essential features of humans vis-à-vis humans, Zahavi makes the case that qualities such as ownership of action, and elements of the pre-reflective self-awareness that underlie those qualities, are (at least partially) determined and produced by neo-natal social interaction. Chimpanzees who were reared in isolation, for example, were found to be unable to pass the mirror test at all despite repeated exposure, until also provided with extensive social interaction with peers. Zahavi suggests that this may indicate that the understanding of selfhood is unlikely to be an internally bounded, essential subjective feature that, to use Dennett's phrase, an individual 'just-so-happens-to-have' virtue of the structure of their brains. Rather, features such as self-recognition are likely to develop in relation to the presence and interactions of others in our social environment.

There is more going on here than than an automatic functioning body on the one hand and a reflexive, self-aware and deliberative mind on the other. The conceptualization of materiality and structures as static in relation to an active, reflexive and agentic mind has been subsequently critiqued in the history of affective neuroscience, biology, social theory and philosophy under various guises, particularly in the affective turn in philosophy and the social sciences since the turn of the last century. Most notably, the relatively recent transition in dominant neuro-scientific thinking from a model of the brain, which saw instinctive or well-learned behaviours or reactions as 'hardwired' towards an emphasis on continual brain plasticity. The movement to a conceptualisation of the brain as plastic even in adulthood, constantly undergoing change whose structure and organisation to a much larger extent are related to the environmental conditions of the lived body rather than exclusively a result of genetic pre-disposition (Jordan Young, R. 2010; Fine, C. 2013), has gone some way towards blurring the previously well-defined opposition of the static, immovable and natural to the agentic, free and cultural. However, computational models of the brain still underlie arguments about human action in other disciplines, as I will discuss in chapter three.

Crucially though, the role of the brain and/or the mind is still often unstated in social theory, despite the impact a particular understanding of the brain and mind has on these theories. As a result, assumptions embedded in computational models carry through to social theory unseen. This means that social theory is at risk of taking as natural, and not questioning ideas about, action that relies on models of the brain that themselves are problematic in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. This leads to cases such as Archer's, who in addressing problems such as the internal conversation (2003), takes psychological approaches as natural and inevitable, too readily drawing universal statements from historically and culturally specific experience of the Western academic subject¹⁴.

The approach I take to reflexivity here is founded upon a particular school of thought which looks at embodied and enactive notions of mind. In chapters five and six, these notions of reflexivity as being fundamentally embodied will be more fully examined, exploring how human reflexivity emerges from more fundamental embodied interactions with the environment and valence (the attractiveness i.e. 'positivity' or aversiveness i.e. 'negativity' of an event or object to an organism, which is defined in accordance with that organism's needs). As a result, I am reluctant to limit this working concept of reflexivity to the conscious mental experience of reflexivity, seeing it as potentially involving a much broader, contextual, adaptive but always embodied dimension. This understanding affects the way in which I critique Archer in this section, but will be explained and explored in more detail in these latter chapters as I start to explore the emergence of the experience of agency.

Archer's notion of reflexivity as a solely self-aware phenomenon, as discussed through Akram (2012), but also documented by King (2010), Elder-Vass (2007), Fleetwood (2008) and Stones (2001), systematically disregards the components of human action that lie in habit (Akram 2012; Fleetwood 2008), embodied skills, and the forms of embodied reflexivity that do not involve the conscious attention of a self-aware mind. As a result, Archer's portrayal of human 'being' has been criticised for portraying subjects as in a constant state of "hyper-deliberation" whereby individuals are in a "continual process of conscious deliberation over everything that came within their orbit every moment of the day" (Fleetwood 2008: 187). Most likely, this is an effect of Archer conflating what Wheeler defines as 'on' and 'offline' intelligence, seeing all states of mentalising as intrinsically self-aware and self-referential. Yet, as Fleetwood suggests, if this were the case this would certainly lead to social and mental paralysis, and the impossibility of this approach feeds into the wider discussion of consciousness itself that I will address in chapters four and five of this thesis.

The assumption that reflexivity is situated in the self-aware realm of the mind has two

¹⁴ I will return to this concept to explain the implications of this type of positionality on both agency and on academic approaches to agency in chapter six.

effects. Firstly, when speaking about agency it encourages the view that it is supra-biological, or, as Archer defines agency: ‘sui generis’ – of entirely its own kind¹⁵: too prematurely separating decision-making from embodied, contextual and adaptive phenomena. Secondly, any debate surrounding agency becomes a debate of what ‘extra’ should be taken into account that may *affect* agency from the outside or comprise it from the inside, as opposed to *why we experience interactions with the environment in those particular terms*. In principle, this in itself is not necessarily problematic for a practical sociology that deals with people’s first-hand experience, but becomes so given the understanding of reflexivity and agency as purely ‘in the head’ at a philosophical level (that Archer denies that she is employing. A critique of her work, however, shows it does have philosophical implications, as I will discuss in chapter four). At times, Archer does assert a relatively embodied position, seeing individuals, defined as agents, as material and embodied actors that have a practical interaction with their environment (Archer, 2000: 106). However, she emphasises the role of agency as a linear dynamic outwards from the mind, through the body, into the world: rendering the body as the *means* by which an ‘agent’ (that is located in self-aware consciousness) acts in the world. Where Archer acknowledges “structural factors working upon us, without our awareness ... the unacknowledged conditions of action” (2003: 4), she retains a notion of conscious reflexivity as primary, stating that “social structures do not act on individuals without some conscious mediation by them” (Archer in Sayer, 2009: 114).

Since Archer takes personal autonomy as being the prerequisite for an individual to become a social being, she, according to King, reasons that the self:

“is at some level autonomous and prior to social interaction because the self has to be able to distinguish itself from its environment. That ability to distinguish cannot be derived externally because the ability to distinguish itself from the rest of the world is crucial to there being a world with which the self can interact with in the first place”

(King, A. 1999: 218).

Archer’s position that King describes above is indicative of a particular assumption about the primacy of the individual, as existing fully formed prior to social interaction and therefore bringing about social interaction and social structures. This is a key point on which I disagree with Archer and will use the rest of the thesis to show there is good reason to consider the possibility that the self is a) not autonomous from social interaction, b) not prior to, but an

¹⁵ N.b. Archer holds that only human self-aware decision-making falls under the category ‘agency’, and so holds that human agency is fundamentally different in kind rather than merely in form (as I hold) from non-human decision-making.

effect of social interaction, and c) the ability of the self to distinguish itself from the environment is derived from and in response to the external, physical and social environment. As I will discuss in more detail in chapters three and four, Archer's conception of cause and effect (where '*cause*' is intelligent, autonomous, conscious and reflexive human individual, and '*effect*' is social interaction and socio-cultural formations; and vice versa) is inconsistent with some key contemporary views on social behaviour and the development of consciousness.

My key objection to Archer's approach is that it uses the concept of emergent properties as a way to construct the phenomena of agentic action as based on a quality that is fully separable from and un-constituted by the physical or social environment. Archer's treatment of agency as a perpetual 'capacity' in this way (a subject "could always have acted differently") esotericises and de-cognitivises what must be the effect of a real world brain-body-world system. If we feel a sense of ourselves making autonomous decisions in the world, we must look to how this process is embrained, embodied and embedded in order to fully understand it, instead of constructing it as analytically untouchable. The next chapter will begin to move towards this, by discussing the social and political context in which our brains and bodies are embedded, and which I argue provides both the context and content with which we both experience the world and theorise agency, particularly in dominant, western academic discourse.

Summary

This chapter has put forward the basic tenets of the structure/agency debate in social theory, and argued against a key player Margaret Archer, who proposes that an analytical dualism between agency and structure is necessary in order to avoid conflation between structural conditions and the basic autonomous nature of agency. I have argued that there is a problem here between form and content, and that what Archer sees as conflation may be the necessary composite elements of the experience and composition of agency itself. This problem between content and form is, I have begun to suggest and will develop in the next chapter, a problem that extends outside of social theory and is indicative of the political and social narratives of autonomy inherent in the contemporary context from which Archer is writing. I have suggested that dividing the approaches to agency and structure into four positions (dominance of structure, dominance of agency, analytical dualism and dialectical), and establishing the ground for a potential fifth (intersectional inextricability), will help us to look at how approaches to the relationship between individuals and society changes in relation to the changing political environment in which those approaches are formed. This includes, crucially, the discursive formations of self and the languages and concepts, the

social norms, with which humans are understood – including understandings of mind, consciousness and control.

In the following chapter I will look at how this relationship between political environment, understanding of self and sociological approaches to agency are uniquely co-produced under the specific political environment of western neoliberalism. While broad, complex and multi-faceted, this chapter will trace how the neoliberal logics of individualism, autonomy, control and possession are involved in maintaining the attachment to individualistic notion of agency, which had previously been more associated with Cartesian models of the self, yet continue to require a philosophical commitment to either an analytic or substance dualism. This will then form the foundation for the second part of the thesis (chapters three and four), that will look at the organisational and phenomenological conditions under which a sense of agency arises. These two chapters will focus on the more fundamental patterns of movement and experience which the sense of agency arises from in order to establish an argument that continuing to talk about agency in a way that conceptually separates it from its enactive states and the contexts in which it is embedded, cannot continue to be considered a useful analytic device in contemporary sociological theory. This will inform the model that I will then go on to develop in part three.

Chapter Two: Politics and the Experience of Agency

Introduction

The previous chapter concluded that agency and structure may be inadequate concepts for looking at embedded human action. By dualising structure and agency, these concepts appear to be oppositional to each other, with structure seen as being something ultimately external to the subject, and agency being entirely internal. This dualism sets agency up as something inherent, pre-social, to an extent biological and unchangeable - a part of human nature that pre-exists society and context. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the concept of agency itself is social and political. It will show that the way in which we conceptualise agency is deeply entangled both with the political and institutional structures in which we are embedded. By showing that social structures and the embodied mechanisms of decision-making are both involved in the experience and enactment of agency, I will argue that agency is not able to be fully located either in the 'outside' realm of structure, nor the 'internal' realm of biology. This will set the foundation for developing this pro-social, politically contextual model of embodied, embedded decision-making in the later chapters.

In order to do this, this chapter will introduce neoliberalism as a political system which is deeply intertwined with the concept of agency. The first section will make the case that agency need not be pre-social in order to be a real experienced phenomena, but that human perception and experience of themselves and their environments evolve in congruence with the social world in which they exist. By dismantling the intuition that the processes of human cognition must be pre-social, we make it possible to consider the effects of the social environment on the way in which we experience ourselves and our actions within the environment that shapes us. The second half of that section identifies the environment that gives us our particular experience of agency, the one that tends to be analysed in social theory, as specifically neoliberal. Here we are able to pick apart some of the epistemological commitments that neoliberalism depends upon, in order to look more closely at how those commitments are involved in shaping our experience of decision-making and action. The second section goes on to analyse evidence that the experience of self and freedom of action are not universal: that they differ depending on both cultural context and on the political and economic system in which individuals are embedded. Interestingly, it appears that concepts of self and freedom of action are directly correlated to whether a subject is raised in a collectivist or individualist society. This section will look at how it is that those political and economic frameworks shape the way in which people conceptualise themselves and the practical effects that this has on action.

2.1.1. Reality is not inevitable or eternal

When agency is conceptualised as a quality which is possessed by a person by virtue of being human, it can lead to the assumption that this quality is both biological and inevitable: a universal, unchanging part of human biology that exists outside of the ephemeral worlds of society and culture. However, the relationship with human capacities (whether biological, psychological or a mixture of the two) and the social, cultural and political context of the human in question, is not quite so simply separated. In this section we will look at the 'reality' of agency, developing an understanding of agency as a contextualised, embedded, embodied, enactive and, crucially, *evolving* method for interacting with the particular demands of the neoliberal social world.

The alternative to conceptualising agency as both purely internal and as an intrinsic quality of human nature is to look at what outside forces may produce the feeling of agency as a way of negotiating our actions within an environment. In chapter one I noted briefly that in social theory the return to the model of individual, autonomous human agency has come at a time where the underlying political and environmental conditions have shifted towards a narrative of atomistic individualism. This individualism, associated with neoliberalism, emphasises choice, systematic freedom of action and total personal responsibility over action. If our intuitions as theorists about agency being internal and intrinsic, are bound up within liberal and neoliberal frameworks, it is necessary to look at how these socio-political logics may go about constructing self-experience and achieve the effect of making the individualist, autonomous subject appear both inevitably universal and pre-social.

There is a difference between claiming that free will or agency do not exist, or are not 'real', and claiming that they are not universal, not inevitable or that they are in fact socially derived phenomena. I argue that if we understand agency as a set of phenomenological methods for interacting with the environment, we can look at how the experience of it arises out of a particular set of social and cultural conditions, a 'conceptual atmosphere' (to use Dennett's term). In order to understand the experience of agency as both socially influenced and as real, we need to challenge our conception of reality as being composed only of facts which exist independently from our understanding of them. When a process or experience arises only under a particular set of circumstances, and in relation to those circumstances, it is not any less 'real' as a result of that ephemerality. This involves understanding the brain and body not as a hardwired and pre-social framework which is 'filled up' with content from the social world, but as something which is plastic and to an extent moulded in-the-terms-of that context, in order to allow the organism or person to best function within that specific context. This is beautifully explained in a passage from Daniel Dennett's 2004 manuscript 'Freedom Evolves' which, while long, is worth quoting in its entirety:

“We live our lives against a background of facts, some of them variable and some of them rock solid. Some of the stability comes from fundamental physical facts: The law of gravity will never let us down (it will always pull us down as long as we stay on earth), and we can rely on the speed of light staying constant in all our endeavours. Some of the stability comes from even more fundamental metaphysical facts: 2+2 will always add up to 4, the Pythagorean theorem will hold, and if A = B, whatever is true of A is true of B and vice versa. The idea that we have free will is another background condition for our whole way of thinking about our lives. We count on it; we count on people “having free will” the same way we count on them falling when pushed off cliffs and needing food and water to live, but it is neither a metaphysical background condition nor a fundamental physical condition. Free will is like the air we breathe, and it is present almost everywhere we want to go, but it is not only not eternal, it evolved, and is still evolving. The atmosphere of our planet evolved over hundreds of millions of years as a product of the activities of the billions of more complex life forms it made possible. The atmosphere of free will is another sort of environment. It is the enveloping, enabling, life-shaping, conceptual atmosphere of intentional action, planning and hoping and promising – and blaming, resenting, punishing and honouring. We all grow up in this conceptual atmosphere, and we learn to conduct our lives in the terms it provides. It appears to be a stable and ahistorical construct, as eternal and unchanging as arithmetic, but it is not. It evolved as a recent product of human interactions, and some of the sorts of human activity it first made possible on this planet may also threaten to disrupt its future stability, or even hasten its demise. Our planet’s atmosphere is not guaranteed to last forever, and neither is our free will.”

(Dennett, D. 2004: 9-10)

Dennett’s hypothesis that free will is both a real experience and that it evolves in conjunction with a conceptual environment, of course relies upon a precondition that reality and ontology are seen to be inclusive of social worlds as well as the physical environment. What Dennett is getting at here is that an appeal to reality does not necessarily imply separability from social systems and nor does it imply a timelessness which would insinuate that because something is real it is unchanging. For reasons that will be explained in chapter three and further elaborated throughout the thesis, reality is composed of far more than physical universal laws, but must include the lived realities of organisms – the meaningful environment which is bound up with perception, experience and phenomenology.

Dennett describes how social interaction and the conception of free will evolved in a co-productive relationship of increasing complexity. Here he provides us with a framework for reconceptualising the ways in which we talk about free will that I will adapt for the demands of the sociological approach to agency. What I will do here is use Dennett’s proposition that

the conceptual atmosphere of free will is what allows agency to exist as a phenomena, to show that the ability to choose does not pre-exist the context of that choice. Rather, the ability to choose, the options available to choose between, and the context within which that choice takes place are involved in a co-productive relationship.

The perceived necessity of maintaining a commitment to agency as a fundamental tenet of human nature has fueled the resistance against materialism and Neo-Darwinism (Dennett, 2003: 15), but also against structuralism, poststructuralism, and any biological, neuroscientific or social hypotheses that suggest that factors outside of the self control or influence the behaviour of that self. As with Dennett's conception of naturalism (2003: 15-16), the effort I am making here at deconstructing the experience of agency is not to say that agency does not exist, i.e. it is not to say that the ability to make choices over our own actions does not exist. This would simply not be true. We experience ourselves making decisions in a near continuous fashion, and (given the available information or available possibilities of a complex situation) are able to control our actions to the extent that we can attempt to maneuver ourselves through complex and multi-faceted social situations and arrangements. This experience and the consequences of these actions are real and they are supported by and made sense of within a social reality which is organised through the assumption that free will, and the agency to exercise it, are the fundamental mode of human existence.

The social arrangements that make agency appear inevitable¹⁶ are themselves dependent upon individual agency remaining to appear inevitable. This causes a circular argument, i.e.: agency/free will *must exist* because we must have a concept of individual responsibility for action – if we did not, the legal system which is founded on this premise would find itself unfounded and unenforceable. While this clearly is an argument that extrapolates the implications of an argument to the extreme, and by doing so removes it from the contexts in which it has been formed, such a thought experiment exposes how tightly bound the model of agency is with not only our self-experience but with the social institutions that provide the environmental context in which we learn to experience ourselves. As introduced in the latter part of the previous chapter, the way in which we experience ourselves and our environment is tied to the narratives that we construct around action and around what it means to be human.

2.1.2 Neoliberalism's logic of freedom

Free will and the capacity to act agencially in accordance with that free will, are central to how we have come to understand human subjects. It is almost impossible to talk about human

¹⁶ and the individual autonomous agent model of humans and human consciousness

choice without relying upon terms that insinuate that “the autonomous individual is the basic unit of human experience” (Gilbert, J. 2014: 37) and that the human in question is separate from the social world in which they are embedded. This section will look firstly at how these assumptions about human nature are rooted in a plethora of social and economic discourses which are specific to a western form of neoliberalism, and secondly at how those defining qualities of neoliberalism as an economic and social system are fundamentally involved in the production of contemporary western subject positions (Gill, 2008: 438).

In order to experience agency as the ability to decide and act freely, the subject must exist within a social framework which holds that an individual is sufficiently separable from others in order to act according to their own will in any given situation. This separability depends upon an idea that an individual is suitably free from cultural and social constraints so as to be able to recognise social constraints and experience themselves as fully separate from those roles and values. In this way roles and values are conceptualised as something that the subject ‘possesses’ as opposed to something that the subject ‘is’.

Neoliberalism is conceived of as both a set of epistemological commitments (Mirowski: 417) and an ideological project (Leitner et al. 2007: 40), which produces subjects in terms of the economic rational individual that is the precondition of its own claim to truth. The conception of freedom itself creates the boundaries that demarcate the ranges of available options from which to choose. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) explain, the focus on the act distracts from the enabling conditions which bring that act, and the conception and practice of ‘acting’, into possibility and give it meaning. Repeated focus at this level allows the effects of systems of production to appear as their cause, reproducing the conditions of production that centralise the subject as the originator and source.

Neoliberalism is defined as particular orientation of economic logics (Harvey, D. 2005), that serve to expand corporate logic to the wider levels of the social, political and cultural: most notably in terms of deregulation, privatization and the logic of possession – such as private property, land ownership, the ability to own and control items and people. While Liberalism differs from Neoliberalism, the logic of neoliberalism was made possible by the widespread acceptance of the basic tenets of the liberal individualism which both preceded it and continue to be bound up within its discourses. While Liberalism refers to a broad range of political, economic, religious and social ideas, the term implies a progressive philosophical strategy associated with the socialist political “left”. Liberal economics however, employs a complex hybridised approach to ideas of freedom, applying them to the market in order to argue for free trade that operates outside of governmental intervention, and underlies the logic behind privatization (Smith, A. 1776), commercialization, consumerism, and their

application to the actions of (and therefore treatment of) people¹⁷. The conceptual framework of possession, deregulation, privatization and individualism are actively involved in how people make sense of their experiences. So, while agency as Archer interprets it, exists as a real power within this framework, its manifestation is dependent upon the prior subscription to and immersion within the neoliberal system. As a result, these qualities cannot be sustained as ontological truths outside of this particular system.

While the roots of individualism are diverse and multi-dimensional, Gilbert (2014) argues that the history of the particular formation of individualism that forms the logical basis of neoliberal sense-making and experience can be usefully traced back to Hobbes's Leviathan (see 1996 edition) and surrounding works (e.g. *De Cive*: or, The Citizen, see 1949 ed.). Gilbert attempts to adjust Hobbes's conclusions to account for the role of society (which do not necessarily hold with Hobbes's 'state of nature'), whilst maintaining the premises upon which the political, economic and social context of neoliberalism is based:

“that the autonomous individual is the basic unit of human experience; that human beings are by nature acquisitive and therefore – in a world of unequal resources and unequal rewards – competitive; that any theory or practice of politics must be predicated on these assumptions. ... what C.B. Macpherson famously calls ‘the political theory of possessive individualism’.”

(Gilbert, J. 2014: 37-38).

The political theory of individualism depends upon a certain view of human nature that sees humans as atomistic and competitive, assuming that an individual will defend their own interests and innately possess the freedom to do so. Though the ideals of agency and freedom are disentangleable within much of neoliberal and liberal philosophy, a conception of agency and a conception of freedom are most clearly made analogous in Johnston's *The Idea of a Liberal Theory*. Johnson's third and final stipulation of philosophical realism, which is relevant here only in so far as it has influenced the common conception of agency in the social sciences, is that each person is defined as an agent (1994: 18), where agenthood is defined by freedom of action: “minimally, the claim that we are free means that we possess the capacity to be agents” (ibid, 22). As we will see in part two of the thesis, this centre of

¹⁷ The individualist values of liberalism, for prominent midcentury theorists such as Hayek and Popper, as well as Mises, Talmon and Berlin (who Bird refers to collectively as the 'cold-war liberals': 1999: 7) were set as the antithesis against totalitarianism, nationalism and corporatism (but also socialism, communism and social welfare) where subordination of individual self-actuation and autonomy is enforced or encouraged to promote a common societal goal or ideal. The argument for the protection of the liberty of individuals over the ideals of either the collective or the state therefore may be seen as a theory of society (Hayek, 1984: 135) which makes both first order normative commitments about the idea of personal liberty and autonomy, and – crucially for the line of argument in this thesis – second order methodological and theoretical commitments to the ontological nature of individuals (Bird, 1999: 6).

human agency and freedom is conceptualised as being a mental phenomena. Freedom and 'being' an agent are things that are acted out through the body at the will of the conscious mind, with that mind being seen as fundamentally separate from the body. In chapters three, four and five we will look into the problems with this conception of mind, but it is important to note here that this assumption is deeply entangled with the idea of agency and freedom as being possessed by an individual. The idea that there is an essence to human freedom that is located within individuals and transcends their context is not an invention of neoliberalism or even liberalism, but draws upon a variety of long standing narratives about what it is to be human. As Gilbert explains:

"[t]here are good reasons for suspecting that the modern assumption that our 'interior' lives are in some sense where the truth of our selves is to be located, rather than being relatively trivial elements of our experience, is largely a modern invention, which has roots in the Christian confessional (Foucault 1978: 61-5) and early Protestant spiritual practice, but only really comes to fruition with the development of Romanticism (Campbell 1987), modern forms of narrative (Watt 1957, McKeon 2002), and twentieth century 'depth psychology' (Rose, 1990)."

(Gilbert, J., 2014: 32).

This idea that our minds are bounded and internal, and that they possess sole or primary control over our actions within the world underlies the individualist conception of the subject. In *Brain Storm*, a novel by Richard Dooling which comments on Dennett's theories of consciousness and free will, Dr. Rachel Palmquist, a neuroscientist, explains the difficulty of seeing oneself as a master over one's actions:

"Folk psychology again," she said. "It's a nice fiction. Perhaps a necessary fiction – that a certain part of your consciousness can stand aside from itself, assess and control its own performance. But a brain is a symphony orchestra without a conductor. Right now we're hearing an oboe or maybe a piccolo make an inquisitive flourish of self-examination while the rest of the instruments are off soaring in a different crescendo. What's left of you is an extremely complex balance of competing wet biological parallel processors in that electrochemical batch of elbow macaroni fermenting between your ears, which is ultimately in charge of your body, but by definition cannot be in charge of itself."

(Dooling, R. 1998: 229).

Dooling's description of agency as a 'necessary fiction' nicely captures the idea that agency is a way of conceptualising action that we depend upon in order to function within our social environments, but that might not be giving an accurate depiction of the way human brains,

bodies and environments actually relate to one another. However, if agency or freedom of action is a necessary fiction as Dooling suggests, that fiction is so deeply intertwined with the way in which we process our reality that it itself becomes real. It becomes a fiction that is necessary because it supports and reproduces the means of its own reality through appearing inevitable, as if fundamentally unconstrained freedom of action is not only a possibility, but a given.

Since the commitment to free will is inherent to the logics of neoliberalism, those neoliberal structures and institutions themselves reinforce the intuition that autonomous personal freedom is inherent and pre-social at the same time as they shape a) the conditions for that experience of freedom; and b) the form in which it is experienced. Neoliberalism and its embedded logics of liberalism, understood as a historically situated set of social relations, can be therefore seen in Butler's terms as "both the condition and the occluded background" of the model of agency as internal, individual and pre-social (Butler et al. 2000: 138). As Butler explains: "*any theory of politics requires a subject, needs from the start to presume a subject, the referentiality of language, the integrity of the institutional descriptions it provides. For politics is unthinkable without a foundation, without these premises.*" (2010: 122). Agency, and as a result the subject, become entangled within a double bind whereby it is explained as cause of the political institutions and discourses which it, in turn, is produced through.

For Gershon (2011), the neoliberal account of agency is now a common default position, and one which we should be wary of given the trend away from the concept of culture as a relational tool without effective replacement. Culture, now re-envisioned in neoliberal terms of individual possession and marketability (Gershon, 2011: 545), fails to provide an adequate analytical concept with which to theorise difference and envisage its own non-universality. David Harvey explains the complexity involved in the normalization and universalisation of an ideological project such as neoliberalism:

"[f]or any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit"

(Harvey, D. 2000: 3).

With intuition and instinct (which draw upon a deeply ingrained set of assumptions about the world), values and desires *and* possibilities all arising from and involved in the constitution of a working ideology, dominant "ways of thought" (ibid) are inextricable from dominant 'ways of being'. This leads us to one of the key objections to deconstructing agency as a foundational and intrinsic essence of humanity. Conceived of as the only safeguard against determinism

of social structures, agency is held to be the part of humans which allows them to avoid falling into the trap of the cultural dope (as introduced in section 1.1.2), and to instigate effective socio-political change. This does leave us with a difficult situation. Without an adequate replacement for explaining dissent, anxieties surrounding attributing the experience of agentic choice and freedom, therefore (at least partially) also to the social systems that has previously been conceived of as its counterpart. Harvey explains in A Brief History of Neoliberalism:

“Neoliberal rhetoric, with its foundational emphasis upon individual freedoms, has the power to split off libertarianism, identity politics, multiculturalism, and eventually narcissistic consumerism from the social forces ranged in pursuit of social justice through the conquest of state power. It has long proved extremely difficult within the US left, for example, to forge the collective discipline required for political action to achieve social justice without offending the desire of political actors for individual freedom and for full recognition and expression of particular identities. Neoliberalism did not create these distinctions, but it could easily exploit, if not forment them.”

(Harvey, D. 2007: 41-42)

However, this conceptual trap relies upon a notion that determinism is the opposite of internal and full agentic freedom, so that the only alternative to having full agentic freedom is unilateral determinism. Determinism is defined as the state where “there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future” (Van Inwagen 1983: 3). Yet, following Dennett, determinism does not imply inevitability¹⁸:

“First, many thinkers assume that determinism implies inevitability. It doesn't. Second, many think it is obvious that indeterminism - the denial of determinism - would give us agents some freedom, some maneuverability, some elbow room, that we couldn't have in a deterministic universe. It wouldn't. Third, it is commonly supposed that in a deterministic world, there are no real options, only apparent options. This is false.”

(Dennett, 2003: 25).

Where there are sufficient causal conditions that produce particular actions in particular ways to unfold, it never happens in a vacuum. Deterministic universes are also complex

¹⁸ There is an extremely complex and ongoing discussion in this area, which I will set aside for the time being, but it is worth noting as I will return to it in chapters five and six, building on the ideas we have set forth here.

ones, interacting with multiple, other, deterministic or causally effective processes. These relations change the course and abilities of the subject who is negotiating them, leading to different, novel and sometimes unexpected outcomes, which then themselves fold back upon the subject's world.

As I introduced in the first chapter, ideas about nature and culture, body and mind, structure and agency, are not only set in dichotomies themselves, but each side of those dichotomies is intertwined and associated with one another along the lines of freedom and determinism: so that the 'material' realm of nature, biology, bodies, brains, hormones and social structures are seen as static, slow-to-evolve, and as deterministic – and are contrasted by the 'esoteric' realm of culture, mind, free will and agency¹⁹. As such, the efforts of naturalists such as Dennett, Dawkins, and E.O. Wilson, much like the efforts of embodiment theorists in the social sciences (such as Bourdieu and Butler) and structuralists and poststructuralists alike, are often wrongly portrayed as determinist accounts that conclude that people are not capable of making choices or having effects on the social context in which they exist.

Rather than give a full account of the work of the founding theorists of neoliberal thought such as Hayek and von Mises, I want to ground Neoliberalism here through Foucault's extensive critique of the subject. For Foucault, Neoliberalism is not simply a uniform method of describing a series of practices but is a discursive formation - complex, messy and not-necessarily internally consistent:

"The discursive formation is not therefore a developing totality, with its own dynamism or inertia, carrying with it, in an unformulated discourse, what it does not say, what it has not yet said, or what contradicts it at that moment; it is not a rich, difficult germination, it is a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions."

(Foucault, M. 1972: 134)

These sets of discourses encourage and constitute a specific form of subjectivity which is regarded and experienced as free, autonomous and self-interested by nature. The neoliberal subject therefore conceived of an atom of both self-interest and moral responsibility that relates to their environment through rational decision-making based on cost-benefit analysis alone. Gilbert explains that this is a shift between seeing human nature as naturally productive in its self-interest as human nature as potentially destructive in its self-interest. An

¹⁹ Such associations are also related to the dichotomies of gender with the body, biology and its attached determinism being more readily applied to conceptions of the female, with the mind, development and plasticity associated with the male. However, this is a slightly different (though interrelated and crucially important) matter, and comments on this can be found in the work of Jordan-Young (2011) and Fine (2010).

emphasis on the self and of the natural status of individualism, possession and acquisition, however remains:

“[N]eoliberalism, from the moment of its inception, advocates a programme of deliberate intervention by government in order to encourage particular types of entrepreneurial, competitive and commercial behaviour in its citizens, ultimately arguing for the management of populations with the aim of cultivating the type of individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour which the liberal tradition has historically assumed to be the natural condition of civilized humanity, undistorted by government intervention.”

(Gilbert J. 2013: 9)

While reified in the structural and logistical management of the markets, these economic styles are based upon philosophical commitments to particular ideas of human nature and human behaviour. Liberalism on the one hand, argues for a free-market philosophy by holding that markets are self-maintaining if participants are given enough freedom to cooperate, create, and innovate. The tendency towards self-actualisation, which is held to be a primary drive of individuals, protects the market from collapse through participants' desire to maintain and encourage a broadly beneficial economic environment. In this way acting in the market's interests are seen as acting in the individual's interests.

Neoliberalism however, assumes that the drive for self-actualisation is dissociated from the state of the broader market system, so that the drive for personal gratification in the short term will outweigh the desire to maintain a stable beneficial market environment. At the same time, neoliberalism holds that the market must be supported, not by maintaining a stable environment, but by artificially creating supposed scarcity in order to drive inflation, interest and desire – producing profit-making opportunities through fostering competition. Through this artificially imposed scarcity, the enabling conditions for cooperation are undermined and individual market agents are rather prompted to act in a defensive, more fiercely competitive manner in order to protect themselves from losses. Here, other participants are seen as threats to survival rather than associates in maintaining a mutually beneficial broader environment. As such, neoliberalism's focus on the individual both reflects and partially produces the conditions for government intervention into the markets: i.e. in order to regulate against too-extreme manifestations of the behaviour which it itself has stimulated.

These defining qualities of neoliberalism as a particular economic system are fundamentally involved in the production of contemporary western subject positions (Gill, S. 2008: 438). The logics that support neoliberalism are those that produce the language, frames of reference and ways of relating-to-the-world with which neoliberal populations experience

themselves as subjects and as actors.

For Butler, Foucault's claim that subjectivation and 'the subject' are produced through each other is not equivalent to rejecting the possibility of individual or collective action that challenges the structures in which they are embedded. There is a linear logic inherent within neoliberalism (as is typical of dominant western paradigms), which equates 'what is made possible' as an imposition of restraints that serve to dictate action in sequential, predictable ways. This inference that therefore, as involved and constitutive participants, we are "always-already trapped" sets up an ultimatum that masks the complexity of the situation (in Butler et al. 2000: 151). The double bind of production and assimilation do not imply the staticism or stagnancy of an immovable system. Integration of different ways of thinking, ideas and ways of being, whilst always translated into the frames of reference which are already-available, expand the language and frames of reference from the inside: enabling the production of new ways of being. These ways of thinking and being, whilst never neutrally 'incorporated', affect the dominant system in their hybridised form by disrupting the processes of naturalisation and normalization. It is these processes of naturalisation and normalization that allow power dynamics to operate transparently²⁰.

This is not to say that humans *always* have an ultimate choice in and control over the direction and orientation of their actions, but that actions are complex, multi-layered and, due to the sheer complexity of the environments in which they are embedded, actions, reactions, movements and effects are not always predictable in linear ways. This means that while determinism cannot be applied successfully to human action, neither can a concept of agency such as Archer's that see it as always able to overcome any structural constraint. Determinism and this type of supra-agency are both incompatible with complexity, since neither take into account nonlinear processes. Unlike linear systems where input → process → output occurs predictably, nonlinear systems are those where the result of a process is not directly relational to the initial conditions or actions undertaken in it. This happens because there may be multiple processes occurring simultaneously which affect one another, or because unknown or unpredictable conditions affect the way in which the process takes shape. These processes are much more common than linear processes in real-world systems due to the high complexity and changeability of systems outside of the lab.

Taking the position that determinism is infeasible in real-world social scenarios has two consequences. Firstly, that the notion that structural constraints are fully coercive and regulatory to the extent of determinism, cannot be applied to humans in their extended social

²⁰ This is a complex relationship and will be returned to in further detail in chapters four and five.

systems (though there is space for regulation, governmentality, conditioning and patterning). Secondly, an appeal to agency can never excuse or override those regulating effects since the experience of agency itself partially arises from those effects. This means that agency cannot be seen to 'trump' social structure, since the dualism in which they are positioned against one another in (structure=determinism vs. agency = full cognisance and freedom), does not reflect the complexity and non-linearity of the lived subject.

As Butler explains:

*"It does not follow [...] however, that we are always-already trapped, and that there is no point of resistance to regulation or to the form of subjection that regulation takes. What it does mean, however, is that **we ought not to think that by embracing the subject as the ground of agency, we will have countered the effects of regulatory power.**"*

(Butler, 2000: 151)

Distancing a subject from the conditions of their emergence results in the illusion of agency as a capacity which is present as an affordance of the body itself rather than as an affordance of the body in relation with its environmental (including cultural) context. Agency is seen as the means by which a subject relates to the world, and thus it is supposed that it exists outside of the culturally formulated subject whose context shapes both the form and content of the agentic decision. To disagree with this neoliberal conception of agency as universal and pre-cultural is to explicitly reject the idea that agency can be unilaterally applied so that it can be said to exist outside of the social institutions and embodied habits that exist in relation to institutions. The alternative to this conception of agency, and the argument which I will begin formulating in the following chapter, is to assert that agency, or rather, the conscious experience of oneself making decisions, arises as part of a process *towards* embodied, smooth coping action within the world. First, however, we must show this relationship between institutions and experience of self, and show that different institutional discourses result in affectively different possibilities for and experiences of action.

2.2.1: Recognising Non-Universality

"When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it 'transmits' is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial 'sources' from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had

such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something which we need not even understand."

(Heidegger, M. 1996, ed.: 43)

As I introduced in the first section, work on the concept of agency, like the majority of social theory, tends to emerge from Western academic contexts, in particular from the US and Western Europe. As Heinrich et al. point out, this leads to an inherent bias, both in assumptions of ontology made by western theorists, and in the participant populations that are used to extrapolate patterns and phenomena to speak for universal human features: *"Researchers – often implicitly – assume that either there is little variation across human populations, or that these "standard subjects" are as representative of the species as any other population"* (2010: 61). Phenomena such as the experience of possessing individual capacity for agency are assumed by these domains to be de facto psychological universals, a standard human quality which provides a foundation to which cultural and social variation is overlaid.

There is an assumption under this approach that agentic capacity exists by virtue of human biology and psychology, prior to and regardless of, the effects of culture and politics. If this is the case then we would expect that the experience of agency as an ontology and as an epistemology would still be strongly identifiable where neoliberal ideologies are less prevalent. This would be difficult to determine for a variety of reasons. Firstly, due to the extent of the globalization of free market neoliberal values, consumerism and capitalist ideology, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the language and logic of neoliberalism may have already been incorporated into other ways of thinking. Secondly there is the problem of translation. In order to understand the language and logic of other cultures, concepts need to be 'translated' into a context and language that we can understand. Since the language and concepts that we use to understand, explain and experience the world are themselves formulated by neoliberal ideas of the free agentic subject, there is a risk of imposing these ideas where they did not previously exist, via the process of translation itself (Boroditsky, 2001: 3).²¹ To this extent, undertaking an investigation into the prevalence of the concept and experience of being a free agent would

²¹ To demonstrate the extent to which we can never be fully confident in the accuracy of translation Boroditsky uses the example of the word 'same'. Say for example, attempting to make sure your translation was as accurate as possible, you asked a participant whether one word (it does not matter what this word is) was 'the same' as its English counterpart. Your participant might answer yes, but one language might take 'the same' to mean 'exactly identical' whilst the other takes 'the same' to mean 'sufficiently similar'. If this is the case then not only does the word 'same' not mean the same thing in both languages, but in the process of translation there is also the inevitability of drawing on a whole plethora of different associations related to that word 'same' and homogenising them into the set of assumptions embedded in your own native language. In doing so, there is a risk of overwriting crucial particularities and distinctions within the non-native language that is undergoing translation (Boroditsky, 2001: 3).

be a difficult and complicated task.

What does it mean to universalize the idea that all humans interact with the world in a state of free choice? In ethics, the term universality refers to that which applies to all individuals in a sufficiently similar context (or given similar pre-conditions). Universalists hold that there exist natural laws which, in Dembour's words, "posit immutable and eternally valid principles" which are most often attributed to nature or to natural kinds. (Dembour, in Cowan et al. 2001: 57). In this way universalism stands in opposition to relativism (though Dembour critiques the notion that each is tenable on its own, *ibid*), which holds that phenomena are constructed by, and differ according to, social and cultural influence. Realists for example, hold that free will is independent of the context and positionality of a particular person, since they see it as a universal feature of human nature. Therefore, even in contexts where a person is imprisoned or otherwise unable to enact their will in any meaningful sense, they still possess this quality of being able to choose by virtue of being human (Haskell, 1975; Schrödinger, 1991). This position is reminiscent of a feature I identified in Archer's position towards agency which I discussed in chapter one: that as a *sui generis* property of human nature, agency always exists as a capacity whether or not it is enacted. To be satisfied that agency is a pre-social capacity that exists by virtue of being human as Archer suggests, we would need to be satisfied that agency exists before (and irrespective of) the political and social context within which the possibilities for choice and the frameworks for negotiating choice are embedded. We would expect humans from wildly different socio-political contexts to exhibit a language of a capacity for agency that exhibits similar descriptions of the ability of an individual to choose.

I am separating this definition of universality from the more mainstream or popular-culture usages which are similar to the usage of the term in dynamical systems or statistical mechanics, that are attached to conceptions of a supra-cultural and static, unchangeable human nature. Those conceptions use universality to refer to factors or parameters that exist independently from the working of the system and are not sensitive to changes in the details of that system (Feigenbaum, 1983). While it is one of the aims of sociology to critique assumptions about human nature to show how many of the qualities that are assumed to be natural and pre-cultural (such as gender roles) are socially constructed, the idea remains that some elements of behaviour, and/or some properties of conscious experience pre-exist culture and exist unchanged across all humans regardless of social and cultural conditioning across geographical space and over time. While I categorically do not disagree with the presupposition that humans across space and across (at least relatively limited) periods of time share certain phenomenological and behavioural, as well as cognitive and physical, traits, it is the purpose of this thesis to critique *the extent to which* the experience of agency – as it is referred to under the terms of the agency/structure debate, and particularly in the terms in which Archer uses it – can be said to exist outside of the political and cultural

context in which it is taken for granted.

The move which places the subject as the grounds of agency, utilised by the critical realist stance among many, cannot be reconciled with a position which accepts Foucault's premise that the subject is produced through, regulated and enabled by, operations of power – which Archer considers to be a conflationist approach. If, as for Foucault, subjectivation is inextricably bound up with subjection, dominant discourses of power provide the principles of self-definition and possibility that enable certain modes of ontological and epistemological experience (Butler et al. 2000: 151). Our political systems do not exist 'out there' as an overarching governor dictating in clear terms what it deems to be true or acceptable. What sociologists call institutional, discursive power structures, are amalgamations of multiple different and discreet structures, practices and norms. These discursive power structures are dispersed within knowledge, language and habits, constructing and delimiting practices and ways of thinking through both carrying and reflecting dominant power structures within a society. Instead of being concentrated in an easily identifiable person or centralised in a particular government, power is embodied and enacted through an aggregation of multiple small-scale practices, habits, and discourses. It is carried in what is considered normal, natural and true within a certain system, which in turn is reflected and constructed by the concepts we have words for and the turns of phrase which both reflect and shape how we think of the world. Foucault termed such discourses 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, M. 1991):

'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true'

(Foucault, M. 1976: 112).

In this way, for Foucault, the operations of power are neither agentic acts nor quantifiable structures, but are rather discourses manifested in a set of repeated linguistic and habitual practices over time. Ideas that we are accustomed to and use, even tangentially, on a day-to-day basis become 'common sense'. Common sense, in turn acquires a status of truth, which causes it to appear as if it needs no further evidence, proof or validation, as Heidegger explains in the passage which prefaced section 2 (1996 ed.: 43). We will focus on the way in which familiar cultural values transform into working truths when I introduce the concept of skilled coping in relation to social structures in chapter five. For now, I want to look at how it is possible that the power discourses involved in the neoliberal conception of individualism

affect the way in which people come to experience themselves and the possibilities for action within their physical and social environments.

2.2.2: Values creating reality, rather than reality creating values

The concept of 'I', the 'I' that does the acting, the 'I' that is capable of deciding on and performing action, is laden with assumptions about relative independence from coercive or structuring forces and levels of control over decision-making and action that are socially and politically derived. This section will look at how these assumptions are carried in the language with which we talk about ourselves and our relationship to our social and physical environment, and how this language is co-constructive with a politically influenced experience of self.

Hunt and Agnoli discuss how thought is influenced by cultural variations in language, showing the relationship between the language which people speak and the language in which they interpret the world and think about it (1991: 377). Following Pylyshyn (1984), they define cognition as consisting of three layers, the physiological apparatus (the 'wetware' of neurons and brains) as the foundational level, and at the highest level content of thought, what they along with others (Holland, Holyoak, Thisbet and Thagar, 1986) refer to as the level of representational theorising, this is the level we experience as 'thinking'. Between these two is what they refer to as the symbol-manipulation level of thought, where "representation is formed without regard to the content of that representation" (Hunt and Agnoli: 1991).

I am less concerned at this point about whether Pylyshyn and Agnoli's model is an entirely biologically or psychologically accurate model of the structure of thought, for example the use of the term 'representation', meaning an internal model of reality which serves as the primary way in which humans access the world, has come under heavy critique especially throughout the work of theorists such as Hutto, D. (1999), Clark, A. and Toribio, J. (1994), and Varela, F. and Maturana, H. (e.g. 1972: 22²²). This model nevertheless serves as a useful tool at this point for explaining the type of cognition we are concerned with here: the structuring framework that stands between wetware and content. This is because when we talk about the influence of power discourse, we are talking about what a person's context *enables* them to conceptualise. Power discourses rarely operate explicitly, but rather they structure the terms by which concepts and situations make sense. Often it is the explanatory framework of thinking and understanding that shifts before the content of thought (the thoughts themselves or what those thoughts are about). Yet this shift in the explanatory framework fundamentally changes the meaning and effects of the content of thought without

²² We will look more into the concept of representation in relation to cognition in chapter four when on embodiment is introduced in more detail.

necessarily being noticeable, changing the outcome of thought processes and behaviour without necessitating a conscious 'change of mind'.

More time will be spent devoted to looking at this process in chapter six, but it is helpful at this point to understand that this can happen surprisingly quickly. For example, Hall describes the way in which subject positions and explanatory frameworks for thought shifted during the relatively short period of time of a shift in government, when given the right socio-cultural conditions. In his 1988 paper 'The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists', he tracks significant changes in how subjects understood themselves and the language with which they used to explain their actions and decisions during the period of Thatcher's government in the UK (Hall, 1988). He attributes these shifts to a significant change in the ideological domain in which people were embedded, aided by a considerable media effort and carefully chosen dialogue constructing the new market as the only alternative to rising unemployment caused by the closure of the coal industry while at the same time re-instating the logics and values of "Englishness, respectability, Patriarchalism, family and nation" which were constructed in opposition to the efforts of unions and coalitions of the working class (1988: 39). He states that he finds "the logics of ideological inference to be more multivariate, the automatic connection between material and ideal factors less determinate, than classical theories would have us believe." (Hall, S. 1988: 43). He argues instead that political overhaul into a system whose logics and values would later develop into the neoliberalism we have today, was made possible by reframing the way in which people made logical inferences about action and the value attachments associated with those actions, through changing the language used to talk about them²³.

For Sapir, reality as it is experienced by the subject is partially constituted through the habitual language of the group in which they are embedded (Sapir, E. 1949: 162). The language we use carries within it certain assumptions about the way the world is, and the relationships between objects and subjects within it. This translates directly into a framework which guides appropriate and non-appropriate forms of action in an extremely nuanced set of inferences (Levinson, S. 1983: 321) about social rules (such as expectations according to race, gender or age). This web of inferences that Levinson describes means that a person

²³ This kind of shift in value systems, patterns of logical inference and the ideas and experience of personal subject positions on a large scale is deeply integrated with shifts and realignments of larger institutional power discourses. In the previous section I very briefly introduced Foucault's thinking on discursive power systems and regimes of truth as an introduction to the way in which power and institutional discipline are approached within this thesis. While a more in-depth discussion on systematic power in relation to the agency structure debate is located in the final chapters which will draw together the ideas put forward in part one and part two, it is worth signposting here that both here and in chapter three, the way in which I approach ideas of habit, repeated practices and discourses is influenced not only by Foucault, but also by Bourdieu (especially habit, and the ideas surrounding embodied politics), and Judith Butler.

can only use the words that local convention provides (Enfield, N. 2015: 217). These inferences combine to create a picture of 'what it is possible to do'. This occurs both for a language-sharing culture as a whole, and within it. The sense of reality, the 'way things are' for a culture are constructed by language informed by politics, and the internal mechanisms which support that 'way of being' are maintained by the way in which language is attributed to describe action.

Let's start with the second of these propositions. Actions have different meanings depending on who is doing the acting. It is intuitive to think that descriptions of practices result from an observation of those practices, but the relationship between language, practices and social realities is not linear. The way in which we describe action is dependent on the social expectations the culture has for the subject being described. This creates a double-bind whereby the subject's actions are described and interpreted in the terms of the behaviour and characteristics expected of that subject (Enfield, N. 2015: 217). Women in workplace settings, for example, are overwhelmingly described in negative terms as bossy and aggressive for exhibiting the same behaviour that results in men being positively described as assertive and confident (O'Neill and O'Reilly, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002). An action itself is not politically neutral. Actions carry the meanings and connotations depending on the social position of the one doing the acting. The way in which those actions are interpreted and the different meanings attributed to them, tend to reinforce and maintain dominant power structures and social stratifications of social order.

This creates a certain set of outcomes for any particular action which are dependent on the subject position of the actor. There are specific sets of actions which are effective to create a higher probability of the desired outcome, and sets of actions that are not. Those sets of actions that are not effective may result in negative social reinforcement or punishment in the form of ostracism, humiliation, threat to personal safety or legal intervention. However, what presents a social or personal threat to a person of one subject position, would be a normal and habitual part of another person's day. Knowledge of these forms of effective action and non-effective action is rarely conscious and self-aware but is rather learned through the habitual repetition of action over time.²⁴ This habitual practice builds a sense of the world in which the subject is acting in which certain actions are feasible and others are almost quite literally 'unthinkable'. The simple act of walking down a street at night has drastically different sets of effective and non-effective action differences according to race, class, sex, age etc., under the specific terms of that culture's social hierarchy and the operational politics that maintains it.

²⁴ We will look more into habitual action, and Bourdieu's notion of the habitus in the third part of the thesis.

Social expectations and assumptions, the way people's actions are read in terms of their positionality, are dictated in part by the language which is available to explain that behaviour, and by the frames of reference by which that language acquires meaning. Sidnell and Enfield explain:

“Because such social action is done with the tools that our languages provide and because these tools are structurally overdetermined through their rich meanings and multiple functions, the conventionalized selection of such tools will have language-specific collateral effects on the final nature of the action. On this view, the language you speak makes a difference in the social actions you can perform. The language-specific vehicle or means for an action—even where that action is a general goal or end that we expect people will want to pursue in any cultural context—will shape the action as a function of the structures it introduces. . . . Differences in language structure lead to linguistically relative collateral effects, which lead in turn to differences in our very possibilities for social agency.”

(Sidnell and Enfield, 2012: 320–21)

Since patterns of available action differ between demographics, people within the same culture operate in different worlds of possibility. This means that while technically it could be argued that two people from drastically different demographics within the same culture, let's call them Tahir and Mandy, may both have the 'capacity for agency' which Archer espouses – i.e. that they always could, at any point, act in any way in which they wished, they are neither likely to act the same, nor likely to achieve the same response to and interpretation of the same action from others. For example, certain forms of action may not 'occur' to Tahir, they are 'unthinkable' as the consequences of those actions would be so detrimental or non-effective as to no longer be something he would consider. Perhaps, if Tahir is under pressure to perform masculinity, it would not occur to him to put on a skirt while he is busy getting ready for college²⁵. This option, while it is obviously *possible* for Tahir to decide to wear a skirt to class, might not even enter his mind as *an option*, even though that option may be a habitual and normal part of Mandy's daily choices and bound up in her interactions. Secondly, if Mandy were to imitate one of Tahir's actions, the meaning of Mandy's action would not be the same as that of Tahir's. On their way to college, Tahir may spread his legs wide as he sits on the bus. For Tahir this is a normal position in which to sit, and other people treat it as so, barely noticing it. If Mandy were to do so, however, especially if she was wearing the aforementioned skirt, the social consequences of this action would be quite different. The outcome of that action, the way in which the action is responded to,

²⁵ I will go into greater depths to show how it is that non-effectiveness for, or negative repercussions for actions shape what becomes 'thinkable' when I look into a social reading of the smooth coping hypothesis in the next chapter.

validated, ignored or rewarded will be according to how well that action fits the expectations of Mandy or Tahir's social role.

2.2.3 Cultural variation: collectivism and individualism

Differences in the sphere of 'thinkable' possibilities for action also differ between larger social groups and between cultures. As described in the previous section, actions must be meaningful within their context, in order to be recognised and responded to: i.e. to be effective. The previous section focused on the smaller scale intra-cultural differences in how an identical action is interpreted differently depending on the positionality of the actor within that society's power structures. On a larger scale, however, actions and their meaningfulness between subjects are dependent upon a shared conception of what it is to be an actor doing the acting: what it is to be a self.

The way in which people conceive of themselves as individuals appears to be closely correlated to the type of economic structure a particular society or community is involved in. Heinrich, et al. found that the greatest variance between Western and Eastern participants were attached to notions of individualism (understanding oneself to be independent, autonomous and self-contained) and collectivism (considering the self to be intertwined and interconnected with others). These differences not only manifested in subjects' descriptions and depictions of themselves, but also were seen to affect the method and means by which a person perceived information about the world. Eye-tracking studies between Chinese and American participants found that the East Asian participants attributed more time to the background of images than Western participants, who spent a greater amount of time focussing on the main subject of the image (Chua, H. Boland, J. and Nisbett, E., 2005). This suggests that our cultural tendencies towards individualistic or collectivistic ways of thinking also affect our perception of the world, markedly influencing what information is seen to be more relevant and given greater importance when making decisions. Gorodnichenko and Roland (2012) for example found that these differences do indeed correlate to value judgments, showing that collectivists tend to pay more attention to the context of a problem than individualists, who tend to attribute accountability to an inherent feature of a subject than to a situation. For example, upon viewing a photograph of a large man intimidating a smaller man, individualists are more likely to describe the image as showing a nasty person, while collectivists tend to describe the picture in terms of a possible explanation for the scenario, such as suggesting the larger man may be the smaller man's boss or father (Heinrich, J. in Robson, 2017).

This pattern of attention attribution, to either the main subject or to the background context, was consistent with differences between drawings made between Japanese and Canadian children (Senzaki S., Masuda, T. and Nand, K., 2014). Canadian children spent more time

and detail on the main subject, and Japanese children on the context and background (Masuda, Gonzalez, Kwan, & Nisbett, 2008). Similarly, when asked to visually depict their social relationships with others, participants from individualistic societies tended to draw themselves bigger and more central in the image than others, while participants from collectivistic societies tended to represent themselves as the same size as the other people in their social networks, and tended to position themselves around others (2014: 606). This was shown to be the case cross-nationally, with Americans drawing themselves on average 6mm larger than the others in their social relationships, Europeans depicting themselves 3.5mm larger and Japanese participants drawing themselves slightly smaller than others in their social group (Kitayama, et al. 2009). Interestingly, it was also shown to be the case intra-nationally, with Chinese wheat growers, which Talhelm et al. find contributes to a more individualistic outlook, drawing themselves larger in relation to others than Chinese rice growers, who depend on co-operation for rice farming, Talhelm et al. 2014: 603).

In order to control for hardwired biological variation, Mesoudi et al (2016), performed a similar study looking at how migration revealed the cultural transmission mechanisms that underlie these differences on an intergenerational level. Looking at thinking styles in first generation British Bangladeshi families living in East London, they found that variance away from collectivist styles of conceptualisation towards individualistic styles occurred within one generation. Children in families who had moved to London showed more emphasis on personal autonomy, freedom, and individual responsibility or accountability than their parents, who tended to emphasise a person's circumstances or relationships within a larger social context. They found that rather than parental transmission or schooling context, it was exposure to media that was the clearest predictor of greater incorporation of individualistic styles of thinking within this group.

It is tempting to think of these kinds of differences as purely psychological, only affecting the content of thought while the basic structure of cognition and capacity for action remain fundamentally the same, able to be enacted freely at any time. However, evidence from Masuda and Nisbett (2001) as a prime example, shows that these cultural narratives of selfhood affect the way that the body gains information from its environment. Since perception and the organs that 'do' perception tend to be thought of as biological, and since currently biology is most often seen as synonymous with the pre-social (an assumption which is changing and that will be continually challenged within this thesis), one may expect that perception would be a politically neutral phenomenon which then goes on to be modified secondarily by the socialised mind: 'picking out' information which is relevant to that society. However, there is a growing field which is showing how social factors affect the way perceptive organs such as eyes do the work of picking out information from the environment and 'deciding' on what is important and relevant in relation to the social context – *before* – the conscious mind is even involved.

Henrich suggests that the level of difference in our conceptualisations of our social networks, our place within them, and the importance or relative insignificance of context in relation to our own and other's actions, means that these subjects are living in considerably different worlds (Henrich, J. *in interview*, Robson, D. 2017). The concept of agency is deeply entangled with notions of the individual as it is constructed by a particular western, individualistic and neoliberal mentality. Individualistic cultures tend to experience their relationship with the world differently to collectivist cultures. This is evidenced not only through differences in explanatory language, but in the ways in which people from different cultures make inter-personal judgments, represent themselves in relation to others, and how they physically take in information from their environments. Crucially, if people from individualistic cultures tend to focus more on personal choice and freedom (Robson, D. 2017) - the very cornerstones of agency, and the majority of theory on agency is being produced within individualistic cultures, it is feasible that theories of agency disproportionately reflect western experience and cannot be universalized to speak for human nature or to pre-social qualities. The concept of agency as it is being debated in the social sciences, as an intrinsic capacity for an individual to act upon their environment in their own interests, may be a notion that describes only the experiences of people within cultures where individualism is prominent, rather than accurately describing a universal human condition. Where Western theorists theorise the relationship between agency and structure, they are taking a model of agency that only emerges as a real experience (and as a real method of interacting with the world) where certain concepts such as inherent individuality and free will are already taken for granted, and where the context within which action takes place and the effects of relationships between people hold less weight in peoples' experience of themselves and their own actions.

There is a problem with proving the theorem that agency is truly universal in the way that theorists such as Margaret Archer suggest: the logic and narratives of agency that we are investigating are deeply intertwined in the language and conceptual tools that we are using in order to investigate it. Understanding that we ourselves, if coming from a Western context and using theory and data produced under western methodologies, are also subject to the Western biases of: a) over-emphasising the subject at the expense of context; and b) depending on a language and conceptual system which implicitly assumes the inherency of individual agency and unhindered freedom of choice. This means that in order to make progress in addressing the stalemate between structure and agency in the social sciences, it may be necessary to undertake the larger task of critiquing the independence of concepts such as mind, body, biology and culture in order to make sense of our own culturally embedded experience of individual agentic capacity. Care must be taken in Western social theory to avoid universalising such experiences and using them to speak for a fundamental state of human nature.

Summary

This chapter has put forward the argument that the experience of agency is a culturally and politically specific phenomenon. Ideas associated with agency as it is conceived within the agency structure debate are tightly bound with political ideals associated with neoliberalism: namely individualism, ownership, free will and a concept of a bounded atomistic subject. Since the majority of the work on agency comes from Western European-American academic spheres, I have argued that theorists must be careful to avoid universalising and naturalising specifically Western experiences of agency to speak for human experience and social phenomena as a whole.

The way in which a society explains human behaviour can influence the way in which humans in that society experience themselves. While it is intuitive that this happens on a psychological level, it is becoming increasingly clear that the effects of society are more far reaching, affecting a person's physical perceptions and the structure of the way in which it is possible for them to conceptualise the world. My hypothesis is this: that the sense of autonomous agency is one manifestation of human-world interaction that emerges only in socio-cultural environments that frame human nature in terms of individualism. What this means is that in order to make progress in the agency and structure debate, we need to look at how the way we talk about agency in a Western neoliberal context affects the way we experience it.

This means two things. Firstly that we need to dismantle the intuition that because the concept of agency reflects *our own* experience of making decisions within the world (i.e. that it is real for us), that it must be symptomatic of something pre-social and universal. Secondly, we need to dissociate the idea that agency as a real, substantial process (something that exists and works) from the idea that reality is unchanging, eternal and exists entirely outside of the social world. This means that, as Dennett set out in the passage quoted at the beginning of the chapter, we need to develop a full concept of cognitive and embodied processes as both real and subject to evolution and change in conjunction with an organism's needs, *including* their social needs.

Chapters one and two, making up the first part of the thesis have concentrated on the reasons why the structure/agency debate remains unresolved and locate this problem within the debate's own embeddedness within a wider logic of neoliberal values and sense-making. Since I am proposing that the phenomenological sense of agency that is experienced as inevitable arises in coproduction with the wider neoliberal discourses that give those experiences meaning, while at the same time supporting those discourses (such as individuality, atomisation of the subject and personal autonomy), this proposal suggests that the experience of agency which underlies the conception of agency in social theory and in

day to day lived experience as inherent and universal is, rather, socially and politically constructed. The following chapters of the thesis will draw out the necessary conditions and contingent philosophical positions in order to formulate such a view, and argue for ways in which agency is not a purely mindful capacity, but rather is part of a wider pedagogical and ontological process that spans embodied knowledge, the process of learning, social narratives and complex corporeal negotiations towards, rather than away from, greater and more varied possibilities for action. The following chapters explore the affective dimensions of ideology that are involved in the regulation and discipline of bodies, and argues that ideologically disciplined bodies formulate and mould the mental experience of the actions of that body. These chapters look at how ideology is involved in the negotiation and experience of both subjectivity and agency *through* the enculturation and politicisation of the body in accordance with the affordances of the social and political environment.

PART TWO

“I claim the varieties of free will I am defending are worth wanting precisely because they play all the valuable roles free will has traditionally been invoked to play. But I cannot deny that the tradition also assigns properties to free will that my varieties lack. So much the worse for tradition, say I.”

(Dennett, D. 2004: 225)

Introduction

The conception of agency as a unified and bounded mental property underlies the ways in which sociology has attempted to explain how this phenomenon has come about in the first place. Granted, it has not been a key objective in the social sciences to uncover the precise generative mechanisms which produce the sensation of agency, this being considered to be more within the sphere of philosophy of mind. I argue that this is to the detriment of sociological theory. It is worth noting that while social theorists may often conflate agency and the 'sense of agency', they are not synonymous. Agency can be described as the process of acting with a particular effect, whereas sense of agency is the feeling that we have authorship, ownership and causal efficacy over those actions and their effects. Where there have been theorisations made into the nature and origin of the sense of agency within sociology, the work lacks thorough interdisciplinary investigation into the embodied, enactive and emotional components of the agentic experience. As a result, sociological explanations of how the sensation of agency comes about, such as Archer's morphogenetic hypothesis, tend to carry with them deeply problematic assumptions about the location and bounds of the agentic experience, locating them within the mind purely, as one might have once located the soul.

There are several elements of Archer's morphogenetic approach that seem promising. The temporal sequence which highlights the interplay between structural conditioning and structural elaboration for instance, especially in her later work, shows a degree of concession to the idea that the nature and parameters of the sense of agency that humans experience may undergo change in relation to their structural environment which is elaborated on in her later work. What I am concerned with here, however, in part two of the thesis, is the explanations of the genesis of agency that we have within the social sciences and how these ideas about how agency comes about both reflect and further reinforce what I consider to be deeply problematic notions of agency as a purely mental capacity which is uniquely human. Archer's morphogenetic hypothesis is a good example of the current direction that sociological theory is taking, and her use of emergence as an explanation for how agency comes to be is gaining popularity. Through a brief discussion of her work, developing on the introduction in chapter one, I will explain and defend my assessment that the use of emergence to explain the genesis of agency in the way that Archer does, here acts merely as a caveat which effectively side-steps the perceived need to explain what is involved in this phenomenon of agency itself and why it is not a permanent, continuous state, occurring in some specific situations and, importantly, not in others.

Given the reluctance within sociology to move away from dichotomous models of sociological structures and the realm of individual mind and action, we need to ask whether

this reluctance may be based on insufficient evidence about the integration of these spheres, a fashion of distrust for post-structuralism which is emerging in the post-millennial decades, or a residual cultural attachment to human exceptionalism and narratives of the uniquely human soul. Whatever the reason for this reluctance, it appears that what sociology is missing is a working hypothesis on the *purpose for which* our internal sensation of agency arises: both on a phylogenetic scale and on a case-by-case basis within an individual mind. This part of the thesis, consisting of chapters three and four will explicitly focus on this notion of genesis: why the sense of agency may come about, what advantages it offers in comparison to a lack of an explicit sensation of choice, and what purpose it serves for our actions within our sociological and physical environments.

The structure of the chapters will run as follows. The role of chapter three is to look at the case for explaining agency in terms of emergence, and consider the problems which need to be addressed. Namely, this involves defining what embodied and social components the sense of agency could be seen to be emergent from, and whether we can locate what theorists refer to as the 'capacity for agency' internally to the human mind or whether the enabling factors for the experience of agency are rather located outside of the body and mind, in their relationship to environmental factors. This means looking at the terms with which we talk about agency in the social sciences and considering the types of ideas about the nature of agency that those terms insinuate. The term 'capacity' in particular is critiqued as a particular way in which agency is constructed as being a mental phenomenon which exists internally to the individual human mind. Through critiquing Archer's particular use of emergence to explain the phenomenon of agency alongside the language we use to talk about it, I want to develop an understanding of agency which is environmentally and contextually based and thoroughly embodied.

This will lead on to chapter four, which will take a more thorough look at what is happening in the body, mind and environment when we are not directly experiencing agency. Throughout her work, Archer repeatedly stipulates that humans are *always able to choose to engage* their agency over a situation – meaning that even when acting habitually they are always able to exert the necessary mental work to choose to act differently. In order to investigate this claim, I will spend this chapter engaging with Dreyfus's concept of smooth, skilled coping, a form of Heideggerian non-conceptual intelligent behaviour that does not require conscious self-reflexive control, but otherwise guides informed relationships with our environment, social group and self. By using skilled coping to show how intelligent action occurs without the direct intervention of a self-aware sense of agency, I want to investigate whether agency can indeed be initiated at will (following on from chapter three, showing it to be a capacity which can be enacted) or rather, which I suspect, agency is a way of relating

to the environment which is triggered by elements in that environment and not by the internal self at all.

These two chapters therefore comprise an investigation into the nature of agency: whether it can be conceptualised as an internal capacity inherent to humans, or whether it is better characterised as an externally catalyzed mode of dealing with and integrating new information into an existing mental and embodied system of environmental coping. Re-envisioning the form which we consider agency as a phenomenon to take, including a reconceptualisation of how it comes about and why, has some serious, and important, implications for the agency/structure debate in the social sciences, and it will be those implications that I will go on to consider in Part Three.

Chapter Three: Agency and the Mind

Introduction

Theorising agency from a sociological perspective tends to lead to an over-emphasis on the practical outcomes of what is seen to be agentic behaviour. As sociologists focus on themes of resistance to social norms and the individual and collaborative social action which leads to change in our institutions, discourses, and ways of being in the world, it becomes very easy to forget that the term agency refers to a theory about the relationship between mind and world. As such, there is a tendency to talk about agency as if it has tangible, ontological truth outside of the specific circumstances where we see effective change. We can talk about this as a kind of confirmation bias, whereby the multiple times and ways that efforts are thwarted by social norms (and perhaps more importantly the myriad situations where change or resistance remains 'unthinkable', in the sense that one wouldn't even consider to consider them), are given insufficient weight as we continue to talk about agency as an innate human capacity to enact one's will. Much of this comes down to the way we explain the etiology, or 'origin story', of agency in the social sciences. When we see agency as a distinct and autonomous mental power, many of the complex processes which are involved in various levels of embodied and contextual (but not necessarily representational nor self-aware) interaction with the world become explained as effects of agentic power rather than pre-existing processes which may interact with this sense of control only in specific circumstances.

As introduced at the beginning of the thesis, theories of agency are theories about human nature. When sociologists speak of human agency they are speaking about a particular form of autonomous decision-making: conscious, self-aware reflective decision-making, free from coercion and constraint, whereby the subject may choose between different courses of action. These theories are attempts to explain the feeling of being in control of our own actions, from the basic ability to conceive a potential action and successfully follow through with that action, to the feeling that we have control over the direction of our own lives and the ability to act in the face of social or political systems or norms that would otherwise be seen to govern us (in the sense of the 'cultural dope', Garfinkel 1967). Furthermore, the value that we place on freedom of action influences the discourses that we associate it with. In chapter two we discussed the possibility that culture and our political systems may have a great deal to do with the way we talk about, and way we experience, ourselves and our control over our own actions. Nevertheless, academic theory about the nature of agency is dominated by Western, particularly European and American, accounts, which often take the experience of

agency as being something mental and internal as a grounding assumption for the ontological nature of agency itself, yet little has been done in the social sciences on explicitly assessing the validity of this assumption.

Investigating the nature of agency, how it comes about as a phenomenological experience and why, carries a great deal of emotional weight precisely because it deals with deeply held beliefs about the nature of humans, our place within the world and our ability to affect and resist structural change. Much of the critique of structuralism was borne from questions of how we could explain our feelings of control and the evidence of intervention in social discourse, without maintaining our concept of human agency as internal, autonomous and ready to be executed. Again, it is this attachment to explaining the attributes and nature of agency in the terms of what philosophers of mind might call its qualia - the 'what it is like-ness' to feel like one has the ability to act of one's own volition – that has bolstered the resurrection of the structure/agency debate in the strictly dichotomous terms that we have increasingly seen in the last decades.

The most typical way in which such a model of agency is defended is by explaining it as Archer does, as an emergent phenomenon in its own right (*sui generis*). Through crediting agency as an ontological fact which is autonomous and separable from the structural, embodied and subconscious components of itself, theorists such as Archer protect the esoteric qualities associated with agency, such as free will and irreducibility, whilst avoiding the need to show how and why this self-referential sense of control over past, present and future actions evolves: explained in terms of a human propensity for complexification, it *just does*. The question resultantly arises that perhaps we in the social sciences have been too quick to draw the lines around agency as an emergent property, and whether while emergence may remain a useful explanation for *how* the sense of control arises through an extremely complex relationship with multiple layers of situational context, embodiment, learned behaviour and conscious deliberation, it may be premature to use it to attribute to agency an ontological status that it may not have.

3.1.1. Emergence as an Explanatory Function

Emergence is broadly defined as a process where interactions between lower-level components give rise to larger entities, patterns or forms that are not exhibited by the aggregate of the lower-level components themselves. The turn to emergence and its multidisciplinary adoption by the humanities was symptomatic of a movement away from hierarchical models of organisation and linear-progressional models of causation. This was characterised by a shift in thinking towards bottom-up pattern distribution, self-organisation

and complexity in the disparate works of Turing (1952), Shannon, E. (1998), Wiener (1948), Selfridge (1958), Weaver (1948), Jacobs (1961), Holland (1998), Prigogine (1989), distributed pattern recognition (Minsky and Papert, 1969), Minsky's resultant Society of Mind theory (1985, 1991, 2007), Hofstadter's iconic *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1980), and the self-organization theories developed by De Landa (1998a, 1998b, 2006).

The type of emergence which has become predominant in the social sciences is a type of direct emergence (Sawyer, 2005: 52) whereby "macroproperties of a system emerge from interactions among its components" (ibid; Clark, A 1997)²⁶. In sociology, the adoption of emergentist models has been extensive and influential (Archer 1995; Bhaskar [1979] 1998, 1982; Blau 1981; Edel 1959; Kontopoulos 1993; Mihata 1997; Parsons 1937; Porpora 1993; Smith 1997; Sztompka 1991; Whitmeyer 1994; Wisdom 1970). Yet as Sawyer argues, approaches are disparate and contradictory and sociologists have not yet developed an adequate account of the phenomenon (2001: 553). He observes that sociological adoptions of emergence, while widespread have been "contradictory and unstable" within the discipline, with some theorists invoking the notion to argue that broader structural phenomena are "collaboratively created by individuals yet are not reducible to explanation in terms of individuals" while others, especially of the individualist disposition discussed in chapter two, "accept the existence of emergent social properties yet claim that such properties can be reduced to explanations in terms of individuals and their relationships" (2001: 551).

The different ways in which theories related to emergence have been utilised since the 1970s has resulted in a variety of positions which use the term but themselves have different ontological commitments. There exists no single theory of emergence which yet adequately accounts for those ontological and epistemological commitments across disciplinary approaches (Pratten, 2013: 252). The form of emergence which is most prominent in the critical realist sphere, for example, describes a stratified account of reality whereby complexity at each level of organisational development is organised into new forms that are irreducible to, and not able to be predicted by, the practices and behaviours of the units at the lower level. This conceptualisation of emergence which is held by these critical realists sees it as composed of a hierarchy of totalities, a series of emergent wholes that are composed of smaller elements that are themselves 'irreducible wholes' (Collier, 1994; Bhaskar, 1978; Elder-Vass, 2000; 2007: 466). In aggregation, these sets of component elements such as perception, reflex and deliberation produce agency as something distinctly different from a mere grouping of those individual parts.

²⁶ This is contrasted with indirect emergence, such as that utilised in artificial intelligence and robotics, whereby "the action of a system emerges from interaction with an external environment" (Sawyer, 2005: 52), and is similar to theories of situated cognition.

Margaret Archer's account of emergence has shifted over her career from methodological collectivism to sociological realism, and contains several contradictory elements in her position (Sawyer: 570). While considered to be collectivist, as opposed to the individualist emergence theories developed by Homans (1958), Emerson (1972) and Coleman (1990), Archer argues for the ontological irreducibility of agents, which she holds are the only causal forces in social elaboration (while elsewhere she does state that structures can also bear causal powers, and this is not fully resolved; 1995: 195). Bhaskar holds that emergence is, in a general sense, bound up with causal and ontological irreducibility, in the case that "a property possessed by an entity may be said to be emergent from some lower level insofar as it is not predictable from the properties found at that level" (1986: 104). The totality of the system emerges with the relational structure, coproducing the emergent property that its structural relations enable (Lawson, 2012: 351–2).

In her account of analytic dualism (1982, 1988) Archer uses emergence as an alternative to Giddens's structuration inseparability. Contrary to Durkheim's (1895) emergentist account which takes social properties as *sui generis* emergent forms that have causal autonomy over individual actors, Archer initially rejected sociological realism (1979, 1998: xiv), arguing that this account did not reify structure as causally autonomous (1995: 148; Sawyer, 2001: 570). This is important for Archer because she conceived of downwards causation of the type expressed by Durkheim (1895)²⁷ to be conflationist, mistaking systemic changes to be causally explained by the system as opposed to agentic acts of individuals. Many of these ontological traditions continue in her later work as she argues for analytical dualism rather than philosophical dualism (1995: 159) at the same as proposing that emergence entails a stratified ontology involving irreducible and relatively autonomous agentic subjects (1995: 14). As a result, she argues that while social phenomena are fundamentally different from individuals, they are so only analytically (1995: 148) but that this analytical conceptualisation can simultaneously be used to ground sociological realism (Archer 1995; Bhaskar 1998).

Archer and Bhaskar have notably used emergence to defend what they propose is an antireductionist position. They maintain that the social level of structural and institutional phenomena results from individual actions of irreducible agentic subjects, and while stating that this produces social phenomena as fundamentally independent from those individuals: that it can always be explained in terms of the acts of those individuals. For Sawyer, this is inadequate to ground a non-reductionist argument (2001: 571), which he proposes would

²⁷ Durkheim's (1895) emergentist account of sociology defined social properties as emerging from the aggregate activities and behaviours of populations of subjects. These social facts were then materialised in subjects, moulding behaviour into distinctive patterns that were quantifiably observable as stable social trends. For Archer, this kind of causal autonomy over subjects is incompatible with her commitment to the ultimate causal efficacy of individual agents.

“hold that only individuals exist and that social entities do not have a distinct existence, yet there may be irreducible social properties and social laws” (2001: 559).

Archer’s hypothesis of morphogenesis is a negotiation of this internal contradiction. Through looking to temporality to defend her conception of analytical dualism, Archer argues that it is emergence over time that allows structures to manifest as real ontological entities and able, to an extent, to constrain individuals (1995: 183). Sawyer argues that this “provid[es] an inadequate foundational argument for the ontological independence of emergent properties and how they could exert downwards causation” (2001: 570), as while structures may emerge over time, they nonetheless may only persist through the continuing repetition of the individual and collective acts and interactions which produce the components of their emergence. While Archer conceives of ongoing interactions as constituting the elaboration of existing independent social structures, she sees this change as temporally extended so that only the structures which have already materialized from past interactions are capable of exerting any type of constraint on agents. This produces a temporally distended notion of social interaction whereby ongoing change through interaction contributes to future emergent structures, but not to direct or ongoing material change²⁸.

The concept of emergence has been indisputably fruitful in explaining the ways in which complex systems give rise to new phenomena that cannot be fully explained using linear dynamics. However, this concept (along with the morphogenetic theory which Archer established) was originally developed specifically in the fields of biology and physics. As Varela warns, great care must be taken when adapting models from biology and theoretical physics for use in the humanities (Varela 2002; translated and cited by Protevi, 2009a: 43). One of the great risks in performing such adaptation is that underlying and untested sociological and philosophical assumptions which lie behind our categorisation of social and mental phenomena may be carried over into these models, creating the illusion that our social ideologies are rather measurable and quantifiable biological facts.

This has occurred to an extent within the critical realist approach to agency as they have sought to explain the complex phenomena of sense of control and reflexivity at the level of mental representation and self-aware conscious thought. Through treating agency as a self-contained capacity for rational action, it has come to be seen as a bounded entity arising as fundamentally different in nature (termed *sui generis*) from those processes which

²⁸ I get the sense that this is a hangover from Archer’s notion of the agent as distinct and bounded. While it is difficult to pin down since Archer’s work is internally contradictory, her prevailing notion of the subject is treated as if socialisation practices are temporally bounded to its ‘construction’, as if socialisation practices occur only in childhood or do not continue to a significant extent into adulthood, where she instead attributes change to the subject as being achieved through internal deliberation and the internal conversation as a characteristic of the bounded agent themselves.

contributed to its emergence. This allows critical realists to look at the qualities they associate with agency, namely, self-aware mental reflexivity, control over action and a conceptualisation of consequence, and see them not as coherent (perhaps in some cases and to some extents, pre-existing) component and embodied features which participate in the sensation of control, but as symptoms of that emergent phenomenon itself. This leaves agency as a catch-all phenomena, considered to be fundamentally different in kind from those behaviours and actions considered to be lower-level (such as reaction, habit, and instinct), and fully separable from those behaviours and actions (though able to interact with them, Carolan, 2005: 396). As Porpora explains:

“Crucial to the morphogenetic approach is that human action is undetermined even by structure and culture taken together. Instead, even with all the structural and cultural factors taken into account, human agency always exhibits an ineluctable creativity (see Joas 1997) that defies subsumation by any kind of nomothetic laws (see Porpora 1983). Thus, even taking structure and culture fully into account, human behaviour can never be explained in terms of such laws.”

(Porpora, D. in Archer, M. 2013: 29).

I argue, that this sense of ‘ineluctable creativity ... that defies subsumation’ (ibid) prematurely segregates the phenomenon of the sense of agency from its embodied and socially derived elements which give this sensation of control and deliberation over action its form, its meaning, and its context. What this means in terms of conceptualising agency as an emergent phenomenon, is that for these theorists agency is seen as a bounded and fully formed capacity, which once arisen, displays totally new properties from the processes which scaffold its formation. When looking at agency as a self-aware form of action, it may seem intuitive that the phenomenological aspects of being in control of action, specifically the sense of control and authorship over action are fundamentally different in kind from lower level non-self-aware behaviour, reaction and habit, the reality is rarely as simple (as chapter four will explore).

3.1.2. Dialectics and Dualism

Situated within critical realism, Archer’s morphogenetic approach to the agency/structure debate is in principle a dialectical approach emphasising the relationship between agency and structure as (analytically) separable (Porpora, D. in Archer, M. 2013: 25), and quantifiably different motivators of social and structural change. As theorists such as Akram (2010) propose however, there is much dissonance between this commitment to the

dialectical relationship between agency and structure and the model of agency which Archer proposes. The dialectical approach, as briefly introduced in chapter one of the thesis, models the interaction between intentional and non-intentional²⁹ human action upon wider social discourse and structure, while at the same time acknowledging that structural forces also affect the way in which that agentic action of individuals is likely to manifest. To an extent, Archer's morphogenetic approach adheres to this by stating that while the agency exhibited by human subjects always may act upon and enforce change of structural elements of society, the way those structures change in turn affect the ways in which that human agency may manifest.

What differentiates the morphogenetic approach from true dialectical approaches however, is that these forces of change are not seen as equal nor co-productive. Archer gives very little attention to the ways in which structural change may affect the nature of agency itself which is seen as ineluctable (Porpora D. in Archer, M. 2013: 29), only conceding that the ways in which that agency may be enacted and the narrative structures used to explain that agentic action may change (ibid). Essentially this is an acknowledgement that the sphere of possible actions to be knowingly undertaken is expanded or shifted over time as new technologies and social discourses are developed. However it maintains that agency itself is exempt, its nature remaining fundamentally unaffected by structural change. Archer explains:

*“from the morphogenetic perspective, all structural influences ... are **mediated to people by shaping the situations in which they find themselves**. The circumstances confronted by each new generation were not of their making, but they do affect what these contemporary agents can make of them (structural and cultural elaboration) and how they reconstitute themselves in the process (agential elaboration).”*

(Archer, 1995: 196. Emphasis in original).

The key relational factor for Archer here is temporality. Since she holds that agency and structures are fully ontologically and analytically distinct to the extent of possessing distinct causal powers of their own (2003: 9), the key to analysing the changes which occur is to do so over set periods of time (Akram, 2012: 47). Archer's concept of agency is elaborated in her following text *Being Human* (2000), which acts as a response to critics referring to the concentration on structural elaboration within the morphogenetic approach as it is set out in *Realist Social Theory* (1995), (Akram, 2012: 48). Even here, however, Archer's conceptualisation of agency is criticised as both underdeveloped in her terms as a capacity,

²⁹ Read here as habitual or instinctive, we will return to the philosophical definition of intentionality later in the chapter

and over-reliant upon a notion of reflexivity as an inherent capacity of the subject, which itself is taken for granted within her work (see King, 2010; Elder-Vass, 2007; Fleetwood, 2008; Stones, 2001; and, Akram 2012).

For Archer, structural elaboration caused by the action of agents involves fundamental and extensive change of the content of social and cultural structures, and also their form and the way in which they themselves affect agents. Acknowledging that new technologies and social discourses, (the codified manner of thinking and talking about processes, institutions and norms), expand and/or change over time and that this change presents new or different opportunities for action, presents agency itself – the *form* of agency – as an essential entity whose properties remain fundamental and unchanged, even as its applications are expanded or altered. Conversely, true dialectic approaches would insist that changes on either side of the dichotomy are able to contribute to or catalyse changes in the form or structure of the other – changing not just the content of that entity, but its nature.

3.1.3. The Problem with Capacity

In the previous chapter I have mentioned in passing my discomfort with explaining agency in terms of a capacity. Both colloquially and in theoretical approaches which do not involve an in depth consideration of consciousness and mind, the term capacity may not appear problematic, even seeming intuitive as a way of referring to an action which it is possible to perform. Assumptions about innate capacity of the human mind underpin the sociological view of agency and its relationship to structure. Here I make the case that the term capacity carries with it assumptions about internality, permanence of being and causal autonomy that I am reluctant to draw into this discussion. The term ‘capacity’ is often used as a synonym for interactions and environmental relationships from the point of view of an organism. However, the term itself implies a causal power which endows the organism with directional properties and masks dynamic relational complexity. Boyle argues from this perspective that it is a mistake to conflate the relationships that we can observe working between an organism and other elements (other organisms or environmental factors) with stemming from a quality or ‘power’ of the organism itself. In his 1999 account, he states that the giving of the name to a process does not necessarily imply a causal capacity (1999: 309)³⁰. Giving the example of a lock and key, Boyle explains that we can describe both shapes in terms of their faculty of one being made in order to lock or unlock, or be locked/unlocked. Doing so may be useful insofar as these objects are meaningful within the world for us, but while their individual shapes allow this relationship effect to occur, the effect is not derived from any

³⁰ Derrida states in a different but interrelated sense that names can never independently signify what they signify. Meaning is always deferred to other words in a heterogeneous matrix of meaning.

causal power or 'capacity' within the objects themselves but from the possibilities that are granted from the environment, objects and processes in the acting entity's world.

Crucially, a problem with the critical realist interpretation of capacity is that it is seen as a fully formed, self-contained potential-for-action that exists internally to the mind ready to be executed at any moment, if indeed it is not always already functioning. There are two points to this understanding that are problematic: firstly, the idea that the capacity to do something exists fully formed and independently prior to the conditions of its enaction; and secondly, that this potential-for-action exists, independently from the world, inside the brain regardless of the environmental context and affordances for action that are accessible or recognisable by the subject. Fundamentally, the idea that either of these propositions is possible relies upon the internalistic and individualistic model of the mind that we have been describing as culturally normative over the course of the thesis so far.

If agency is a capacity which can be enacted at any given time, then the very act of 'deciding to implement control' is an agentic act itself in the sense that we must therefore have agency over what we have agency over. This is an epistemological fallacy that is reified in accounts that hold that a person 'could have chosen to act differently' or could have intervened in a situation where they did not. The notion of capacity and this ability to act differently, the ability to exert control or will, is central to the contemporary Western legal system, representing "a crucial dividing line between legal subjects and those are the object of legal protections" (Knauer, N. 2002: 323).

Capacities are enabled by material organization but are irreducible to them (Shandro, 1998). This may qualify capacities to be seen as emergent, but it does not explain them in terms of 'belonging to' or as 'intrinsic to' the organism. The organism appears to acquire a new capacity when a factor that fits within its sphere of sensibility *and* triggers effects within the organism or its behavior that are seen to be productive. In Boyle's analogy, the lock (organism) does not change when the 'key' comes into existence, though the effect of fitting and opening appears to suggest a 'higher power' or 'stronger organisation', meaning that the 'capacity' of being able to cause an effect (locking/unlocking) cannot lie intrinsically within either the lock (organism) or key (environmental/external factor), but in their extended relationship.

There are however, important social and political components of the notion of capacity, especially when related to human agency and action. Capacity has historically been reserved only for those subjects who are conceived of as legitimate in the eyes of the state, and this sense of legitimacy is tightly bound within institutional structures that compose the conceptual apparatus of decision-making. In contemporary Euro-American discourse,

agentic capacity is commonly presumed to individuals over the age of 16 or 18, but has historically been denied to subjects along the lines of gender, sex, race and class (Knauer, N. 2002: 341). As Knauer notes, this historical “exclusion of entire individuals from participation ... has left an enduring legacy of institutionalised inequality that [we] have yet to displace” (ibid).

The ability to engage in deliberative decision-making, is of course what Archer is referring to in her internalist notion of her inherent capacity for agency. Her understanding of agentic capacity as internal, neutral, objective and distinctly separable from environmental context however means that her account overlooks the distinctly social and political discursive mechanisms that presuppose intelligibility, rationality and common sense expectations of normalcy and alterity within particular epistemological and ontological paradigms. A person may make context sensitive, deliberative judgments in order to inform their actions, but if either those judgments or those actions do not sufficiently adhere to dominant norms, the legitimacy of those deliberations and the legitimacy of the subject themselves is brought under question³¹. The dominant norms are important here since they make assumptions about neutrality from the experience of those in power rather than those who are subjugated, and therefore standards of capacity and intelligibility are “coded as white, male, and able bodied.” (Knauer, 2002: 341). While materialized within the legal system, these norms and power structures are encoded and materialized within multiple intersecting institutions such as language, gesture, social mobility, legal and educational structures, which also themselves regulate accessibility along those lines. In this way, intersectional stereotypical constructions portray deviation from the presumed neutrality of the straight, white, able-bodied, male as antithetical to rationality. As such, by coding non-normative bodies as less rational³² “not only denies autonomy, but also silences identity” (ibid: 342), through coding the actions and intentions of these subjects as less rational and as less autonomously capable³³.

³¹ One could raise cases of internal logical action sequences of subjects with schizophrenia or dementia, whose actions that seem illogical to outside observers make sense and adhere to rationality within the world as it is experienced within the delusion.

³² e.g. “[w]omen have long been portrayed and perceived as irrational, as incapable of objectivity or of engaging in reasoned decision-making”. (Stefan: 772). This also extends to people of colour, of divergent sexualities or gender and to those of different abilities, and is enforced through social narratives of “angry black men” (Wingfield, A. 2007), “emotional women” (Lutz, C. 1996), for example.

³³ In the legal system as in ethical codes of conduct adopted by institutions, notions of capacity have begun to be extended to take into account broader intersubjective power relationships. A subject is not necessarily seen to be able to enact certain capacities, in the case of social and mental coercion enforced by those who hold positions of power over them, such as employers, landlords or abusive family members. In such cases, the state of precarity created by the power relationship constitutes a certain extent of incapacitation on the part of the victim or accomplice.

3.2.1. Willed Action: Intention, Awareness and Self-Definition of Agency

As discussed in the previous chapter, sociological conceptions of autonomous action have been guided by a model of free-will, and have been heavily associated with the self-aware form of consciousness. When sociologists speak of human agency they are speaking about a particular form of autonomous decision-making: conscious, self-aware reflective decision-making, free from coercion and constraint, whereby the subject may choose between different courses of action. In this section I will consider whether autonomy must always be self-aware or whether the type of autonomous action associated with agency occurs at other operative levels, such as habitual or reflexive embodied action. In the previous section I briefly introduced the problem of speaking about humans having the capacity to enact their will or to resist the structural forces in their environment. Clearly humans to a great extent are not merely programmed to unilaterally respond to certain affordances in a standardised way. This section will consider what the role of self-aware consciousness is in this enactive relationship between the subject and the structural and social environment, and whether the sociological account of decision-making is sufficient to account for the version of agency that critical realists endorse.

The way in which we define autonomous movement in the social sciences and in philosophy of mind affects our approaches to agency as an embodied and enactive cognitive phenomenon. Specifically, I will critique how autonomy is associated unconditionally with consciousness within the social sciences, leading to the particular notion of agency as an emergent property of the conscious mind which I am rejecting here. It is useful here to call into question what it *is* that critical realists define as self-awareness within their conception of agency. It seems, for example that there is some conflation between agency and self-aware types of consciousness in general. This is a problem if we are to be looking at whether agency itself is an emergent property from embedded, embodied action within the world, since if agency is a fully bounded emergent property which is *sui generis*, is it synonymous with self-consciousness or does it merely interact with it? If it is the latter, then the self-conscious properties of agency must be called into question, if it is the former then we cannot necessarily say that agency is an independent, emergent whole.

For Archer, self-consciousness is located only within the particular representational consciousness which she associates solely with humans: “[T]he human body is unique, because of its dual role as the source of perception which is also able to sense itself. [It is here] that the self-consciousness which constitutes me as subject, rather than object, arises” (Archer, 2000: 130). Here Archer raises two points which give us some insight into why she conceives of agency as an internal autonomous capacity which arises specifically at the level of higher order consciousness and is both unique to humans and a defining condition of

human action. By 'able to sense itself', Archer is referring specifically to the phenomenological experience of selfhood that gives us representational first-person perspective (the experience of being an "I" in relation to others), then following Archer's statement we are left with a dilemma as to whether first-person perspective can precede self-consciousness – the very awareness of self that she states arises out of that ability to sense oneself. On the other hand, if she is referring to basic first-order experience, the ability to recognise that events are happening to oneself and respond, along with perceptual experience such as hunger, pain, fatigue and desire, or even more complex perception of internal states such as emotion, then we come up against a different problem. While these states may indeed to some extent precede and scaffold self-consciousness in the abstract, representational and phenomenological sense, they are clearly not exclusive to humans (see Rowlands, M. 2012; Panksepp, J. 2004; Masson, J. 2009).

Complex emotions and pro-social abilities such as empathy are seen in other social animals such as rats (Bartal, Decety and Mason, 2011; Mogil, J. 2012; Panksepp, J. 2013), and these complex phenomena are also seen to be subject to modulation through exposure to particular social experiences. For example, what had been considered to be an innate distrust of rats to rats of other breeds and colourings turns out to be a social phenomenon dependent upon the particular breed and colourings of other rats which a young rat is raised with (Bartal, I. Rodgers, Sarria, and Decety, 2014). Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that some non-human animals also share conceptions of selfhood (Irvine, L. 2004). The mirror test and litmus test, which aim to demonstrate an animal's ability to recognise that reflective surfaces show an image of themselves and not another animal by subsequently removing or touching a mark placed on themselves (rather than attempting to remove the mark from the reflection itself) when shown a mirror, indicates that animals such as elephants, dolphins and chimpanzees share at least the basic components of selfhood and identity (Plotnik et al. 2006). Other studies suggest that it is possible that non-human social animals such as dolphins are able to comprehend extended sentences and sentence structure when tutored in acoustic or visual artificial languages (Herman L. et al, 1984), and refer to one another using a naming system (Barton, R. 2006), indicating complex social organisation and concepts of identities (Pack, A. and Herman, L. 2006).

Archer's conception of selfhood as uniquely human is subject to extensive criticism, and this feeds over into her approach to the ontology of agency. Archer conflates the specific abstract, representational, phenomenological experience of self that we associate with human conceptual thought with all kinds of embodied and conscious experiences of self. As a result she associates phenomena such as reflexivity and self-awareness solely with the former. It is arguable that the type of self-reflexive competence to deliberate the consequences of actions in reference to past experience and potential effects is a crucial

aspect of an agentic subject position. However by over-relying on this aspect as a defining feature in her model of sui generis emergent agency, Archer effectively disregards the equally important spheres of what Akram (2012: 47) refers to as the unconscious, but what I here define as socialisation, habit, and adaptive aspects of non-reflexive coping with the environment. This has the effect of leaving no space within the morphogenetic dialectic for embodied levels of smooth action, leaving us with a model of agency which is consistently hyper-reflexive, continually conscious and unceasingly representational in a mental sense.

3.2.2. Sense of authorship and directed intentionality

In a stronger position such as Archer's, only self-aware conscious agency counts as 'agency' proper and this type of agency is fundamentally different in kind, to the agency discussed in cognitive science which is described as a being that "*acts* autonomously, rather than simply *moves*" (Stuart 2002: 100; emphasis in original). Looking at the circumstances which lead to the feeling of having control over one's actions, the qualia or the phenomenological experience of agency, motivates us to consider the necessary components which make up that experience, including the necessary situational and contextual cues that may trigger or give rise to the sense of agency as a mental and/or physiological state. Wegner suggests that this sense of authorship over action is an illusion caused by the mind drawing causal inferences about the relationships between thoughts, actions and effects which may not always be connected (Wegner, 2003; 2004). He finds that "Cognitive, social, and neuropsychological studies of mental causation suggest that experiences of conscious will frequently depart from actual causal processes" (Wegner, 2003: 65).

One such way in which the experience of conscious will deviates from causes of action is documented by Penfield's (1975) and Ammon and Gandevia's (1990) studies on electrical manipulation of movement through stimulation of the motor cortex. Across these studies, the correlation between whether an action was experienced to be agentic or not (whether the subject had a sense of control and authorship over the action) was not correlated to whether the cause for the action stemmed from the subject themselves or an outside force such as magnetic stimulation, but has a direct relationship to whether or not the actor had the *intent* to do so or not. We know for instance, that when a cause of an action is not perceived by the actor (such as magnetic stimulation of the motor cortex), an actor will still experience the movement as being voluntary and controlled *if* the action is expected (Ammon and Gandevia, 1990). There is however, another caveat, one which we will develop at greater length in the following passages and in the next chapter, which applies to actions which are more complex than the isolated movement of index fingers, and that is not just intent for

action, but also how well that action fits with the pre-held beliefs and moral commitments of the subject.

This raises an interesting question about intent and intentionality. Intentionality is defined by the Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy as “the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs” (Jacob. P. 2014) whereas intent is usually used in the social sciences to refer to prior motivation and understanding of an action that is expected to be undertaken. Searle explains this distinction: “[a]ll *intentional actions have intention in action but not all intentional actions have prior intentions. I can do something intentionally without having formed a prior intention to do it, and I can have a prior intention to do something and yet not act on that intention.*” (1980: 52–53).

Fundamentally, intentionality is not only the sense of directedness towards objects but “the practical involvement with objects exhibited by a sentient creature dealing skillfully with the world” (Brandom, 2008: 178). As Chapman puts it, “[i]ntentionality is the directed property of certain mental states ... intentions are the causal antecedents of actions and, as such, are only one type of intentional mental state” (Chapman, 1990: 251), as opposed to Archer who would view intentions as characteristic of mentalising ipso facto. When explaining behaviour, the ‘because’, the ‘reasoning’, in the latter case refers not to physical causality (as it might for actions undertaken in an intentional state) but to psychological causality. Great care must be taken here to avoid re-imposing a dualism of mind and body to account for this difference. While there is certainly an important distinction that exists between intentional goal-directed action responding to changes in the environment, such as ducking an object unexpectedly flying in our direction, and acting with intent, such as consciously weighing up anticipated outcomes of several courses of action before implementing them, if we are to understand the relationship of agentic action and structural conditioning we must take care to avoid prematurely imposing a Cartesian dualism attributing some actions purely to body and some purely to mind before we fully understand this middle ground of conscious, yet not-necessarily self-aware reflexive decision-making in real world situations. Gallagher explains:

“On the enactive view, one does not need to go to the level of mental states (propositional attitudes, beliefs, desires, inside the head) to encounter intentionality – operative intentionality is in the movement, in the action, in the environmentally attuned responses. This operative intentionality is the real (non-derived, primary) intentionality. Anything like attributed intentionality in terms of mental states is derived from this, and in most cases of everyday interaction, is unnecessary, redundant, and not necessarily real.”

(Gallagher, S. in Schulkin, J. 2008: 136-137)

In order to understand this, I want to briefly introduce theory of mind. Theory of mind is the study of how we understand the motivations of others and respond accordingly. It includes the ability to recognise other people as agents with intentional and directional desires, emotions, beliefs and objectives that may be different from our own³⁴. Approaches that see action and interaction purely as effects of the conscious, agentic mind, as Archer does, tend to associate such recognition of the minds of others with conscious and agentic deliberation. Alternatively, theorists who prioritise the role of embodiment in interaction do not consider conscious recognition to be the sole bottleneck to intersubjective understanding and response, arguing that this occurs directly and instantaneously, using culturally-contextual cues. In this sense intersubjective, context sensitive interaction is seen to guide, rather than be derived from, conscious agentic intervention.

The primary model of theory of mind, and the one that most closely resembles what Archer seems to be describing in her internal conversation hypothesis is Theory Theory of mind (henceforth TT). TT (Carey, 1985; Wellman, 1990) holds that social interaction occurs through a linear, representational process whereby we accumulate evidence for other people's mental states through observation. This evidence is then applied to theories of behaviour acquired from social models and rationalised. Here, mental states are conceived of as theoretical entities which are consciously read and consciously compared to cultural ideas about how a subject is likely to feel and behave in a given situation. There are, of course, several approaches within TT about how this occurs. Baron-Cohen (1995) and Leslie (1991) for example, consider this process to be the result of a particular mental mechanism which allows for 'mind-reading', whereas Gopnik and Meltzoff (1997) state that this capacity is developed in childhood through trial and error. Both, however maintain that understanding the intentional states of others happens through making inferences about others in accordance with folk-psychological or cultural rules of 'common sense', i.e. that the understanding of others is achieved through the conscious application of *theories* to explain observable behaviour traits (Gallagher, 2011: 56).

Simulation theory, as set out by Gordon (1986), holds that our ability to recognise intentional beliefs and desires in others depends on the capacity for comparison between their minds and our own. In this approach, the understanding of others is achieved through simulating a model of their mental state using a model of our own. This process must occur with explicit conscious attention, using a representation of our own mental states and applying a systematic comparison in order to deduce motivations and feelings. This model takes the idea of "putting ourselves in another's shoes" to be the primary mode of gaining understanding of other people's intentional mental states. We observe a person's situations

³⁴ It is important to note that there are also implicit versions of these views, as described by Gallagher and Zahavi (2008: 177-181). For our purposes here, however, I want to just give a broad introductory outline to these ideas.

and emotional cues, then imagine ourselves in a similar situation and project how we ourselves would feel and react, then apply that sense in order to plan further interactions.

Theory Theory and Simulation Theory are similar in that they rely on the more traditional approaches to mind and action that we discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, information is neutrally obtained through perception of others, their behaviour or social cues. Secondly, that information is applied to internally held models, either culturally-informed folk-psychological explanations of behaviour in Theory Theory's case, or to understandings of our own intentions and belief systems, in Simulation Theory. Thirdly, these representations are explicitly considered and appropriate reactions are planned, so that: input (perception) → mediation (explicit conscious rationalization) → output (appropriate action). Much like the traditional theory of action described in the previous chapter, these models centralise the role of explicit conscious and self-aware representation in order to produce appropriate response.

There is, however, a third approach which does not rely on executive function and seeing social interaction as an explicitly self-aware process. Gallagher's Interaction Theory of mind closely resembles the model of mind and action which I began to sketch out in the previous chapter. Interaction theory is heavily based on phenomenology and developmental psychology, and emphasises strong interaction as "a pervasive feature of intersubjectivity" (Gallagher, 2011: 55). Interaction theory sees social interaction as something fundamentally different than deliberative mentalising, which is more than the sum of its component parts of (and therefore irreducible to) individual subjects. The second feature of interaction is that it is particularly dependent upon being embedded within the communal context, whether that be literal in the form of presence within a group, or through interaction with others through artifacts such as books, the internet or through shared practices, and that context is never neutral or sufficiently separate from individual experience to be objective in any meaningful sense. Looking towards the models of action which I will describe in chapter four, these interactions draw heavy similarities with masterful skilled action that we see after internalization has rendered conscious interjection largely unnecessary. Gallagher defines these sorts of interactions through immediacy and immersion, meaning that they are undertaken without sufficient space and time for the type of abstract representational reflexivity which would be associated with objective, rational agentic action. There are three key points to interaction theory:

1. Other minds are not hidden away and inaccessible. The other person's intentions, emotions, and dispositions are expressed in their embodied behaviour. In most cases of everyday interaction no inference or projection to mental states beyond those expressions and behaviours is necessary.

2. Our normal everyday stance toward the other person is not third-person, detached observation; it is second-person interaction. We are not primarily spectators or observers of other people's actions; for the most part we are interacting with them in some communicative action, on some project, in some pre-defined relation; or we are treating them as potential interactors.
3. Our primary and pervasive way of understanding others does not involve mentalizing or mindreading; in fact, these are rare and specialized abilities that we develop only on the basis of a more embodied engagement with others."

(Gallagher, S. 2011: 59)

This means that interactions with the social world and with others within it cannot be solely mediated by self-aware, representational and deliberative types of cognitive processes, since those processes are seen to be largely redundant in smooth ongoing (non-problematic) interactions. The repercussions of this are that interactive mind-reading, deducing the mental states and projected motivations and actions of others, is not predominantly based within the scope of conscious awareness or within the grasp of representational thought, so that TT and ST approaches, whilst perhaps going some way to describe particular methods of problem-solving in social contexts, are not exhaustive accounts of interaction. As I will come to explain in chapter four, much of the cognitive work of social interaction is taken on by immediate, context-sensitive and self-adjusting non-representational processes, partly in cognition outside of executive function and partly through the sensorimotor processes of the body itself.

The phenomenological conception of operative intentionality, which is consistent with neopragmatism, draws heavily from fields of action-oriented perception characterised by theorists such as Heidegger, Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty, and from theorists of enactivism such as Varela, Thompson and Rosch, (1991) and Noë (e.g. 2013, 2015). Gallagher explains that social engagement depends upon reading the contextualised non-intentional cues from others and not, as representationalists have theorised, by consciously attributing mental states to them. He continues:

"[W]e engage with others in ways that depend on embodied sensorimotor processes. We do not first perceive non-intentional movements, and then make inferences to what they mean. We perceive the actions and emotional expressions of others as a form of intentionality – i.e. as meaningful and directed ... we see their emotional expressions and contextualised actions as meaningful in terms of how we might respond to and interact with them ... Accordingly, our understanding of others

is pragmatic and it references their actions in context: it is not indexed to Cartesian mental states that purportedly explain their actions.”

(Gallagher, S. 2017: 76)

Direct, non-explicitly mentally-mediated, perception of intentionality within and of the act characterises operative intentionality, and is distinct from the type of mental-act intentionality which is governed in reflexive inference or judgment (see Merleau-Ponty, 1961, xviii). In the latter, the action of others is observed from a detached reflexive state which is then deliberated and inferences are drawn as to the motivation of that action and sufficient response. Consistent with the conception of agency which is utilised broadly in the social sciences, this model of perceiving the actions of others requires that the human subject is consistently and constantly within a state of self-aware consciousness, deliberating all action and all perception as it occurs in real-time. However, humans acting within their physical and social worlds cannot be reduced to fully self-aware conscious states for all of their actions – this is simply not how interaction with the environment and others occurs. Rather, our interactions with our physical and social world are more direct, our understanding and response governed not by the ‘meditation of reasonings’ (Gallagher, S. 2017: 77) but through direct understanding, feeling and response whereby the intentionality of the other is understood and responded to, a large proportion of the time, without self-aware reasoning and deliberation.

Beginning a discussion on intention (and intentionality) is entering extremely difficult territory. The purpose I bring it up here for is to highlight the complexity of what we may, on a day to day basis, experience as being agentic, and being in control of our actions. While it may seem like we are fully in control of what we are doing most of the time, a large proportion of this experience is likely to be a kind of retroactive attribution of intent that helps us to tell a tidy linear story about our actions and is not so easily separable from the type of deliberative and considered action that we generally associate agentic action with. The sense of agency does not always emerge prior to or during action, but is often retroactively applied to past actions. This may indicate that it is habitual, responsive and present-in-the-moment intentional action, but not necessarily action with prior intent (that we will in the next chapter come to know as ‘smooth coping’) which is the most common and normative state of action for humans acting within their environment. Prior intention appears to be key here, returning to intention and intentionality:

“People tend not to say that an individual intends to perspire just before giving an oral presentation. In addition, observers tend not to say that an individual intends to be nervous when one predicts that one will be anxious when giving an oral presentation. However, one might say one intentionally put one’s hand on a door

knob and turned it (operant behavior) when entering a room, because the consequences of doing so are relatively likely and reinforcing.”

(Neuman, 2007: 215)

The retroactive attribution of control and freedom of choice may partially explain discrepancies in experience of agency. For Graham and Stephens this higher-order retroactive attribution of ownership and authorship over action (“I caused this action”/ “I acted like this because...”) are themselves partially constitutive of the personal experience of agency, but in the social sciences agency and ownership of action have to a great extent been treated as synonymous (Graham and Stephens 1994: 102 ; 2000: 162; as described by Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008: 162) . For Zahavi (2005a) and Gallagher (2005) however, ownership of action is distinct from agency in the sense that actions which are produced by the body, whether by instinctive reaction, habitual (or socialised) response or emotional drive, can operate outside of a sense of being in control over those actions.

This is usually explained, as it is by Gallagher and Zahavi (2005), in terms of pathologies of ownership. Usually, our sense of agency, authorship and control over action is supported by a comparison between intentional action and the corresponding sensory feedback. It turns out, however, that our proprioception (our brain’s conception of the boundaries of our bodies) isn’t quite as stable as we might have assumed. This can lead to some fun party tricks where a person whose hand is hidden under a table but is instead presented with a rubber hand, can be fairly quickly made to assimilate the rubber hand into their body schema through lightly tickling both the real and fake hands in unison with a paintbrush. When the practitioner then goes on to suddenly smash the rubber hand with a hammer, the participant responds immediately as if it were their own hand that was being smashed. Aside from merely being amusing, this tells us a great deal about our bodily perception and our sense of ownership over our bodies and actions in dynamic environments³⁵.

Every time that we move, we create both a motor command to the muscles doing the movement, and a prediction about what that movement is going to feel like, based on previous experience of similar movements (the efference copy), that then reassures us that our movement is taking place as it should. Senses of ownership and authorship arise, not just from the intention to perform an action (which need not be consciously held), but from

³⁵ It has also led to the development of an effective treatment for easing pain in phantom limb syndrome. Patients who had undergone amputation of a limb, often reported feeling unbearable cramps in the limb that was no longer there. Using a variation on the rubber hand trick, researchers placed a mirror lengthways in front of a subject so that their working limb was reflected in the place where their amputated limb had once been. Through repeatedly stretching and scratching the working limb, patients were able to utilise the fluidity of their proprioception in order to make it look, and eventually feel as if they had satisfactorily stretched and scratched the limb, leading to relief (Ramachandran and Rodgers-Ramachandran 1996; Chan et al. 2007).

the sustained synchronization of intentionality in the form of the motor command and the closeness of incoming sensory input to the efference copy for that action.

In the latter half of chapter two we discussed how self-reporting of agency in respect to ideas such as control and ownership are also correlated to social factors such as the political system the subject is embedded in and prominence of discourses such as individualism. Self-referential narratives allow humans to construct causally-linear stories about their lives. Firstly, having a linear narrative allows subjects to systemically 'forget' complexity, the messy, entangled circumstances that surround action and decision-making in order to create the illusion of linear causality. Secondly, the social requirement for justification for action lends itself towards the need for retroactive explanations for why one particular course of action was taken, over other possibilities. The construction of sense of agency as a continuous cognitive phenomena may therefore be co-constructed by perceptual and biological cognitive functions *and* the demands of the particular social and cultural narratives which the subject is simultaneously embedded within and partially constructed by. In order to conserve the narrative of free-will which is the dominant explanatory function of action in Western societies, actions must be explained in terms of judgment calls as opposed to instinct, and conscious deliberation over best-outcome rather than relying on habit of reaction internalised by socialisation. In the process of justifying action, the feeling that one had rational cause (rather than emotional or socially-conditioned influence), and specifically high-order cognitive control over a past action can be created retroactively by the very process of considering causal factors after-the-event.

3.2.3. Retroactive application of agency

Protevi describes an extreme form of the retroactive application of intentionality and ownership of action using the example of 'Beserker rage' (Protevi, J. 2008: 409). Named after Nordic warriors who were famed for the trance-like rage in which they would battle, Beserker rage is a pre-cognitive state of affect which enables close-range killing in subjects whose prior socialisation had primed them more for cooperation and compassion. A subject's usual state of intent and inhibition, as moderated by their moral belief system which are usually taken to constrain subjective action (which I will explain further in the following section), is taken to make subjects averse to such close-quarters combat. However, this state which is associated with higher-level cognitive control appears to be able to be overridden under certain extreme circumstances by what Protevi refers to as a 'biochemical cascade' (Protevi, J. 2008: 407).

Protevi identifies a combination of a particular form of infantry training associated with the Vietnam-era, where subjects are conditioned to respond to threatening stimuli with violent reflex action. Driven by extreme circumstances such as trauma, “a modular agent replaces the subject” (Protevi, J. 2008: 409), enabling those subjects to act in a manner which they would usually find abhorrent or physically, viscerally impossible. In such circumstances, it is theorised that higher order consciousness is suspended:

“Past a certain threshold of biochemical parameters correlated with the sense-making activities of affective cognition, antagonistic muscles fire and punches are pulled, fingers release their strangleholds, well beyond and against subjective will.”

(Protevi, J. 2009b: 148).

Without the initiation of this type of rage state, the conscious intention to kill is inhibited by unconscious processes. Whether the ability and drive to kill in close-quarters combat is usually mediated by a fundamental pro-social and empathetic compulsion or through the disciplinary mechanisms of civil socialisation, this type of rage appears to be able to overcome such safeguards – rendering them unable to intervene in the complex unfolding action sequences involved in the attack. In a rage, the overall intention to kill can be carried out by the body-subject, albeit without reflective conscious control of the killing actions.

While this state of rage which can submerge the type of subjective sense of control that constitutes sense of agency (henceforth referred to as SoA), intentional action remains. Intentionality and desire, two of the elements that we have described earlier in the chapter as being composite of SoA, are driven by emotion and biochemical surges rather than reason or the type of consideration that are associated with true agency. Crucially, while these actions are intentional in the sense that an action is initiated with a particular anticipated result, these actions are initiated without moderation by that third composite element of SoA – belief system.

“In this way we see two elements we need to take into account besides the notion of subjective agency: (1) that there is another sense of agent as nonsubjective controller of bodily action, either reflex or emotion, and (2) that in some cases the military unit and nonsubjective reflexes and basic emotions are intertwined in such a way as to bypass the soldiers, subjectivity qua controlled intentional action.”

(Protevi, J. 2008: 152-3)

Here we return to the concept of ownership of action. Whilst the initial action may be undertaken under the combined influence of embodied reflex conditioned through intense training and the biochemical reactions to fear and panic (as the majority of soldiers are not able to kill in 'cold-blood', Protevi, J. 2009b: 146), the identification of the action to one's own self seems to reconsolidate in the resulting aftermath. As Protevi states, "[o]wnership is the sense that my body is doing the action, whilst agency is the sense that I am in control of the action" (2008: 409). The sense of agency only returns to the subject after the automated state of reflex reaction and rage-influenced intentional action has subsided, wherein the trauma and realization of what has been done set in. There is little space within our current narratives to adequately describe states which produce "complex, coordinated ...[but also] automated" action (Griffiths, 1997: 77). Where we attribute an action to reflex or habit, it tends to be an extremely short and simple movement: leaping backwards at a surprise, grabbing at something dropped, or swatting a child's hand away from a hot surface for instance. More complex actions tend to be seen as conscious and attributable to a subject's responsibility because of the way in which we associate complexity with higher-order rationality and control³⁶. In cases such as military rage killing where actions undertaken are complex, relatively extended (involve more than one succinct action over a period of time), the actor tends to retroactively feel responsible for them: attributing a sense of ownership and control over the actions undertaken in the killing even as they were not experienced during the action itself.

While in the next chapter I will specifically look at the process of training in producing the smoothness of complex, skilled actions, here the focus is on the emotional and affective aspects of this kind of action. Griffiths calls this type of extended and complex pre-cognitive action "affect programs" (1997: 77). These emotional responses are "complex, coordinated, and automated ... unfold[ing] in this coordinated fashion without the need for conscious direction" (ibid). While these affect programs precede any cognitive control which theorists such as Archer would deem necessary for them to be seen as agentic, they are more complex than what we would call reflex action, more exceptional than we could attribute to habit, and sufficiently inconsistent with our social norms than could be accounted for through socialisation. It is likely that the intensity of the military training program contributes to influencing all three of these types of pre-cognitive action (reflex, habit and socialisation) towards a lethal response from the subject, along with further psychological preparation through dehumanization of the enemy, though not any one of them alone could account for the response.

In the case of Berserker rage, under the specific circumstances of trauma (usually induced by

³⁶ I will return to this association in chapter four where I will specifically look at the mechanisms involved in complex skillful action sequences and their relationship to conscious self-awareness.

immediate threat to life, panic or witnessing the death of a comrade, Protevi, J. 2009b: 152) and within the particular assemblage of the military structure whose training and culture are organised in order to provide the structural and embodied conditions necessary to kill, Protevi attributes the responsibility for such killing to the cybernetic organism that is the state of the military through the bodies of the soldiers themselves (2008: 117). But the soldiers themselves, particularly after return to civilian life, overwhelmingly tend to attribute the responsibility of killing to themselves, considering themselves to be the agents and arbiters of those rage-induced actions, whilst simultaneously remaining unable to identify with those actions nor able to conceive of being able to perform them.

Such an extreme cognitive dissonance between knowing ones body was the source or initiator of such action whilst being unable to tie those actions to one's moral sense of identity and capability is commonly seen in the symptoms of post-traumatic stress (PTSD; Protevi, 2009b; van der Kolk and Greenberg, 1987; Shay 1994) of soldiers in the aftermath of battle. The drive to attribute responsibility and cognitive control onto action appears to be so strong that the agent is unable to shake the retrospective guilt and feelings of accountability, despite the awareness that they acted outside of conscious control. Protevi refers to this as a kind of "centrifugal power" to subject constitution (2008: 413), a drive to take responsibility for actions which larger contextual and situational powers are ultimately responsible for. This in turn, I suggest is a result of attempting to consolidate these experiences within a language and conceptual apparatus that does not allow for temporally extended unfoldings of non-reflexive action. This amounts to an inability to explain behaviour outside of the dichotomy of active/complex/coordinated agency or static/simple/passive extra-mental world of the body and physical and social environment.

Emotion and instinctive reaction have traditionally been seen as the antithesis of reason and agency (Hodgson, 2006; Veblen, 1909: 624-5). Under the dualist or Cartesian ontology reason, conscious intention and the kind of agency that is associated with free will are associated with the rational and objective mind, while emotion and instinctive reaction are associated with the 'primitive' body: separating intentionality "completely from matter and materialist causality" (Hodgson, 2006: 7). This way of thinking returns to the familiar narrative where the mind is seen as the ultimate regulator the body. Following this, true action and true agency are seen to be that where conscious mind can control the instinct and emotion which may otherwise drive a person to act in a way they do not recognise and will regret.

There remains a question of whether we can meaningfully separate emotion, instinct, and by extension, habit (including habituated socialised norms), from the senses of intent, adherence to belief system and expectation which themselves produce SoA. Along with

subjectification, a proto-empathetic state which the social sciences may usually attribute to the more embodied and pre-cognitive states (such as those we see in other mammals such as rats, see Bartal et al. 2011), but that also shapes our moral agency associated with intentional action, must also be suspended or submerged beneath the biochemical surge, but arises once again and is applied to the situation in retrospect. For Graham and Stephens (1994: 101; as cited by Gallagher, S. and Zahavi, D. 2008: 161) these explanations “amount to a sort of theory of the person’s agency or intentional psychology” whereby the sense of agency is derived not from the pre-reflective consideration of the action, but from our reflection upon it (Gallagher S. in Clark, A. et al. 2013: 123). In this way, it is whether we find a past action to be explicable, able to be justified in rational terms, which partially gives rise to our feeling of having had agency over it. Graham and Stephens go on to explain that this follows to the extent of categorising whether or not an action was fully under our control or not:

“[It] depends upon whether I take myself to have beliefs and desires of the sort that would rationalize its occurrence in me. If my theory of myself ascribes to me the relevant intentional states, I unproblematically regard this episode as my action. If not, then I must either revise my picture of my intentional states or refuse to acknowledge the episode as my doing.”

(Graham and Stephens, 1994: 102;
as cited by Gallagher, S. and Zahavi, D. 2008: 162).

If this is true then the same action, under the same circumstances, may be retroactively constructed as either a product of agentic decision-making or of reactive, coerced or non-cognitive (often, problematically, explained in terms of emotion) depending on whether that action sufficiently matches our ordered set of beliefs, desires and intentions. Our own sensation of control and agency over these actions is therefore not solely based upon whether or not conscious deliberation was involved prior to the action, but on the post-action consideration on whether the effects that action had have sufficiently matched with the social norms and expectations that we identify ourselves with.

Concepts of reflexivity and higher-level cognitive processing are often drawn upon in defining the actions of humans as ‘true’ actions as opposed to automatic ‘reactions’ and instinctive behaviour. It is these functions that are often referred to as higher-level functions, when considered in respect to their role in action, that are considered to constitute agency. In a perfectly rational world, actions may be expected to always match exactly with our own internally held beliefs, desires and intentions. However, action is paradigmatically an embodied ability: a body interacting with the physical, social and symbolic environment in real time. This means that rather than there being a direct linearity between intention and

action which the sense of agency promotes, action/reaction, instinct/reason, conscious-reflection/embodied-habit, pre-emption/retrospection, are occurring simultaneously or interacting at different stages of the enactive process to produce the experience of that action specifically in relation to the social needs of the subject at that time. In this way the sense of agency could be conceived of as a pro-social function for aligning our interactions with the environment and others to the requirements of the group³⁷.

3.2.4. Belief systems and action

In section 2.2, I referenced trials where electromagnetic stimulation of the motor cortex caused action (Ammon and Gandevia, 1990). In this study, sense of control over action was not seen to be produced by the actual physical initiation of an action, but rather by the link between that sensation or observation of action having occurred combined with the prior intent to initiate that action. If a subject intended to move a finger, they would experience that action to have been controlled and intentional regardless of whether the movement itself was initiated by their sensorimotor system or by externally applied electrical impulse. There are two components necessary for the experience of control over action:

- 1) Expectation: our bodies moving in a way we anticipate.
- 2) Adherence to a belief system: acting in a way that one would expect oneself to behave, according to one's self-image. (Panskepp, 1998: 190).

When we act without expectation (jumping at a sudden noise, or are moved in a way *we did not expect* by outside electrical impulse) we do not necessarily produce the SoA that enables us to feel like the author of those actions, as there was no experiential sense of prior intent. If however, we have a prior understanding of an expected reaction yet are waiting with anticipation for a particular signal in order to initiate it, we may feel control over that action regardless of whether or that initiation is fully under control. If, for example, we are waiting for the sound of a start gun to begin running, the adrenaline and expectation may take care of the initiation of our leg movements for us. There may be no conscious acknowledgement of and rationalization about the starting signal prior to the action, as our bodies are already primed for movement, yet we may retain a retroactive application of agency over the act itself.

By belief system here, I mean a general embodied sense of how we can expect the world to be, the way in which we anticipate that events unfold, or the causal influence of our actions.

³⁷ This would seem to stand in opposition to the concept of agency in the social sciences where it is seen as the locus of the capacity for resistance, particularly from dominant social norms. However, it will become clear as the thesis progresses that this is not necessarily the case.

This can be as seemingly basic as ‘when I put my mug down on the table, I expect it to stay there and not leap off the edge’ (provided I haven’t put it down too close to the edge) or as complex as systemic beliefs about demographic difference along the lines of race, gender, sexuality and class with accompanying non-consciously held expectations about behaviour. These belief systems are built up over time through both experience and exposure to social narratives and for the most part shape the parameters of our behaviour non-consciously. For example, we do not usually have to concentrate on putting our mug down on the table after taking a sip, rather performing that action while perhaps deliberating the next line of text we are about to type. Our self-aware conscious mental effort does not need to be applied to these behaviours because the belief system we have cultivated over time has given us adequate confidence that the table will not suddenly move of its own accord. Non-conscious embodied coping strategies are then able to take the cognitive and logistical load of that action.

However, as I indicated earlier, these belief systems are also social and incorporate social norms and narratives that are specific to our social identities and cultures. While we will delve more into the implications of this in chapters five and six, it is worth highlighting here because neo-pragmatists in particular stipulate that the definition of agency and authorship (as opposed to merely a causal catalyst or instinctive actor) may only be applied to those actors that act in relation to social norms (Bechtel, 1988: 71). For neo-pragmatists then, the definitive factor for agency is not just the ability of an organism to make deliberative decisions about itself, something which we find many examples of across species from insects and birds to higher-level mammals, but the need to factor in complex social structures, ‘cultural’ norms³⁸ and intersubjective meaning.

Again, we must be careful, since here we are not synonymizing agency with self-aware deliberative consciousness. Just as I specified a few paragraphs previously that social belief systems are non-consciously held at the same time as they structure our expectations about reality, the social norms which are identified as having a central role in the experience of agentic behaviour do not necessarily have to be fully consciously held, nor understood as social norms in the kind of representational manner that we associate with human thought. One can adhere to or negotiate vastly complex social norms and ‘understand’ them on a visceral and embodied level without ever having to abstract them consciously or philosophically. In this case agency and the ebb and flow of the experience of agency may

³⁸ I have placed the term cultural in scare quotes because it is not only in humans that we see this kind of intentional action with complex social practices. Interestingly we are starting to see in these same species, such as Delphinidae (including orca), apes, rats and corvids, distributed inter-group linguistic and behavioural differences, which have been described as cultures (Laland and Hoppitt, 2003; De Waal and Tyack, 2009; Rendell and Whitehead, 2001).

be vastly more messy and complex than the critical realists described in chapter one have suggested, being entangled with, dependent on, and susceptible to the influence of factors that have been traditionally associated with the body, such as reflex, emotion, proprioception and the kind of habitual and non-conscious skilled action which is developed with expertise.

Summary

The distinction between agentic action and non-agentic action does not appear to be as simple as Archer proposes. Intent and intentionality (both directed and operative), reflexivity, the sense of authorship or ownership of action and feelings of responsibility do not always correlate solely with the kind of objective, representational thinking that Archer takes to be constitutive of true agentic action. Instead we are finding that emotion, reflex, affect and habit do not just underlie directed intentional action, but constitute it even where conscious control is absent. Socialised practices and contextualisation within larger group assemblages like the military can facilitate a temporary suspension of the sense of agentic control and override the usual moral and empathetic controls on violence.

This suspension could be treated by critics as an anomaly in otherwise rationally-mediated action, yet earlier in this chapter and in the next chapter of the thesis I have touched on other, less extreme and mostly less lethal, areas where sense of agency is suspended in the moment and later retroactively applied. Contrary to what Archer would have us believe, the explicit sense of being in control and possessing ownership over our own actions appears to be far from the continuous state of being. Even more confusingly for the agency/structure debate, qualities typically associated with agency and having been theorised to be emergent properties of agency itself, such as reflexivity, intentionality and control seem to be at work even in some states of suspended cognitive control. The state which Archer associates with true agentic action is beginning to look like the exception rather than the rule of embodied, contextually embedded and affective, intentional human action.

As opposed to the standard conception of structural and social norms limiting the enaction of agency, these norms appear to be deeply integrated with the way in which agentic action arises, how it is applied and how a subject comes to attribute an action to their own control or to another source of control such as their bodily reflex, emotional impulse or outside coercion. Belief systems ranging from morality to sense of self and the 'way the world is', affect the phenomenological sense of responsibility and ownership over a subject's action, and not just on the superficial level that we might expect (where a person may convince themselves of having an alternative, more socially-acceptable motive for an action). Beliefs about the way the world is and beliefs about agency and responsibility themselves may well

be involved in the retroactive attribution of agency, compelling subjects to search for linear narratives of reasoning, sufficient provocation or compliance with existing ethical and moral standards in order to justify such actions. Since we are unable to fully conceptualise a state where we are conscious and have directed and willed intentionality which is followed by action and effect, but do not necessarily have conscious control (whether that be in the state of panic-induced Berserker rage as Protevi notes, or whether it is because we are acting within a conscious and skillful, but ultimately habitual and automatic state as we will discuss in the coming chapter), we attribute agency to past actions because those are the only explanations for complex action that are readily available and understood in our culture.

In the following chapter I will explore Dreyfus's concept of skillful coping (1985; 2014) as a possible explanation of this temporally extended and complex type of engaged, non-deliberative action. As is often the way, looking at the ways in which the sense of agency does not arise may tell us a great deal about what agency itself is. As the final chapter of part two, chapter four will engage more thoroughly with the concepts from philosophy of mind that I have been touching on throughout the past three. These concepts, including skilled coping, will form the foundation for developing a thoroughly interdisciplinary model of agency which we will then be able to apply to the social-science debate over agency and structure in part three.

Chapter Four: Control and Agency in Masterful Interaction

“Matter, when organized so that it cannot help but try (and try, and try again) to successfully predict the complex plays of energies that are washing across its energy sensitive surfaces, has many interesting properties. Matter, thus organised, turns out, as we’ll see, to be ideally positioned to perceive, to understand, to learn, to dream, to imagine, and (most importantly of all) to act. Perceiving, imagining, understanding, and acting are now bundled together, emerging as different aspects and manifestations of the same underlying prediction-driven, uncertainty-sensitive, machinery.”

(Clark, A., 2016: xiv)

Introduction

We have seen that Archer’s approach to agency is insufficient to account for the full scale of the relationship between human action and social structures. Archer proposes that models of action which suggest a tight relationship between agency and structure fall victim to either upwards, downwards or central conflation between the two (see chapter one), and therefore asks for a full analytic dualism. In this chapter I suggest that in doing this Archer performs her own conflation by associating all types of intelligent, contextually sensitive action with the type of cognitive control associated with explicit self-aware consciousness. I argue that intelligent, adaptive action is thoroughly integrated with perception, cognitive processing and implicit directed intentionality before and without the intervention of explicit conscious attention. In chapter five, I will proceed to argue that this phenomena extends to social norms, discourses and structures as well as the physical and conceptual skills that I will be focussing on here.

If intelligent adaptive action was solely the product of explicit rationalisation, we would expect the level of explicit conscious control over action to remain unchanged or increase relative to the complexity of our interactions. Theory of action however, ranging from the study of music practitioners and athletes to the development of artificial intelligence, suggests that the opposite is true. Whether it be a more heavily cognitive skill such as mathematics or chess playing, or more physically based skills such as playing an instrument or surfing, subjects appear to exert *less* explicit control as they become more experienced. Additionally, phenomenological reports suggest that imposing conscious attention makes it more difficult to perform once a sufficient level of mastery has been achieved.

The traits which appear to recede as expertise is gained are those that Archer associates with the agentic position, which she takes to be the primary mode of human action in the

world, as the state of 'true' action. If these traits are in a negative correlation with experience, it would suggest that the agentic subject position serves a particular function for human action: to incorporate and adjust to dynamic complex environments, and not, necessarily, for its own end. The agentic subject position may be, as I will explain through the work of Dreyfus, Sutton, Hoffding, Wolpert and Andy Clark, a particularly adept problem-solving state, whose function is to eliminate the need for its own emergence on a case-by-case basis.

Archer does note the role of socialisation in her morphogenetic approach, but her focus is primarily on how the expansion and elaboration of social structures expands the repertoire of opportunities the agentic decision-maker can interact with (1995: 157). The depth of the relationship between learned skills (including social ideals, concepts and norms) and normal day-to-day interaction is not given sufficient weight. I suggest that this is because of Archer's underlying commitment to the confluence between the agentic state and true action, and that this understanding of action both reflects and reinforces too great a dependence on the agentic state for normal, skillful, ongoing action in the world.

For sociologists to investigate the relationship between structure and agency, we must have a clearly defined account of what agency is that is informed by philosophy of mind and philosophy of action, including empirical evidence about the brain and body. This chapter will therefore look at qualities which Archer would take to be emergent properties of agency: reflexivity, deliberation and complexity of action. This involves looking closely at the continued association between context-sensitive or adaptive action and mindfulness. This association with mindfulness and adaptive context-sensitivity on the one hand and mindless, instinctive automata on the other, encourages non-consciously directed action to be underestimated in her approach: seen as instinctive, simple, mechanistic and deterministic. By looking closely at approaches to skill learning in this chapter, I will show that there is a case for breaking the strict association of controlled, responsive, extended context-sensitive action with conscious cognitive direction. The ability to offload these kinds of intelligent and responsive actions to the supervision of non-representational cognition is a vital part of adapting to dynamic environments. This involves two assertions: firstly, I propose that the standard mode of operation for humans is not self-conscious rumination and consciously controlled action, but rather the predominant and preferred state is a form of what Dreyfus terms 'skilled coping'. Secondly, that if conscious directed control is working properly, its aim is to create the conditions which would render it unnecessary. As a process directed towards internalization, it has achieved its goal when it is no longer needed for that particular action,

and the body can instead remain online³⁹ but on-call, ready to be re-activated if and when there is a problem which exceeds the affordances contained within the smoothly-coping system. I will discuss this in more depth in the latter parts of the chapter, as in order to do this I first want to make the case that smoothly coping non-self-conscious embodied systems, while perhaps 'automatic', are not automata in the way that standard Cartesian thought has suggested.

4.1.1. Archer and Descartes: differences in dualisms

Understanding why the sense of agency and authorship emerges for embedded, embodied cognitive subjects entails understanding where and how it does not. Until relatively recently the common conception of action conceived of skilled, intelligent, adaptive and context-sensitive action as conscious and agentic, and intuitive, reflex action as automatic, which itself was understood as basic, context-blind and non-cognitive (see chapter three). This understanding carries over into the way action and agency are approached within the social sciences. There is a strong intuition to talk about human action in terms of a linear process whereby conscious, self-aware attentive decision-making is put into motion through the body in order to achieve particular, consciously intended effects in the external environment so that:

Sensory input → conscious thought → decision → intention → motor control → action.

Some of this intuition stems from the way in which perception and intent are normatively characterised in the social sciences. The standard conception remains that perception occurs as an autonomous and objective input of data which is presented to the brain for consideration, pruned for relevance towards a pre-existing goal, whereby a decision about an appropriate action is deliberated. Certainly, this is an important aspect of human action, but it refers only to a very small part of the relationship between perception, thought and action.

In the morphogenetic cycle, Archer proposes that agentic behaviour cumulatively changes social structure, which in turn affords participating agents more opportunities for different kinds of action. This series of elaborations bootstrap one another, whereby structural

³⁹ Online here refers to an engaged and immersed system which is fully integrated with and involved in the unfolding events of its immediate context. Offline refers to a representation process which is decoupled from ongoing activity and immersive skilled prediction/action/reaction processes, allowing detached, representational thought which provides the sense of an objective standpoint towards itself (Wheeler, 2005: 142).

expansion leads to greater opportunities for agentic intervention into the social structures themselves:

Figure 2: The Morphogenetic Cycle

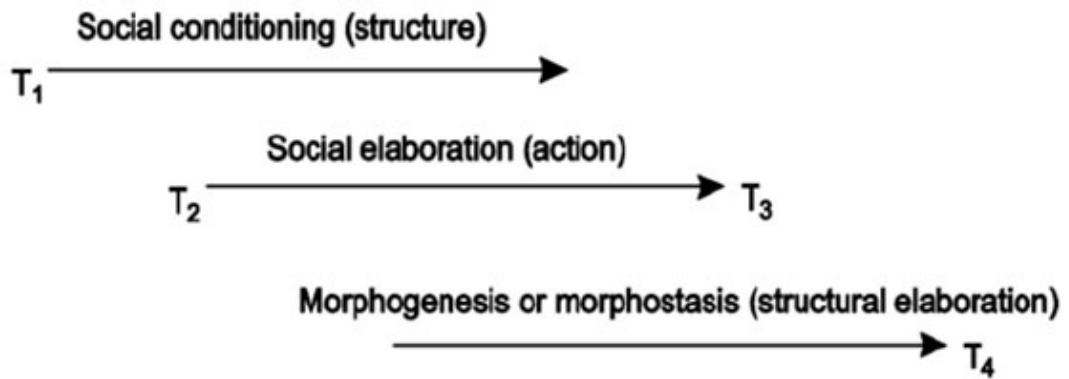


Fig 2. Archer's Morphogenetic cycle in terms of social conditioning and social elaboration.

(Archer, 1995: 157)

Archer's morphogenetic hypothesis, however, is concerned primarily with the opportunities afforded to agentic behaviour by expanding or changing social structures. In her account, very little attention is given to the roles that structural elaboration may play in the conditioning of the subject who is experiencing the sense of agency, and the way these changes may affect how, in what way, and towards what, the agentic state may arise. This reflects Archer's philosophy on the phenomenology of agency itself. As I introduced in chapter one, Archer attends only to action which is conscious and deliberate but she makes no distinction between mindful action which is ongoing and unsupervised by deliberation and the state of explicit representational thought. For Archer, all types of mindful action which occur in relation to the social world are categorised as reflexive, deliberative and agentic, for the reason that there is always the opportunity to choose actions which deviate from the persuasion of social norms, even if it is not taken. In this way, Archer draws the distinction of action between agentic (as all mindful action, that being where consciousness and cognition is involved at any level) and automatic (as that which is purely outside of conscious control, such as reflex).

This hard distinction between mindful and bodily action with the associated conceptions of active and passive, is tightly interrelated with this dualistic interpretation of body and mind which is associated with Descartes. It is worth noting at this point that while Cartesian scholarship is often characterised by a strong distinction between an active, agentic and

executive mind in contrast with an automatic, mechanistic body, Descartes' work itself did not always reflect such an extreme division. Sutton et al. refer to this as the "twin bogeymen of dualism and mechanism" (2011: 83).

The association of automata with hard-wiring, biological instinct and mechanistic, static and deterministic action, while undergoing various permutations, persists strongly in the way that we deal with conceptualising action and cognition. It is difficult to fully conceive of true intentional, responsive and cognitive action as being of the body without self-aware conscious control, as there persists the connotation that "flexibility and genuine action arise solely through the mediation of the rational soul." (Sutton et al, 2011: 84). For Archer, human action is quintessentially agentic. As I outlined in the introduction, Archer attributes phenomena such as context-sensitivity, intelligence, intentionality and control as properties of agency which itself is an emergent property, existing *sui generis* in itself and only in humans. In order for this to be the case, these aforementioned properties would need to be enacted through conscious, self-aware and deliberative agentic intent, as properties of that intent. There is a similar disagreement ongoing in philosophy, specifically in the debate concerning the approaches of McDowell and Dreyfus, over whether conceptuality and reason-giving are necessary for practical, competent skill. For both Archer and McDowell, action must be preceded by rational analytic decision-making in order to distinguish it from the lower-level reflex and instinctive actions (Hoffding, S. 2014: 51).

For Sutton et al. however, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of Descartes' original work, as Descartes "clearly and consistently" describes his 'automata', as "capable of (corporeal but entirely genuine) learning" (Sutton et al. 2011: 84). Rather than creatures of instinct, reflex and pre-determined reaction to stimuli, Descartes describes how creatures that he describes as lacking the soul as a seat of free will and agency, nevertheless are fully involved in their particular contexts: responding by adapting not only their behaviour but the structure of their brains for the purpose of more appropriately responding to the demands of their particular environmental contexts. Such flexible, intelligent and context-sensitive interaction need not be dependent on the relatively abstract and detached control of explicit, conscious reasoning:

"Standard Cartesian scholarship, scarred by the inability to think outside a dichotomy between self-conscious rational thought and mere reflex, wrongly relegates all ordinary corporeal cognition to the agent's exterior, whereas in fact Descartes sees the unique history of each embodied organic creature as grounding a much wider array of flexible responses and activities than just those mediated directly by reason."

(Sutton et al. 2011: 86).

While the debate continues as to exactly where and how action is either dealt with via more heavily embodied forms of cognitive work or through self-aware directed attention, there remains a conception of these two spheres as qualitatively and quantifiably different. Automatic action, even as it loses its association as unilaterally pre-cognitive, remains sufficiently different from the kind of explicit conscious control associated with agentic action. In order to understand how agentic action differs from notably responsive, situationally-context-specific and adaptive action we need to look at how these two 'ways of thinking' operate together and alone.

4.1.2. Skilled Coping: Dreyfus and non-agentic intelligent action

When we act, whether we are in a state of directive and conscious intentional attention or whether we are absent-mindedly carrying out deeply internalised, habitualised tasks, much of the cognitive and corporeal labour of action goes on in the background: already taken care of by our flexible and adaptive (and as we will come to see, socially and culturally informed) body. This is not to say that such aspects of these actions are unconscious. Much of the time we are aware of their occurrence, but they do not demand our full conscious attention. When actions do require undivided attention, such as the intense concentration that a novice guitarist needs to pay to each finger on their left hand when learning the position of a simple chord, other aspects of action are being coped with smoothly and skillfully in the background. That aspiring guitarist may be lamenting the seemingly impossible task of independent control over their 'fourth' finger, but while their attention is fully directed at this struggle, they are simultaneously also (perhaps) effortlessly balancing that guitar on their thigh, engaging and communicating with their instructor, adjusting effortlessly to the room's lighting, shifting their body to account for the uncomfortable new positions inflicted by this alien instrument, perhaps sipping on coffee whilst listening and interpreting information, and adapting relevant information into the conscious attempt to master this one singular task. Skip forward ten years and our now competent guitarist may now be focussing their attention on the acoustics of the room, seamlessly adapting the sound to account for the number of audience members, background noise and the shape of the room, utilising pedal boards and amplifiers, listening and intuitively responding to changes in tempo and 'feel' from their drummer and bassist, all whilst singing lyrics and engaging audience members, interacting socially at the same time all of this is going on. The strength and control over their once unwieldy fourth finger is now taken for granted, it no longer requires the conscious oversight it originally did. She is free to focus on the 'feel' of the sound, the emotion conveyed, the reactions from the audience members – or – in the case of one notable guitarist who graces Edinburgh's music scene, to demonstrate the level

of this internalization by playing an entire guitar solo with only his left hand whilst making and eating a cheese sandwich using the other⁴⁰. Whatever we are doing, whatever our attention is focused on, whether we are in a state of intense concentration or we are mentally distracted whilst acting, there is an integrated collaboration between skills which have been internalised, and differential considerations which must be attended to.

For Dreyfus, this shift in attention tells us about the nature of consciousness and the agentic subject position. In his paper *Intelligence Without Representation*, Dreyfus articulates the five different stages of acquiring a skill, from novice through advanced-beginner, competence, proficiency, to expertise. His focus in this paper however is demonstrating the shift from detached rule-following and representation (2002: 372) to involvement and immersion (2002: 370). According to Dreyfus, the type of representational attentive self-conscious awareness that is involved in attending to a new problem decreases with practice. This decrease in conscious awareness, for Dreyfus, is not just a result of expertise, but is a prerequisite of it, such that: “proficiency seems to develop if, and only if, experience is assimilated in this a-theoretical way and intuitive behaviour replaces reasoned responses.” (2002: 371). He defines this as the tendency towards maximal grip (Dreyfus, H. 2002: 367):

Figure 3: Tendency towards maximal grip

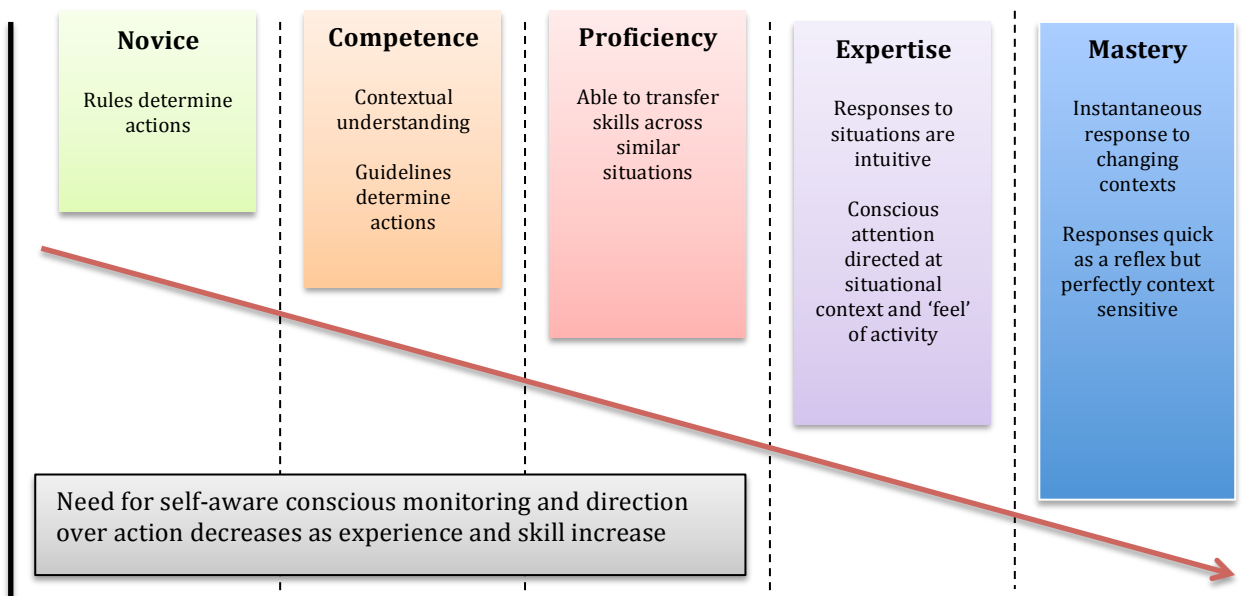


Fig 3. Diagrammatic representation of Dreyfus's model of skilled coping, showing the negative relationship between conscious self-aware deliberation over action and skill level.

⁴⁰ Many thanks to Jedd Potts, for agreeing to be included as an example here. Jedd also raised the example of Levon Helm, drummer for The Band, whose skill level was such that he was famously able to multitask while drumming: holding a conversation and rearranging his kit, without missing a beat.

In time, so few of the actions which compose the skillset are accessible through this analytical type of conscious awareness that the performance of the skill is experienced as entirely intuitive. An artist no longer has to think about or concentrate on the type of micro-movements that had taken them all those years to perfect. In fact, in true mastery, there is very little micro-management at all, and analytical conscious awareness is freed up to focus on other, more formidable or parallel tasks. It is this that Dreyfus refers to when he states that there is no room for mindfulness in mastery (2007:374). The very definition of mastery itself is the offloading of tasks from the abstract problem-solving mechanisms of the mind seemingly into the body itself.

This is not an entirely new approach to pedagogy. In 1899, Bryan and Harter explain a similar progression in the learning of language, where at first a novice “hustles for letters”, only after they are well practiced enough that the words come sufficiently intuitively are they able to focus on meaning (1899: 352); or in Dretske’s example: “[l]earning to type or to drive frees the mind to think about what to type and where to drive. It no longer has to bother with the routine chores, the mechanical details, of moving fingers and pushing pedals.” (Dretske, F. 1998: 1). Without offloading problems that have already been solved, abstract decision-making and problem-solving would be unable to move on to other, more-complex or more demanding problems, leading to a state of hyper-deliberation (Fleetwood 2008) that, as we discussed in the last chapter, Akram argues would result in total “social and mental paralysis” (2012: 50). This progression is also reported in musical skill theory as a necessary transition towards competence (as depicted in figure 4), with consciousness representing the middle ground of skill learning whereby rules and techniques are known but not yet internalised. In this case, consciousness and competence are shown in a relationship whereby a beginner, not yet knowing the extent of the skills and understandings that they will need to know, gradually gains this understanding over time and practice. The act of practicing allows more complex theory and technique to be understood, and at this point much of the work of performing is done through conscious mediation as the beginner struggles to put theory to action. As skills improve and competence increases, less work is done through conscious consideration until skills are able to be performed intuitively on-the-fly and on demand without the subject needing to think through the component steps needed to perform them. Again, here, internalization and the lack of conscious cognitive interference is associated with mastery:

Figure 4: Relationship between consciousness and competence in music theory

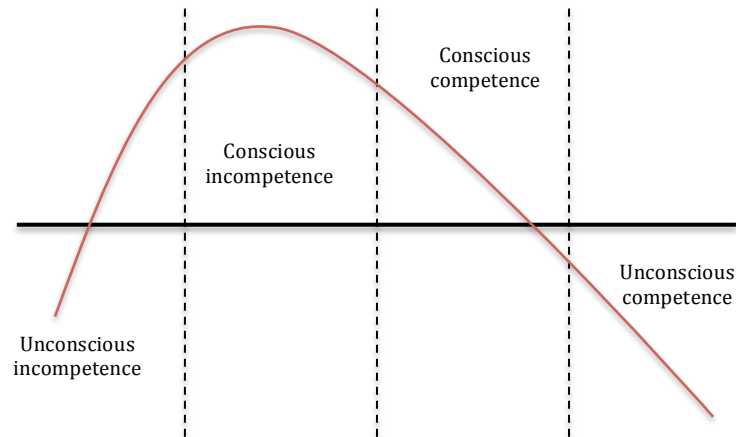


Fig 4. A colloquial form of the negative relationship between skill level and conscious reasoning and deliberation from music theory, similar to Dreyfus's model of skilled coping.

Taken from: Emiliani, M. (2014)

This is not to say that the body itself does not problem-solve. One of the prime objectives of the masterful body is to be competent in predicting and adjusting for variabilities, and seamlessly adjusting to mistakes without the need for conscious intervention. While not necessarily dependent on the higher-level functions that are associated with self-aware agentic action, this prediction, action, adjustment triangle is hugely complex, responsive, adaptive and intelligent. As Sutton et al. argue, the heavy dependence on cognitive ability and directed attentiveness of such skills requires that such action must continue to be seen as mindful even as it includes automatic and intuitive behaviours (Sutton et al. 2016: 38).

When talking about the internalization of skill for instance, Sutton states that the use of a learned skill can be "fast enough to be a reflex, but it is *perfectly* context sensitive" (Sutton et al. 2011: 80) and context sensitivity, for Sutton, requires some form of mindedness (*ibid*). There is some inconsistency with the way the terms mindedness and cognitive are used. Under my reading, if an activity is referred to as mindful, where mindful is taken to mean within the sphere of self-aware conscious thought, then it must also be cognitive, where cognitive is taken to mean a task demanding neural work (and perhaps mental work outside of the parameters of directed conscious attention). As in Archer's work, we run up against the problem of applying models which attempt to define certain aspects such as reflection,

attention, directionality and intention to the side of the 'properly mindful' or 'properly agentic', whereby embodied praxes, or those which utilise sub-conscious learned behaviour patterns are taken to be mechanistic.

Of course, the majority of action that we undertake in the world shows this kind of meshing between conscious, cognitive and automatic processing (where automaticity is also understood to be responsive to change). To a great extent our self-aware, rational and analytic parts of our mind depend upon the ongoing coping of our bodies. These bodies and their background cognitive processing perform a huge amount of work as they intuitively navigate a plethora of changing and complex social and physical environments as we go about doing our higher-level cognitive work (such as attempting to remember whether we had turned the oven off before we left the house). This ability to free up self-aware conscious processing and decision-making is crucial to undertaking tasks themselves.

4.1.3 What Happens to Consciousness when we Acquire a Skill

Much of the literature of skill acquisition focuses on specific instances of relatively easily encapsulated adult learning such as learning an instrument, a sport or a game. This is because these compact instances enable us to focus on a relatively linear progression from no understanding to automation with a relatively stable and un-changing control subject. However, as Sutton et al. point out much of the conceptual, social, cultural, linguistic and practical skills that we need to use to negotiate our world on a day-to-day basis are acquired during childhood and go on to further enable or scaffold the acquisition of skills in adulthood (2011: 86). While still adhering to a similar trajectory from conscious concentration through to pre-conscious (through adaptable) automaticity, the types of skills that we use to negotiate 'normal' everyday life are likely to be far more complexly interrelated with one another than the type of specific skillsets that have specific directed function to such an extent.

4.1.3.1 Dual process vs. systems theory

Two key views on the role of cognitive control in action which are relevant to understanding how consciousness is treated in action are the Dual Process view and the Systems view. The Dual Process view holds that there is a substantial difference between actions which are regulated by processes that are automatic, and those which rely on "effortful, explicit (conscious) reasoning processes that are strongly dependent on working memory". (Sutton et al. 2016: 39). According to these theorists, such as Posner and Snyder (1975), and Evans and Stanovitch (2013), automatic control of action is characterised as operating "without attention, without conscious awareness, and without producing interference with other

ongoing mental activity” (Sutton et al. 2016: 39). On the other hand, conscious attention is responsible for establishing a strategy for processing incoming information, depending heavily upon accessible, representational memory (as opposed to ‘muscle memory’) in order to rationalise new problems. This results in a system where two autonomous processes run parallel to one another without necessarily intervening in each others’ operation. Automatic control governs responses where there is no need for conscious attentive deliberation, and vice versa.

This is contrasted with the Systems View, as characterised by Sutton et al. (2016). According to this approach, automatic control and executive thought are not distinct and autonomous processes which are to be contrasted, but rather executive control relies on numerous processes which themselves depend on varying degrees of automaticity at any one time. These theorists therefore argue for a more “complex and nuanced understanding of automaticity” (Sutton et al. 2016: 40), which takes some intentions, goals and adjustments to be non-conscious and strongly embodied. At the same time a broader understanding of mindedness is adopted (ibid, 2011: 95), whereby extended, complex automatic control which is heavily dependent upon deeply internalised sets of responses is understood to be conscious, attentive and mindful to a certain extent, even as it does not necessitate intervention from representational memory or even directed, self-aware intent.

The exact point at which conscious control intervenes in automatic function is highly contested. Dreyfus’ theory of skilled coping for example appears to adhere to the dual systems view as he maintains that much of action is undertaken “without recourse to mind and brain representations” (Dreyfus 2002: 367). However, he maintains that action which is ongoing without conscious cognitive control is intelligent: characterised by continued learning, and skillful action as opposed to blind mechanistic processes. It is important to see this as less of a relationship between two autonomous control centres whereby action goes ahead until it is ‘told’ to change by higher-level explicit thought (as the dual systems view would hold) but that action itself is the adaptive product of varying degrees of coping and conscious informational input at any one time. As Chaffin and Imreh explain, “*these influences cannot operate simply as top-down triggers of fully structured motor programs: rather, expertise is in part the training up of the right indirect links between thought and action, not the evacuation of thought from action*” (2002: 342). As we become more adept at a skillset, the body commits patterns, behaviours and responses that are successful to an embodied repertoire, which are honed over time and practice to become so quick to action and so intuitive that in both speed and precision they may often rival instinctive and reflex actions that are associated with pre-cognitive action (Sutton et al. 2011: 80).

An example of these non-consciously held skill sets received a great amount of media attention in 2016, when a passage from Forsyth's 2014 book *The Elements of Eloquence* went viral. The passage described the rule for the correct order of adjectives in the English language:

"[A]djectives in English absolutely have to be in this order: opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose Noun. So you can have a lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling knife. But if you mess with that word order in the slightest you'll sound like a maniac. It's an odd thing that every English speaker uses that list, but almost none of us could write it out. And as size comes before colour, green great dragons can't exist." (Forsyth, M. 2014: 39)

He goes on to note:

"There are other rules that everybody obeys without noticing. Have you ever heard that patter-pitter of tiny feet? Or the dong-ding of a bell? ... when you repeat a word with a different vowel the order is always I A O. Bish bash bosh. If you do things any other way, they sound very odd indeed." (*ibid*)

Language is much more than a set of assembled words, the structure of the way we combine those words gives them meaning in relation to one another. The rules of how these words should be combined in a particular language in order for meaning to be correctly conveyed only need to be explicitly learned by non-native speakers who take up the language later on in life. For a native speaker these ordering rules are picked up throughout childhood and through interaction. Most native speakers would not be able to describe more complex grammar rules, they only know that if words are not in the correct order they sound alien. Their actual execution of those rules occurs consistently without either conscious deliberation dictating order, nor any consciously held internal representation or schema for that rule set. The rule set is utterly habitual and non-accessible, but still it is executed correctly and seamlessly in everyday conversation and writing.

4.1.3.2 Skill acquisition: automatic, full cognitive or hybrid

There are several theories as to what happens to explicit cognitive control over the course of skill acquisition. These theories are divided by Christensen et al. (2016) into three main approaches, the Automatic View, the Full Cognitive View, and the Hybrid View, illustrated in graphical form in Figure 5 below. Under the Automatic view (Figure 5a), as exemplified by Dreyfus's skilled coping, as experience in a skill increases the level of conscious cognitive control needed for its enaction decreases until no cognitive control is necessary. This is

contrasted most starkly with the Full Cognitive View (Figure 5b), which holds that cognitive control remains involved in skill performance regardless of experience, providing step-by-step oversight of action by higher level mental faculties at all times. The Hybrid approach (Figure 5c), as the name suggests, is a compromise which holds that certain aspects of a skill may be fluidly enacted by the body as expertise increases, but holds that the performance of the skill itself still necessitates conscious cognitive oversight. Under the hybrid approach, the precise terms of that oversight may shift from smaller chunks of control such as the finger formation to play a C chord, to the acknowledgement that a C must be played, but there is no descent into fully autonomous automatic performance. This is not to say that such executive functions ‘drive’ implicit action, but that certain cues that are appropriate to ongoing action are taken into account by these automatic processes as they unfold. As Sutton explains: “[t]he basic idea on which this theory is based is that cognitive control is not eliminated in advanced skill, but is rather shifted primarily to higher-level action control.” (Sutton et al. 2016: 38).

Figure 5: Models of the relationship between cognitive control and experience

Where X is the level of the cognitive control present in action.

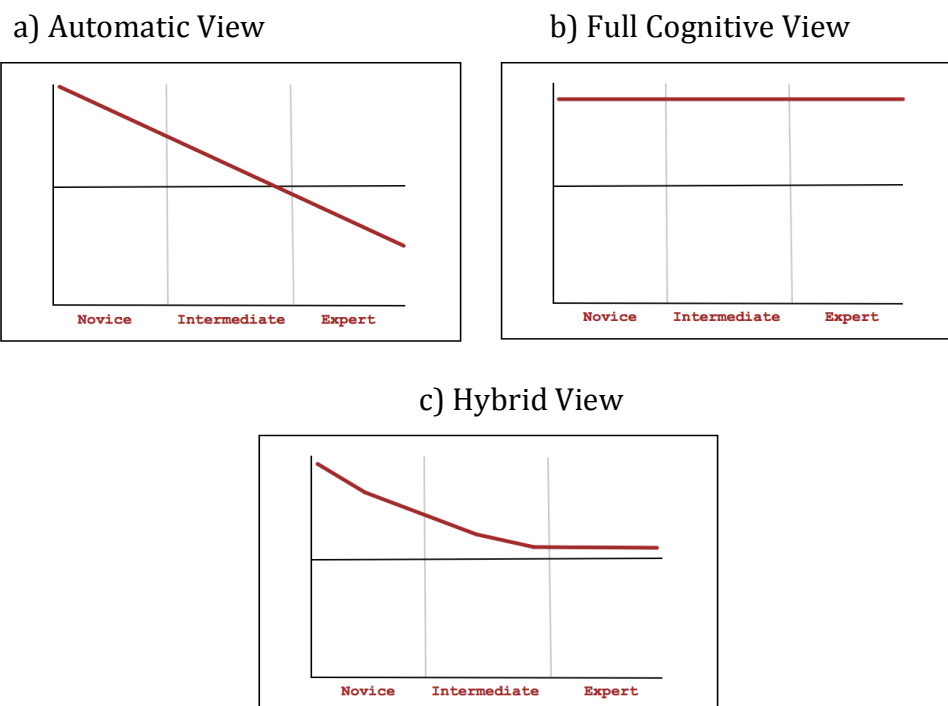


Fig 5. Three key models of how we may expect conscious reasoning and control to relate to skill level over time.

Taken from: Christensen, W. Sutton, J. and McIlwain D. (2016: 42).

The degree of explicit cognitive control over action is difficult to map in this way as ultimately it depends on self-reporting of the experience of action. The experience of having conscious

control over action is a fundamental component in the sense of agency. As discussed in chapter three, the sense of agency is composed of both the sense of control and the sense of authorship, meaning that the active subject must have a sense of having chosen to initiate the action and have a sense of intention about the *way in which* that action is performed (qualitatively different from the sensation of instinctive reaction or protective reflex). As experience in the mechanical and epistemological components of a particular action or skill increases it may be that certain trajectories for action, including its style become 'chunked' (Dreyfus, H. 2004: 180). Sense of agency over actions in real time are transferred from the specific rule-following for the technical aspects of action to larger trajectories of action. While intent for a novice may be composed of smaller blocks of action (I move my arm up to block an offensive attack, step away to clear space, then look for an opportunity to attack) an expert may experience agency over larger, extended objectives but no longer the smaller components of those extended actions, which now feel as if they take care of themselves. The sense of agency over an action remains, but is composed of a greater quantity and complexity of mechanical movements and epistemological understanding. When an action is deconstructed, the expert may not feel as if they had authorship and control over the particularities of the action, but rather had authorship and control over the intentionality of the combination of those actions working all together. This complicates the relationship between cognitive control and internalization, as expert actors may only notice more basic aspects of their actions when attention is drawn to them from an outside source such as an interested observer, and the experience of cognitive control may be imposed on those smaller aspects of action when attention is drawn to them in retrospect, even if such experience of control and authorship was not present *at that level* of action during the process of enactment.

4.1.3.3 Variations on the Hybrid view

There are two hypotheses within the hybrid view which appear promising. This first is the autonomous-hybrid view as outlined by Sutton et al. (2016), which draws from the dual process view introduced earlier in the chapter. Associating cognitive control specifically with conscious reasoning (ibid: 42), this view holds that for skilled actors much of the practicalities and methods of action are ultimately handled by automatic processes in real time. Conscious cognitive control, on the other hand, handles overarching tactics with which to weave these abilities together in order to produce a certain desired outcome. Here cognitive control is seen as being concerned with strategizing, abstract problem-solving and decision-making (Beilock and Grey, 2017), holding that there is a definitive difference between skills that rely on these faculties and those that do not. As Christensen et al. explain, the dual process view states that:

“Conscious cognitive processes are fleeting, and based on underlying processes that are largely automatic (‘intuition’). Moreover, while they produce intentions that guide action, these intentions are at a high level (such as a pass to teammate) and do not play a strong guiding role in the online execution of action, which is largely autonomous.”

(Christensen et al. 2016: 42-43).

Christensen et al. formulate their own hybrid approach which they term Mesh (2016: 43). In addition to designating cognitive control to strategy and automatic process to implementation, Mesh holds that this relationship is not strictly hierarchical but rather these methods are tightly integrated, passing information and control between them in accordance with the developing demands of the context. They explain: “controlled and automatic processes are closely integrated in skilled action and ... cognitive control directly influences motor execution in many cases”. Cognitive control here is described as an aid to the appropriate performance of automatic ingrained skill, by integrating relevant information to adjust its parameters to fit consciously held goals (2016: 43). This is in addition to what is referred to as situation awareness (Endsley, 1995), where relevant environmental and interoceptive information is integrated directly with automatic and skilled action without explicit inferential reasoning (Miller, 2000; Duncan 2010), nor necessarily being noted by any form of conscious awareness. Situation awareness occurs before conscious attention, forming the parameters of movement and readying the body for contextual change in real-time. However, it is also closely linked to attention control, raising problems, inconsistencies or relevant information to conscious awareness for problem-solving on a more analytical cognitive level. In this way, while these phenomena are seen as analytically separable, they both contribute to action by relaying relevant information to one another such that ongoing action can be moulded specifically to the demands of a particular context. Additionally, both are able to apply incoming real-time relevant information to guide both conscious attention and real-time appropriate action. In doing so, incoming information is efficiently and effectively relayed to both automatic and deliberative levels of action control to produce a cognitive and motor configuration which is appropriate to the context (Duncan, 2010, described in Christensen, et al. 2016).

Many of the cases which are taken to rebuke this view that conscious attention is involved in skilled action cite experiences of total immersion in skilled activity to show the possibility of absence-of, and to critique the necessity-of, self-aware deliberative thought for skilled action. Total immersion, the type of experience whereby a subject describes feeling as if their mind is blank or absent during the action (such as during the performance of a concerto) is slightly different from other types of immersive activity which can include being so engrossed in a task such as reading, writing or skating that one loses track of time. Typically, in these

examples, the experience of immersion tends to depend upon a deeply connected cognitive and embodied skillset which come together in order to solve a particular problem, and many of these examples depend upon intense analytic and cognitive work alongside deeply masterful embodied and intuitive skills and the behind-the-scenes non-conscious mental work of making symbolic and theoretical connections, drawing on years of previous work in the area.

4.1.4. Immersion: what 'mindlessness' tells us about the mind

In the previous chapter's discussion of biochemical cascade and retroactive self-attribution of agency, I began to introduce this relationship between explicitly intended and intentional complex action as a key problem for addressing the agency/structure debate in the social sciences. In doing this I looked at both instances of what Protevi terms Beserker rage, where complex autonomous actions are undertaken in a state of extreme emotion that suspends deliberative thought (though not necessarily self-awareness), and at levels of routine action which underlie conscious thought and deliberate control, operating while our conscious attention is diverted to other tasks. In both of these instances, this ongoing action exhibits elements of knowledgeable and adaptive capability which differentiates it from the kind of instinctive or reactive action we would associate with pure automaticity, but at the same time lacks the conscious self-aware attention and deliberation that would be necessary to qualify as agentic under Archer's definition.

A key point of critique of Dreyfus's work is that he contends that there is no place in skilled coping for mindedness (2007: 374). This is poignant for the direction of the thesis because the type of self-aware reflective and deliberative action which many of these theorists take to be mindful, is the type of action which Archer is pinpointing as that which is properly, emergently agentic. In response, consensus is building to broaden the definition of mind so that it includes cognitive function of the type that is involved in skill. Secondly there is an understanding, especially in the types of hybrid approaches such as Mesh that we discussed in the previous section, that automated or habitual action more often involves various degrees of continuous flux between conscious attentive thought and smooth bodily coping, meaning there is usually a degree of mindedness in skilled action. This can be in the sense of occasional interjection of explicit directed thought or in a more fluid sense where even actions that do not involve explicit interjection at all are thought of as mindful as they still exhibit intelligent, adaptive awareness and some form of consciousness.

Dreyfus suggests that the phenomena is more akin to switching from a mode of detached self-observational rule following to "a more involved and situation-specific way of coping."

(Dreyfus, 2005: 52). Coping is, in a manner of speaking, a form of awareness rather than a state of conscious-less or unconscious action as cognitivists suggest. There is, however, a state of fully automatic coping which sometimes appears in these accounts whereby all forms of self-awareness appear to dissipate while a particular action is ongoing. As it is far less common and appears to only emerge under very specific circumstances, I will not spend a great deal of time discussing it, but it is useful to note that this state of complete alienation of the self from complex and meaningful action does occur. More often than not this appears to be experienced by extremely high-level experts in a particular field, and is far less common than ordinary expert-coping where the actor is able to focus on the 'feel' of an action as opposed to its technicalities. There are three types of performance absorption that I want to address here: a) flow: complete immersion involving loss of self; b) stoke: complete immersion where the mind is relegated to a detached observer with no power of intervention; and c) 'going to Netto': where complex action continues, but the mind is 'elsewhere', daydreaming or fixated on tasks other than the ongoing performance.

Retrospective reports of loss of self-awareness during skill performance are seen across all sorts of artistic (e.g. Bastian, 1987; Meinertz, 2008), sporting (Körding, K. P., & Wolpert, D. M., 2006; Thrift, 2008; Hamm, 2004), and skillful experiences. This experience of absence-of-selfhood is particularly interesting from a phenomenological perspective, because the loss of self-consciousness, "*qua* 'the minimal self' as an essential feature of consciousness" (see Zahavi, 2005a; 2011; Hoffding, S. 2014: 62), has traditionally been associated with unconsciousness, with a completely un-involved, inactive and non-perceptive state. Clearly, as Hoffding points out, extremely skilled performers in action cannot be simultaneously unconscious. We must be careful to avoid reducing non-self-aware absorption and immersion to absent-minded or 'mindless' state. As Csikszentmihalyi points out, while the experience of this kind of flow of action "appears to be effortless, it is far from being so", and often involves "highly disciplined mental activity" in the form of "complex mental operations ... completed in a few seconds, perhaps the fraction of a second." (1990: 5).

Some models tend to conflate flow with smooth coping. I suggest that the state of flow, while qualitatively similar in some regards is an extreme manifestation of smooth coping, which does not necessarily reflect ongoing normal action with the world. Flow is taken as complete immersion and suspension of conscious thought entirely, but it is not yet clear whether this type of fully embodied loss-of-self that is described by musicians is of the same type as the kind of full immersion that is experienced when reading particularly immersive writing, or when completely involved in a creative project. 'Getting lost' in a task is fairly common, where hours have passed seemingly instantaneously and we realise as we come out of this state that we have missed important appointments and/or disregarded or not even felt our

most basic bodily needs. Yet, this kind of immersion tends to involve extremely focused attention, as opposed to flow, where the mind itself 'gets lost' in the absorption of the task.

Stoke, is slightly different from flow. Whereas in flow, the mind seems lost and one is utterly absorbed in the action, in stoke, the mind is still present and utterly attentive but feels relegated to the role of observer while there is a sensation of the body being completely in control. The experience of selfhood here is qualitatively different. In this state, many subjects describe the opposite effect than that experienced during flow, typically feeling hyper-present but as if they only exist in their bodies (Booth, 2008; Thrift, 2008: 24), and their bodies intuitively perform actions sometimes to the 'surprise' of the mind which is felt to be lagging behind the unfolding action, watching everything happening in real time but with no significant ability to intervene.

There are instances, however where coping is indeed associated with an absence of mind, but specifically the absence of mindedness in relation to the specific task at hand, rather than a complete mental absence. One such case is a form of skilled performance where the mind is present and active, but on a task utterly unrelated to the practical task at hand, such that no conscious awareness of the task is experienced and no memory of it is stored. One of Hoffding's research participants terms this phenomena 'Going to Netto' (2014: 59), which he describes as the state in which "you for some time mentally leave the performance to think about something as trivial as what you might need to shop for later." (*ibid*). Yet this is common in all sorts of day-to-day tasks to the extent that most of us will experience it from time to time.

"It could be like if you are driving and then have driven ... or suddenly find yourself someplace else down the road, that you suddenly are 500 meters further down the highway and cannot recollect having driven those 500 meters. ... absentminded playing is just like normal absent-mindedness, as when one cannot remember whether one has locked the front door. While playing, and seemingly without detracting much from the quality of the performance, the mind wanders somewhere else and thus exhibits an intentionality distinctively different from that of standard playing in which one is intentionally directed towards some aspect of the performance ... this mode of awareness is distinctively different from the other absent-mindedness-like experience of absorption."

(Hoffding, S. 2014: 59)

Loss of self-awareness and/or the loss of an attentive mind to intervene in action appears to be dependent on task-specific immersion, whether that task be as physically demanding as surfing, as technically demanding as playing an instrument or as seemingly common and

accessible as sitting down reading fiction or driving. All of these instances involve immersion in a task which requires the full directedness of our bodies and minds and is seemingly averse to any influence from detached, objective and distanced reasoning.

Hoffding points out, as Archer has done (Archer, 2000b: 469), that “asking [people] to retroactively ascribe reasons to their actions does not yield much insight into their phenomenology” (2014: 52). He reasons that most likely this results in vague attributions of rationality which do not give any substantial insight into whether or not intent, decision-making or sense of control is felt during the act itself. He argues that “such non-experiential events are beyond the limits of a phenomenological method, which is solely concerned with conscious experience.” (ibid: 54). I would add that given the cultural weight of agentic reasoning especially for Euro-American participants, it also may merely cause the participant to retroactively apply agentic reasoning and a narrative of control over an experience where it may not have been present in the moment. When we are challenged upon a particular past action, whether it be through the type of post-traumatic guilt attribution we discussed in the latter part of chapter three, or something as simple as someone questioning whether we ‘intended to’ twist the doorknob to exit a room, a sense of agency is able to be attributed retroactively to past actions that may not have been actually present during the performance of the action itself.

As we gain experience and expertise in a field or skill, the sense of agency, feelings of control and authorship over action, appear to be shifted to larger blocks of action-sets. At the same time, the performance blocks of action at this level of skill does not necessitate consistent oversight or conscious management. This has corresponding effects on the phenomenological experience of those actions, where we may feel distanced from the performance, either through having no memory of having performed them at all, experiencing them as an external observer or through becoming lost in the feel and movement of the action sets as they unfold. As I have discussed earlier in this section however, we must be careful not to associate this absence of a sense of agentic oversight with hard-wired, routinistic and deterministic action sets. The expertise that allows (or necessitates) the suspension of the agentic subject position must itself involve some of the qualities we have traditionally associated with the mind: adaptivity, responsiveness, intelligence, prediction and, importantly, generalizability.

4.2.1. Prediction: acting in a dynamic environment

“[T]he agent does not merely receive input passively and then process it. Rather, the agent is already set to respond to the solicitations of things. The agent sees things

from some perspective and sees them as affording certain actions. What the affordances are depends on past experience with that sort of thing in that sort of situation.”

Dreyfus (2002: 373)

As I discussed in the introduction to the thesis, agency is an ambiguous term in the social sciences. The definition of what is considered to be agentic behaviours differs between theorists depending on their conception of what lies under the remit of agentic powers. This itself depends on where they consider the reach of explicit conscious attention to i) recognise affordances within their environment which provide alternative courses of action to those which may be performed habitually, and ii) intervene into habitual action at a certain given point. In section one of this chapter, I have put forward a particular approach to action which shows that skilled action relies on the recession of the explicit conscious decision-making associated with agency: in the sense that in order to act masterfully, deliberate conscious control must give way to intuition. In this section I want to develop the underlying processes which characterise this state of intuition and allow adaptive, skillful behaviour to continue without explicit conscious control on an ongoing basis. I identify these two factors as: the primary role of prediction in sensory perception, and generalizability of learned rules. The resulting framework will enable us to draw a clearer distinction between embodied skill and agentic decision-making, which will reflect the increasing understanding of intelligence and adaptability in non-explicit thought processes.

When skill sets have been internalised in the process of gaining experience and expertise, the crucial component is that those skillsets remain adaptable. We need our skills to be able to be appropriated ‘on the fly’, rather than skillsets being ‘closed off’ once they become automatic. This automation is already thoroughly interconnected with other parallel skills, information and incoming perceptual data: “[c]ertain patterns of behaviour which might appear stably chunked, automated, and thus inflexible are in skilled performance already and continually open to current contingency and mood, past meanings, and changing goals.” (Sutton et al. 2011: 96). Skillsets must be applied as we move through changing contexts in real time and smoothly combined with other skills in order to deal with new scenarios, conditions, and people “in response to the needs of the moment, and on the basis of a dynamic implicit repertoire of tendencies and potential responses” (Sutton et al. 2011: 87). When we characterise skill learning as Schmidt and Wrisberg do as a progression to increasingly automatic action production (2008: 47), we need to retain a concept of the automatic as always-already malleable and adaptable to context, and not as a hardwired autonomous cascade of rigid commands.

Movement, and the needs pertaining to on-going movement in dynamic contexts must therefore be central to the problem of skillful, non-deliberative control. For Wolpert, the *raison d'être* of the brain, the reason why the organ itself evolves in some organisms and not in others (at whatever level of complexity) is for movement and for movement alone (2011). Anything that the brain goes on to deal with, including the type of offline, representational thought that can be done sitting still in the dark, all works towards improving the body's ability to cope with its environment and produce adaptable, complex and appropriate movements within it. As Brooks explains:

“This suggests that problem solving behaviour, language, expert knowledge and application, and reason, are all pretty simple once the essence of being and reacting are available. That essence is the ability to move around in a dynamic environment, sensing the surroundings to a degree sufficient to achieve the necessary maintenance of life and reproduction.”

(Brooks, R. 1991: 141)

This speaks to a common commitment between Wolpert (2011) and Clark (2013), who both hold that the function of the brain and sensory organs, whether human or otherwise, is to enable efficient and effective movement. In order to do this, the brain must combine and organise the barrage of incoming sensory signals, identifying only what is relevant to the organism and its goals and combine this information with internalised belief systems of what the organism can expect from the world. It is only with this combination of real-time experience of the world and epistemological beliefs about what that information implies that an organism or subject can respond appropriately to their context. Movement within a dynamic environment however, necessitates a more involved relationship than merely the processing of information and the 'spitting out' of a sufficiently appropriate response.

The key here seems to be the ability to generalise – having broad models about the way in which information is usually organised which can be applied to unexpected variation in the environment (Clark, 2013: 2). Rather than having access to a huge amount of information, all specifically tailored to particular instances and outcomes, it seems that systems we would describe as intelligent rather have a relatively limited set of procedural elements, but those procedures are able to be adapted to multiple outcomes. Our learned praxes enable us to respond more comprehensively and appropriately to situations even if we have not encountered them before. In other words, we are able to do more with less.

The intellectualist view, which holds that skills, beliefs and ways of acting must be explicitly encoded in the brain, is beginning to give way to a model of decentralised generalizability from patterns of previously-successful action. Rather than seeing the process of learning as

a method of encoding if/when/or commands into specific neuronal connections as one might program a piece of software, learning appears to draw upon already-internalised patterns of interaction and pre-established belief systems about the world, expanding an existing repertoire of action from within. Mapping out every eventuality of every situation that we may encounter with our expected outcomes would be too heavy a burden on our cognitive and bodily resources. The signaling of these deviations from prediction cannot therefore be dependent on specific comparison to exact situational models in the brain. As Sutton explains, “there are no independent storage boxes which can either be full or empty, only the sets of folding pores in the net of the brain. Our bodies thus hold cultural forms of life not as quasi-theoretical axioms but as nested sets of causal tendencies.” (Sutton et al. 2011: 86).

This prediction of ‘the way things should be’ in an ongoing sense as we move around our dynamic changing environments is necessary because the nature of dynamic changing environments implies a constant state of uncertainty (Clark, 2016; Wolpert, 2006). The world we are embedded within contains a huge amount of information which is changing at sub-second speeds. Only a tiny proportion of that information is both meaningful to us individually and is also relevant to our ongoing tasks and objectives. The brain goes to a lot of effort to reduce irrelevant environmental noise in order to more accurately and efficiently respond to meaningful tasks. At one time this was thought to happen in the brain, which when provided with an objective image of all available data by the sensory systems, would sort through this data in order to pinpoint relevant details. Yet, we are seeing that it is not solely processing of incoming information that enables this, but rather a continuous prediction of what is likely to happen. Task-directedness and perceptual prediction cooperate to respond to only meaningful incoming data in our environments. As Chabris and Simons explain, this is referred to as the illusion of attention (2010; Leven and Angelstone, 2008).

This has been a formidable hurdle in the development of AI systems, where the attempt to create robots with smooth adaptive response to dynamic environments has been constrained by the way in which we traditionally code responses as linear systems. Based upon the traditional model of *input* → *computation* → *response* I outlined earlier in the section, for these robots or computer systems, being able to respond to more situations means having more code: code which is specifically designed to deal with that particular situation. When set in real world environments, the sheer quantity of code resources needed to respond to changing conditions outweighs the capacity of the system. This is not a problem in environments where there are a limited number of laws and rules that can be followed, but in dynamic, lived environments where affordances, threats and appropriate practices are in continuous flux, the system appears clunky. The development of predictive coding has gone some way to addressing this problem, and again the key to adaptive self-learning systems appears to be less code, rather than more.

AlphaGo Zero, a neural network game algorithm which was able to beat all previous Go algorithms within 24 hours of initialization, for example, involved not more complicated controls, but a more elegant set of instructions for teaching itself. AlphaGo Zero begins as a blank slate with no training in the methods of the game from its programmers at all. Instead, the program repeatedly plays games against itself, spitting out values and using the winning strategies to inform the following games. Predictive coding itself was developed primarily as a strategy for data compression (Shi & Sun, 1999), given the vast amount of information that needs to be communicated for image transmission. Pixels however, are not random. Images tend to follow pretty similar rules about gradation and object boundaries. In order to keep the size of transmission down, it made sense that if the computers on each end of that transmission could already ‘know’ how pixels were likely to behave. Then, the only information one computer would have to pass to the other would be the outliers, the ones that did not follow those norms. We then have two intelligent systems which know how an object should behave, and the information which clarifies a particular image or situation is informed only by incoming data on prediction error – by how much and in what ways the current situation deviates from what one would expect (Musmann, 1979). This results in a faster, cleaner more elegant system which is able to communicate vast amounts of information by only physically sending very little.

This is a much more efficient method of dealing with environmental noise and uncertainty. By having a pre-existing world-view composed of internalised skills, systems have a sense of what they can expect from their environment and are able to expend extra energy only for dealing with information that is unexpected. In 1940, British psychologist W. Ross Ashby wrote that “[t]he whole function of the brain is summed up in: error correction”, a sentiment which is becoming increasingly central to models of prediction and perception in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Precise prediction, it is becoming clear, is a primary organising principle which guides the relationship between action, thought and adaptation. Before ever being a locus of abstract representational thought, the brain is already a prediction machine: combining past experience and incoming sensory data to read their environment so that they are in the best place to respond appropriately to the most likely future turns of events. A certain sensory effect could be the result of numerous possible causes and deciphering the most likely cause of a particular set of sensations involves a difficult process of inferring context clues with a model of distal causes accumulated from past experience and the world which exists for the organism in question. Rather than building up this model from accumulating low-level rules, high-level causal models inform the brain’s prediction of the lower-level incoming cues. This model of reverse mapping is known as analysis-by-synthesis (see Yuille and Kersten, 2006; Neisser, 1967; MacKay, 1956;

Gregory, 1980; Clark, 2013), a cognitive psychological tradition which paved the way for understanding smooth adaptive actions within dynamic and changing environments.

Generative models of predictive perception (such as Rao and Ballard, 1999; Lee and Mumford, 2003; and Friston 2005) and the more recent extension of this logic to models of action (e.g. Friston and Stephan, 2007; Friston et al. 2009; Friston 2010; and Brown et al 2011) suggest that the embodied brain, embedded in its known world, uses similar types of models to streamline the efficiency of gathering relevant contextual data from the world and eliciting appropriate responses. The production of these ongoing predictions about our immediate environment, while pre-conscious, are still richly informed by prior knowledges, including social, cultural, and symbolic as well as practical information. These are therefore not the kinds of processes that we can categorise as pre-cognitive, passive or instinctive, but are in a sense masterful, intricately honed to the particularities of our individual worlds.

4.2.2. Predictive Perception

Versions of the predictive brain hypothesis replace the traditional view of perceptions as a bottom-up feature of accumulating sensory evidence. Clark refers to this traditional view of perception as a 'Lego-block' formation (2015: 51) of sensory evidence, utilising chunks of neutral incoming information to derive a three-dimensional model of the immediate environment. This type of approach understood the brain as a passive and stimulus-driven information-decoder whereby neutral information is fed into the visual cortex and sent into the brain to build an accurate model of the environment which could then be assessed for possible affordances and problems. Predictive processing approaches on the other hand reject the model of embrained organisms "passively await[ing] sensory stimulation" (Clark, A. 2015: 2). Rather, they reason that the prediction processes about the environment are already-ongoing before any one set of information can be modelled in the brain. Here, the brain does not wait for an object to be readily presented to it before it then mechanistically deduces its affordances for action or potential barriers to the organism's intentional state. Instead, the brain is able to 'infer its own priors' (Clark, A. 2013: 3) continually highlighting likely potential events, objects and changes within its environment and the implications they may have upon the organism's action within the world, engaging in a continual process of iterative estimation (Dempster et al. 1977; Neal and Hinton 1998). Before any perceptual information has been presented about that object or event, cognitive systems are already pro-actively predicting their implications and various means of appropriate response.

4.2.2.1 Iterative Estimation and Inference

When engaged in focused, immersive activity, the relationship between prediction and perception seems to be strongest. In 1995, police officer Kenny Conley ran straight past a number of his colleagues who were beating an undercover police officer they had mistaken for a suspect. In court, charged with perjury and obstruction of justice for failure to report police brutality, jurors could not believe Conley's statement that while his path directly passed the incident, he never saw or noticed anything happening (Lehr 2009; Chabris et al. 2011). Multiple studies have shown that even events that we would intuitively think would be glaringly obvious are often entirely overlooked, especially if participants were otherwise engaged in an immersive task. In cases such as this, inattentive blindness quite literally means 'looking but not seeing'. This information is not dismissed by the brain, but because it is not relevant to the task at hand nor threatening, it is never flagged to conscious awareness. Hyman et al. found that pedestrians talking on phones often failed to notice a clown on a unicycle passing right by them (2010). Similarly, participants shown a video of a basketball scene and given the task to count how many times players dressed in white pass the ball, will often fail to notice a man in a gorilla suit walk right through the players, stopping midway to look at the camera and beat his chest (Chabris and Simons, 2010). After the fact, or once our attention has been drawn to such an anomaly, it seems impossible that we would have failed to previously notice such an occurrence, yet even minimal task-directed attention appears to be enough to filter out extraneous data before we even get the chance to notice it.

One notable proposal to explain how this prediction error is managed in dynamic environments in relation to changing goals, is that prediction error is precision weighted by the brain. Essentially this means that the brain can dial up or dial down the amount of prediction error it will accept towards elements of its environment in relation to the tasks at hand. We can test the tight coupling between prediction, perception and meaning through the phenomena of tickling. The sensation of being tickled is not quite the same when it is self-imposed, and this has been suggested to be a by-product of the relationship between ongoing sensory prediction and sensory input. Blakemore's experiment on the impossibility of self-tickling revealed that the phenomena was consistent if the tickling was done through a robot arm, as long as the robot was both controlled by the subject and the effect was sufficiently instantaneous. If however, there was even a fraction of a second's delay between the button being pushed and the tickling motion, the ability to recognise the action as one's own was disrupted and the participant would respond with laughter and aversion (Blakemore et al. 2000).

This kind of ongoing iterative estimation against prior world models, built through embodied experience in situated contexts, is thought to involve informational integration using Bayesian inference to account for variability. Körding and Wolpert describe how perceptual

systems may utilise Bayesian inference to update probabilities of the precise circumstances of an event that we are acting in relation to (Körding, K. P., and Wolpert, D. M. 2004; 2006). In this case, the generalised knowledge models acquired through experience can be modified for particular circumstances as sensory input communicates unexpected variation. While the brain is not operating within continually novel environments, even known environments inherently involve fluctuation, change and subtle variations in the distribution of affordances and conditions which can affect the efficacy of our actions. Due to a degree of ongoing unpredictability within known systems, even those that involve skills that have been mastered to an intuitive level need to continually adjust for environmental variation and the shifting conditions which are implicated in an active subject.

Our brains are extremely well adjusted to the particular world in which they have found themselves and been exposed to over time. As Skinner has suggested, these brains and their bodies are extremely adept in picking up patterns in our environment when they have meaningful repercussions for us (1992). Patterns in the environment and patterns of behaviour of others in our environment enable us to learn appropriate action to interact effectively. In real time, action and response needs to be fluid and immediate as well as appropriate in order to be effective. The demands of these interactions are not presented to us with sufficient time for the type of systematic deliberation described by the traditional linear approaches to action. Under the linear approach we have a very long sequence of events that needs to happen before we can respond to anything. First we must wait for all available sensory information to be presented to the brain, *then* for the brain to build an accurate three dimensional representation from this information, *then* to apply the information from this representation to past representations in order to decipher directional movement or other emerging patterns, to *then* be compared with past experience through memory, *only then* to deliberate over the best possible signals to send to the body to produce effective responsive action. No matter how quickly this process could operate, the completion of all of these steps on a continual basis could not systematically keep up with a constantly changing environment in real-time.

In order to cope with this, predictive action theorists propose that in any one context our brains are already making connections to situationally-specific information. Before we encounter any new information, our brains have already tuned in to the likely scenarios which may emerge from our present context based on our deep wealth of past experience. When something happens then, our brains have already pinpointed the likelihood of this encounter and primed both the perceptual systems to 'look out for' indicators of this occurrence, *and* the embodied response systems which might be needed to be on hand to

respond⁴¹. This means that when something happens, our brains do not have to sort through an extensive neural filing system from scratch but have already pruned the likely sets of needed behaviours so that they are on hand. This way, once any information that might require a response from the subject becomes available, the body is in a prime position to pick up on that information and instantaneously respond with appropriate action. All of this is constant, “even in the absence of ongoing task-specific stimulation” (Clark, A. 2015: 2), continuously focussing our perceptual systems and priming our bodies for appropriate response and action within constantly changing complex environments. Clark explains:

“Systems like this are already (and almost constantly) poised to act, and all they need to process are any sensed deviations from the predicted state. It is these calculated deviations from predicted states (known as prediction errors) that thus bear much of the information-processing burden, informing us of what is salient and newsworthy within the dense sensory barrage.”

(Clark, A. 2015: 2).

4.2.2.2. Linear view vs. systemic: modeling ongoing interaction

Internalised experience shapes the way in which we perceive and respond to the world on a fundamental pre-conscious level. Previous experience facilitates future action through streamlining the relationship between incoming sensory data and response, not by picking out relevant details from noisy environmental data, but priming us to sense only those details which are likely to be relevant. The difference in conscious-attentive and embodied-adaptive loadbearing is easiest seen diagrammatically where orange represents the former and purple the latter. The model I present in figure 6, which describes the traditional approach to action described in section 1.1, shows far heavier cognitive load with relatively little work undertaken by the body. This is compared to a model of predictive perception and skilled-coping as I describe in figure 7. In the latter model, the body can smoothly deal with ongoing dynamic interactions on its own, leaving conscious attention free to deal with problems, other ongoing tasks, or anomalies instead of relying on conscious intervention for numerous relatively menial tasks.

(continued on next page)

⁴¹ and signal to the perceptual systems to prune their own methods of information-retrieval to ‘look out for’ environmental indicators for these particular occurrences.

Figure 6: Traditional view of action sequencing

Orange: conscious self-aware internal processes; Purple: input/output

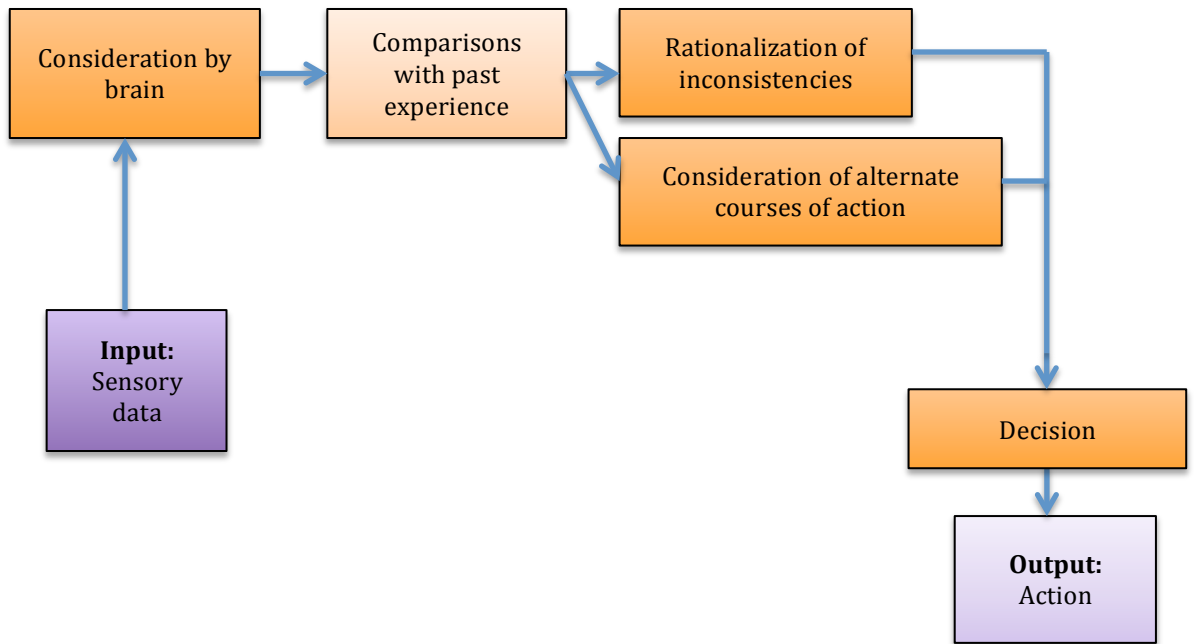


Fig. 6. Diagrammatic representation of a linear model, such as Archer's, which takes conscious reasoning as the primary mediator between perception and action.

Figure 7: Predictive perception and skilled coping

Orange: Conscious self-aware internal process; Purple: non-aware underlying process.

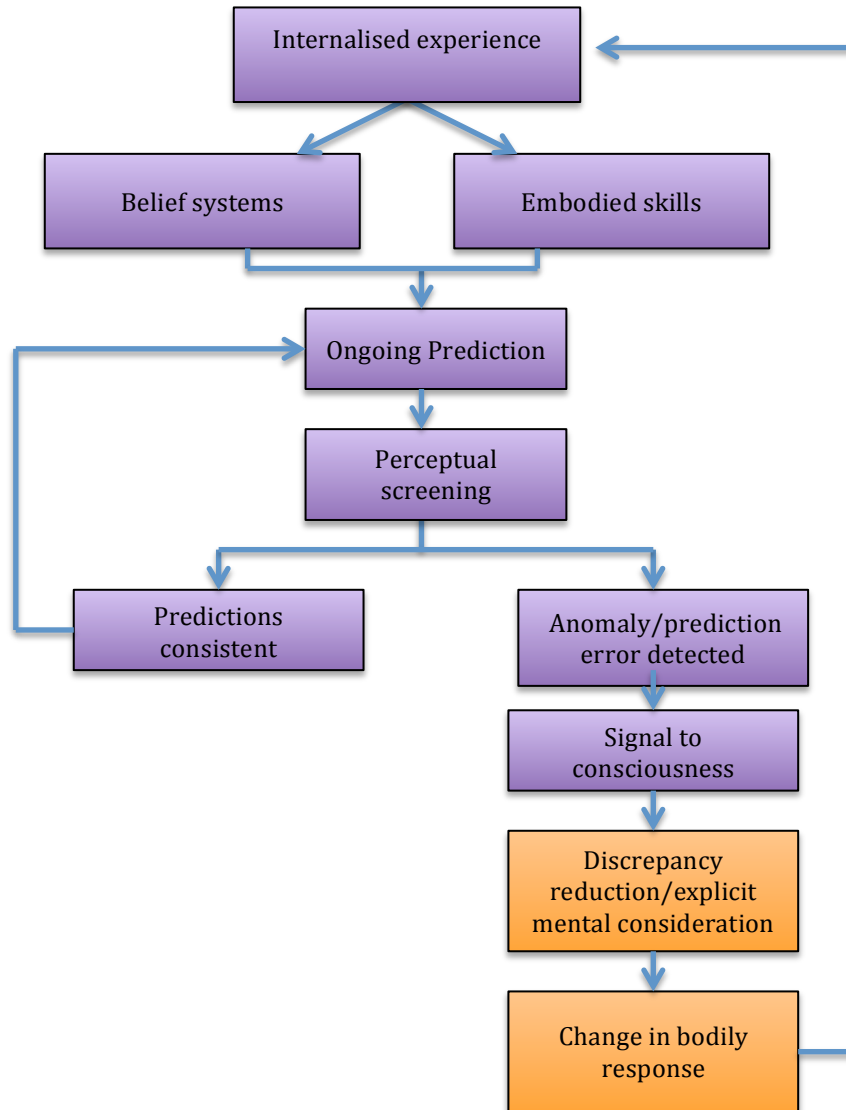


Fig. 7 Diagrammatic representation of the relationship between pre-conscious prediction, perception and conscious reasoning that I am proposing in terms of Dreyfus's skilled coping.

In figure 6, each task or problem is taken to be a separate unit where the process ends in an appropriate action being chosen through conscious deliberation. As each problem is solved, the mind becomes free to direct attention at another problem. Comparatively, figure 7 depicts an ongoing relationship between action, perception and cognition. Where no anomaly or deviation from prediction is detected from sensory feedback, the cycle continues in a feedback loop without interjecting into conscious thought. Where deviation or a problem is detected however, the problem is passed to explicit conscious attention for rational deliberation. When a solution for the problem is found (either by attentive control over action or dismissal), the new coping strategy is passed back to the body. Over time, through exposure to enough of the same kind of problems, the coping strategy is internalised and no longer requires conscious attention. The repertoire of internalised experience therefore builds over time, freeing conscious attention to be used for other problems, which in turn expands internalised experience. This is an ongoing loop, which does not necessarily have neutral input nor a distinct final output at any one time, as the model which figure 6 represents does, but rather symbolizes a learning system in continuous flux.

4.2.3. The Place of Agency in Predictive Action

The relationship between action and cognition is fundamentally interrelated, especially if we are to understand cognition as arising in order to facilitate action. Regardless of whether self-aware consciousness is present in the form that humans experience, there can be no true action without some form of cognition - without something that at least acts like a brain. While Archer would define true action, which for her is unilaterally agentic action, as only that which is under the control of conscious, considered and deliberate thought, we have seen that there is a vast amount of action which does not depend on this kind of deliberative, reflexive oversight. A large proportion of that action which does involve self-aware oversight is also mediated through and dependent upon aspects of pre-internalised non-conscious action mechanisms. True action here, then, is defined as purposeful and directed action which is appropriately moulded to a dynamic world, with purpose, intentionality, and directedness, but not necessarily explicit awareness, intent or direction. Meaningful, appropriate action is the basis for the kinds of representational thought which enables the abstract decision-making that we see in Archer's definition of agency. Yet, meaning, flexibility and adaptivity are ongoing whether reflexive oversight is attending to them or not.

In this chapter I have talked extensively about the problem of defining non-explicit self-aware cognition as non-intelligent and non-adaptive. The traditional association of true action, with the explicit sense of agency, can make it difficult to see automatic and habitual movement as complex, contextual, controlled, predictive and adaptive. However, it is becoming apparent

that action that occurs without or with little oversight from higher-level functions in fact must have these traits in and of their own accord. The environment we are acting within is always one that, to a greater or lesser extent, we have learned about, internalised, including action sequences that are practiced to the point that negotiating them does not require conscious direction. We do not necessarily 'know' that a certain social context has particular demands of us, but our body responds accordingly to signals picked up that infer those social demands, and primes us accordingly. Our brains are constantly predicting expected courses of action and expected sensory signals from the information available at any one point. Additionally, our belief systems about the way the world is, what to expect and what is true are already helping the organs filter out incoming information before that information ever reaches deliberative mechanisms of self-aware consciousness for it to do any rationalising about it. The learned, socialised and practiced aspects of our life are already involved in perception and cognition before self-awareness has anything to do with the process, if indeed it ever does in any one particular case.

When we look at the ways in which belief systems and learned skills for interacting with our particular environments are involved in both retrieving meaningful environmental information and in forming action before or without intervention by explicit higher level thought, we must re-conceptualise what this agentic subject position brings to the table of embodied human action: what it is for and why it emerges in certain circumstances and not others. According to this approach, agency cannot be the sole site of knowledgeable action within the world, other embodied processes often take on this role themselves. Throughout the approaches to skill acquisition we have discussed in this chapter, particularly in the automatic-hybrid and 'Mesh' approaches, self-aware deliberative mental states are present in two cases, firstly in integrating new information and new physical skills, and secondly in dealing with problems.

Summary

The key point I want to bring from the discussion of these ideas in relation to Archer's conception of agency is that the agentic state is not the primary state of human interaction, at least within a world which is well-known to a subject. The sense of agency is a cognitive phenomenon. Specifically it is a phenomenon associated with higher-level, relatively objective, explicit deliberation. In some areas of social theory there remains an underlying assumption that because this phenomena involves higher-level processes it must exist as an end-unto-itself, sui generis and separate from lower-level embodied processes. The primary purpose of brains and of cognitive systems, however, is to enable efficient and effective movement around a dynamic environment. In order to do this, organisms learn skill sets that enable them to negotiate elements of that environment, and those skill sets build up belief

systems about how the organism can expect their environment to behave and what movements are effective in relation to it in order to reach their goals. These belief systems help the organism be more attuned to relevant aspects of their environment by both internalizing known action patterns, and predicting what sensory information the organism to expect in return from those actions. These predictions have three effects which cut down on the energy needed to negotiate dynamic environments. Firstly the organism can adjust for variability in the environment efficiently (Körding, K. P., & Wolpert, 2004, 2006). Secondly, information from the environment which is not relevant to the organism does not interrupt and slow down necessary action (Musmann, 1979). Finally, they allow the organism to efficiently and effectively notice meaningful deviation in those predictions which can indicate a threat or a problem, allowing the organism to attend to that problem efficiently and effectively (Clark, A. 2015: 2).

In more complex organisms such as humans, higher-level cognitive functions such as self-aware consciousness and the experience of being in deliberate control of ones actions may be a function of the third effect. In traditional cognitive theory, such as that which Archer's morphogenetic approach is predicated upon, cognitive intervention into action is considered to be stable over time and experience. In contrast, the model of action we are developing suggests that the agentic state is relegated to two states: i) initial stages of novice skill learning, and ii) consideration and integration of problematic phenomena that are beyond the parameters of the internalised skillset. This suggests that explicit cognitive intervention into action has emerged as a method of dealing with novel and problematic elements in our environment, for the purpose of integrating them within our expanding repertoire of ongoing skilled coping.

This chapter has focused specifically on making the case for this approach to agency through using examples of relatively self-contained practical skill-sets which are learned in adulthood. However, skill learning and the tendency towards automation are not confined to technical physical ability. In the coming chapter I will put forward the case for expanding this model of skill acquisition to also account for the types of social and conceptual skills that humans acquire through embeddedness within social structures. I propose that an understanding of predictive, generalizable social cognition can help us understand the relationship between social structures, socialisation and action within sociology without relying on Archer's model which necessitates agentic deliberation for all social action, but also avoiding the conflation between non-explicitly conscious action and determinism.

PART THREE

“There are no ‘sovereign’ individuals who act upon the world ... there are only bodies that are produced through their contexts and connections with the world.”

(Hickey-Moody, A. and Malins, P., 2007: 4).

Introduction

What stands between us and social structures? Where does one end and the other begin? Intuitively, social structures cannot exist without individuals, but can individual humans, in the way that we now know them, exist without social structures? The aim of sociology has been to understand the extent to which those institutions fold back upon us, how their presence and form may structure our actions and beliefs in particular ways. In this respect, the sociological conception of the mind as the site of reflexive autonomy from and point of potential resistance to structure has been remarkably resilient to concepts of social constructivism. Understood as the mediating resource which stands between social pressure and inherent will, the predominant sociological conception of the mind has largely remained tied to ideals of autonomy, independence, free will, resistance and pre-social human nature.

This final part of the thesis is an investigation as to the relationship between social institutions and our self-aware, deliberative, conscious mind. Of course, this thesis is about agency, and the relationship between social structures and the inner processes of our individual minds is central to that. As theories about agency are theories about deliberate, intentional action, it is necessary to understand whether those intentions are formed independently by an autonomous will or whether, as I want to argue, they are formed through particular interrelations between the socialised subject and their meaningful world. At this stage, therefore, I am moving away from notions of qualia or of phenomenological experience of decision-making. Here I want to look instead at what we might not think about as experiences at all: the kinds of interactions we habitually and intuitively perform whilst thinking about something else, or with minimal and fleeting conscious attention: the kinds of actions we forget (or might never think of again) unless someone or something specifically drew our attention to them. In order to understand how social structures guide and shape our actions, I want to talk not about great feats of achievement or resistance, but about action which is normal, ordinary, and forgettable (but no less important).

In the previous chapter I described how skillful, adaptive action can be performed as quick as a reflex (Sutton et al. 2011: 80), and perfectly context-sensitively, operating in a feedback loop with beliefs, predictions, perception and adjustment without any necessary recourse to self-conscious awareness. In that chapter I proposed that achieving the ability to act without conscious oversight on technical details, or even technical theory about that action, was not only a sign of mastery but was a critical function in achieving that mastery. The transition of technical details away from our conscious awareness to embodied automation frees that awareness up for other tasks, from higher-level reasoning, to multi-tasking, to daydreaming. It allows us to perform tasks and complex skills that we use all the time without sacrificing the kind of attentive awareness that might be ordinarily needed for other tasks (noticing on-

coming predators, keeping an eye on children or trying to work out what to have for dinner). What used to be a comprehensive mental list of technical details is replaced by an intuitive sensation of common sense, and it is difficult to reverse engineer. Once a skill has been mastered, people often find it difficult to explain exactly how and why they are doing something a particular way. Common sense and intuitive action, however exists in the just as extensive and technically complex sphere of social interaction.

We negotiate our social worlds in ways that are broadly intuitive and knowledgeable. Many of our day-to-day actions and interactions do not require substantial in-depth deliberation, but occur flexibly and immersively in an ongoing fashion. Not all common sense is the same, however. 'Common' sense is common only between those that share the same basic presuppositions, the same internalised social skillsets, and the same types of relationships with the same types of social institutions. Not only do the intuitions of how things work, how to behave and how to think differ cross-culturally and over time, they differ between subcultures and between demographics within those temporally-located cultures and subcultures. Such intuitions are deeply held and actively performed, affecting the types and styles of actions that a subject is likely to enact, but also what they are likely to understand and how they understand it. Everyday, normal actions and the internalised logics behind them are not universal but neither are they actively and freely chosen.

The following two chapters compose part three, the final part of the thesis. In this final part I want to apply the approaches to action we have discussed in part two to social forms of action. Here I want to assess whether it is feasible that the socially derived logical and conceptual apparatus that a particular individual adapts in relation to, also provides a thorough and explicative account of how, and under what circumstances, such normative ongoing functions are altered or disrupted by self-aware conscious deliberation. To understand why and how agentic attention and deliberation occur, it is crucial to understand how, why and when it does not. In chapter five I will give a brief historical review explaining the persistence of notions of the generative subject, showing how it is retained in contemporary notions of action through returning to a consideration Archer's work. I will then go on to explain how and why I believe that this persistence, and perhaps resurgence of this notion is related to neoliberal notions of individualism and egotism, building on the discussion I began in chapter two: making the argument that this conception, as it is built into our notions of common sense as well as philosophical theory, is deeply rooted in the wider socio-political discourses from which we are also writing. Extending from this, I will go on to explain how this common sense enables (but also constrains) particular types of action and behaviour, and how this is a crucial function in enabling skilled context-sensitive social interaction.

Chapter six, the final chapter of the thesis will take these ideas further. Here I will examine strong notions of the social subject developed by Butler, Bourdieu, Gallagher and Protevi. I will make the case that the socio-political subject, their affordances for action and the parameters of their conscious attention are thoroughly composed of and in a continuous dynamic interrelationship with their particular position in relation to shifting social and political institutions, roles and enactive belief systems. A person is not composed purely by one relationship with the social environment but by a matrix of intersecting and often contradictory demands, beliefs and ways of being. These positions, I will argue are not unilaterally rolled out over populations of subjects but are idiosyncratically composed by a subject's particular experience with and exposure to particular types and differences in belief systems and institutions. I will go on to propose that while our propensity to internalise enables us to function relationally in the midst of such complexity, this complexity and the multiple contradictions, conflicts of interest and ruptures of sense-making logics is the catalyst from relatively ongoing shifts from skilled coping into different levels of conscious attention and deliberation – defending the key hypothesis of this thesis: that conscious deliberative mental states arise in response to environmental needs and not as a consistent, primary state of the human subject.

Chapter Five: Decision Making in Social Structures

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have been investigating the process by which we learn and internalise skills. I used examples of relatively bounded sets of adult skill learning such as learning to play an instrument, but the general transition from conscious attention to internalised second nature is, I suggest, more broadly applicable to the wider skills that are necessary to negotiate our particular physical and social environments. Traditionally skill learning has been thought of as a process which is under the control of the agentic subject. In this way, the learning of skills has been conceived to be enabled by the desires and discipline of a pre-existing agent, who itself generates the necessary commitment to learning and practice. This model may appear intuitive when we are speaking about the types of relatively-bounded skill sets that we may decide to commit to in adulthood, but focussing on these types of skills produces a problematically limited vision of skill internalization. The way in which our brains and bodies cooperate to internalise skill sets to the extent that a subject does not depend upon conscious attention to enact them suggests, I propose, that these skills are the fundamental components of, rather than the effects of, the emergent sense of agency that we experience.

Internalised skill sets are drawn upon to produce adaptive, context-specific action. Our brains and bodies cooperate to internalise skillsets to the extent that a subject does not depend upon conscious attention to enact them. When actions are internalised to this extent, in the masterful sense we explored in the previous chapter, they can be performed as quick as a reflex (Sutton et al. 2011: 80), operating without recourse to executive function. Yet, crucially, these actions are acutely context sensitive (ibid), not only to the physical environment and to conceptual techniques, but to our particular socio-political context. A minimal claim here is that social interaction with the world, whether with objects, institutions or others, is characterised by affordances⁴² that emerge in the relationship between a subject and its environment. In previous chapters I have alluded to the extent that the social world is constitutive of mental life, including the experience of deliberation and control over action. In this chapter I want to tighten up my analysis and consider what a socially situated model of decision-making would look like, before moving on in the final chapter to discuss how I propose this kind of agency is able to effect social and structural change.

⁴² Defined as “what [the environment] offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes” in respect to what is available for an animal or subject to act in respect to (Gibson, 1979: 127).

The first section of the chapter will discuss the relationship between socialisation and agency in Archer's work, looking at how her conception of the subject's relationship to the world and to the socialisation process is based on self-aware, mental deliberation in the form of the internal conversation. I will explore the implications that this has for a notion of a socially-embedded subject, arguing that this model confines the influence of the social environment purely as aspects which a subject may consciously take into account while making decisions. I will contrast this notion with pro-social views of interaction which stand against neoliberal views of the subject as individualist, self-contained and self-oriented. I will then, in the second section of the chapter, put forward the case for socialisation and interaction to be seen in terms of implicit affordances as opposed to consciously held representations, and look at Gallagher's notion of mental institutions to provide a framework for a situated model of decision-making that does not rely solely on self-aware deliberation, but includes embodied, skilful and socio-politically context-sensitive action in an on-going manner.

5.1.1. The Generative Subject: Archer's Internal Conversation

For Archer, subjectification practices stemming from social, political and economic structures compose the *content* of rational thought, but she maintains that agency emerges internally to the individual and is independent from further socialisation. Archer has a particularly limited position on the role of social discourse in reflexive social interaction, where she regards social interactions as attendants and informants to reflexivity (i.e. providing the content for, a style in which people make decisions; Burkitt, 2012: 463) but nevertheless as relatively autonomous to agency itself (Vogler, G. 2016: 72). For Archer, interaction with others and with social forces is not direct, but is mediated by (or always could be mediated by) internal, self-aware, reflexive deliberation, primarily in the form of what she terms the 'internal conversation'. In this section I will explain how the notion of agency as a mediator between Archer's conception of the autonomous agentic subject and external social phenomena relies on a notion of the subject as generative of, but not generated by, the social environment, and how this notion itself is tied to persistent socio-political ideals.

Archer's account of the internal conversation is primarily an account of the phenomena of self-aware reflexivity in the form of deliberation (Walsh, 2016: 74), and is reminiscent of "what Descartes called 'introspection' and Locke [calls] 'reflection'." (Archer, 2015: 21). She describes this conscious deliberation, the kind of internal voice inside our heads that we hear when thinking through problems, as the confluence of social discourse and autonomous, agentic reflexivity (Archer 2015: 123). Under this conceptualisation, the deliberative state includes both the conscious examination of belief systems including those taken from social practices, and intention formation including the directed control relative to those intentions. The model of agency that Archer envisages here is almost entirely linear. Individuals

formulate intentions through conscious deliberation to define their 'ultimate concerns': the goals, practices, and values which they find most pressing (2007: 42). With these ultimate concerns in mind, the subject goes about planning a course of action, or 'projects' which they envisage best enables them to achieve these goals and these are translated into a series of practices, which then go on to affect or elaborate social structures.

Figure 8: Archer's basic schema for the social role of reflexivity in social change

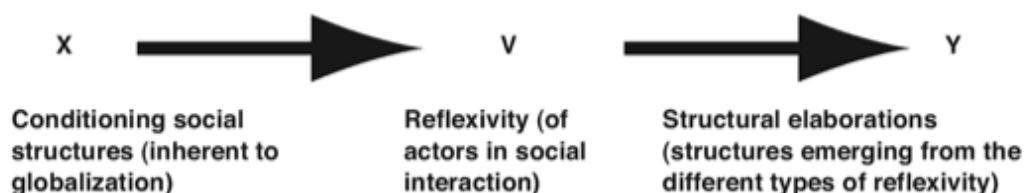


Fig 8. Archer's model of reflexivity: seen as a mediator over social structures, leading to their elaboration.

(Donati, P. in Archer, 2010: 146)

Archer defines reflexivity as the “regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal⁴³ people, to consider themselves to their (social) contexts and vice versa.” (2007: 4). Here, reflexivity is characterised by the internal conversation within explicit conscious, self-aware, representational thought (2007: 2). Intention formation and enaction here are conceptualised as both deliberative and consistently self-aware. Rumination, the internal, mental imagination of possibilities for Archer is the key to intention formation and to decisive agentic intervention. In this model, a subject deliberates possible trajectories for action and potential consequences before deciding upon and initiating a course of action. Here there is little space for non-deliberated action, agency is seen to be the mediator between self and society and must, for Archer, be always on hand.

Archer's conception of reflexivity in this sense is a direct critique of Giddens and Beck's hypothesis of reflexivity (Archer, M. 2007: 30-32; Donati P. in Archer M. 2010: 146). Giddens (1994) and Beck (1992) contend that reflexivity is a practice which transcends self-monitoring, and is fundamentally related to institutional and structural changes in society. Giddens' structuration theory, most iconically, argued for a weaker version of dualism than Archer's, whereby agency and structure were conceived of as two sides of the same coin. Similar to Archer, Giddens holds that structure is dependent on human agency in order to evolve, and that those structures are enabling and constraining upon an individual's agency. This is where the similarities end however, as Giddens goes on to argue for a movement

⁴³ It is unclear what Archer means by normal here, whether it is to mean neurotypical, to suggest the absence of pathologies, or to suggest that this is the 'correct' way in which relation to social contexts should be done.

away from looking for innate composite elements of individual human agency to focus on shared social practices which shape the subject in an on-going matter in accordance with shifting social systems. Archer sees this kind of stance as central-conflationist (see the reading of the literature which I described in chapter one), holding that his understanding of this structuring enablement and constraint is too deeply involved in his conception of the subject, leaving too little room for the autonomous objective-rational human subject.

Following Archer, Donati describes an emphatic or radical form of functional reflexivity that causes a “further disembedding from structural, positional and situational constraints” (Donati, in Archer, M. 2010: 158) through an increasing individualisation of a subject’s world-view and an abstraction from (and therefore relative immunity from) communal forms of reflexivity such as shared belief systems and practices (ibid). I will return to this thought in the second section of this chapter, as I believe there is a type of positive feedback loop of dissociation from cultural belief systems that requires investigation. For now, I want to merely concentrate on how Archer regards such a process to be a result of and catalysed by internal reflexivity⁴⁴.

Archer seeks to defend the notion of the primacy of innate autonomy and irreducible coherence of the subject prior to and outside of interaction with the social environment. Personal development for Archer is constituted through this reflexive internal conversation where information is considered in terms of the individual’s own goals and priorities. Social discourses may be integrated into a subject’s belief system only through reflexive consideration, and her presupposition is that any part of those discourses may be resurrected and reflected upon at any given point. This position is a direct result of Archer’s view that we discussed in chapter four, that reflexivity is a characteristic of agency, and that agency itself is inherent to the subject and stands sufficiently independently from social discourses to objectively reason and decide upon which aspects are relevant or not to their ongoing, consciously-held goals.

In Donati’s model shown in figure 8, Archer’s model of agency appears as a linear system. I suggest that if we are to look at the process of reflexivity as Archer describes it, reflexivity provides a feedback loop to incorporate or reject new/reconsidered information. Archer states that reflexivity (R), is an emergent property of agency (A). Reflexivity, for Archer, is solely responsible for intention formation (IF) and control over action (CoA), and while belief systems (BS) are formed through social interaction, they exist within the conscious sphere of

⁴⁴ Whereas I will go on to argue that such a feedback loop will not occur unless the subject is presented with sufficient contradiction of sufficient importance that they are not able to be held in functional cognitive dissonance.

reference and are ultimately accessible to full consideration and deliberation. I suggest, therefore a visual representation of Archer's model that includes my proposed extension:

Figure 9: Agentic control over action via conscious deliberation

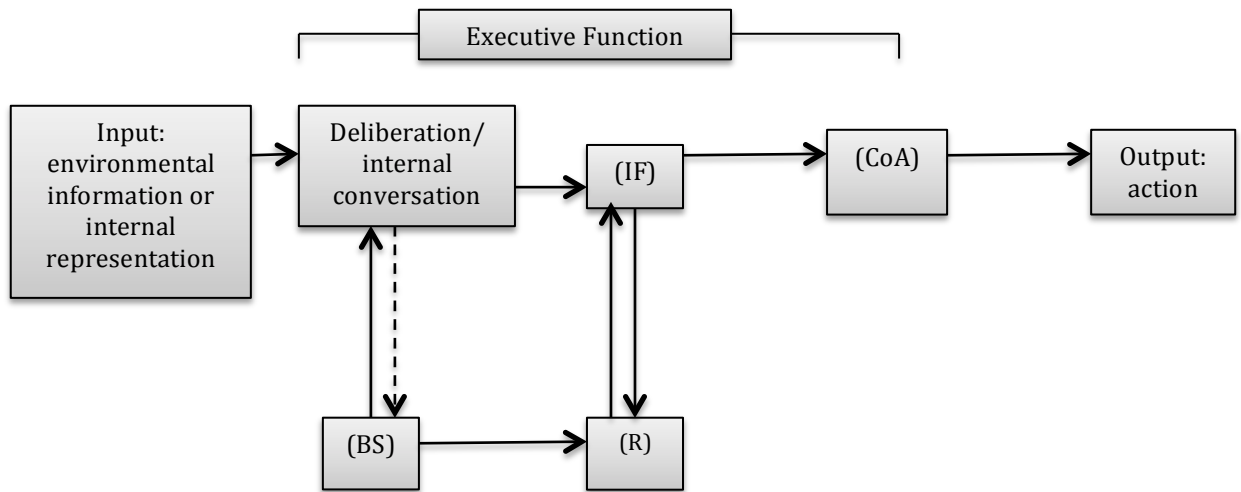


Fig 9. An elaboration of Archer's linear model that I propose must include a feedback loop between intention formation, reflexivity, belief system and the internal conversation.

Since for Archer the subject is the locus of an innate agentic capacity, both intention formation and reflexivity (which Archer sees as composed in the self-aware internal conversation) are seen as inherent emergent properties of that capacity. Under this understanding, control over action occurs through the agent forming intentions which are compared against belief systems, and go on to guide further action according to those consciously held intentions. In this conception, every stage of this process is conscious and self-aware, meaning that all relevant elements of social and systemic discourse are accessible to conscious assessment. To this end, Archer conceptualises social structures as quintessentially external to the self and to the processes of consideration and deliberation that, in her hypothesis, go on to form intentions and their corresponding actions. In this way Archer insists on the fundamental autonomy of the reflexive subject position from structural processes. Commitment to this autonomy means that while the reflexive subject may take into account information from the external world, it is sufficiently separate as to be able to approach this information objectively, and rationalise about it. Since agency and the process of reflexivity are seen to be self-sufficient and pre-exist interaction with the world, social discourse and the structuring constituents of society are conceptualised as information to be considered as opposed to formative elements of the decision-making process. Concisely, social structures for Archer are conceived of as the content, rather than the form, of conscious thought.

This is a persistent idea that is not exclusive to Archer. Social context, along with the ideologies and technologies of that context has often been seen to provide content over the top of, or as Clark puts it as a “wrap around” (2003: 86) to a pre-existing and fixed human nature of which inherent agency or will of the subject is part. Much like the Cartesian dualism which we saw continually reasserted through language and conceptual systems, these ideas remain where the models themselves have been largely disregarded. Again, much like the standard conception of the Cartesian dualism, dependence on the notion of free will as the mediating factor of social organisation is deeply integrated into the ways in which theorists go about thinking about the nature of agency: its structure, form and where it resides. As Gallagher explains:

“Those who defend free will also often appeal to processes that are in the head (intention formation, reflective decision-making, or the phenomenological sense of agency, e.g., Pacherie 2008, Stephens and Graham 2000), or to mental causation, (Searle 1983, Lowe 1999). These approaches – whether they dismiss or defend the notion of free will – follow a traditional view that conceives of self-agency (or the lack of it) as a matter of individual subjectivity. Free will is either in the individual system or it is not. Even those theories that take social phenomena into account often use the individual as a measure of whether free will exists.”

(Gallagher, 2011: 66)

This is not limited only to social theory, and in the rest of this section I want to explore its persistence in philosophical argument. In his critique of Clark and Chalmers’ extended mind hypothesis, the proposal that mental processes are supported (or even partially constituted) by processes and technologies outside of the brain and body, Protevi notes that even here there remain persistent elements of individualism, which I have noted also persist in Archer’s notion of the internal conversation model of action (2009: 29-30). This might be surprising as contrary to the model that Archer aligns with, whereby mental processes are thought to be located within the head, the extended mind hypothesis suggests that cognition is (at least sometimes) constituted through and in relation to the physical and symbolic objects in our environment.

The key here, is that despite the conception of mental processes being enabled by a scaffold of tools and technologies that exist externally to any one subject, the extended mind hypothesis in this original form remains tied to a notion of internalism. While the extended mind hypothesis, as the name suggests, argues that cognition involves much more than what goes on inside our skulls, the parity principle (Clark and Chalmers, 1998: 8) which is used to define what constitutes an extended mental system, reflects a minimally internalist

view. The parity principle considers the type of thought processes which *can* go on entirely inside our heads as the benchmark of what can be considered to be ‘true’ cognition. Many of the critics of the parity principle, at least in this early proposal of the hypothesis, have read it to mean that an extended cognitive process must be recognisable as such by those traditional standards.⁴⁵ This means that if we were able to imagine the process occurring entirely in the head then it may contend to be a mental extension even if it in practice offloads mental load onto external tools and technologies and draws upon those technologies in order to enable certain types of internal mental processes:

“If, as we confront some task, a part of the world functions as a process which, were it to go on in the head, we would have no hesitation in recognizing as part of the cognitive process, then that part of the world is ... part of the cognitive process.”

(Clark and Chalmers, 1998: 8)

Clark and Chalmers propose that mental offloading onto external tools and technologies is an integral part of certain types of cognition. As technologies develop, the affordances for the expansion of mental processes that they provide make available types of mental processes that are not able to continue should those technologies cease to exist:

“An individual required to make judgments about the legitimacy of certain arrangements interacts with the legal institution and forms a coupled system in a way that allows new kinds of behaviour to emerge. Take away the external part of this cognitive process—take away the legal institution—and “the system’s behavioural competence will drop, just as it would if we removed part of its brain”

(Clark and Chalmers, 1998: 9).

They explain this as a type of positive feedback loop or ‘bootstrapping haven’ (2003: 8), whereby the types of mental processes made available by the improvement of technologies go on to further improve those technologies. This phenomenon is not simply limited to tangible tools and technologies that we can physically see and hold. Rather than the availability of portable notebooks which enable us to work out lengthy mathematical constructs that we would not be able to hold entirely in our own heads being the critical key to the expansion of mental processing (Clark and Chalmers, 1998: 8), for Gallagher the

⁴⁵ Clark and Chalmers themselves do not suggest that this can be inferred from the parity principle, stating that if a thing going on in the world were to have gone on in the head and we would have called it cognitive, then the extended process is cognitive too. While critics such as Rupert (e.g. 2009) do infer from this that therefore all extended cognitive processes must be like internal processes, this is found in the work of critics rather than the original work.

intangible systems of language and algebra are also to be treated as bootstrapping technologies.

As I will discuss in the coming section, Gallagher expands the extend mind hypothesis to include cultural and social symbolic resources as well as the tangible, more traditional, tools and technologies that Clark and Chalmers describe. Yet even here, the extend mind hypothesis retains a model of the mind as fundamentally separate from, with interactive capacities which precede, the informational content provided by external physical and conceptual technologies. Despite the extension of some mental processes into the environment, there remains a generic universal subject which possesses internal capacities for action of the type I critiqued in chapters two and three, which underlies and remains relatively stable in relation to that extension. We are still left with our model of the generative subject:

“by relegating the cultural to a storehouse of heuristic aids for an abstract problem-solver who just happens to be endowed with certain affective cognition capacities which enable it to interact successfully with the people and cultural resources to which it just happens to have access.”

(Protevi, J. 2009b: 29-30).

Protevi locates the problem of this persistent spectre of the inherent generative subject as a problem of insufficient analysis as to the synchronic variation, diachronic development and political categorisation of those subjects (2009b: 8)⁴⁶. Modelling mental processes in terms of a universal generic subject, essentially treating all subjects as the same, leads to an illusion of certain cognitive processes and capacities as existing outside of a social context and therefore as existing inherently to the brain, mind and body. I suggest this is precisely the logical trap which Archer falls in to in social theory. We are left with a model of subjectivity where the subject itself is seen as the generative causal mechanism for mental processes such as reflexivity, where reflexivity then appears as an objective capacity which the subject ‘just so happens to have access to’ which is able to mediate incoming information and outgoing deliberated action. Before I develop how the subject positions which the extended mind hypothesis and Archer both take to be universal must themselves be socially and politically constituted, I want to spend some time showing how the notion of the universal subject is itself tied to a particular socio-political ideological apparatus that persists within the cultural context from which these theorists are speaking.

⁴⁶ I will return to these ideas in greater detail in chapter six, but they are worth noting here as an indication of the direction in which we are going.

5.1.2. The Generative Subject as a Neoliberal Condition

In chapter two I looked at the way in which notions of the abstract subject and agency as an inherent power of that subject were consolidated in the set of concepts and postulates that compose neoliberalism. In that chapter, I challenged the assumption which is latent in much social theory that the phenomenological experience, or the 'sense', of agency is universal. Before looking at the distinct ways in which a subject and their mental processes are thoroughly composed in relation to their specific set of social and political conditions, I want to show how sets of logic about the nature of the subject are pervasive to particular neoliberal belief systems: seemingly establishing egotistic individualism as the basal state of human nature.

While neoliberalism frames individualism as a timeless essential truth through this appeal to human nature, the notion of seeing oneself as unique, with idiosyncratic desires, aspirations and properties was not as extensive prior to the eighteenth century (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016: 2). While there were notions of a soul or essence of a human life and consciousness, a person's identity was thought to be constituted in terms of relationships and allegiances, such as kinship, country, religion and monarch as opposed to an inimitable selfhood (Bloch 1940; Bynum 1980; Springer 2016: 2). Eagleton-Pierce's historical analysis describes the popularisation of individuality as distributed and complex, but locates the fall of feudalism and the associated weakening of ordering structures of society as important contributing factors in the emphasis on individual subjects. The declining influence of the church and monarchic hierarchies, combined with weakening kinship structures, as improved transportation and changing economic structures which were shifting towards capitalism and the industrial revolution, led to break ups of communities as younger members moved to cities in search of employment. The fracturing of situated groups sharing affinities may have contributed to a weakening of the logic which framed subjects predominantly in terms of their inherited associations (Williams 1976), and towards the particularities and multiplicities of association experienced by particular subjects relative to others.

The stabilisation of this approach to selfhood may have then become necessary in order to support the changing structures of the economic system. Ideas of individualism became attached to notions of free enterprise and a philosophy of natural rights and self-advancement (Lukes, 1976: 23)⁴⁷. In so doing, freedom of choice became synonymous with agency and decision-making in a far more pervasive and extensive manner. Dissociated from (and considered to have authority over) the structural circumstances in which a subject

⁴⁷ It is important to note that this was not a linear nor a universal progression. Even within Europe there were disparities and criticisms of burgeoning logics of individualism. Popular opinions in France related the rise of individualistic thinking with a tendency to privilege small-scale and unimportant difficulties over transcendent societal interests and the greater good. Similarly, individualism has been utilised both to defend and to critique capitalism, as seen in a comparison of the works of Hayek and Marx.

finds themselves embedded within, concepts of internal deliberation as objective and exaggerated notions of personal responsibility are framed in the terms of a natural state. As a result, free choice and personal responsibility become framed in terms of work ethic, shifting responsibility for living and working conditions away from governments and company managers on to workers themselves. Such a shifting of responsibility for living conditions and social circumstances into the private realm, indeed the mental realm, of the individual, combined with expanding choice over career, location, family structure and identity, placed greater demands on reflexive deliberation and rationalisation. Protevi explains that rational egoist behaviour is conditioned and maintained by those institutions that create an “artificially imposed scarcity” (Protevi, 2017: 1), undermining the logic of cooperation and unionism in favour of internal conflict and personal competition between workers themselves⁴⁸.

In order to do so, such systems rely upon perpetuating a notion of that conflict as not merely natural, but as *the* natural state of human behaviour and desires. The logics of what Eagleton-Pierce terms the ‘spirit’ of Neoliberalism (presumably in the tradition of Weber’s *Spirit of Capitalism*), are distributed schemas of justification which capitalize on marketizing such conflict (Springer et al. 2016: 2). Crucially this involves a notion of the subject which is reminiscent of the subjects portrayed in social contract theory as formulated in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: as warlike, competitive and self-oriented in the absence of structured governance. As Ostrom explains: “*Leviathan is alive and well in our policy textbooks. The state is viewed as a substitute for the shortcomings of individual behaviour and the presumed failure of community*” (Ostrom 2005: 254). Under this model, which assumes rational egoists are the basic units of society, social governance must be designed in terms of individual rewards and costs. But for Protevi this logic is the wrong way around (2017: 1). Rather than rational egoists needing to develop and institutionally enforce pro-social behaviours, it is pro-sociality itself which gives rise to rationality. Where rational egotists presume that cooperation develops out of necessity from otherwise self-oriented individualised actors, Protevi and Gallagher suggest that sociality is the preferred state of action, and that it is individualism that is a learned phenomenon.

While the social contract model of organisation has given way to more self-organisational approaches, it relies upon a notion of mind and self-aware consciousness as preceding social organisation, and to an extent this notion has not fully subsided. This presumption of

⁴⁸ Protevi gives a nice example of how this process continues by both being the aim and the justification of capitalist systems through naturalisation by using the case of the commercialisation of higher education: “*converting universities from a generational time-scale tax-payer supported common good aimed at the development of epistemic and civic virtue to an individual up-front tuition-driven and student-major-evaluated employment certification factory, thus pitting student against student and department against department (Satz and Frerejohn 1995); such produced behaviour is then held to justify the assumption (“aha, I told you people are naturally competitive!”).*” (referenced to Ostrom, 2005, appendices G and H)

the agent as precedent is invoked both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, as the basis of political and social interaction on the one hand and as the basic state upon which socialisation is imprinted. This results in a prevalent model of the mind in the social sciences such as that utilised in rational choice theory, where the content of the mind is influenced by social discourses and structures, but the mind itself, its structure and form pre-exists and remains unchanged in the face of socialisation.

When self-oriented behaviour is characterised as the basal human state, pro-social behaviour is seen as developing through coercion of circumstance: through necessity, to satisfy some desire within ourselves, or through enforcement of overarching law. Holding that rational, individualist subjects are the basic building blocks of society relies upon the assumption that actors and their behaviours pre-exist and exist independently from their political and social structures. Under this way of thinking, we then need “to know under what conditions people deviate from selfish rationality” (Frey et al., 2010, cited by Protevi, J. 2017: 1) in order to understand human behaviour, rather than consider whether a socio-political environment may be creating the conditions, such as the artificially imposed scarcity which Protevi references (ibid), under which humans deviate from a fundamental pro-social drive.

The literature surrounding the biological and bio-social impetus for pro-sociality, cooperative behaviour and altruism is vast, complex, interdisciplinary and nuanced, far exceeding the available attention I am able to grant it here. It is worth noting however that such work suggests that empathy and cooperation are fully involved in and pre-exist conscious concepts and experiences of selfhood (de Waal and Suchack, 2010; Tomasello, 2001). As Protevi summarises:

“Prosociality or other-directed care and cooperation, even at a cost to the agent, is our evolutionary heritage; it is an adaptation; it helped our ancestors and can help us if we let it. It was and is so wide-spread as to have been, and continue to be, the oft-overlooked glue of society. It is the social condition.”

(Protevi, 2017: 1)

Hypotheses as to why such an instinct towards cooperation has developed, alongside the chemical ‘rewards’ of dopamine for engaging in such behaviour (Spreckelmeyer et al. 2009; Kelley and Berridge, 2002; Insel, 2003; Aharon et al. 2001; Rademacher et al. 2010, Izuma et al, 2008, Krach, 2010), include the need for human social groups to maintain mutually beneficial practices within widening social groups (Dunbar, 1998; Adolphs, 2003) that exhibit decreasing levels of genetic relatedness. In this way more general impetuses for cooperation compensate for the reduction in the instinctive familial protection which are often seen as rationales for empathy, by widening our parameters for empathy and group-orientation to

include non-related members. Bartal et al. (2014) found that rats would extend pro-social behaviour, including attempting to free another rat from a humane trap, if the free rat had been raised with others with similar colourings or attributes to the trapped rat. This was found to be the case regardless of the colouring and genetic attributes of the free rat itself. Positive pre-exposure to intra-group difference widened the scope of what a singular rat would be empathetically compelled to altruistically assist (i.e. for no benefit of their own). Familial cooperation and pro-sociality, if that is the impetus for prosociality, therefore appears to be flexible so as to include members of genetically different others in the face of positive socialisation.

What this suggests is that proto-empathic identification is not dependent upon a pre-existing, internal conception of selfhood and individual identity, but on the social experience of the animal (Bartal et al, 2014) to the extent that “strain identity is meaningless without social experience during development” (ibid: 7). Bartal found that rats who were adopted and raised in families of different colourings or genetic heritage did not display familial proto-empathic behaviour towards rats of their own colouring, suggesting that socialisation rather than intrinsic instinct was the key factor. This suggests that empathy and pro-social behaviour is motivated by sensory cues of group categories that are learned through the rat’s socialisation rather than chunked instinctive impetus. The rat needs no conception of selfhood in order to stimulate pro-social behaviour, and neither aesthetics nor genetics appears to play a role that would suggest self-identity being a factor in relationships to others. Mason explains “there is no mirror in nature ... they are not born with an idea of who they are, and therefore who they should help.” (Mason, 2014 interview a), “... So what they see forms their identity” (Mason, 2014 interview b). The others in the social group that the rat is raised with compose the forms of social interaction and proto-empathic identification the rat will then exhibit, and this empathy, altruism and understanding of others operates *without* an internal understanding of self-identity which exists separately from the social group in the way in which we understand reflexive conscious human identity.

This suggests an important criticism of the idea that individuals are rational egotists, with prosocial behaviour accordingly seen as something which develops in order to protect one’s own genetic lineage. The flexibility of such prosocial behaviours to include non-genetic-group members, possibly as a result of rising populations, increased exposure to difference and increasing social complexity, suggests that pro-sociality, empathy and altruism may be far more fundamental behavioural drivers than pure individual gain/cost motivators as explained by genetic safeguards. Secondly, the correlation between sociological factors, such as exposure to diversity and the level of flexibility observed in any one individual suggests that there is more going on than the pure intrinsic nature of an individual subject. Rather, the social environment of the rats has a direct effect upon the type and extent of pro-

social behaviour they exhibit. Observing pro-social behaviours and exhibitions of proto-empathetic acts existing independently from full deliberative self-awareness, brings into question whether the basic constituent elements of morality, empathy and sociality can be seen as effects of an objective, rational agent (Rowlands, M. 2015). Rethinking empathy and affect to be direct and immediate as opposed to things we need to consciously decide to enact, causes us to rethink the structure of social interaction to consider what role such conscious decision-making plays in our understanding of and responses to others.

5.2.1. Affordances over Unconstrained Choice

“If, in thinking about action and agency, we need to look at the most relevant pragmatic level, that level is not the level of mental or brain states. We shouldn’t be looking exclusively inside the head. Rather, embodied action happens in a world that is physical and social and that often reflects perceptual and affective valences, and the effects of forces and affordances that are both physical and social. Notions of agency and intention, as well as autonomy and responsibility, are best conceived in terms that include social effects. Intentions often get co-constituted in interactions with others – indeed, some kinds of intentions may not be reducible to processes that are contained exclusively within one individual. In such cases, the sense of agency is a matter of degree – it can be enhanced or reduced by physical, social, economic and cultural factors.”

(Gallagher, S., in Clark, A., Kiverstein, J., & Vierkant, T., 2013: 132)

When we say that options are contextually formulated independently of a subject’s volition, the emphasis lies in the word volition itself. The proposition is not that choices are offered to a subject from their environment in a deterministic sequence, but that the environment offers possibilities for action in relation to the particular needs, dispositions and meaningful relationships that subject has with that environment. As introduced in the previous chapter, the term affordance is used to describe the ways in which an environment provides possibilities for action according to the particular niche which a subject inhabits. Affordances are fundamentally relational, as in they are not inherent qualities which are intrinsic to a particular object or concept. Originally developed within ecological psychology, the case is being increasingly made that the term is applicable to the socio-cultural environment as well as the purely physical (Bruineberg, J. et al. 2018; Chemero 2009; Gallagher 2011; Reed 1996; Rietveld and Kiverstein, 2014). The same environmental structure, object or concept may provide substantially different affordances to different subjects depending on their capabilities, meaningful environment, goals, social position, belief-systems or cultural tendencies.

When observing a subject within their environment who is making choices about that environment with the logics that environment has provided, the existence of free will and agentic independence can appear intuitive: 'of course that subject is making free choices about their actions, we can see them doing so'. However, the embeddedness of that subject within their situational context, and the level of adaptation that the subject has undergone to negotiate that particular environment, has in the same move become invisible to us. The choices that they are making, and the structures and discursive roles that makes those choices meaningful are prematurely spliced so that the conceptual apparatus, and situation logics of opportunity involved in those choices are taken for granted, shifting the focus of decision-making solely onto the actor. Gallagher proposes that it is a conceptual shift that is needed in order to combat this premature separation of agency and context:

"[W]e can conceive of self-agency in different terms by conceiving of the agent as something other than an individual who either has or does not have free will. If we view the agent as someone who emerges from intercorporeal interactions, and develops in social interactions with others, then we have a good model for speaking about self-agency in a system that is not reducible to a simple individual. On this model, self-agency – and a proper sense of freedom (which comes along with a proper sense of responsibility) – can be found only in the context of social interaction, where our intentions are formed in or out of our interactions with others."

(Gallagher, 2011: 67)

A considerable objection to the over-emphasis of representational thought is that it fails to account for the phenomenological aspects of existing in a fully embodied and embedded context. These types of objections such as those put forth by Kind (2014), pose that the type of intentionality which is conceptualised in discussions of representation fail to account for the complex interplay of different kinds of directedness towards one's own body, mind and world (both physical and social), granting too much power of objectivity to internal representational problem-solving whilst failing to adequately consider the influence of emotion, intersectional social roles and social narratives which form the content of that representation as well as the symbolic method by which that representation is managed, negotiated and 'solved' into a subsequent action. Gallagher (2011b) criticizes Clark and Chalmers's formulation of the extended mind hypothesis for its belief-desire psychology and its reliance on the apparatus of propositional attitudes, representations and intentional states that, as I discussed in the previous section, depends on a notion of the generative and autonomous subject. This original form of the extended mind hypothesis assumes a model of the mind that Gallagher holds it should instead be challenging. For Gallagher, minds, along with the sense of agency, emerge in dynamic, relational interactions between subjects

and their environments. For Gallagher this means rethinking autonomy away from an “all or nothing” dichotomy to something that a subject may experience to a greater or lesser extent depending on their particular position within their context.

We can think of this in terms of the instrument analogy I used in the previous chapter. Once a musician has internalised a substantial enough set of skills, scales, chords, arpeggios, hammer-ons and tone control for example they become able to play their instrument in a manner that seems inaccessible to greener musicians. When improvising while ‘jamming’, such a musician is able to interpret the music being played by others in an ongoing fashion, responding to the changes in key and tempo with seemingly impossible accuracy, composing their own music on the fly. We can say that they are exhibiting agency by the definition of experiencing both control and authorship over their actions because they are the ones who are composing the music as they go. However, can we say that they are *deciding* what to play? In such a case, the skilful and creative acts seem to predominantly by-pass conscious consideration, responding to external information in what many musicians refer to as ‘feeling’ the music, predicting future changes on the fly and bouncing off one another. While jamming, or performing group improvisation, musicians are at once perfectly in control of their on-going action and sometimes experiencing no conscious control at all. The pre-learned internalised skills are accessed and performed so readily in response to changing environmental cues that the subject does not have time to deliberate, plan or intentionally access specific ideas or skills. But this is not deterministic in any way, the music is being *composed* on the fly. While guided by internalised rule sets and pre-learned skill patterns, the experience is entirely different from the performance of a song learned by rote. In jamming the construction of the song is both immediate and purely novel and creative.

Crucial in this example is the co-existence of control and authorship over action with the absence of the executive rationalisation that is traditionally considered central to true agency or free will. The senses of control and authorship are informed by sets of pre-learned skills, patterns and musical logics that have been learned from others, and are being practiced by others in the same way at the same time. Despite playing different instruments, jamming could not work if the multiple participants were following different logics. The group creativity which occurs in-the-moment is dependent upon a shared language of practice and of a shared understanding which allows each participant to read and predict one another’s trajectory and respond efficiently and appropriately.

This shared language or logic composes a series of action-possibilities. From each note that is played, a musician can intuitively deduce from the key, style and tempo of the music a series of potential future notes and their rhythm, that would sound congruent to the piece. The possibilities of these future notes are not only dependent upon the level of experience

and skill of the player, but also on the style within which they are playing and the knowledge of the potential future movements of the other players involved. All of this situational knowledge combines with the individual skill of each musician to continually inform the sense of what future actions are appropriate, what movements would work. Action possibilities in this way are not entirely 'free': certain actions would not 'work' or make sense within a particular piece or particular context, causing disharmony that could not only disrupt their own performance, but the flow of the others involved as well. As a result, for the experienced player or social subject, some possibilities may not even be proffered as a potential (it would not occur to such a musician to switch to a key that would produce disharmony). Such action-possibilities are already shaped by the context and the experience of the actor before they can be experienced as possibilities, whether in conscious self-aware thought or as more ready-to-hand intuitive possibilities as in the case of jamming. Importantly for Gallagher however, is the explicit acknowledgement that such possibilities, having been informed by internalised skills and logics, are not inherently created inside the mind, but are learned from others and from the technical conceptual apparatus that a subject has acquired through practice (Gallagher 2011: 67). He continues:

“What we call autonomy, then, is not constituted in just an internal intra-individual negotiation made by an agent with respect to herself, but is inextricably interwoven into and out of our relationships with others. In this regard, self-agency becomes a matter of degree rather than an all or nothing issue.”

(Gallagher, 2011: 68)

This is not to say that certain social relationships are coercive so that an individual is prevented from acting freely despite the desire to. This kind of situation is of course common, but it is not what is under consideration here. Rather than coercion or the type of roles or responsibilities whereby a subject feels compelled to perform in a certain way in order to fulfil moral obligations despite being able to conceive of alternative courses of action, here we are talking about the subtle types of institutional conditions whereby actions and performative relationships are considered common sense and performed interactively and on-the-fly in an on-going and pre-reflective manner in a similar way to our jamming musicians.

Gallagher explains that we cannot choose whether or not to engage in interaction. It is something that we are always, already a part of, and something that has always already partially constituted us (2011: 63). We do not 'decide' to engage in social interaction in the type of way that theorists such as Archer would see as fundamentally agentic, because it is already there before “anything like a decision is even possible.” (ibid). The experience of possessing agency is phenomenologically complex: “involving different levels of experience,

from the basic aspects of sensory-motor processing (e.g. Farrer et al. 2003; Tsakiris and Haggard 2005; Tsakiris, Bosbach, and Gallagher 2007) to the higher levels of intention formation and retrospective judgement (e.g. Pacherie 2006, 2007; Stephens and Graham 2000; Synofzik, Vosgerau, and Newen 2008; Gallagher 2007)” (Gallagher, S. in Clark et al. 2013: 118). All of these levels themselves are subject to greater and lesser extents of awareness, or may operate without attentive oversight at all.

Decisions are not only made using self-aware deliberation. We are making skilled and informed judgements about our interactions continually as we move through the world, using greater or lesser amounts of cognitive work and greater and lesser degrees of conscious attention. In many cases, the terms deliberation and decision may be too strong for the type of more direct decisions that unfold in an ongoing dynamic environment, despite their association with focussed conscious attention, but those negotiations are no less skilful. Utilising deeply internalised understandings and behaviours that create an entire logic of action and interaction, we are able to engage reflexively with dynamic interactions even as multiple affordances are presented. The choices between these multiple possible trajectories for action are felt out context-sensitively. The social and cultural logics of interaction, including the complex interplay of roles and identities are masterfully negotiated, flexible to changing context and so instantaneous that such action can be experienced as second nature, instinct or as expressions of personal identity, whilst remaining engaged, direct and complex in and of themselves. However, much like our musicians, the ability to successfully navigate such complex unfolding interactions is dependent upon sufficient expertise, and is characterised by non-reflective, pre-reflexive senses of control and authorship.

Despite not being deliberative, intentionality, directionality and cognitive authorship are present. What this means is that self-agency, the control and authorship which is experienced within and over our own actions, is constituted differently according to the particular relations and situational context in which an action or series of action is taking place (Gallagher 2011: 68). Emphasising intersubjective interaction in this way, also means rejecting the notion that agency and individual will are internal to the individual mind, and reducible to neural or mental causation (Gallagher 2011: 68). Given that pro-social tendencies can be argued to be direct and immersive (i.e. not dependent upon mediation by self-aware cognitive processes), yet are also culturally and politically context sensitive, how can we theorise immediate and context-sensitive social action which is at once skilful and socially-literate and non-(at least not necessarily)-deliberative? Here I suggest we return to the models of skill acquisition we discussed earlier in the thesis.

5.2.2. Socially-skilled Coping

In the previous chapter I described the negative relationship we see between skill level and self-aware and deliberative conscious thought. The kind of intelligent yet pre-executive adaptive action, which Dreyfus terms skilled coping (2002, 2004a, 2004b), has been theorised to be the preferred state of an organism in action, even where conscious self-aware forms of action-control are available. Conscious, self-aware action control, of the type that Archer associates with agency, seems to be reserved for novel action: for the process of learning new skills or for adapting existing skill sets for novel and precarious conditions. In the previous chapter I began to sketch out a model of skilled coping, which accounts for the complexity of embedded and embodied intelligent action without throwing the proverbial baby of mindedness out with the bathwater of unremitting hierarchical executive control. There is no reason that mindedness, awareness of self and of trajectory, must be defined by and associated with the capacity to intervene in an action and assert direct executive control. Especially if, and where, there is no reason for such an intervention.

Where executive function does interact with internalised skill sets, it is often not merely as simple as exerting perfect control over the action. The control over action exhibited by the internalised skillset, often colloquially termed 'muscle memory', often competes with attempts by the self-aware forms of control to modify those movements. We can see this in situations where new techniques are applied to well internalised skills. Attempting to apply a new technique can result in a struggle against our own internalised embodied skill set, so that our body appears to undermine us, returning to old well-internalised methods even when we are concentrating hard on effecting change. Similar to the procedure outlined in the previous chapter, executive control is brought in to remember the new rules we are attempting to apply, but our bodies continue to tend towards the pre-existing model. We are at once mindful about the positioning of our bodies, applying conscious control over movements, but also aware of the struggle against the tendency to relapse into the old familiar way of doing things. This 'old familiar way' does not carry on unnoticed, we are aware of the movements and the bodily 'pull' towards that familiarity, it retains aspects of consciousness, mindfulness and attentiveness. We might for example, if we have recently moved house, drive safely and attentively yet nevertheless may autopilot our route to the house we no longer live in, realizing our mistake only when we pull up to a house that has the new tenant's cars parked in the driveway. On the other hand, interjection from executive function is not smooth and simple, the application of the technique is not simple merely because we understand it and are actively concentrating on it, rather it is a difficult process of gradual re-training.

There remains, in such action, a sense of authorship over action, and (except in cases of 'Netto', see Hoffding, 2014: 59), a sensation of control over action, even if that sensation is retroactively applied after-the-fact, as in cases of post-traumatic experiences such as Berserker rage (Protevi, 2008) or when our attention is retroactively drawn to an action completed habitually. Unlike the feeling of authorship, the phenomenological feeling of being the one who instigated the action and the one who those actions belong to, it is unclear as to the extent to which the feeling of agency and control may be influenced by the cultural weight placed upon individual autonomy.

This is not to say that explicit, self-conscious and considered action is not an important feature of social interaction, but that much like our models of skilled action discussed in chapter four, it is not the primary mode of interaction. The skills that are mastered by subjects in this case, however, are the social, political and economic discourses and logics which structure the worlds in which we are embedded and in which we act. These discourses, as they become internalised, contribute to our prediction about expected sensory data, and the production of perfectly context sensitive action and interaction, without and before explicit conscious consideration. Self-aware consciousness still exists, and still plays an important role, but it plays that role in the same way as practical skills such as playing instruments or sports is specifically for directed attention to the integration of relevant novel information and to problems and anomalies within learned responses. Protevi explains:

"The idea is this: in certain forms of political activity consciousness is not eliminated, but is rendered superfluous in prediction and manipulation. In certain conditions, it simply does not matter what one would "prefer" in some private interiority, since social constraints can be made strong enough to render the vast majority of actors predictable."

(Protevi, J. 2013: 111)

The intersection of specifically subject-oriented and context-sensitive affordances which arise in terms of the institutional environment, along with the subject's tendency towards skilled coping creates a world where subjects skilfully and context-sensitively negotiate their environments whilst avoiding unnecessary intervention by time and energy inefficient self-aware, conscious, and deliberative mental states. This is a very different picture of normative human action than Archer paints in her morphogenetic approach which we discussed in chapter one. Decision-making and attentive, situational consideration are here considered largely peripheral to on-going context-sensitive adaptive social action and interaction. Far from being deterministic, such a model is dynamic, sensitive, adaptive and pro-social. For

Gallagher, however, such an understanding of contextual adaptation is a basis for, and thoroughly constituent of, deliberative mental states, not opposed to them.

In the previous chapter, I raised the example of the non-consciously held rule sets for word order that structure our everyday language but that most speakers are never consciously aware of (Forsyth, M. 2014: 39). These kinds of structuring rules are rarely explicitly taught through childhood but are picked up through interaction and correction – usually not because of a consciously noted deviation from a known rule, but because deviation from those rules ‘sounds’ or ‘feels’ wrong. Alliance of behaviour or speech to these rules are encouraged and protected through correction, while the reason why we do it may never be consciously held. We do not necessarily know why we do these things, we only know deviation feels uncomfortable. The rules of structuring social organisation may be both internalised and inaccessible in a similar way.

Recalling the traditional model of agency in figure 9 (5.1.1.), agency is there seen to be an inherent quality of the subject. Under that model, the only necessary component needed for agentic decision-making is the subject itself. Social discourses and institutional structures enter the picture only as information which can be consciously drawn upon in the deliberative process and taken on or dismissed as the subject feels fit in order for them to accomplish their individual goals. Agency, if seen as both the deliberative mode of self-conscious decision-making *and* non-deterministic, adaptive and skillful but not necessarily self-aware sense of control and authorship in ongoing action, needs to account for the extent to which the socio-political discourses which are relevant to and internalised by the subject help to constitute those actions smoothly, skillfully and in such a way that is perfectly context sensitive to their own particular broader and immediate circumstances.

As socialisation occurs and the institutional structures of the particular social orders and worlds in which we inhabit are internalised, our methods of effectively and efficiently engaging with the world are sensitively refined to meet our needs within that world. In the next chapter I will describe in more detail how and in what ways the affordances for action which are available to us change in relation to our positionality within our socio-political systems. For now, I want to sketch out a preliminary model of how this approach looks in relation to ongoing context sensitive action and to self-aware deliberation within these institutional contexts. This model will then be developed in terms of positionality in the coming chapter where I will move on to discuss the emergence not just of structural stabilization but of conscious efforts towards structural change, and will consider anticipated criticisms and the further work which is necessary in developing an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to the structure/agency problem. This leads us to a model of agentic action which looks more like an ongoing accumulative feedback loop with the social

environment. Note that the traditional model of agency is part of the model, but the inherently agentic subject has been replaced by a wider system of integration and internalization of relevant information which produces the circumstances in which this particular form of agency (the self-aware deliberative stance) comes about.

Figure 10: Socially embedded action sequence

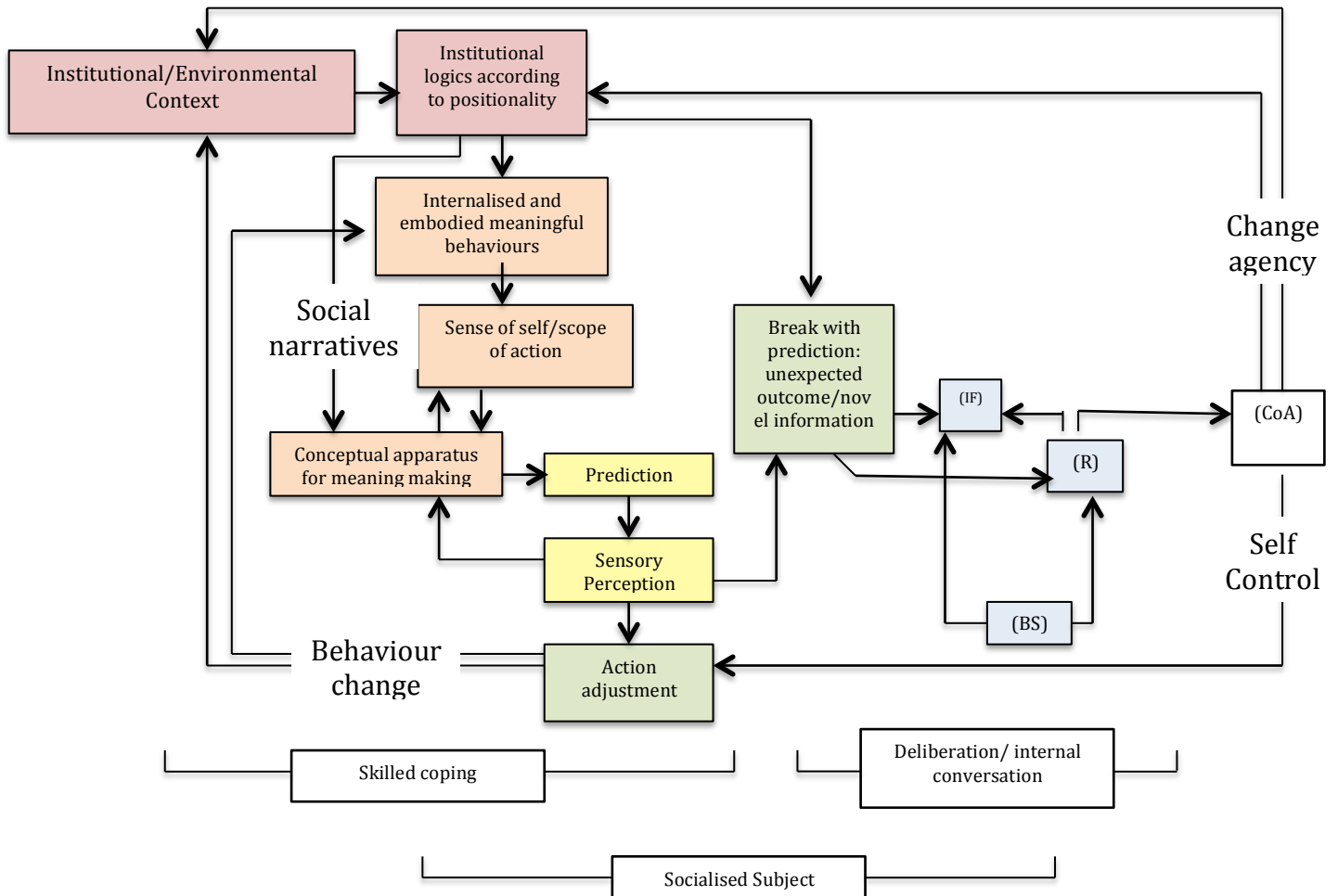


Fig 10. A suggestion as to what a socio-political model based on the premises of skilled coping might look like for use in the social sciences.

Key:

Red: socio-political structural and discursive context ;

Orange: embodied and internalised techniques/conceptual apparatus for thought and action ;

Yellow: predictive and perceptual pre-conscious negotiation of incoming information ;

Green: interaction between conscious conceptualisation and internalised concepts ;

Blue: deliberative rationalization and conscious decision making

It may be noted that unlike the first model of agency, the subject does not appear as a generative causal mechanism. In this model the subject is encapsulated by the whole ongoing process of internalization (orange), conscious-awareness (blue) and non-deliberative enaction and adaptation (yellow and green). Situational context (coded in red) interacts with the subject through the internalization of discourses and behaviours, and is itself adjusted through an adjustment of the subject's behaviour, whether that be through prediction/perception adjustment as seen in the discussion of Wolpert's work in chapter four, or through deliberative, self-aware control over action (which would typically be seen as agentic in a strong dualistic approach). The transition to self-aware deliberation is no longer understood to be under the agentic will of the subject (the problem of being agentic about what we are agentic about), but is seen as a response to situational contexts and information which cannot be adequately adjusted to using typical skilled coping mechanisms. Structural change is effected through changed behaviour, regardless of whether that behaviour is changed with the conscious awareness of the subject as in active resistance to socio-cultural and political norms, or by ongoing non-consciously determined (or non-representationally conscious) development and adaptation. Shifting structural discourses in turn are internalised or thrust into the subject's deliberative stance for conscious cognitive attention depending on how easily they are adopted into a subject's current adaptive skillset.

Clearly, mind is not something which can exist in its full and useful form independently from its structural context. While Archer would continue to argue for an analytic dualism of mind and structure, where agency is conceived for her as a purely mental process, such an analytic separation may only be useful insofar as understanding singular points of decision-making, but cannot be extended as an ontological account of the mind itself⁴⁹. As I discussed in chapter two, experiences of agency may be culturally and economically divergent, suggesting that the institutional environment, including the political system and economic structure that a person is embedded within may affect the way in which that person experiences the degree of scope for and affordances for action. Developing the theory of skill learning and skilled coping which I developed in the previous chapter, I argue that such differences are not necessarily solely the result of differing extents of restraint and control over a subject. Rather, I argue that a subject's social, political and economic environment enables opportunities or affordances for action in relation to that particular context. These affordances for action, I argue compose the form and not just the content of a subject's experience of agency and authorship over their actions.

⁴⁹ Archer claims that she does not do this, but for the reasons explained in chapter one, I hold that she does.

5.2.3. Mental Institutions

“Positing an abstract or generic subject neglects the way in which culture is the very process of the construction of bio-social subjects, so that access to certain cultural resources and to the training necessary to acquire certain forms of affective cognitive capacities is distributed along lines analyzable by political categories.”

(Protevi, J. 2013: 131-132)

Affordances for action emerge through the subject's relationship with their physical, social, political, cultural and economic environments. Unlike features of phenomenological perception however, affordances do not need to be recognized or conceptualised by the subject, and so they exist prior to the self-aware deliberative process, and as I will explain in the coming chapter, constitute the parameters of its content. Gallagher proposes that the institutional aspects of our social lives, the structures and mechanisms of social ordering which are materialised in practices, may operate in a much more similar way to physical objects in terms of affordances for action that they provide, and the relationship they have between skill level and attention.

Traditional approaches to social structures, as I have noted in chapter three and chapter four, conceive of them as the information which informs the content but not the form of human thought (the parameters I mentioned in the previous section). Under these approaches, the structure of human thought and the agentic process by which intentional actions are produced exist independently of the particularities of our social environments – so that the form of thinking and acting is universal, while the informational content which those processes interact with may differ. Modernist reasoning, which I referred to in chapters three and four, which theorised that skillsets must be coded into our brains in autonomous blocks, produced the assumption that greater adaptive abilities must entail more complex and greater amounts of information existing innately, allowing us to efficiently adapt to our specific environments. However, the ability to be able to adapt to the particularities of certain environments, rather than depending on more hardwiring may, as we discussed in chapter three, actually depend on less.

What this means is that the cognitive load of the particular information and logical systems that a subject will need to navigate their particular environment are carried in the environment itself rather than inside of pre-socialised infant brains. As socialisation occurs, this informational content (the logics, roles, conceptual apparatus and adaptive practices) are embodied and internalised so as to compose not just the content of thought, but the form and structure of the way the brain deals with information and the corporeal practices which communicate their specific meanings. Before I look at the way in which this process may

have extensive similarities with the process of skill internalisation I discussed in the previous chapter, I want to spend more time explaining how taking this strong position on the role of social structures in producing cognition entails a particular reconceptualisation of social structures themselves.

Gallagher and Cristafi challenge the notion of the separability and independence of cognitive functions and social environment. They argue that there are certain social structures and discourses which not only are drawn upon in order to achieve particular cognitive processes, but which are integrated to such an extent to be indispensable to them. They term such social practices and structures 'mental institutions' (Gallagher and Crisafi, 2009). The concept of mental institutions is the offspring of Gallagher's broader enactivist hypothesis the 'socially extended mind' which itself is a development of Clark and Chalmers' extended mind hypothesis. As described in the first section of this chapter, Gallagher proposes that the mind is fundamentally extended into the social world, not unilaterally via the effects of agentic actions as Archer might envisage, but in an ongoing relationship whereby certain features of human cognition are constituted by and dependent upon social and environmental structures. In their words, "they are not only institutions with which we accomplish certain cognitive processes, but also without which such cognitive processes would no longer exist. They are at least enabling conditions, and on the most liberal reading, constitutive of those processes." (Gallagher, 2013: 8).

Gallagher builds on this hypothesis to propose that social practices and the affordances that they create are a crucial component of this process, such that the "various social practices that occur within social and cultural institutions" and "the use of various institutional procedures and social practices may offer structures that support and extend our cognitive abilities" (Gallagher 2013: 4). What is being suggested here is that some of the more sophisticated aspects of human subjectivity including our decision-making processes are not as neatly summed up as innate capacities which objectively utilise social norms as the information with which to make decisions. Rather, because social structures enable certain aspects of some cognitive processes, they are a component of that cognitive process itself. In Hegel's description of the objective spirit⁵⁰, he describes a continual process of internalising and externalising whereby mental processes are materialised externally to individuals in social institutions ranging from cultural practices and logics to legal and economic systems. These institutions take the cognitive load off of individual minds, providing logical frameworks that can be utilised without full engagement and conscious,

⁵⁰ In their 2009 paper 'Mental Institutions' Gallagher and Crisafi explain that the use of Hegel's work in this regard is to be taken as a resource as opposed to a direct philosophical consultant, acknowledging that true Hegelians may not be comfortable with this partial analysis which does not insist on the full dialectic concept of spirit: "[r]ather we see him as a resource that can be used on a limited basis, and specifically, here, in regard to the question of the extended mind" (2009: 45)

critical understanding, but nevertheless provide a springboard for further cognitive work (Crisafi, A. and Gallagher, S. 2010: 125). We can utilise the structure of systems like language in order to develop and extend ideas without needing to understand or be conscious of the rules which enable that language to function (see the discussion of 'green great dragons' in 4.1.3.). The resultant cognitive processes which are enabled by the internalisation of external systems are unable to be analysed as autonomous from those structures, even if those processes go on entirely inside the head (Gallagher and Cristafi, 2009: 49). Social systems, structures and institutions are seen therefore as component parts that enable certain types of cognitive behaviour that cannot be detached from a conception of the thinking and embodied subject.

Gallagher and Cristafi pose a question as to whether it is the case that Hegel's conception of the objective spirit is too large or whether Clark and Chalmers' conception of the extended mind is too limited (Crisafi, A. and Gallagher, S. 2010: 125). The institutions which structure a society, socially, legally, and educationally, originate in human cognition and also go on to scaffold the conceptual schemas which structure the way in which we think, as well as what we are likely to think about. Here we are beginning to uncover a picture of socialisation which is messy, complex and inextricably co-productive. Where once we neatly conceptualised a biological basis of brain and body which was overlain with culture and mediated solely by intrinsic agency, we now have a heterogenous developmental matrix whereby our patterns of learning, guided by neural and behavioural efficiency are composed of and scaffolded by sets of physical and conceptual apparatus which, whilst existing externally to any individual, are internalised in particular ways depending on the needs of the subject, creating opportunities for action in ways that do not rely exclusively on conscious awareness nor rational deliberation (Clark, A. 2003: 86).

Summary

My key objection to the model of agency which Archer proposes is that it relies on some notion of the agentic subject which lies outside of the social realm. Such a stance draws on notions of intrinsic, objective personhood that is encapsulated in other relatively discarded ideas about social formation such as the social contract model. By having agency involve only the unconstrained and un-pedagogical will, Archer makes a claim about the subject being able to access an objective stance outside of the structures and cultural meaning systems that compose and scaffold that subject's understanding of the world. In this chapter I have engaged with Archer's idea of how agency functions: through the internal conversation. This model, I suggest, is too linear, showing deliberation as the primary mediator of incoming environmental information and the output of action. Action is far more

complex than this. Drawing on the arguments made in chapter three and four, I have suggested that affordances enable opportunities for action which pre-exist the agentic stance and inform the parameters of what decisions can be made. Engaging with the discussion of neoliberalism put forward in chapter two, I have suggested that Archer's model is enabled by the logics of self-centrism, possession and acquisition and have countered these logics through a discussion of work that suggests that the roots of decision-making that underlie the sense of agency and the practical unfolding of action are deeply social.

In the following chapter I will develop the notion of the socio-politically scaffolded mental life that I have begun to trace out here in order to address these two problems: the why and the how of the emergence of the sense of agency over action. This following chapter, the final chapter of the thesis, will draw together the key arguments made throughout the previous five in order to begin to sketch out what I suggest may help inform the beginning of an explicative, interdisciplinary methodology on the study of agency in social theory. I will then assess whether or not the compilation of critical and theoretical work compiled here is sufficient to ground a stronger claim about agency: that the sense of agency along with the deliberative self-aware mental state are made accessible through the breakdown of skilled coping, and that furthermore such a state cannot necessarily be accessed at the will of the subject (that we do not necessarily have agency about what we have agency about). Rather, as I will continue to argue, rational self-aware deliberative states are made available only through situational exposure to contradiction, dissonance and novelty.

Chapter Six: Change agency in the socialised subject

Introduction

“[W]e have to think about the social environment in which affective-cognitive capacities develop. ... [G]enes are a developmental resource, but there are other resources, intra-organismic and extra-somatic, (e.g., recurrent social practices), that need to be taken into account. And once we're in the social realm with regard to development, the cat is out of the bag. There can no longer be an abstract subject, but we must deal with populations of subjects, with varying distributions of capacities, and the practices that produce these capacities can be analysed with political categories.”

(Protevi, J. in Braidotti and Pisters, 2012: 29-30)

In Archer's work, agency is often taken to be a relatively abstract concept which is seen as analytically divisible from the structural environment in which it arises. As we have seen in the previous two chapters however, smooth, fluid action which provides the context and content of agentic decision-making is thoroughly infused with non-consciously held conceptual systems, deeply internalised technique, tradition, and politically based logics. It no longer makes sense to conceive of agency as a politically neutral feature of cognition, we must look to the ways in which decision-making becomes possible for particular subjects in their particular contexts and look at the ways in which the parameters and language of decision-making differ across populations of those subjects.

Agency is understood by theorists such as Archer as the essence of unconstrained, autonomous human action. Such seemingly autonomous actions seen in aggregate however often align with predictive models of behaviour. Understanding how this predictability and those wider patterns emerge from individuals, who feel fully in control of their own actions, has therefore been one of the longest running problems that sociology has been trying to resolve (Durkheim 1895, 1897; Calhoun 2002). Social structures, and the discourses which are intertwined with them, themselves compose the material and symbolic environment: the complex political and cultural context in which we act, and within which our actions make sense and have meaning. They also compose the specific demographic assemblages that both constitute individual identity and affect the ways in which individuals are affected by their cultural environment, and how they may act in relation to those contexts.

In the previous chapters, I have begun to sketch out a model of the experience of self-aware, representational deliberation which Archer defines as agency, as only one part of a much

broader, embodied and embrained schema of on-going, context-sensitive, and skilled action. In this chapter I want to position the conception of agency I have been developing within the intersectional political positionalities involved in subject constitution. Here, I want to position the discussion on skill learning and embedded, embodied, mindful action within the intersectional political frameworks that Judith Butler describes in her work on performativity and precarity. I make the argument that precarity is a catalyst of the type of agency which Archer treats as primary and neutral, following from the discussion in chapters four and five that sense of agency arises in response to novelty and disruption. In discussion with the notion of affordances as politically delineated, I look to the social and political environment to explain how the sense of agency and the mental state of self-aware conscious, attentive deliberation arises within the drive to internalization discussed in chapters four and five.

Here, I draw together the key points developed in the previous five chapters to reiterate the primary arguments of the thesis, that: 1) skilled coping and internalisation/automation of action is the preferred state of human minds and bodies, and; 2) self-aware, states of deliberation arise in response to novelty and precarity, as a method of assimilating and or adjusting to dynamic environments. This leads to direct critique of Archer's argument that a natural increase in self-aware deliberation is the drive behind the exponential increase in social elaboration and complexity, to argue that rather, it is the increase in social complexity and precarity related to neoliberalism which is resulting in an increase of the frequency of states of self-aware deliberation. That increase in frequency, I suggest, may be a key mobilizing factor in the resurgence of approaches that treat the agentic, deliberative mental state as primary, which I described in chapter one.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 6.1.1 I consider the question of whether social/structural conditions shape agency, and argue that although Archer's recent work appears to give social and structural conditions a role in this respect, ultimately she still treats agency as free-floating deliberation rather than seeing it as properly embodied and socially and politically embedded. In section 6.1.2 I argue that Bourdieu and Butler offer preferable ways to consider the deep impact of the social and political environment on agency and deliberation. Section 6.1.3 explores these ideas in more depth, and argues that they can be productively linked to the notion of intersectionality. In Section 6.2.1 I explore the ways in which the contemporary social and environment, being neoliberal in character, places many, especially disadvantaged, groups at risk of 'precarity'. But I also argue that there is a productive possibility of rupture in the face of these conditions, an idea I explore in Section 6.2.2 and then link to change agency in Section 6.2.3. That section also considers the relevance of pragmatist ideas for thinking about conscious agency in a context of problem-solving, linking this back to the increase in problem-solving needed in conditions of precarity. This connection is further explored in Section 6.3 that concludes the chapter.

6.1.1. Contradictions in Archer's reflexive modes hypothesis

In the introduction to her book *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity*, Archer takes a much more socially-embedded view of agency than she did in her previous work. Here, Archer identifies the tendency to treat reflexivity as a homogenous phenomenon, and asks the question of whether reflexivity has a history. Until now, the morphogenetic theory that I have discussed over the course of the thesis has predominantly dealt with temporality as a significant component of explaining societal change, but only through relatively abstract terms. Here, Archer begins to apply socially and historically situated circumstances, not just to structure, but also to the experience of the agentic process, asking: 'does human reflexivity show distinct variations in the modes through which it is practiced and, if so, were such modalities subject to change over time in response to changing historical circumstances?' (2012: 10).

While Archer's position in relation to this question contains promising elements, it is inconsistent with her overarching ontological commitment to analytical separability between agency and structure. In this section I will explain how Archer defends the continuation of analytical dualism through conceptualising the causal mechanism of increasing reflexive modes under modernity to be a natural progression of reflexivity itself, as opposed to an embodied and mental response to increasing environmental complexity (as I will put forward that it is later in the chapter). I suggest that this internal inconsistency is realised through the omission of the role of embodiment and skilled-coping in relation to reflexive modes as Archer attempts to avoid structuralizing reflexivity through any comparison to Bourdieu's habitus.

Archer argues that "reflexivity is not a homogenous phenomenon but is exercised through distinctive modes" (2012:12) and that "there is a historical succession in the dominance of such reflexive modes" (ibid). In this work, Archer begins to raise the question of whether historical circumstance and contextual factors play a part in the types of reflexivity that lead to particular types of action. This approach appears to open up her morphogenetic hypothesis to more thoroughly account for personal circumstance in the experience of agency than she has before. She argues that the types of reflexivity that a subject uses to negotiate their world, to problem solve, make decisions and internally deliberate about situations is related to a person's background and previous experience. For Archer here then, reflexivity cannot be psychologically reducible: the "dominant mode of reflexivity practiced by singular subjects did not appear to be psychologically determined because structural and cultural characteristics of subjects' social backgrounds were found to be

closely associated with the predominance of different modes of reflexivity.” (Archer, 2012: 16)

Archer describes these “different modes” (ibid) as follows: contextual continuity, according to Archer, is related to communicative reflexivity, while contextual discontinuity is marked by a tendency towards autonomous reflexivity (Archer, 2012: 16). Discontinuity of identity with natal background (the social conditions one is born and raised within) tended towards a primarily meta-reflexive mode of reflexivity (a tendency to think about the process of thinking), while extreme contradiction and precarity was associated with fractured reflexivity, defined as a preoccupation with traumatic or contradictory circumstances to the extent that reflexivity is predominantly concerned with the needs associated with immediate survival (Archer, M. 2012: 249)⁵¹. Archer gestures towards upbringing and the circumstances of birth as being contributing factors to the type of reflexivity that one tends towards, yet her explanation fails to clarify *how it is* that subjects go about experiencing their self-aware mental states differently: how one subject may need continual external validation or critical input in order to make decisions (communicative reflexivity), while another feels comfortable making decisions in the relative isolation of their own internal mind (autonomous reflexivity); how one subject will tend towards systematic consideration of all conceivable outcomes and perspectives, questioning the ethical bases of ultimate concerns and actions (meta-reflexivity), while others utilise belief systems relatively intuitively to guide action in relatively linear ways.

While these descriptions of type and style of internal deliberation may be valid, and Archer does gesture more thoroughly to the role of the social context in reflexive style, this account continues to prioritise the reflexive mode without substantial examination of the spheres of embodied socialised skills that must be in particular relationships with each of these different mental styles. Someone who tends towards meta-reflexive thought styles for instance, may have a substantially different relationship with their internalised skills and context-sensitive automation processes than a person who tends towards a communicative reflexivity that draws validation and guidance heavily from structural, institutional and interpersonal interaction⁵².

⁵¹ These characteristics were determined by Archer’s ICONI scale analysis of interview data of student participants. In these findings, reflexive style was seen to change over time, rising from 7.9% (10 students) to 17.4% (22 students) between first year and final year of degree studies, with a 1:4 ratio of males to females (Archer, M. 2012: 249).

⁵² There is an increasing amount of work on ‘Third Culture Kids’, people who have been socialised within competing discourses having grown up in cultures different to their ‘home’ culture. Studies on experience of reflexivity in relation to the internalization of (sometimes multiple) competing logics would be an interesting further route of study.

Where I criticised Archer's older work as acknowledging the role of socialisation in the content but not the form of reflexivity (so that the reflexive method was politically neutral, and merely the subject matter was conceived to contain social bias or be affected by institutional and structural processes), here Archer appears to be suggesting the opposite. Here, the method through which the process of reflexivity manages information and goes about the process of deliberating and making decisions is subject to societal and contextual influence (2012: 249), but it is the content of thought which retains sufficient autonomy from structural influence so as to maintain agentic capacity – relating this to the switch from the situational logic of competition, which she states characterises modernity, to the situational logic of opportunity (novelty begets novelty; *ibid*). Here we can see a conceptual shift to autonomy of content:

*“in their private mental lives, real subjects will focus their intra-personal dialogues on any combination or permutation of the above activities because **no rules govern what we choose to dwell upon in the privacy of our own heads**”*

(Archer, M. 2012: 14; emphasis added)

*“[t]his is a **supremely reflexive task**, entailing ‘strong evaluation’ of our social context in the light of our concerns and adjusting these concerns in the light of our own circumstances.”*

(Archer, M. 2012: 15)

Setting aside the technicalities of Archer's approach to the modes of reflexivity for now, I want to focus on the retention within this newer work of her older conception of the reflexive foundation of agency as *sui generis*. In the effort to avoid the conflationism she sees Bourdieu's theory of the habitus as embodying (where she sees attributing habit to structural factors rather than agentic ones), Archer maintains the division between ultimate concerns and embodied, structured dispositions, arguing that such concerns arise from a 'situational logic of opportunity' characterised by late modernity (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015: 627). This 'situational logic of opportunity' is beginning to sound a lot like the notion of affordances that I have utilised in the previous two chapters, but it is based on a very different ontological stance. Although both situational logics of opportunity and affordances for action are (or at least often give rise to) internal experiences of externally based, structural conditions that are personal to a particular subject, there are nevertheless clear differences. Since she rejects any notion of pre-reflexive dimensions to subjectivity (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015: 626), both the ultimate concerns that Archer states drive action and guide the internal reflexive conversation, and the situational logic of opportunity which invites particular kinds of action, remain relatively autonomous to the subject position which Archer states produces

its form. Archer's logics of opportunity are thus consciously accessible guides that are drawn upon in the internal conversation, existing entirely within the scope of self-aware deliberation. I have conceptualised affordances on the other hand, as much more ready-to-hand in Heidegger's sense, arising in the relationship between internalised physical and conceptual skillsets and the immediate physical and conceptual environment. Affordances both guide ongoing adaptive pre-reflexive action and help produce what is conceivable to a subject in mental deliberation (and in what manner).

Here, Archer gets closer to the consideration of social factors in affecting the form of the conscious relationship between the subject and their environment. It is important to note that this contradiction of reflexive style is socially conditioned, but with agency itself as *sui generis* within Archer's continued separation between agency and structure. Although I agree with some of her ideas about the historicity of reflexivity, I conceive of reflexivity as the deliberative process of consolidating information within the idiosyncratic demands of the context that acts on the particular socialised subject – and as result, I am treating agency itself as subject to the same historical and political influences as reflexivity rather than being an independent autonomous capacity which operates neutrally through reflexivity.

Archer's focus on reflexivity here is grounded in an observation of the increasingly centralised role of reflexive decision-making and deliberation in social contexts. What she terms 'reflexive modernity' is considered to be the historical context for increasingly meta-reflexive forms of the internal conversation. This observation is not exclusive to Archer, and she locates her analysis in relation to Giddens, Beck and Lash (1994; Doneti, P. in Archer M. 2010: 158), who argued that this trend was a mental response to structural changes in society related to increasing risk, destabilisation and available choice (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1994). Archer criticises these theorists, along with pragmatists such as James, Dewey, Mead and Pierce, for basing the genesis of reflexive deliberation in situational uncertainty without providing a thorough historical evaluation:

*"[pragmatists] generically endorsed the formula that action would follow routine guidelines and resort would be made to reflexive deliberations only when subjects were confronted with unforeseen and problematic situations ... it seems that to them 'problematic situations' would be encountered at all times⁵³ and the ahistorical response would be a resort to the mental activities and inner dialogue that constituted reflexivity **tout court**"*

(Archer, M. 2012: 11; emphasis in original).

⁵³ Note that Archer states 'at all times' because she considers reflexivity to be a continuous state as opposed to something which arises relationally.

As Archer states, historicity and contextuality are critical in developing an understanding of non-homogenous reflexive engagement and action: “if this notion truly seeks to incorporate reflexivity, it will be practiced in different ways by different people and differently in different social settings” (Archer 2012: 11). However, for Archer now, this difference accounts only for the internal *style* of reasoning or *method* of engagement. Since the increase in the deliberative state and the rapidity of contemporary socio-cultural change renders any conception of embodied organisational dispositions, such as Bourdieu’s habitus, inconsequential for Archer (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015: 627), the full weight of adaptation is carried by the conscious, self-aware deliberative process. As such, this account does not provide a fully contextual account of reflexivity in which particular social strata or different socio-political systems and logics may also make available certain types of actions and conceptual logics that are particular to subjects along demographic, as well as historical, lines. In both cases, reflexivity is thought to occur through deliberation, or the internal conversation, but where Archer conceives of contextual particularities as being negotiated through pure mentalising, the alternate account we are developing here insists upon the dependence of the content and form of that mentalising on pre-internalised skillsets and conceptual logics which are context-sensitive to the structural conditions relevant to a particular subject.

6.1.2. Change Agency and Political Socialisation

The primary concern of structure and agency theorists so far in the sociological debate at least, has concerned what theorists such as Nentwich et al. term ‘change agency’ (2014): the ability of a cognisant subject to effect different outcomes according to their will, not just in everyday interactions, but against larger, more tangible elements of societal structure. This has raised the following question: if human minds and behaviours, but also identities and subjectivities, are constituted by elements of the social structures in which they are embedded, then how are we to conceptualise societal change? This question amounts to whether a subject who is constituted by a certain process or discourse become sufficiently independent from that discourse to effect substantial change. Critics who subscribe to the concept of determinism have tended along the course of thinking that arguments for the social constitution of the subject, i.e. not considering there to be sufficient independence of mind and behaviour from societal structures, must entail an attack on free will. Yet, as I will put forward in the remainder of the chapter, this assumes that structuring social influences are both internally coherent, and do not come in to contact with other, contradictory structures. Such critics would likely argue that by conceding structural constitution of form rather than merely content of mind, in the sense that I described earlier in this chapter and in chapters three and four, decisions and behaviours are too heavily driven by social forces,

outside of the remit of executive function (the mode of conscious, rational, self-aware decision-making) – especially if, as is the case I am beginning to make, the form of that executive function itself is also constituted by the social and political environment.

This concern stems, I suggest, from the way in which many have conceptualised free will and rationality as something bounded, *sui generis* and essential (intrinsic and pre-social), much in the same way that Archer conceptualises agency. On this conception of agentic decision-making as something which pre-exists the conditions in which it arises, the ability to choose becomes divorced from its ontological state of relationality. This is the case against Archer's use of the term 'capacity' to describe agency which I formed in chapter two, which I argued constructed agency and the freedom of choice over action as an inherent quality which a subject possesses, rather than something that arises in relation to their environmental context. Assuming the independence and autonomy of freedom to make decisions however has an additional effect: by that logic, any modification of that freedom, by social norms, pedagogy or accessibility is seen as a stifling of a pre-existing capacity, rather than as opportunities for production and formation of particular kinds of techniques and knowledgeable, interactive skillsets for negotiating particular, relevant, socio-political environments.

Two of the most important social theorists attempting to understand the ways in which social structures are constitutive of identities (and are embodied in a similar way to the embodiment of other skillsets, as we explored in chapter four), are Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler. For both of these theorists, embodiment and embedding in socio-structural discourses are fundamental to the construction of the subject, including the ways in which those subjects are able to both reinforce social structure and enact change within them. The respective hypotheses of Bourdieu and Butler are particularly interesting for addressing change agency as their emphasis differs, with Bourdieu focussing on the reproduction and stability of social systems, while Butler primarily concentrates on heterogeneity and diversity (Nentwich et.al. 2014: 238). Both theorists however, describe the ways in which the structural elements of society are embodied into the subject and help produce their behaviours, views and modes of interaction with the world on a level that partially precedes self-experience. For both, human agency, the way in which people are able to make decisions, is deeply connected to the field of relations and the socio-structural and political environment in which they are embedded. Bourdieu's habitus and Butler's performativity both emphasise the internalization of social discourses to the extent that the subject is produced by, and is fundamentally inextricable from, the structural elements of society: i.e. that there is no pre-discursive, fundamental subject which can stand apart from and look out over society from an objective stance.

Bourdieu distinguishes between two types of change agency, that which does not change or threaten the socio-political structures within which they are embedded (their doxa) but rather changes the subject's situational positioning within them, and that which does cause adjustments to that doxa by shifting the logic of relations and practice that reinforce them (Bourdieu 1998; 2003). As Nentwich et al. explain, "the first method of change can alter the lived experience of one or more individuals, it does not transform the relations of oppression and domination in the field" (ibid: 241), and the second form tends to be reliant upon group forms of agency over long term. Here, it is relatively gradual shifts in many interrelated systems of logic, and a resultant process of normalisation, which enables a widening available sphere of meaningful actions. For Bourdieu, while change agency on the scale of societal change is evidently possible and does occur, it is relatively difficult to achieve and involves a more complex and distributed process (that is dispersed into the environment and logics of the wider populace) than would be possible through the work of an individual actor. Bourdieu maintains the dual presence of both change and permanence in developing discourses (2001), explaining that while some aspects of individual stance and of structural processes are more susceptible to change, they are concurrently interwoven, scaffolded by and supporting deeper, less malleable systems of thought and practice. In order to achieve societal change, the structures and institutions in which aspects of that social process are consolidated and the systems of logic, languages and customs of practice, in which the social process are embodied and enacted even tangentially, as well as what he terms their symbolic capital, must be also dismantled or adjusted. A clear way of explaining this process can be found in Bourdieu and Wacquant's discussion of the socio-cultural liberation of women, which they explain:

"can only come from a collective action aimed at a symbolic struggle capable of challenging practically the immediate agreement of embodied and objective structures, that is, from a symbolic revolution that questions the very foundations of the production and reproduction of symbolic capital and, in particular the dialectic pretention and distinction which is at the root of the production and consumption of cultural goods as signs of distinction".

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 174)

The complexity of achieving significant structural social change is deeply linked to the more everyday action that we experience in our more banal or individually-oriented activities. Bourdieu reasoned that these discourses and logics which sediment the structures of society are embodied within the subject through socialisation and form their individual dispositions according to their subject position (Bourdieu 1977). These socially and politically shaped dispositions shape both the individual's form of action such as their gestures, movements,

posture and composure (what Bourdieu terms 'hexis') and the internally held systems of belief, perception, understanding, schemas of logical deduction and recognisable opportunities for particular types of action. Bourdieu terms the aggregate of these socially-derived, internalised, and performative embodied styles as the subject's habitus. The habitus is more than a system of habits however. Rather, it is the basis from which and within which actions make sense, have meaning and gain traction:

"The habitus is, in essence, the socially conditioned body schema. It is not a mental state, a conscious or cognitive attitude, nor even a network of such attitudes, but a set of bodily habits produced and stabilised by the social world, which they in turn reproduce and restabilise."

(Carmen, T. 2008: 217, italics in original)

The concept of habitus, having been first introduced by Aristotle, was later developed by both Mauss (1934) and Merleau Ponty as well as Bourdieu and Wacquant, and appears in the works of Deleuze (2001), Elias (1939), Weber and Husserl (1989) under slightly different forms. Butler's hypothesis of Performativity follows a similar trajectory, arguing that there is no inherent identity that underlies the enaction of roles and embodiment of intersectionalities. This is not a statement which is intended to dismiss the multiple ways genetic factors, individual tendencies and personality traits are involved in subject constitution, however. How a subject becomes able to make sense of, embody, perform and utilise those factors though, is thoroughly dependent on the ways in which their socio-cultural context views those factors and the affordances which are enabled or limited as a result.

Butler insistently rebukes the notion that the social construction and political constitution of the subject and their behaviours is deterministic. Critics such as Archer, whose conceptualisation of agency depends on the inherent independence and autonomy of the subject from their social environment, perceive any internalised pressure to act in a particular way to be bordering on deterministic, claiming that such socialising influences are imposed *upon* the subject and thus are seen as a limiting factor to an otherwise free agent. As a result, they argue that while a subject may behave along the trajectory contingent with their particular demographic, even in predictable ways, they inherently possess the capacity to have always acted differently (see critique of the term capacity in 3.1.3.). Butler however, denies that any such subject exists sufficiently separately from the socio-political environment in which they are embedded, and instead sees the particular processes, roles, pressures and expectations that people embody along demographic lines as the material through which their identity is formed and by which their opportunities for actions arise in relation to that particular identity. In this way performativity is invoked through contextuality, not determinism. She states: "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary

scene of agency” (Butler 1990: 147). As such, Butler argues that the socialising practices and discourses, which construct the subject themselves, construct rather than curtail that subject’s agency: producing the epistemic environment in which meaningful individual choices may be made towards the subject’s own particular positionality.

Butler does not underestimate the sense of agency over action, nor the power and reality of resistance to social norms. For Butler and Athanasiou though, resistance is not as simple as the enactment of will over social structures, as it is for Archer. The logics by which sense-making and meaning are constructed in interaction, are not only constitutive of the mentalising and acting subject, but to a great extent for Butler and Athanasiou, are particular to the positionality of that subject in their particular socio-political context (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013). Haraway describes this type of positioning as much more than the mere context in which a subject rationalises within, she describes it as “the key practice grounding knowledge’ (Haraway, 1991: 193). As opposed to being a statement about a subject’s fixed identities, positionality is an effort at describing a person’s place within a shifting network of relationships (Maher and Tetreault, 1994). Since positionality signifies a particular location in a matrix of power relationships which a subject resides within, and with which they negotiate the world, the knowledges which are created from that specific place within that matrix cannot claim universality.

Butler’s focus on repetition and the body extends Nietzsche’s argument that “there is no being behind doing ... the deed is everything” (Butler, J. 1990: 25; Nietzsche 1887), yet draws on the theories of the performative as developed by John Searle and John Austin whereby the mental components of action are considered secondary to the actual embodied enactment of particular acts. In this, the role of the mind is shifted from being an objective pre-social deliberative and reflexive decision-maker who chooses to take on or discard certain types of embodiment, to something which is also constituted through the taking on and repetition of those actions themselves. Butler’s main emphasis, especially in her earlier works where she develops the hypothesis of performativity (see *Gender Trouble*, 1990; and *Bodies that Matter*, 1993), is on the constitution of gender roles and of gendered subjects. However, it is the way in which she theorises that the process of socialised subjectification occurs which is of particular interest here. Similar to the theories on the acquisitions of skills which I described in chapter four and five, Butler emphasises the importance of these social skills, roles and practices becoming internalised to the extent which they are performed intuitively and flexibly, and highlights the role these internalised skills and discourses play in pre-reflexively constituting the prediction and availabilities of future actions:

“When I speak about the subject in such contexts, it is not a “subject” who is the sovereign precondition of action and thought. But it is a socially produced “agent”

and “deliberator” whose agency and thought is made possible by a language that precedes that “I”. In this sense, the “I” is produced through power, though not the deterministic effect of power. Power relies on a mechanism of reproduction that can and does go awry, undo the strategies of animating power, and produce new and even subversive effects. The paradox or quandary that emerges from this situation is one that we find in politics all the time: if the terms of power lay out “who” can be a subject, who qualifies as a subject of recognition, in politics, or before the law, then the subject is not a precondition of politics, but a differential effect or power.”

(Butler, J. 2009: iii).

Butler describes this process of construction as performativity. Performativity is different from mere performance of a role, which again implies that the subject is inherently separate and able to take on or shed that role and its associated behaviours and logics at will. Rather, performativity describes the ways that the particular roles and subjectification practices which a subject is enculturated with and socialised into are enacted through the body without intervention or awareness of the executive functions but also shape the logics by which a subject comes to understand and perceive the world relative to their enculturated state. Subjects themselves are constituted through the repetition of socially-appropriate acts, which consolidate into that subject's identity, and through their enaction reinforce the discourses and social structures from which they were acquired.

This is far more than the popularised notion that gender is a social construct. Butler has been extremely careful to avoid reducing gender or other bio-social institutions to a superficial layer which is artificially imposed upon some fundamental reality of the biological body. Much like as Clark noted, and we discussed in 5.1.1., the idea of the social being as a mere ‘wrap around’ over nature is problematic (2003: 86). It insinuates that socio-political and cultural identities can be taken on or discarded at will, and that our basic corporeal and mental nature exists imperviously to social influence. Butler's argument is far more nuanced, proposing that institutions such as gender exist in the repetition of linguistic, embodied and conceptual acts that both cultivate the form of embodied and mental identities as well as, through their repetition, consolidate the presumed neutrality and normalcy of those institutional forms. As Fraker suggests, this means that “performativity stretches into the minutiae of the everyday” (2018: 1), producing identities in relation to social norms through the production and realisation of routine interactions and gestures that are enacted without conscious deliberation or attention. Fraker gives the example of the non-conscious reification of masculinity and norms associated with male identities through the example of the handshake:

“There’s an unspoken choreography that moulds the encounter between two men – and indeed, the less it is thought about, the smoother it operates. The moment the performance is brought to the level of awareness is precisely when it comes to feel clunky and unnatural, because this reveals the fact that the sequence could have been executed differently. So, while gender is performed, Butler argues, it is not a truly voluntary performance. Rather, it is made to feel ‘natural’ by virtue of its banality and repetition. The handshake makes the man, not the other way around.”

(Fraker, W. 2018: 1)

With this stress on the everyday, I want to draw the link between the emphasis of repetition in Butler’s work and the practice schemas that I detailed in chapters four and five. In those chapters where I discussed Dreyfus’s concept of skilled-coping in respect to theories of action and experiences of control and authorship, we saw that skill level and experience necessarily showed a broadly negative correlation with attentional deliberation over action. As practical embodied (chapter four) and conceptual skills (chapter five) were mastered, we saw what Dreyfus and Sutton referred to as a ‘chunking’ of action sequences (Dreyfus, H. 2004: 180; Sutton et al. 2011: 96). In this chunking two things happened. Firstly, skills became relatively autonomous from the deliberative self-aware mental state, able to operate fluidly, context-sensitively and adaptively without intervention. Secondly, an attentional state is then typically only applied to these adaptive action sequences only under novel circumstances or when something went wrong. Even here, however, there was limited conscious accessibility into the action sequence itself, the conceptual apparatus (or techniques and logics) behind it had become normalised to the extent of self-evidence, and it became difficult for subjects to describe why or how an action was performed in a particular way. We saw this both in cases where techniques and logics were deliberately learned through attentional repetition, as in the case of learning a musical instrument, and in cases that were learned through situational embeddedness and contextual repetition (from our surroundings) such as in the structure of language (as in the case of our ‘green great dragons’ in 4.1.3.). The key to both, however, as for Butler, is repetition, whether or not it is executed with self-aware deliberative attention and theoretical knowledge or through consistent exposure and cultural conditioning.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Butler’s focus on repetition draws extensively the workings of difference and repetition that are seen in Derrida (1976, 1982) and Deleuze (1994) respectively. An important difference between the approaches to repetition that Derrida and Deleuze take is that while both stipulate that the productive energy of repetition derives from negation, Deleuze insists that there is also another, positive and affirmative type of repetition (Bearn 2000: 441). For our purposes however, I will set aside an analysis of utilising Deleuzian and Derridean approaches to repetition for further work following the thesis, here it is helpful merely to gesture towards the tradition of thought that Butler is influenced by.

6.1.3. Intersectional positionalities and affordances for action

Conceptualising reflexivity as independent from parameters of social constraint and accessibility to practical and epistemological affordances promotes a view of the reflexive process as politically neutral, and of identity formation as predominantly autonomous from social influence: a theoretical position which Skeggs associates with social privilege (Skeggs, 2004). In contrast, Farrugia proposes that if theories of reflexivity are to substantially contribute to sociological understandings of subjectivity, such theories must incorporate understandings of the pre-reflexive components of subject positions which are shaped by positionality in relation to broader social structures (2013: 284). Put simply, intention formation cannot be seen as merely a mental state which is politically neutral by virtue of its internality – the political and social position of the subject forming intentions is deeply involved in the type and form of intention they are likely to make.

In *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Butler refers to how structural elements of society are embodied to the extent that they are practiced without conscious consideration, composing a “nearly involuntary dimension of our somatic lives” (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 96). Much like the rules of language which intuitively forbid any ‘green great dragons’ (as we discussed in 4.1.3.), we may not ever be consciously aware of the rules, logics and processes which guide the manner in which we behave, we do not need to be, but we may nevertheless internalise those logics and they will organise our language and behaviour respectively. These social skills are embodied and practiced with near perfect on-going accuracy without needing to be consciously understood as a learned skill, as described in the early stages of our skill acquisition models in chapter four.

This is not to say that these social skills are not rehearsed, but rather that when social norms appeal to the natural, biological and inevitable, the trial-and-error learning stage is taken to be a normal part of childhood development (as opposed to being seen as social training). Cordelia Fine’s *Delusions of Gender* and Iris Young’s *Throwing Like a Girl* give phenomenological studies on the way in which the practices which compose and reflect gender roles are policed as children develop, firstly through childhood mirroring (re-enacting what they see from others), secondly through absorbing and re-enacting environmental information such as adverts, TV shows, magazines and other widely available cultural representations, and thirdly through active adult reinforcement/punishment (coding interactions with children along the lines of the child’s correct or incorrect adherence to the norms of their gender, in subtle forms such as compliments, typological gift-giving, or in stronger forms such as explicit instructions, punishment, withdrawal of approval/affection, or violence). In this way, these skills go through the internalisation process with a degree of tuition whilst being commonly accepted as natural and universal. Motivations and intention

formations in such a case, are deeply informed and disciplined by the dominant norms that a person is subjected to, and are not merely as Archer has suggested, politically neutral desires to improve one's own situation. This speaks to Gallagher's view that intention formation is, at least partially, constituted through social interaction, and constituted through the language, logic and belief systems which we acquire from our social arrangements:

"[T]he prospective and retrospective dimensions of intention formation and action interpretation, which affect [sense of agency], are often shaped by others, and by the situations in which we encounter others. In contrast to internalist views – for example, where simply having a belief about A encompasses the motivation to A (e.g. Nagel 1970) – and in contrast to many analyses of agency in philosophy of mind and action theory, deliberation, intentions, and motivations to act are not simply mental states (propositional attitudes), or causal brain states – they are often co-constituted with others."

(Gallagher, S. in Clark, A. Kiverstein, J. and Vierkant, T. 2013: 130)

Social facts operate at different levels and facets in society, from generalizable cultural norms and international economic-political structures, to trans-national alignments according to creed, heritage or shared value systems, and small-scale subcultural values and ways-of-being which are specific to locale. This means that while conceptual apparatus are shared, they are also nuanced and hold different meaning and different consequences according to the particular set of intersecting positionalities a person may embody (referred to henceforth as a subject's intersectionality). Norms and values are intersectional as they have different effects on a person according to the particular ways in which people may simultaneously belong to multiple identity groups experienced by a particular subject in a number of different amalgamations, and therefore be subjected to specific amalgamations of norms, values, beliefs and embodiments. For example, someone's experience and social affordances as a black, lesbian, working-class, able-bodied woman, may be very different from a white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, wheelchair user, despite both having been born and raised in London. These logics from various different identity groups do not always perfectly coincide, and may compete against one another. Such competition may result in either cognitive dissonance on the one hand or the subject being thrust into a deliberative awareness of those competing narratives and able to rationalise them, at least to the extent that those conceptual models enable. As a result, Athanasiou explains that:

"[We need to] rethink the materiality of bodies in terms of processes of social mattering that are regulated by normative and idealised fictions of what counts as a liveable body. In various forms of racism and land dispossession, as well as in

neoliberal forms of governance through market assessments, social mattering emerges as an apparatus that regulates contemporary processes.”

(Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 97).

This is the case for opportunities afforded to subjects on a more tangible and thus, more easily quantifiable scale (such as differences in gender and race in STEM subjects (Wang, M. & Degol, J., 2017) but less easily quantifiable are the psychological and realisable ways in which affordances for action and mentalising differ between these groups in smaller scale interactions. It is the aggregation of these smaller scale discrepancies in affordances which go on to create discrepancies that we see in broader demographic studies on behaviour patterns and social norms, but these smaller scale affordances are far less visible. Crucially, their invisibility (or the likelihood that such discrepancies will be disregarded) is due to the continuing belief in the intrinsic agentic power over social structure, which in chapter two I explored as central to the logic of neoliberalism. As a result, following the commitment to the idea that agency is intrinsic to the subject, the material effects of these discrepancies are often conceptualised in terms of a failure on the part of an individual subject.

This failure as being an individual problem of will and implementation translates into Archer's vision of how intentions are formed. For Archer, intentions are produced as a direct result of consciously held goals and desires (2003: 29), which a subject develops through self-aware rationalising about their 'ultimate concerns' (2003: 170) and the contextual feasibility of those concerns (2003: 134). Here, intention formation is a solely self-conscious process whereby incentives are consistently consciously accessible, and the agent which rationalises them is sufficiently autonomous from the context in which those incentives arise that they are able to, at any point, rationalise about whether those incentives are sufficient to, or consistent with larger goals. This model is reliant upon this sufficient autonomy, but for Gallagher incentives, goals, contextuality and social interaction are much more intricately connected so that rather than autonomy allowing for objective rational consideration of incentives, those incentives are already thoroughly involved in the meaningfulness of a social context. Here we find that the salience (noticeability and importance) of aspects of our social environment underlie both intention formation and the sense of agency which Archer treats as the mediating factor:

“Brain regions mediating incentive sensitisation are inscribed within the same areas that process action specification, motor control, and social cognition – regions of the brain thought to code for intentional deliberation, social navigation, and action (Allen 2009). This reinforces the idea that situational salience, including perceptual salience of the social situation, contributes to intention formation and the sense of agency – sometimes enhancing but also (as in extreme addictive behaviour)

sometimes subverting [sense of agency]. Intentions can be dynamically shaped in relation to how others are behaving, and by what is deemed acceptable within specific subcultures.”

(Gallagher, S. in Clark et al. 2013: 131)

The focus on salience and on conditions of possibility (a philosophical concept popularized by Kant which I discussed in chapter one, see: Meiklejohn, ed. 1990: 235-6), emphasises the necessary frameworks, circumstances and phenomena that need to be in place for another phenomena, such as social change or the experience of autonomous agency, to emerge. The picture I want to paint here is that agency is something which emerges between practices, according to the enablement and constriction of affordances along the lines of intersectional demographic norms that constitute a subject and their intelligibility. If we consider agency only to be the self-conscious deliberative process of choice, we not only disregard the quantity of knowledgeable, adaptive and skilled action and interaction that we negotiate on the fly, or without conscious deliberation (yet may still experience authorship, and a sense of agency, control and purpose over, at least in hindsight), but also we feed into narratives of agency being a power which exists outside of the knowledge making apparatus and meaningful narratives that construct our understandings of the world, of ourselves and that are particularly formulated for our specific position within a complex and dynamic world. Thought processes, internalised behavioural schemas and the conceptual apparatus with which we negotiate that complexity are not politically neutral, but are politically and culturally composed in particular configurations. The internal conflicts and practicalities which need negotiated are neither universal nor objectively neutral. They cannot stand outside of culture or politics, since culture and politics are the conditions which formulate them as specifically-adapted mental tool-kits for negotiating our particular social environments.

The act of choosing, whether done as immersively and intuitively as a jazz musician ‘chooses’ their notes during a jam session, or in the specific meaningful instances of dissent or congruence with the specific social norms which affect us, is always formed in relation to, and uses the conceptual apparatus that, our positionality has provided. In such a way, there is no determinism per se, only the opportunities afforded to a particular subject under particular circumstances, which have particular parameters given that subject’s prior experience and meaningful conceptual tools. The social narratives, common senses and logics of relationality are the binding logics which link experience and social facts with larger patterns of experience over time. Social facts, a term introduced by Durkheim (1895) are aggregates of the experience of social groups within particular cultural and political systems which are used to communicate ‘how the world is’ for and within a particular demographic. These values, norms and structures are partially constructed through the socio-structural

environment and the real tangible and experiential outcomes the patterns those structures produce for a particular group, but they also exert control through guiding the affordances which are available to particular subjects under particular circumstances.

These ideas are similar to those which Protevi develops in his work on what he terms the “body politic” (2009, 2011). Whilst Protevi utilises a Deleuzian framework which draws heavily on dynamical systems theory, he shares the commitment that the embodied and embedded subject must be approached with recognition in regard to the political power relations which regulate affordances for action (Protevi, 2009: 29), in a way which speaks heavily to Butler’s account of performative subjectification practices. Similar to the idea of positionality which has been influential in the social sciences, Protevi’s Deleuzian model of shifting attractor layouts which ‘clash or resonate with each other’ within a ‘complex phase space’ or ‘virtual field’ (ibid), analyses the production of subjects whose cognitive, affective and corporeal affordances are partially composed of, and through, the particular intersecting set of socio-political subjectification apparatuses in their structural and institutional environment: both over the course of the development of a subject or system (diachronically) *and* in their particular manifestations in on-going, real time interactions (synchronically).

The key point here is that mind, both in its self-conscious, reflexive and deliberative form and in its on-going engaged and immersive forms, is generated within and through specific relations between the subject and their physical, social and political environment. This approach offers the social sciences a method of understanding the ways in which the particularities of context, including a subject’s stance in relation socio-political institutions, both constitutes the subject and enables particular affordances for action which are idiosyncratically suited to their own particular, shifting context. The skills which we internalise through social immersion and interaction enable immediate and perfectly context-sensitive action for a particular subject in their particular social environment, despite vast cultural differences across groups of subjects and distinct individual factors. Agency, in this vision of the inherently social mind, looks less like the objective ability to stand apart from culture and society to reason without affective and social interference in order to enforce actions that consciously reinforce or resist social pressures. Here, agency appears as a mode, but not the only mode, of conscious, embodied, deliberation between affordances which have been made available by the subject-social environment matrix, affordances which arise as context-sensitive and meaningful for that particular subject, in order to integrate new information or to adjust already internalised information as we go on operating within those environments.

6.2.1. Neoliberalism as institutional precarity

In section 6.1.1. of this chapter, I looked at Archer's turn to contextuality and historicity in her focus on temporality in agency. In this turn, Archer has been adamant that this contextuality contributes to the form of agency and the way in which reflexive decisions are made, but does not implicate too strong a role of the structural elements in society. In making this argument she is attempting to distinguish this approach from the approaches of Giddens and Beck who she describes as being central conflationist – mistaking external structural conditions as co-productive of human reflexivity and agency. In order to broaden her discourse on historicity and contextuality without drawing on the logic of co-production, Archer insists that the complexification that we see in society (which she terms as reflexive modernity) is a result of a natural progression of an internal human agentic capacity towards increased reflexivity.

Reflexivity is not a continuous and stable feature of human mental experience however, and in this chapter I want to reject the idea that complexification of society is caused by the intensification of an omnipresent internal reflexivity on the part of individuals. The background for this is laid out in chapters four and five, in which I looked to skill acquisition and skilled coping to understand why reflexivity, conscious self-awareness and deliberation arise in some circumstances and not in others. Instead of the continuous reflexive state which Archer proposes, I have suggested that reflexivity is a mental response to two key features: novelty and rupture. If reflexivity is a response as opposed to a consistent mental feature, it would hold that observations of increased rates and intensities of reflexive states are to be explained by increased frequency of reflexivity's causal conditions: i.e. increased rates of novelty and increased rates of contradiction that cause the rupture of embodied/cognitive skilled coping processes. One important aspect of this in contemporary times is precarity:

Butler and Athansaiou describe this process of increasing novelty and contradiction as an effect of precarisation. When precarity becomes a 'disciplining norm', it both serves the purpose of regulating human behaviour at the same time as working to justify further disciplinary apparatus such as surveillance. As such, precarity acts as a type of "anonymous power" in Foucault's terms, a decentralised disciplinary mechanism that is seen to be necessitated by the conditions which it, itself, produces. Framed, as Maguire states, in contrast to a norm of security, states of precarity are utilised in order to justify and enforce security mechanisms such as increased surveillance and intensified presence, force or intervention of law enforcement. Such steps are associated with a decline in the personal rights of individual citizens, which citizens themselves are asked to bear temporarily in the interests of regaining a state of security from an external threat or that of an internal minority:

“In [the work of Bourdieu and Castel], precarity is given an exclusively negative meaning, and a conceptual binary is constructed between the secure welfare state, and insecure precarity... If precarity is always framed in contrast to a norm of security, it becomes impossible to grasp the contemporary normalization by which precarity becomes the disciplining norm.”

(Maguire, A. 2016: 211-212)

Schram notes that neoliberalism itself begets precarity (2015: 79), arguing that we should understand precarity, and the modes of discourse which produce precarity not as “a passing episode, but a new mode of regulation that distinguishes our current era. (Lorey, I. 2015: 211). Under related but different philosophical directions, Butler in particular argues that the structural elements of western and globalized societies are increasingly characterised not by stability, but by precarity, and that this destabilization is characteristic of the dominant contemporary socio-economic system of neoliberalism, which I first introduced in chapter two. The distinct modes by which this happens and the instances of destabilization such as the privatisation of social services provide a huge ground for further research, but it is the combined effect of these processes which are tied together by the underlying neoliberalism which I am interested in here. The popularization of zero hour contracts over employment stability, the turn of the media away from fact reporting towards destabilization stories focusing around fear, insecurity and risk, the inaccessibility of the housing market to the increasingly large zero-hour workforce initiating a rent-society with decreasing rights in the face of rising rent prices and short-term lease conditions and the undermining of unions, as just a few examples, combine to produce an environment within which subjects’ lives are characterised by instability. The basic needs of providing consistent income for food and provisions, access to healthcare, acquiring reliable shelter, and being able to take a wider state of safety in one’s environment for granted are undermined within these multiple and intersecting practices. Where a subject is continually encountering problems or needing to consistently anticipate and mentally negotiate future problems, the course of skilled coping with that environment is continually and consistently interrupted.

Here there lies a tension whereby precarity is seen both as a causal mechanism of reflexivity and the ability to make deliberative, agentic decisions, and as the means by which a subject becomes critically aware of the broader structuralising forces that constrain, rather than enable the possibilities for their actions. As Butler explains, precarity can appear to be the antithesis of agency, as the constraining and destabilising conditions whereby a subject is placed at the mercy of broader, more powerful forces:

“[p]erformativity was, to be sure, an account of agency, and precarity seems to focus on conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one’s control.”

(Butler, J., 2009: i).

“social and political institutions are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity, especially within the nation-state ... and yet, “precarity” designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”

(Butler, J. 2009: ii)

Social institutions, infrastructure and broader social structures have been conceptualised as stabilising and ordering influences which compose the cultural, social and political landscape in which we contextualise our actions and the decision-making processes involved in agentic action. They are also, as Butler points out, also the source and conditions of chronic destabilisation for both marginalised groups and those that lack access to the socio-cultural and logistical affordances that are taken for granted in the logic of those structures. The lack of accessibility to certain affordances associated with education, qualification, housing, fiscal stability and mobility for example, is a restriction of access to the logic of stability and the logics of economic and political legitimacy, visibility and iterability which is assumed by the structuring discourses of neoliberalism.

This is particularly salient due to the negative relationship between precarity and intelligibility, visibility and access to the technologies and apparatus of structural change. Precarious positions are maintained and exacerbated by a lack of access to (and the inability to be adequately seen or taken seriously by) those in structural positions of stability and power. As in the discussion earlier in this section, where I quoted Maguire on the notion of the hierarchisation, precarity is not something which describes a unilaterally shared state of being. Rather, it is unequally distributed along political and demographic lines. A person's subject position and positionality is related to the dimensions of precarity felt by an event and the extent of the real tangible, and sometimes lethal, effects of that precarity. Butler explains this in terms of the differential norms associated with gender roles and accessibility to structures and structural logics according to the norms associated with them:

“Precarity is, of course, directly linked with gender norms, since we know that those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence.”

(Butler 2009: ii)

Maguire states that such exposure to risk along demographic lines is enabled through the socio-political narrative process of othering (Maguire, A. 2016: 212), and is applicable not

just to gender but along the lines of race, citizenship, sexuality, mobility, ability, class and other intersecting demographic positionalities. Furthermore, it is quantifiable in both risk of first-order harassment and violence and through insidious forms such as lack of access to healthcare, inability to protect oneself from hazardous working environments (through lack of unionization and replacability of the workforce), and other secondary exposures to risk.

Athanasίου explains that the “normative ontologies of the body work to judge, adjudicate, and demarcate which bodies matter. The body-in-history implies a constitutive relation ... to the social norms that constitute us as intelligible or unintelligible” (2013: 97). Intelligibility here has an important effect of autonomous decision-making. Firstly, intelligibility denotes what is understandable between groups of subjects – which concepts and shared experiences and practices which may be taken for granted within one group can be translated into sufficiently similar concepts held by a different group such that understanding can occur. Where concepts, practices and ways of being or doing are not able to be translated, the group that holds more social or political power either rewrites or imposes their own meaning upon and over the meaning held by the subjugated group resulting in a loss of adequate representation of difference which works to present the logics and practices of the dominant group appear universal (Spivak. G. 1988) When this occurs, the practices of the subjugated group that do not follow the logics of the dominant, continue to be read through the dominant rhetoric and appear illogical, discordant or irrational (ibid). This reading of the behaviour of marginalised groups as irrational then goes on to reify the existing power structure as normal, natural and inevitable. This process, however, is often fractured and internally incoherent. Just as in chapter four I described how contradiction within deeply internalised skill can cause a rupturing of the smooth unfolding of a skill, contradiction in practices and logics between social groups along political lines can result in epistemological rupture.

6.2.2. Epistemological Rupture

In chapters four and five, we saw that the tendency towards automation was a necessary component of mastery. In order to achieve fluid, context-sensitive and adaptive coping with the environment or with a particular skillset (whether it be predominantly physical such as sport or technical ability, or more heavily conceptual such as the rules and logics of language), fluidity, accuracy and the experience of intuitive response when using that skill was necessarily related to conscious-inaccessibility of more basic components of action. The increasing inaccessibility of more basic technical and conceptual abilities, termed internalisation, allows the body and pre-conscious cognitive processes to bear a heavier load in unfolding on-going context-sensitive action, freeing up precious conscious attention to focus on other tasks which place demands on the subject (whether those be more

advanced technical elements, simultaneous social interaction, or merely planning what to have for dinner).

In chapters four and five, I predominantly focused on how internalisation happens. There is, however, substantive phenomenological difference in the kind of agency which is exhibited in skilled on-going controlled action which we have seen in skilled coping, and the kind of explicit senses of control and authorship which are seen in self-aware conscious deliberation. These two methods of coping with a dynamic social environment achieve the same result of adapting behaviour context-sensitively, using internalised conceptual apparatus and embodied cultural norms, but do so, I propose, as responses to different circumstances. If, as I have proposed through the discussion of the work of Dreyfus, Gallagher and Butler among others, our primary and preferred state of environmental engagement is that of skilled, non-deliberative coping, why do some circumstances and interactions with the world thrust us into an explicitly conscious, intentional mental state? What function does that state have and what role does it play in our on-going adaptation to a continually shifting context?

To take Dreyfus's account of skilled coping too lightly would give the impression of a mental life which was predominantly smooth, tranquil and uninterrupted. To argue that skilled or smooth coping with the environment is the preferred state is not to say that that state is unilaterally achieved. The socio-political context subjects exist within is often turbulent, and even at its smoothest and most simple, typically involves frequent shifts in behavioural demands. The drive towards skilled coping is the tendency towards internalization where possible in order to simplify and increase efficiency on further engagements, but our social environments are rarely so simple as to make complete internalization attainable, there is simply too much environmental noise. Bourdieu's version of embodied coping, composed in terms of habitus, argues that despite the tendency towards embodiment and internalization of skills, it is "maladjustment, discrepancy, contradiction, transplanting and rupture [that] are more typical of social existence" (2003: 46-7).

The concept of epistemological rupture or break has been widely theorised in sociological and philosophical approaches which emphasise the role of embodied and internalised knowledge in mental life. A rupturing or break within internalised skillsets describes the state whereby new knowledge, experience or observation challenges techniques, logics or common sense as to the way the world is or works. Similar concepts arise in Durkheim's *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895), in the works of Weber under the notion of axiological neutrality (1958), as well as in the works of Althusser (1969: 257), and Bourdieu, Passeron and Chamboredon (1968). In his study of the development of the scientific mind, Bachelard describes the drive to internalization as an epistemological obstacle to the

objective scientific method. Just as the sociological study of science has noted that paradigm shifts are drawn out processes whereby one discrete set of thought patterns, postulates, assumptions and methods can persist in the face of increasing evidence to their contrary, Bachelard describes common sense (understood here as the working culmination of norms, values and symbolic and conceptual cultural schemas) as something that must be crossed, made visible and challenged, in order to assess its validity and limits (Bachelard, 1938).

For Bachelard, the epistemological break is a necessary component of the continual 'correction of concepts' which encapsulates the *raison d'être* of scientific investigation. This correction can only be done by disassembling and questioning the very intuitions about the world which in chapter four I described as being the aim of learning to create: the intuitions which compose and enable the predictive, effective real-time context sensitivity to our on-going social environment. As I went on to describe in chapter five, such intuitions are composed not only of scientific facts, but of the positional, intersectional and institutionalised political, social, and economic realities which structure an individual's particular social landscape. In that chapter I went on to describe how these factors are internalised into the subject in much the same way as the skills we discussed in chapter four, through learning embodied techniques and conceptual tools, developing the right (or effective) links between actions was not dependent on ever necessarily understanding the full epistemological and ontological reasoning on which they are based.

Lahire characterises the individual habitus and schema of embodied knowledge not as a coherent whole that itself works smoothly, but as itself subject to intersectionalities: a "depository of diverse dispositions that are the product of multiple socialising experiences ... and competing cultural influences" (Noble, 2012: 258). In contrast to Bourdieu's crises that demand readjustment, Lahire formulates a rupturing of the practical sense and logic of situational performance (2003: 121-2). From a skilled-coping approach, this rupturing of logic that Bourdieu and Lahire talk about can be seen as the continual process of adjustment of the internalised conceptual apparatus in relation to on-going environmental change. Either new information or situational skills are incorporated into that apparatus, or they sufficiently challenge a subject's positional stance and require conscious attention in order to be addressed.

Social structures, discourses and logics are not, however, stable. They change over time, and this change is widely theorised to be a result of the interaction and/or interjection of agentic subjects. Much of the theorising on the epistemological break or epistemological rupture has been in terms of pedagogy. Specifically, its primary usage has been in the sociological analysis of the scientific method, in examining the role of social discourses in the way in which scientists break away from widely accepted conceptual models. Here, I

want to broaden the logic of the epistemological rupture to how the mind works more generally.

6.2.3. Rupture: a necessary component of change agency

When sociologists speak of agency, the most critical aspect is the notion of change agency. Change agency is specifically the ability of a subject to act contrary to the conditioning structural powers placed upon them in order to effect a subversive impact on those powers themselves. Change agency is held to be the most critical human ability which prevents subjects from the trope of the deterministic 'cultural dope': allowing subjects to act against and change the social structures, institutions, discourses and processes which socialise them. Change agency is a fundamental component of sociological accounts of resistance, of social change and of social instability, and is as central in Archer's morphogenetic approach as it is in Butler's accounts of performativity and precarity. The way in which change agency is conceptualised and how it is seen to unfold, however, differs substantially.

While Archer sees change agency as a relatively continuous mode of being, that is continually accessible to a subject, it is unlikely that instances of resistance are solely and directly products of conscious will. Conceptualising it as an internal response to (or negotiation of) external conditions as opposed to an internal state, I argue that change agency, like the smaller, less momentous instances of choice, has been increasing in response to increasingly precarious conditions. In drawing out the difference in internality and externality of the genesis of resistance and effecting change here, let us briefly return to Foucault. For Foucault, resistance is always internal to power structures rather than something that stands outside of them in opposition: "*[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power*" (Foucault, 1984 [1976]).

Even in forms of resistance which require explicit conscious awareness of particular forms of power, the conscious, reflexive subject remains within the conditions and structural context through which those discursive power formations operate. This means that even in explicit resistance and protest, dissenting subjects must continue to be partially constituted by, and utilize the conceptual and structural apparatuses which they are attempting to disrupt. While pragmatists differ substantially in approach from Foucault, both suggest that opportunities for the epistemological foundations of resistance arise from the internal conflict and internal contradiction within power structures and their logics and narratives. To an extent, internal conflict and contradiction within our environments and social narratives can be withstood, but as with epistemological rupture within science, increasing instability or precarity of norms and claims associated with repeated contradiction, interrupts the smooth usage of such norms in on-going conceptualisation and action. Sufficient interruption leads to the

breakdown of the ability of the subject to utilise such norms to inform on-going action on a pre-reflexive level. As this smooth usage of logics, norms or physical and technological apparatuses are interrupted, these internal contradictions are brought more frequently and persistently to the attention of the subject.

The American pragmatist tradition in particular has utilised the conception of reflexivity as a response to novelty and problematisation in the way that I am endorsing here from a skilled coping perspective. The pragmatist tradition, which includes Dewey, Mead, and social phenomenologists such as Shultz, contains within it differing approaches and explanations, but generally responds to utilitarian models of rational action through a critique of the mode and means of individual action. Utilitarian theorists, who share a similar conception of action to Archer, see action as stemming from pre-conceptualised, deliberative, internal representations of that action and its consequences, model an individual's actions upon the linear progression of external stimulus combined with consciously held goals (or 'ultimate concerns' in Archer's case), towards pre-conceived, consciously guided and controlled execution of acts. Pragmatists criticise this model for upholding an unrealistically stable representation of both environmental contexts and of individual goals and intentions. Contexts and intentions, for pragmatists, are in a continual elaborative and dynamic relationship, whereby the continual shifts in context, priorities and demands of the social environment effect continual iteration of a subject's stance in relation to it. As such, such thinkers:

“insist that action not be perceived as the pursuit of pre-established ends, abstracted from concrete situations, but rather that ends and means develop codeterminously within contexts that are themselves ever changing and thus always subject to re-evaluation and reconstruction on the part of the reflective intelligence ... As actors respond to changing environments, they must continually reconstruct their view of the past in an attempt to understand the causal conditioning of the emergent present, while using this understanding to control and shape their responses in the arising future. This process forms the core of what Mead (1932: 76) calls “the deliberative attitude,” the capacity to “get hold of the conditions of future conduct as these are found in the organized responses we have formed, and so construct our pasts in anticipation of that future.”

(Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A., 1998: 968)

There is, in pragmatism, a consideration of the intricate, continual relationship between dynamic and changing contextual circumstances with the actor's orientation towards that context and their conscious intentional stance. Such an approach, as Emirbayer and Mische

explain, focuses on temporal-relational engagement and presents agency as a relational and context-dependent response to changing structural environments (1998: 963). In a similar way as I have criticised Archer's dualistic appeal to ontological irreducibility, theorists such as Dewey see this relationality to be primary and argue that divisions such as that between the mental and physical are nominal concepts which help thinkers to approach particular problems given their available access to knowledge, but that such conceptual tools are often too readily used to appeal to a more fundamental ontological reality (Dewey, J. 1929; Hildebrand 2003).⁵⁵

What I want to address here is not *that* epistemological ruptures or change agency occur, but *how* they occur: specifically to challenge the prevailing notion that the catalyst for such breaks are an intrinsic quality of any inherent supra-social rational agent. Here, I argue that epistemological breaks are a possible, though not a necessary, effect of the kind of problematisation that I described in chapter four. In that chapter, I described how once a physical skill has been sufficiently mastered, its performance is largely coordinated without conscious intervention. This is except for in the case where there is an error in prediction - whether by a problem in the environment or enaction sequence, or by novel circumstances - which affects the unfolding of the skilled process. In chapter five I then went on to describe how this process may be extended to the learning of social and conceptual skills derived from institutionalised social structures. In both these cases, where problems arise in an unfolding internalised behaviour, that problem is raised to the type of conscious, self-aware deliberative attention that is most traditionally associated with agentic choice.

I propose here the strong argument that problematisation is the only way to achieve this self-aware mental state of engaged deliberation. Furthermore, I am arguing that such problematisation is overwhelmingly externally derived. Succinctly, while Archer repeatedly returns to a notion of the subject itself as the genesis of reflexivity, I argue that the break from skilled coping to states of reflexive, self-aware deliberation where subjects experience control, authorship and choice occur within the mind but are not generated within them at

⁵⁵ I am reluctant to associate too strongly with the pragmatist school of thought at this point, as the insistence upon the practical application of ideas, and the testability of such application in human experiences is not something that I am focused on developing within the confines of this thesis. As an example, the emphasis on the practicality and utility of the philosophical elements of science, knowledge and belief systems is not necessarily something that I would fully subscribe to. However, I do appreciate that a further investigation of the relationship between pragmatism, skilled coping and embodied schools of thought such as performativity may be a fruitful area for further work. Here, in the last sections of the thesis, I want to focus my attention on the potential of the specific pragmatist assertion that conscious thought arises specifically as a tool for problem solving to guide action in unpredictable or novel situations - rejecting the intuition that the function of conscious, self-aware representational and deliberative thought exists either for its own sake or for the purposes of mirroring external reality (James, W. 1909).

will. Rather, such breaks are a response to sufficient challenge to the technical or conceptual components of an internalised action apparatus and rely on exposure to such challenge through social interaction, exposure to different ideas or ways of being/doing, or through the repeated failure of the subject's internalised apparatus to the extent that it can no longer be smoothly utilised. As such, challenge and novelty lie at the heart of the transition to self-aware deliberative states, and we would expect the frequency and extent of the exposure to such challenges to directly correlate with the frequency and extent of a subject's experience of self-aware deliberation (i.e. a reduction in the experience of flow). If this holds, we would expect the reflexive modernity Archer speaks of not to be a result of a natural expansion of human reflexivity, but to be closer to Giddens and Beck's concept of the risk society, as a direct mental consequence of increased structural precarity.

Summary

"[I]t is our nature to acquire second natures, to be driven by habitual activities that gain us access to the world around us ... We are lost in schemes of organization of which we are not the author and about which we command no clear understanding."

(Noe, A., 2015)

If we define agency in terms of control over action, we must include the kinds of skilled-coping which we see subjects exhibit without interference of conscious deliberation. If we define agency in terms of authorship, the same problem occurs. If we define agency as only those situations where there is sufficient time and mental space for deliberation, where a subject truly has the free choice between several outcomes, we must take into account that these types of situations are relatively rare. Identifying the link between strong dualist accounts of agency and structure with the logic of the individual characterised by neoliberalism suggests that the notion of a pre-social autonomous and independent *intrinsic* human subjectivity is the uniting factor in sociological accounts which emphasise agentic free will and cognitive autonomy from the social environment. Utilising this observed transition from conscious attention and deliberation towards intuitive intelligent instantaneous coping to understand how subjects may learn to engage in their social environments also may help us approach the problem of why we experience a sense of agency in some, deliberative, conditions, and not in others. Furthermore it may offer a way of explaining retroactive applications of the sense of agency and authorship, where subjects caught up in the flow of interaction and enaction may only experience a sense of control and authorship *after* as opposed to *during* an action or interaction.

If this is the case, then any smooth and skilled social interaction or practice which is sensitive and appropriate to a subject's cultural and social context must be dependent on social rules and logics having been deeply internalised and embodied to the extent that conscious reflexivity is necessarily bypassed. This understanding of masterful social engagement severs the link between conscious rationality and appropriate action, which is presumed under dualist theories which follow the logic of the Leviathan model of social organisation. In this case, attentive and deliberate social change of the type associated with agentic behaviour, is made possible only through the breakdown of the dominant modes of logic which structure the context in which social groups act. This breakdown is possible in its more productive forms through education and exposure to difference, but is more widely associated with the discord which arises through marginalisation and the differentially distributed exposure to forms of precarity felt by those who do not fit the dominant models, nor have access to the structural apparatuses that those narratives and infrastructural organisation structures assume.

Here I am putting forward the strong argument that exposure to precarity is an important stimulus of reflexivity and change agency in a contemporary context. Complexity and contradiction interrupts the otherwise skilled flow of action, enabling critical discourse as problems are thrust into conscious attention. However, the management and negotiation of such critical attention is also dependent firstly upon having immediate and non-problematic access to problem-solving apparatuses (tools of language, modes of social interaction and cooperation, accessibility to other structured modes of operation), and secondly upon having relative security in other areas of life. An excess of precarity, or precarity which extends to multiple spheres at once, has the opposite effect – either through driving a subject to a state of hyper-reflexivity whereby routine action is acutely dissociated and action sequences are no longer able to function properly, or, as we have seen under neoliberalism, extensive structural precarity can paralyse populations through by the strict regulation of accessibility to primary needs of security, food, housing, stable employment and rest: enabling precarity to be utilised as a method of social control. Given that precarity is a critical component of critical agency *and* that such agency is also dependent upon accessibility to social, structural, conceptual and material affordances within the physical and social world, sociologists must take care not to simply associate critical awareness with agentic social change, but must take into account scales of rupture and the threat of critical and social paralysis. Theories of agency in the social sciences must also always be acutely aware of the salient relationship between differentially distributed levels of structural precarity, accessibility to resources which are regulated by that exposure to precarity and their impact on the realisation of critical, deliberative conscious decision-making.

In the immersive, continually dynamic world where appropriate actions must be constituted on the fly, I propose that we see interjection by executive function (the set of cognitive processes which are necessary for behavioural control through monitoring action and conscious trajectory towards goal attainment) only under these two conditions. Firstly, if there is a problem with the unfolding of the action sequence: if we do not have the tools to hand to perform the required action, something is broken, has not behaved the way we would expect it to, or if there are novel or unfamiliar aspects to the task that need to be attended to. Secondly, if our attention is drawn to a problem by an external source: i.e. another person draws our attention to something, or we have received new information about a skillset that is relevant to an important task, skill or interaction. The sensation that one 'could have' acted differently in a given situation, or could intervene into any masterful skillset at any time, I propose may be a useful fiction constructed in line with the heavy value western forms of neoliberalism place on total individual autonomy, but that oversimplifies the ways in which choices become available, and sufficient impetus to choose arise in ongoing, complex and skillful interactions.

Conclusion

“The atmosphere of free will is another sort of environment. It is the enveloping, enabling, life-shaping, conceptual atmosphere of intentional action, planning and hoping and promising ... we all grow up in this atmosphere, and we learn to conduct our lives in the terms it provides. It appears to be a stable and dehistorical construct, but it is not. It evolved as a recent product of human interactions ... our planet’s atmosphere is not guaranteed to last forever, and neither is our free will.”

(Dennett, 2004: 9-10)

I began this thesis with an epigraph from Wittgenstein’s “Culture and Value”, which concluded that *“The new way of thinking is what is so hard to establish. Once the new way of thinking has been established, the old problems vanish; indeed, they become hard to recapture. For they go with our way of expressing ourselves.”* (1989: 48e), and I want to conclude with an insight from Daniel Dennett. In the first, Wittgenstein draws attention to the ephemeral nature of the conceptual apparatus with which we communicate, interrelate, become visible and ‘express ourselves’ within a particular paradigm. In this thesis, I have approached the resurgence of dualism in the agency/structure debate through seeing the attachment to concepts of autonomy for structural influence as partially an expression of remnant Cartesian dichotomies embedded within Neoliberalism. The complexity of such narratives of autonomy, freedom, responsibility and the inherent ability to stand sufficiently apart from the contexts in which we find ourselves to make rational decisions about them, are tightly bound not just to those structures themselves, but the way in which we experience, explain and express ourselves and our actions within them. Crucially, however, as Dennett notes in the above statement, this does not necessarily imply that a claim to universality or to ontological truth that extends beyond the conditions of their emergence is valid.

Throughout this thesis I have aimed to destabilize the synonymy that Archer assumes between the sense of agency as the self-aware phenomenological experience of having control and authorship over decisions made within the world, and the appeal to an ontological claim about agency being an inherent, individual capacity which a subject possesses that is fundamentally different to, and autonomous from, the social context in which it arises and is enacted. In critiquing this synonymy within critical realism I have looked at how the sense of agency arises, and importantly, where it does not. The negative relationship between skilled action and accessibility to the practical and logical apparatuses of action through conscious awareness suggests that much more is going on in the sense of agency than simply a linear mediation between conscious intent and action. In looking at

such action, I have advocated for Dreyfus and Gallagher's stance that smooth, skilled coping with the physical and social environment is the preferred method of an embodied, embrained subject acting within the world. This is in direct contrast to Archer's implicit assumption that conscious reflexivity is one-dimensional and omnipresent. Over the course of the thesis I have challenged the notion prevalent in the critical realist school that agency is an innate state of human ontology which can be accessed and initiated at will irrespective of the contextual conditions of the subject in question. Conversely, I argue that opportunities for agency, defined as choices made with a degree of experience of freedom between options, arise as a response to external conditions of novelty or rupture, whether that rupture be physical or epistemological.

Shifting the understanding of the way in which our bodies and minds prefer to manage information, adaptation and interaction from conscious deliberation to predictive, context-sensitive coping, affects the way in which agency is understood. Rather than being the constant politically- and socially-neutral mediator between us and the world, agency starts to look more like a graduated, perfectly contextually-honed mechanism for dealing with problems that arise in response to those particular circumstances and fades accordingly when those problems have been negotiated. This account of agency makes a claim about conscious self-awareness more generally, implying that self-aware reflexive modes themselves are subject to this environmental stimulus. A strong argument of this type might even claim that higher-level consciousness as a whole may arise for the sole purpose of integrating novel and problematic factors into the skilled coping repertoire. Investigating the parameters and logistics of such a claim would make for interesting further work, here, however I want to merely make this claim about the experience of agency.

Making such a claim involves both an opening up and a contraction of what is considered agentic. This opening up primarily involves a rejection of the determinism by which agency has been typically contrasted. As discussed in chapters two and three, agency has been caught up in a set of interlinked ideologies which saw any notion of socialised, habitual or embodied action, as antithetical to true agentic action. As a result, only the precise set of explicitly self-conscious mentalising processes that feed into instances of deliberate action are taken to be symptomatic of true agency. At the same time, true agency is also taken to be the primary manner in which humans negotiate their environments. Questionably, this appears to exclude that which is seen to be 'common sense' or intuitive, that I have argued feeds into the conceptual apparatus that self-aware decision-making utilises but that also guides the types of unfolding action we see as subjects in a continual on-going relationship within our environments. It is these underlying processes, of 'common-sense', second-nature and intuition that I want to draw back into the definition of agency, arguing for their status as agency's necessary components. This means conceptualising these non-reflexive elements

of action as composed of skill, experience and an ongoing, predictive and adaptive relationship with the environment, as opposed to being rudimentary unthinking reflexes.

Discussion

“[M]ost studies of the sense of agency fail to take into consideration that it involves more than simply something that happens in the head (mind or brain), and specifically that it has a social dimension.”

(Gallagher, S. in Clark et al. 2013: 118)

The premise of this thesis is that Archer’s Morphogenetic hypothesis of agency ultimately fails to account for the real ways in which minds, brains and bodies interact with their dynamic environments. I positioned the popularisation of this hypothesis within a broader political and cultural framework of western neoliberalism, indicating that the politics of individualism and the cultural narratives of intrinsic autonomy are promoting a return to a paradigm of separatism between body and society on the one hand and mind and free will on the other. I then returned to action, and the ways in which skilled action develops, showing that while Archer’s hypothesis was intended to reconcile agency and structure whilst protecting the subject from determinism, Archer produces a notion of the agent which is outside of the actions and affordances which compose their sense of the world and their meaningful movements within it.

I then discussed the ways in which skilled, intentional action occurs outside of the executive control of self-aware deliberative action, looking to the ways in which such a mental state must necessarily take a backseat in on-going complex masterful action. I looked to philosophers such as Gallagher, Sutton and Protevi to look at how in the social sciences we might approach socialisation as a set of masterful, skilled, context-sensitive interactions that rely on the same embodied and pre-executive functions as those other more physically-based skills. I then argued that such skills should be considered to be constitutive of the form and style which our conscious, self-aware states of deliberation take, extending this argument to engage with Butler’s account of how positionality and intersectionalities, and the different subject positions which they produce, profoundly affect the types of actions and choices that a subject is able to make, what is ‘thinkable’ to them, what is meaningful and why some actions are available to some and not others along political and demographic lines.

The first part of the thesis dealt with the current state of the agency-structure debate within the social sciences. The first chapter was devoted to identifying the resurgence of latent assumptions about pre-social subjectivity in sociology, which I suggest are key factors in the

stagnation of this debate. Through identifying and defining five main ways in which this debate is typically approached (1.1.2.), I proposed that the contemporary resurgence of dualism stemming from critical realism is related to the broader political climate in which this theory is being produced. These positions were not clearly defined in the literature, as many theorists transition between positions over time, are defined differentially by others, or, like Giddens and Archer, have philosophical commitments to one position yet utilise the language of another in their work. Nevertheless, I proposed that they can be broadly defined as:

1. Dominance of structure: action is always a result of structural conditions, and the experience of autonomy is largely superficial (the structural dope).
2. Dominance of agency: free will is always accessible and able to supercede structural conditions.
3. Analytical Dualism: structure and agency must be taken as autonomous and fully separable at any point in time.
4. Dialectical: structure and agency are interconnected
5. Inextricability: structure and agency are fundamentally entangled and co-constitutive

Here, I identified that contemporary sociology is negotiating a stalemate between agency and structure, and located the critical difficulty as being a problem in how the question itself is posed, and the terms which the debate uses. The concepts of agency and structure themselves are dialectically related such that they presuppose one another (1.1.2.). It is important to note here, that the definitions of the terms agency and structure, much like the terms of body and mind in other spheres of philosophy, are shifting, expanding and becoming re-articulated in relation to the changing socio-political context in which theorists are embedded. Continually, however, social theory finds itself returning to and renegotiating the terms by which any claim to free will and autonomy exists within a structural, conditioning environment (1.1.3.). The way in which we approach that argument is heavily defined by the type of language that we are using to conceptualise action, and in chapter two I moved on to look at the ways in which the recent theoretical return to dualism is heavily contoured by the language and logics of intensifying individualism inherent to neoliberalism.

The second chapter went on to identify this political climate as contemporary neoliberalism, arguing that the naturalisation of individualism, logics of possession and ideals of essential autonomy are reflected in the assumptions that are made when sociologists theorise the subject, agency, structure and change (2.1.1). In this chapter I began to investigate neoliberalism's claim to speak for the universal human subject, looking at the ways in which identity markers and self-experience differ over time, culture and economic structure. This was a tentative move at this point in the thesis, given that I am also speaking from within the

socialising structures that I am critiquing, so here I was aiming to make the case that some of the claims which both neoliberalism and critical realism make about the nature of the subject and the ontology of action are themselves produced through the socio-political structures that claim to reflect them. By situating contemporary accounts of dualism within neoliberalism, I have worked to ground ideals entangled with the concept of agency which can appear intuitive, and therefore also appear to be natural, de-historical and inevitable (2.1.2). The ways in which agency is experienced cross-culturally and intra-nationally correlate to differences in economic structures between individualism and collectivism (2.2.3.). This suggests that the way in which western theorists may experience agency, and extrapolate from that experience, is not necessarily universal. Rather, the sense of agency and its relationship to ideas of autonomy, freedom, self-orientation and individualism may be produced by political and economic structures: reflecting, rather than representing, them.

In the second part of the thesis, composed of chapters three and four, I moved on to take a more nuanced look at how it is that assumptions of internality, autonomy and individualism have been retained in Archer's work in particular, and began to look at how we might alternately theorise action. In chapter three, I made the case that the popularization of theories of emergence in the social sciences have worked to cover up, rather than explain, assumptions about the nature of the human mind (3.1.1.). I looked at the language with which theorists such as Archer explain mental phenomena, and the way that reflexivity is prioritised above other, less-directly-experienced mental processes. I argued that these factors of language and disproportionate focus feed into Archer's intuition that agency itself can be thought of as a bounded, autonomous process which is fundamentally separate from the social environment and entirely of its own kind (3.1.2.). Defining agency as a *sui generis* phenomenon, in the way that Archer does, is a reflection of the way she treats the mind in general (3.1.3). Since, especially in her earlier work prior to 2015, Archer treats agency and reflexivity as synonymous with conscious awareness, there is little space within the morphogenic approach for a thorough, complex understanding of ongoing action which does not necessitate acute attention, deliberation or executive oversight (3.2.1.). As a result, there are recurring instances in the logical argument for morphogenesis where complex, ongoing embodied action which is not necessarily attended to by explicit oversight is bundled in either with that consciously-directed control or with instinct, reflex and automatic habitual action.

In the latter sections of chapter three, I therefore turned to accounts of the experience of agency in ongoing action: looking at how intent, intentionality, a sense of authorship and sense of control over action are not always experienced as neat mediators between informational input from the environment and outputs of deliberated, consciously-considered action (3.2.2.). In real, ongoing interaction with the world, a sense of agency and authorship

is often applied to activity after-the-fact, only when attention is drawn to an action or behaviour by an outside source, or through the interruption of a part of that action sequence. In such cases, we might say that 'of course we intended to turn the doorknob' when exiting a room, even though no particular attention to the action itself may have been experienced as the action was unfolding. At the point of turning the doorknob, we may have been engaged in immersive conversation, or thinking about where we are going, whether we are running late, if we've got everything we need with us, for example. The intent and explicit sense of authorship may be felt over the overall action sequence, but conscious intent may not be experienced over the action itself in the moments where it is being performed (3.2.3.). This itself does not make that action any less purposeful.

In contrast, Archer's underlying commitment to the synonymy between the agentic state and true action, places too great a dependence on the agentic state to account for normal, skillful, ongoing action in the world (4.1.1.). Such a dependence places too great an emphasis on conscious deliberation, which Fleetwood suggests leaves us with a model of a hyper-reflexive subject, whose reliance on representation, deliberation and conscious attentiveness is so great that such a subject would likely enter a state of mental paralysis, unable to function under the weight of these simultaneous, ongoing mental demands (Fleetwood, 2008: 187). In order to assess Archer's model of agency as the causal mechanism of what she sees as true action (action which is not instinct, reflex or mindless habit), I broke down the experience of agency into two composite elements: sense of control; and, sense of authorship.

In light of this, the fourth chapter then went on to further investigate Archer's dualism between reflexive agency and consciousness on the one hand and instinctive automata and habitual action on the other (4.1.1.). If Archer's dualism is correct, we would expect to see an increase in the scope and complexity of conscious deliberation and reflexive attention as skill levels increase, consistent with the level of knowledge and physical control needed to enact mastery over action. However, looking at skilled action, and the relationship between conscious attention and skill acquisition, we find that there's a broadly negative relationship between the two (4.1.2.).

This means that the active subject must have a sense of having chosen to initiate the action and have a sense of intention about the *way in which* that action is performed (qualitatively different from the sensation of instinctive reaction or protective reflex). As experience in the mechanical and epistemological components of a particular action or skill increases, it may be that certain trajectories for action, including its style, become 'chunked' (4.1.2.2.), so that the experience of having control and authorship shifts from the composite elements of the action, to the broader intention of an action sequence in a particular context. For example,

as the skill level of a guitarist or bassist progresses, skills will become progressively compartmentalized into larger and larger groups. At the beginning, their consciously held intentions and experience of authorship and control are concentrated on finger position, attempting to retrieve memories of F sharp minor, and which notes a '4' (B) and '7' (E) of such a scale would be, gearing up to land perfectly on a slide from fret 3 to fret 15 and attempting to maintain their hand in the proper position. All of this is eventually replaced with merely the intention to play 'Wonderwall'. The playing of Wonderwall may then, with enough practice, be enacted without recourse to any of these prior concerns unless something happens, such as a string becoming unexpectedly untuned, or a muscle strain in the wrist causing certain positions to be painful or difficult to reach. In cases where a chunked action has become sufficiently mastered not to necessitate conscious attention and control over the minutia of its component actions, imposing conscious attention to those details can disrupt, rather than support, the continuation and performance of such actions. Being thrust into states of critical self-awareness (such as experiencing stage fright, or in the aftermath of an accident), can lead to subjects being physically unable to access the state of skilled-coping that allows those motions to go on smoothly, adaptively and context-sensitively.

If conscious attention to the details of action, and specific experiences of control and authorship over the components of such action disrupts rather than enables the unfolding of that action, then there is a significant problem in Archer's assumption that true action must entail conscious attention and directed supervisory attention. As a result, in chapter four I went on to define true action as: "purposeful and directed action which is appropriately moulded to a dynamic world", stating that: "meaningful, appropriate action is the basis for the kinds of representational thought which enables the abstract decision-making that we see in Archer's definition of agency. Yet, meaning, flexibility and adaptivity are ongoing whether reflexive oversight is attending to them or not." (see: 4.2.4).

Taking internalization of skill to be a fundamental basis for smooth, context-sensitive, ongoing action gives an account of dynamic intelligent action that is not consistently monitored by self-aware consciousness nor undergoing continual deliberation on a technical level (4.1.2.). Yet, not all types of unmonitored skilled action are the same. There is a difference between immersive activity that distracts from critical reflection, for example, and the type of habitual skill that underlies everyday tasks. Through looking at the different ways in which people report action that is not consistent with Archer's model of continuous and always-available agency (4.1.3.), we saw that there are commonalities that suggest that the type of agency Archer is referring to arises in response to very particular sets of conditions: where there is a problem in the conditions necessary for enaction, or where elements of a context or action sequence are completely new (4.2.4.).

This led us to consider how this type of context-sensitive, intelligent ongoing action can unfold without reflexive oversight. In the latter phase of chapter four, I engaged with the work of Wolpert and Gallagher in conversation with one another in order to look at how the brain, understood as an enabler of motion and action relies heavily on prediction, rather than merely the computation of incoming information (4.2.1.). While our worlds are complex, dynamic and changeable, much of what goes on in our day-to-day lives is relatively familiar. For the most part, we have our routines, a relatively stable social group and broadly consistent goals and tasks that rely on the same, shared underlying logic and rationale. We come to know how the things, people and situations which are likely to arise for us are going to affect us. This can be as simple as being sure enough that gravity works in a certain way (without necessarily even understanding the basic physical theory of gravity), that we can take setting a mug of coffee down on a table for granted, and not have to think much about doing it. What seems like a simple task, such as setting our coffee down between sips, is in fact a finely tuned set of physical micro-actions that are sensitively adjusting to environmental cues. Balance, situatedness (not being too close to the edge of the table, or half on/off a small stack of paper), proprioception of where our body is in relation to the table, arm/hand movements, temperature, other movements from the environment (a wobbly table or colleague shifting things about next to us), all go into this one small task taking less than a second. Rather than having to take all of these factors into account, process them and decide upon the best course of action, our bodies have already figured out the most likely set of factors and have prepped us to respond to that, most likely, model of how this action is going to unfold. We see this when our predictions don't quite match the environment – if for example, lost in thought, we accidentally go to pick up an old, empty coffee mug, rather than the full one we set down a minute ago, things might go awry. Without any deliberation or executive oversight, our body has prepared itself for the weight and balance of a full mug. This mug, being empty, is far too light: the resistance our muscles have prepared for the action are not met with the expected counter resistance, our hand goes flying up, our balance is momentarily lost, and our full attention is brought spiraling back to compensate.

Relying on prediction, informed by experience and internalised models of what to expect from the world, is extremely energy efficient (4.2.3.). We live in a constantly shifting environment full of these kinds of instances. If we were to go about micro-managing all of our tasks and the various factors that could possibly affect it, by the time we decided on the best course of action to take, all those subtle factors would have shifted and we would have to start all over again. More pressingly however, is that if we were to deal with all of these factors after we had all the incoming information about them, even menial tasks would take up all of our time and mental energy. Predicting the most likely set of occurrences, while perhaps not being infallible, provides us with a best fit, most of the time, and allows us to

interact with our environment in real time, primed to respond – not to everything at any time – but more energy efficiently, to what we know from experience is most likely to happen.

Our beliefs about what is likely to happen therefore are not just mediating, rationalising factors as Archer treats them, but are deeply internalised guides for ongoing action in the world. In the final part of the thesis, chapters five and six, I focus on how these belief systems are not just inherently socio-cultural and political, scaffolding our interactions specifically to our social worlds, but fundamentally compose our sense of agency: what we experience having agency over, and what we are able to act towards or in relation to, given the regulating, disciplining and enabling structures of our particular intersectional positionalities. The agentic subject position may be, as I explained through the work of Dreyfus, Sutton, Hoffding, Wolpert and Andy Clark in chapter four, a particularly adept problem-solving state, whose function is to eliminate the need for its own emergence on a case-by-case basis (4.2.3.). By this, I mean that as opposed to the assumption taken by theorists such as Archer, that the agentic state is a continuous basal state of human mentalising, that the sense of agency and the processes of deliberation, explicit rationalization and self-aware reflexivity that characterise it, arise for the sole purpose of problem solving in unfamiliar circumstances. This means that we would expect these states to arise only in response to a particular set of environmental conditions of novelty or problematisation, with the purpose of negotiating and solving them. Through solving them, by internalizing new coping strategies or dismissing that particular set of conditions as irrelevant, the agentic state removes the need for itself, and the brain-body-environment assemblage returns to what I suggest, is the primary mode of subject-environment interaction: smooth, ongoing, skilled coping.

Skills are not only physical, however. They are also social. Chapter five looked at this assertion in relation to the notion of the generative subject on which Archer models her approach to agency. Archer describes the process of making decisions about action as a process that largely happens ‘in the head’ through the internal conversation (5.1.1.). Looking back to the problems discussed in the first part of the thesis, I went on to make the case for sociology to utilise the notion of environmental affordances (5.2.1.), arguing that the generative subject illusion is something that reflects western academia’s relationship to neoliberalism (5.1.2.), but that does not reflect the observations about action compiled in chapters three and four. Here I suggested that Gallagher and Cristafi’s stronger model of ‘mental institutions’ (5.2.3.), the idea that our social institutions (understood in the Hegelian manner as the externalized products of shared mental processes) scaffold certain cognitive processes, to the extent that some of the mental processes and cognitive abilities that we take for granted as internal, innate and natural are enabled by and come into being only in relation to social structures in our environments.

Certainly this was entering complicated territory, since by that same line of argument, the neoliberal logics which I am attempting to detangle from the practice of social theory are actively involved in producing the language, conceptual apparatus, affordances for action and subject positions with which that social theory is done, including – of course – my own. As I discussed in chapter two, however, understanding social structures to be partially-constitutive of cognitive processes is not to imply any sort of determinism in the way that Archer understands it. Shifting the ‘way of thinking’, as Heidegger put it in the passage with which I opened the thesis, from structures limiting an ontologically free pre-social agent, to seeing actions and choices as the emergent product of particular relationships within those structures, means there is no determinism to be had (at least on this general level), only particular arising opportunities which are afforded to particular subjects in their particular meaningful environments.

So, how does one go about initiating change within a socio-political milieu which composes the practices, affordances and cognitive processes of its subjects? Change, and structural change in particular, is a core component of the agency-structure debate. Provoking change in our environments is central to the experience of having agentic choice, freedom and efficacy. In chapter six, therefore, I moved to look at how social and political change can be conceptualised in terms of subjects who are socially and politically constituted by the structures to which they are opposed. I suggested that the answer to this lies in the multiplicities of social structures and the messy, complex and intersectional ways in which they constitute subjectivities and environments differently (6.1.2.). Butler explains through the notion of performativity, that subjects are constituted by differentially distributed factors along demographic lines. These processes of subjectification, however, are not neatly encapsulated, but often involve contradictory dissonance between multiple influencing identity markers and group or sub-group associations (6.1.3.), that are not merely additive but produce quintessentially different subjectivities in their different amalgamations. When these identities and their different practices and logics compete, dissonance and disruption can occur in the same way as when practical skills are disrupted (6.2.2.). This results in activities and belief systems being called into question, and needing to be resolved. The amalgamations of contributing influences involved in a person’s identity and those of the people around them may be enough to stimulate a conscious awareness of (and perhaps dissenting position towards) the conceptual apparatuses that otherwise smoothly allow us to act within the world.

Dissonance and disruption are not just internal factors however. As Butler and Athanasiou explain, neoliberalism is characterised by precarity, the destabilization and impermanence of relations, situations, locations and accessibility to the relationships that structure a subject’s

environment and actions within it (6.2.1.). Drawing on the relationship between skilled action and reflexive attention that was described in part two, I suggested that endemic structural precarity is to this extent, a causal factor, both for the increase in reflexive modes of experience as described by Archer (2007) and Giddens and Beck (Beck, 1992; Giddens, Beck and Lash, 1994), and for the increasing naturalisation and normalization of these modes: explaining the contemporary resurgence of dualism in sociology that I described in chapter one.

Seeing neoliberal precarity as a disciplining norm and mode of regulation, the social and environmental relationships that contemporary subjects are relating to are less able to be governed by smooth skilled-coping, but rather are interrupted by frequent rupturing events that require attention, deliberation and conscious assessment. This means not just interruptions into the physical aspects of our skills, but deeper disruptions of the epistemological, logical and conceptual apparatuses with which we understand ourselves and others, and with which we make decisions (6.2.2.). Both ongoing skilled action and the experience of agency (including what we have agency over), must be thoroughly intersectional. We are thoroughly social beings, whose sociality both extends downwards to our instincts and basic emotions and is thoroughly co-constitutive in scaffolding complex cognitive processes and our experiences of them (6.2.3.). This means however, that our cognitive processes, including our experience of free agency, is thoroughly political: produced through, scaffolding and scaffolded-by intersecting and differentially distributed political processes.

Key Points

There are several, interrelated key points that I want the reader to come away with. Firstly, that I suspect that the resurgence of dualism noted in critical realism is informed by the naturalisation of individualism and the logics of possession inherent to neoliberalism. This assertion, however, is itself supported by the alternative model of action that I put forward in this thesis: that our social and political environment is thoroughly involved in our affordances for action and the way in which we feel like we have authorship and control over them. The socio-political environment informs the belief systems and 'way that we expect the world to be' that underlie our predictions, assumptions and habits as we navigate our worlds. This includes the way that we experience ourselves as agents, describing and explaining our behaviour in terms of the narratives that such socio-political systems provide us: in this case individualism, autonomy, free choice, self-orientation and rationality. However, as the system of neoliberalism itself begets precarity, skilled-coping processes of neoliberal subjects are frequently interrupted, leading to an increase of the frequency of states of self-aware deliberation that neoliberalism describes as the basic nature of human experience. That

increase in frequency, I suggest, itself may be a key, mobilizing factor in the resurgence of approaches that treat the agentic, deliberative mental state as primary, which I described in chapter one.

This is not to say that neoliberalism is the only defining factor in generating our experience of ourselves and our actions. Treatments of agency such as Archer's, while having a focus on temporality, treat structure as if it is homogenous and standardised over space. This assumes that structuring social influences are both internally coherent, and do not come in to contact with other, contradictory structures. As a result of this, there lies an unchallenged assumption within such work that structural change comes from individuals, envisaged as the external factors which interrelate, intersect, catalyse aspects of and cause internal contradiction within a particular structure. Given that precarity is a critical component of critical agency *and* that such agency is also dependent upon accessibility to social, structural, conceptual and material affordances within the physical and social world, sociologists must take care not to simply associate critical awareness with agentic social change, but must take into account scales of rupture and the threat of critical and social paralysis. Theories of agency in the social sciences must also always be acutely aware of the salient relationship between differentially distributed levels of structural precarity, accessibility to resources which are regulated by that exposure to precarity and their impact on the realisation of critical, deliberative conscious decision-making. Making these arguments is, however, dependent upon an aggregate set of supporting arguments, which run as follows:

1. Skilled coping is the primary and preferred state of being, meaning that there is a tendency towards automation and internalisation of skills and behaviours whether they be physical, social or conceptual. These include belief systems about the physical and social world which inform the pre-conscious predictions that we make about the world that enable our actions to be smooth, context-sensitive, on-going and instantaneous (unfolding in real-time).
2. Self-aware deliberation of the type Archer associates with agency arises only under two circumstances: novelty and rupture. This means that self-aware rationalisation and deliberation exists for the purpose of problem-solving in real, meaningful situations, and not as an end unto itself. The purpose of deliberative cognition can therefore be seen to be the extinguishing of the need for its own emergence on a case-by-case basis: to solve the problem and internalise the relevant skills to the extent that it is no longer needed for that particular process. This happens only when a situation is new to a subject, or when something doesn't work, or breaks within a known process.

3. Since these internalised skills include the conceptual apparatus involved in socio-cultural systems and the political logics which frame our belief systems, this rupturing can occur through exposure to contradiction. This contradiction can be external, through exposure to difference, or internal through competing identities, roles and positionalities. The intersectionality of positionality, therefore means that identities always contain within them the propensity to disrupt the smooth coping of the subject they generate.

The scale of the topic undertaken for this thesis is large. Arguably, the structure agency debate is one of the most widely contested discourses in sociology, and therefore the scope of available trajectories the project could have taken are immense. Similarly, the scope for interdisciplinary engagement with philosophy of mind is more fertile than I have been able to fully characterise here. I have endeavoured to stay relatively focussed on select theorists whilst aiming to uncover the scale of further interdisciplinary work which can be pursued in any number of these intersections of theory. As is to be expected the cost of breadth is, however, depth. In this thesis I have touched on a number of complex sociological and philosophical ideas, and I am aware that the treatment of each of these ideas deserves far greater attention than I have been able to give here. The central aim of this thesis is merely to unpack the extent of the interdisciplinary conversation which needs to be had between social theory and philosophy of mind in order to move past the stagnating structure/agency debate. In the interests of brevity and clarity in my objective to form a foundational outline of an alternate model of agency for the social sciences, it is necessary to temporarily put aside in-depth discussion of topics such as psychological colonisation, intelligibility, translatability, precarity and relationality, topics which themselves are composed of complex and competing ideas, for further work.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis should be viewed as an initial exercise in demonstrating the relevance of philosophical debates to sociological theory, rather than as an attempt at a conclusive solution. I have begun to sketch out a position in which social practices and the logics of rationality and action which they underpin are constructed interactively. Through replacing latent sociological assumptions of the pre-social subject with a model of adaptive, context-sensitive bio-sociality, I have called for a more co-productive stance on the relationship between social structures and individual minds than is possible from a critical realist position. As a result of this, there are extensive fertile opportunities for further research that would benefit the development of the suggestions I have made within the thesis.

Further work

A concern with how agency is conceptualised may affect the way in which practical sociology can be usefully carried out. Social theory, like all other areas of philosophy, is concerned with the foundations and implications of practical research: serving a dual role of reflecting back on the methods and implications of data collection in order to better inform future study. While the thesis itself is a critique of the morphogenetic hypothesis and the implications that it has for the practical sociology which Archer and followers of this theory go on to produce, here I want to briefly summarise these concerns and put forward some of the ways in which the ideas raised in the thesis may be further explored.

1. An extensive analysis of the link between rupture, precarity and the genesis and development of resistance movements over time. Such an investigation might look at the ways in which historical or contemporary resistance movements related to increased exposure either to structural precarity or to widening diversity, or may look at individual actors and the ways in which they began to question structural processes or social norms.
2. An analysis of the development of 'gut feelings', intuition and social instinct as forms of non-deliberative/non-reflective affective experiences of internalised, context-sensitive, social and practical skillsets. This might include of a widening of affective approaches to intuitive sensations to include a consideration of institutionalised power structures and cultural conceptual apparatus. Such an account may lend itself to analyses of an increasing predominance of anxiety in contemporary urban neoliberal contexts, or to the developing interest in 'third culture kids', subjects that are raised and socialised in (often numerous) international cultural and social contexts that differ from their 'home' culture.
3. An investigation into this approach to the agentic mental state in the contexts of group action and the concept of collective agency. In this thesis I have limited my field of investigation primarily to instances of individual agency, looking at the relationship a single subject has to feelings of control, authorship and possibilities for action. While there was not the space to delve into it here, collective agency and its links to emergence and self-organisational theory could well be explored using this work as a foundation.
4. An investigation into how the production or presumption of precarity as a disciplining norm in interpersonal interactions may be a pertinent element to investigate in terms of employment law, unionisation of precarious industries such as zero-hour contract workers, the disintegration of contract rights and support to unionised workers, immigration policies and the psychology of abusive relationships. By looking at the psychological effects of precarity in terms of its manifestations of a subject's

affordances for action and the ways in which they experience themselves as agents, we may be able to make practical contributions to service provision in these areas.

Crucially, a sociological theory about the ontology of agency must be applicable to practical sociological study and primary research methodologies. As Bourdieu states, a sociological theory without application to a practical methodology is impotent (1990: 21). The application of theory to real life instances of agentic intervention, resistance and intersectional experience would be a natural progression for the ideas that I have begun to develop in this thesis. Historical analysis of factors affording social change, of course is one potential, but more immediately useful may be an exploration of the affording and curtailing factors in neoliberal social narratives involved in the resurgence of far-right political thought, as well as the types and styles of resistance which are being utilised in response. An exploration of logical schemas and access to particular types of social apparatuses available to different demographics may be bolstered by an understanding of agency, critique and deliberation on both sides as arising only in instances of epistemological rupture or novelty. Following the trajectory of the radical socio-political thinkers Butler, Athasinou and Protevi, this can also be done in a philosophical sense combined with active engagement in resistance politics, combining philosophical development with both contemporary political embodiments and outreach with social impact that stretches outside the bounds of academia.

Final Thoughts

“The perspectival trick we need in order to escape the clutches of the Cartesian Theatre is coming to see that I, the larger, temporally and spatially extended self, can control, to some degree, what goes on inside of the simplification barrier, where the decision-making happens, and that is why, as Wegner says “Illusory or not, conscious will is the person’s guide to his or her own moral responsibility for action.”

(Dennett, D. 2003: 49-50)

The rethinking of the morphogenetic account of agency is necessary in order to understand why behaviour continues to be analysable along demographic lines. It is not enough for social scientists to caveat behavioural patterns with a notion of subjects having ‘been able to act differently’. Such a move masks the very real opportunities for affordances that subjects have access to, and the constraining pressures that regulate subjects’ behaviour and actions both with the threat of retribution and penalisation, but also by the more subtle but equally important process of sense-making whereby some actions which are normal for one sector of society may not only not make sense to a subject, but are not thinkable, let alone realisable, without structural access to the types of particular social narratives, pedagogical

tools, training systems and concrete institutional and technological apparatuses which scaffold and enable them.

This thesis bears testament to the difficulty sociology continues to have in marrying the internal experience of selfhood and autonomy with the influence of our social environments. While this research is a tentative inquiry into what agency is, whether it is merely a 'feeling', an affective phenomenological experience that provides an interface between the complex interplay of skill, socio-political affordance, prediction, perception and our dynamic environments, or whether it is something that has a deeper ontological truth, it remains tentative. Rather than the claims I am making as to the ontological nature of agency or the lack thereof, the key point I want to be taken from this thesis is that this task is not one that sociology can undergo alone. Questions of agency, of reflexivity and of socio-political constitution, are fundamentally questions about the mind. As much as sectors of philosophy of mind have been reaching towards social, political and economic explanations as to what the mind is and how it works, sociology must reach back in order to ground conceptualisations of subjects as both embodied and mental individuals, without appeal to *sui generis* capacities. Understandings of fully contextualised, mental and embodied, skilled subjects must be informed by both philosophy of mind and the philosophy of society and politics.

Social institutions and the regulation of access to structural mechanisms along political lines are integral to the way in which agency is experienced on an individual level. The parameters of action, and the ways in which a person negotiates problems, given the physical and conceptual resources accessible to that particular subject, produce the ways in which it is possible for that person to make choices and act freely within the enablements and constraints of their particular positionality. Freedom here, then, operates within particular bounds: choices are made, but only between meaningful options, and structural change is effected when subjects have access to the social, epistemological and technological apparatuses to make such affordances for change thinkable and then further realisable. Affordances are key here, and to speak of agency as primary over the structural and institutional apparatuses which it arises in relation to, in the way that Archer does, risks undermining already marginalised voices, reifying the illusion of equal opportunities where complex forms of institutionalised subjugation persist. This is a deep problem, which I have argued exists within our wider epistemological and ontological approach both in social theory and in the wider political environment within which a substantial amount of such theory is produced. Seeing agency, not as intrinsic and pre-social, but as a product of particularly embedded, socialised positionality allows social theorists to engage with how the effects of this control over action differ between populations, but this approach is necessarily predicated upon a notion of agency as properly embodied, properly social, and thoroughly

political: seeing agency as a finely honed context-sensitive problem-solving tool, that emerges in relation to the environment in which the subject is embedded, in all of its intersectional complexity.

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