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Creating Safe Spaces: Bergson, Affirmation, and the Constitution of LGBTQ Identity

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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The central claim of this dissertation is that the ability to feel comfortable, both in terms of your identity and in your fluid movement through the world, is the result of what I call affirmative feedback loops. When your environment affirms and reflects your identity back to you, you become comfortable with yourself and in that environment. This affirmation can be as direct as someone explicitly affirming you (for example, when you come out) or it can be as subtle and quotidian as being able to display photos of loved ones in your workspace. I argue that caring for other people requires becoming attuned to affirmative feedback loops, and learning how they are formed and repaired. Being affirmed is not a luxury, or a dispensable pat on the back, it is the fundamental process through which we form and change our identities, and it is an essential core of caring for others.

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List of Abbreviations

Creative Evolution (CE)

Creative Mind (CM)

Matter and Memory (MM)

Time and Free Will (TFW)

Two Sources of Morality and Religion (TSMR)

Kew Writings (KW)

Introduction

Over the past several years, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identified people have made great advances in securing certain legal rights and protections. The repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, the collapse of DOMA, a handful of states granting Marriage Equality, local anti-bullying initiatives, and anti-discrimination legislation have all been heralded as successes for the LGBTQ movement. Yet, the same period has seen an increase in hate crimes targeting LGBTQ people¹, homeless youth are still disproportionately LGBTQ identified², and recent media attention has been drawn to the connection between school bullying, cyber bullying and LGBTQ teen suicide. Given these facts, we must ask if LGBTQ people, especially LGBTQ people of color, are really experiencing an improvement in their quality of life. I want to approach this question through an examination of how LGBTQ people experience public spaces. If we want to improve LGBTQ people's quality of life, we need to ask if they experience places like schools, public facilities, parks, shopping centers, public transportation, government offices as threatening or comfortable? As places where they can be open and move fluidly, or as places that demand hiding their LGBTQ identity? Legal reforms are important, but how can we make these everyday spaces more welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ folks?

Phenomenology and feminist new-materialism provide two compelling, but ultimately unsatisfying, methods for answering this question. Phenomenological description is an intuitively understandable and richly descriptive theoretical language, making it useful for arguments that reach beyond academia. Contemporary phenomenologists like Sara Ahmed have described how our identities differentially affect our movement through space. Yet this framework is often anthropocentric, and does not give enough attention to the role of inanimate objects and immaterial forces (specifically, emotion, memory, and time) in our experience of different spaces. New work in what is starting to be called feminist new-materialism does provide a more expansive and supple theoretical frame. Thinkers like Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Susan Hekman make the case that we must consider ourselves as actors embedded in a web of forces that include both material and immaterial, animate and inanimate, actor agents. However, these accounts are necessarily extremely complex, broad in scope, and while rooted in feminist politics they rarely provide concrete suggestions for better ways of acting and improving people's quality of life.

What we need is an analysis with the breadth and flexibility of feminist new-materialism and the approachability of phenomenological description; one that is explicitly geared toward making specific recommendations for creating spaces that affirm LGBTQ people. What follows satisfies this need through a philosophical analysis of *affirmation*. My analysis will accomplish

¹ <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/13/nation/la-na-lgbt-hate-crimes-20110713>

² http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/homelessness_numbers.html/

² http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/06/homelessness_numbers.html/

three goals. First, I will demonstrate that affirmation is not simply a psychological phenomena but is something that arises from our nature as temporal beings and the deep structures of how we exist in, and make sense of, our shared world. Second, I argue that affirmation is a form of ethically attuned agency, and as the root of care it is a potential guiding thread for our deliberations and behavior in an extremely complex world. Third, I argue that must make affirmation a conscious priority in the construction of psychical, social, digital, and cultural spaces, and I provide concrete suggestions for putting this analysis into practice.

The work of French philosopher Henri Bergson is my touchstone throughout the entire dissertation. Bergson's distinction between qualitative or temporal difference and quantitative or spatial difference, along with his articulation of the *virtual* as the movement of indeterminacy and creativity, are essential to my entire project. I will be taking Bergson into realms he never entered in his own work, specifically the formation of LGBT and queer identities. I will argue that the experiences of LGBT and queer people are best understood through a Bergsonian lens, and that these experiences provide support for the picture of identity I will extract from Bergson's texts. I will argue that Bergson's entire body of work provides a compelling and coherent account of how identity, the body, memory, and specific spaces are interrelated. By bringing Bergson into conversation with feminist and queer theory I want to see how Bergson's picture of the human temporal being can be applied to pressing contemporary issues.

Chapter One - *Queer Feminist Intuition* - is my methods chapter. In this chapter I read Bergson's method of intuition next to Haraway's epistemology of situated knowledge to outline a method I am calling queer feminist intuition. While methods are usually clearly defined and procedural (think of a checklist of steps to be repeated in each experiment) I am concerned with articulating a kind of attunement, an intuitive relationship between the observer and observed. This is an epistemologically modest method, sensitive to material and immaterial contexts and the temporality of life. Bringing these thinkers together allows me to dispel readings of Bergson's work that dismiss intuition as mysticism or spiritualism, while also highlighting the role of temporality and the immaterial in Haraway's situated knowledge. This queer feminist intuition is something I see present in much of the academic work and activism that motivates my project, and it is the method I will employ for the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter Two - *Entangled Bodies: The Tangible Immaterial and Fluid Embodiment* - looks to Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, to present a thick view of embodiment that recognizes our situatedness in both material and immaterial contexts. Through a reading of *Matter and Memory* I argue that Bergson sees the body, the mind, and time as completely embedded in the material world. I then elaborate on this reading by drawing a connection between his use the 'the image' in *Matter and Memory* and Barad's notion of entanglement. Both thinkers are concerned with the processes we use to create stable and clearly defined objects out of a world of constant flux. I argue that when memory and repetition combine they act to affirm our perceptual field, which in turn affects our ability to physically move within a particular space. Taken together, these thinkers allow us to take mobility as an example of how the immaterial (specifically the past) can be thought of as having

material agency in the present, affecting our mobility in different environments.³ I establish *fluid mobility* as my primary criteria for judging if an environment is positively affirming or threatening.

Chapter Three - *Queer Duration* - examines Bergson's distinction between intellect and intuition, arguing that intellect always requires a denial of duration, and intuition is a movement back toward duration. Looking at work on queer temporality, I make the argument that maintaining a stable identity requires an effort of intellectual spatialization, and an openness to queer becoming and queer futures requires an intuitive openness to fluidity, undoing, and novelty. Through a reading of Bergson's *The Possible and the Real* I show that his concept of the virtual is very similar to how certain queer theorists use the word queer. Both describe the indeterminacy at the heart of life, that time is not necessarily linear, and that novelty is emergent and unforeseeable. Chapter two argued that affirmation helps to organize and solidify our perceptions, allowing for certain kinds of mobility in certain contexts. Chapter three explains that we can affirm something *with a difference*, that affirmation can be a mechanism of change, and describes a kind of attunement that is open to possibilities of different ways of seeing, and being, as they emerge and become materially realized.⁴

Chapter Four - *Affirmation and Practices of Care* - is where I fully explain affirmation by describing how affirmation can qualitatively alter our mobility in specific spaces. I argue that affirmation takes many forms (verbal, physical, images, seeing oneself reflected in one's environment, seeing other people that are "like me") and has a direct effect upon our embodied mobility. When the material and immaterial forces in a given space become affirmative they form a circuit with the affirmed, what I call an affirmative feedback loop. Understanding these various forces, and determining how best to intervene in their functioning, requires the methodological approach outlined in chapter one. We must be able to intuit the various material, psychological, emotional, and temporal forces that make the spaces we live in feel either safe or threatening. My analysis extends beyond a psychological understanding of affirmation to argue that affirmation is connected to our bodily comfort in a given space, and our ability to move fluidly within that space. Affirmation demonstrates our embeddedness in multiple networks, visible and invisible, and proposes a way of making those networks more conducive to human flourishing. I use the work of Care Ethicist Sara Ruddick and feminist Luce Irigaray to describe affirmation as a form of care, and to answer the two crucial questions, *what* ought I affirm and *how* ought I affirm it?

³ By mobility I mean the ability to move fluidly in a particular context. Fluidity is not a normative standard, it is something particular to each individual. For an able-bodied person this could mean walking, for someone without the use of their legs fluidity could mean easy access to, and free movement of, their wheelchair. It designates action that is unimpeded by self-consciousness, fear, or material constraint.

⁴ I will not be arguing that intuition or queerness is superior to intellect or stable identities. Like Bergson, I prioritize intuition and queerness because they are so marginalized in our contemporary ways of thinking. Ideally we can appreciate that both intellect/stability and intuition/queerness are necessary to human flourishing.

Chapter Five - *Affirmation in Action: A Holistic Approach to the Causes of, and Solutions to, Bullying* - uses affirmation as a lens to examine the bullying in the United States. I continue articulating affirmation as a form of care and argue that zero-tolerance policies treat human beings as fully autonomous agents, while holistic approaches to bullying are sensitive to our nature as emergent beings sustained by our relationships. I outline specific changes that can create affirmative environments (for example, creating positive representations of LGBTQ people, giving LGBTQ people the ability to organize a space, the normalization of language respectful of LGBTQ identities, encouraging the use of preferred pronouns, etc). I argue that prioritizing the creation of affirmative spaces is the only way to shift from treating LGBTQ people as a protected class, to treating them as full participants in public space and public life.

The first three chapters can be read independently, but are meant to be understood as a single coherent argument about our embodied condition. Grounded in the thought of Henri Bergson and drawing from contemporary feminist and queer theory, these chapters present a picture of the world in its interconnectedness, a view of what it means to have an identity, and a specific argument for how it is that we can become better more ethical people. The final two chapters assume that the reader is familiar with the picture drawn in the first half of the dissertation.

Ultimately my project is an effort to explain what affirmation is, how it works, and how it can help us develop more just and sustainable communities. There are two reasons I have decided to use the work of Henri Bergson as the unifying thread of this project. First, I see Bergson's thought either directly influencing or aligning with new work in feminist and queer theory in fascinating ways. I am interested in strengthening these theoretical bonds and making the case that Bergson has a lot to say to both disciplines. Second, understanding Bergson's work requires one be willing to engage with him in a way that is affective, emotional, and intuitive, as well as intellectual. What Bergson's work allows me to foreground is the fact that one cannot perform, or even understand, a queer feminist methodology without doing the work of becoming attuned to queer and feminist issues and experiences. That is to say, certain intellectual work requires consciousness raising.

While each chapter deals with a different aspect of Bergson's work his idea of *the virtual* is absolutely essential to each chapter. This concept, drawn from Bergson but most fully elaborated by Deleuze, is absolutely essential to understanding everything that follows, so I devote the remainder of this introduction to describing my understanding of the virtual, and I end by very briefly describing how it is involved in each of the following chapters.

The Virtual

The virtual is a way to understand *difference* in terms of temporal duration instead of spatial impenetrability. Bergson first makes this point in *Time and Free Will* when he distinguishes between a quantitative and a qualitative multiplicity. A quantitative multiplicity is a group of things distinguished and made discrete by their position in either real or abstract space. Take, for instance, counting sheep. If I want to count sheep I need all of the sheep to be

constrained within the same space so I am sure not count some sheep more than once. Even if I am counting imaginary sheep, perhaps trying to fall asleep, each sheep must be placed in an abstract space in order to be counted, “for though we reach a sum by taking into account a succession of different terms, yet it is necessary that each of these terms should remain when we pass to the following and should wait, so to speak, to be added to the others” (TFW, 50). Likewise, the idea of number rests upon an abstract mental space in which “4” can be divided into four discrete objects (1+1+1+1).⁵ The difference between two things is the result of spatial separation and impenetrability. Two sheep cannot occupy the same space, and are therefore considered discrete and different from one another. This is *extensive* difference. Numbers can be divided or combined in an infinite set of permutations without changing in kind. No matter how they are spatialized (4, 2+2, 1+1+1+1) it does not change the fact that you are manipulating numbers. There are, however, things that cannot be spatialized without undergoing a change in kind. An emotional state is a complex *whole* that is constantly morphing across time and with relation to itself. A novel can evoke a richly complex and undifferentiated feeling, but if I stop to name my emotion the qualitative nature of the emotion changes. The act of naming it takes a temporally thick phenomena and spatializes it into a single concept, separate and separable from the other feelings from which it was abstracted.⁶ Likewise, there is infinite nuance in the gradients between colors. We say that violet is different from blue because we draw a line between these gradations. These qualitative multiplicities are differentiated *intensively*, or through internal comparison and gradations in nuance over time. Certainly there are differences between emotions and colors, but those differences are internal and intensive, and if we impose extensive differences onto these phenomena we change them qualitatively. If spatial difference is a difference that exists in the space between discrete things (objects, concepts, moments), and intensive difference is spatially indivisible, then intensive difference is something that must result from movement through time. This second form of difference, where differentiation is the result of the movement of time, is the virtual. It is a temporal way to understand difference and differentiation, and does not rest upon spatial concepts like distinction, non-contradiction, and exclusion.

Why does Bergson distinguish between extensive spatial difference and intensive temporal difference or the virtual? To answer this question we must remember that all of Bergson’s work is a sustained argument against mechanistic thinking. The virtual is one of several concepts and images, including the *élan vital*, that tries to communicate both the indeterminacy of the future and the continual creation of novelty in the universe. It is one of the many concepts meant to keep us thinking *in time*, maintaining an awareness of the propulsive movement of duration.

This is most clearly articulated in Bergson’s essay “The Possible and the Real,” where he examines what he considers the two “agonizing problems of metaphysics”: why is there something instead of nothing and why order instead of disorder (CM, 78)? For Bergson, these two questions arise out of the same error. He says, “they consist in believing that there is *less* in

⁵ “Every number is one since it is brought by a simple intuition and is given a name; but the unity which attaches to it is that of a sum, it covers a multiplicity of parts which can be considered separately” (TFW, 49).

⁶ Indeed, this is why it can be quite helpful and calming when we encourage one another to name our emotions, transforming them from polyvalent experiences into discrete emotional states.

the idea of the empty than the idea of the full, *less* in the concept of disorder than in that of order” (CM, 80-1). Bergson points out that actual nothingness is unthinkable. When we imagine an empty universe we first think of the universe and then negate it, we take the *concept* of nothingness and *place it over* the fact of the universe. This is spatial thinking. The universe is not an empty container filled with being; there is only being which we then attempt to ignore, “all of which amounts to saying that the idea of Nothing... implies as much matter as the idea of All, with, in addition, an operation of thought” (CM, 79-80). The same logic applies to order and disorder. Disorder is not a state of being that lacks order; it is the disappointment of not finding the specific order one was seeking. The world simply exists, and we consider it disordered only when we superimpose on it an ideal order that it fails to satisfy. Similarly, we tend to think of possibility as not being as real as reality. Bergson explains why this is a mistake:

Underlying the doctrines which disregard the radical novelty of each moment of evolution there are many misunderstandings, many errors. But there is especially the idea that the possible is *less* than the real, and that, for this reason, the possibility of things precedes their existence. They would thus be capable of representation beforehand; they could be thought of before being realized. But the reverse is true... we find there is more and not less in the possibility of each of the successive states than in their reality. For the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted. (CM, 81)

Bergson argues that the possible is not less than the real. Just like nothingness and disorder, the possible is the real with the addition of an operation of thought. “The possible is therefore the mirage of the present in the past” (CM, 82). Our common way of understanding possibility is as a kind of bloodless potential that gains existence as it comes into the real, that possibilities precede their realization and have *less reality* than the real. Bergson reverses this process. The world is always becoming, always changing, and we retroactively understand what has *already been* realized as *having been* possible. We do not move from possibility to reality; instead, the becoming of reality leaves possibilities in its wake, like dust in the tail of a comet. “We must resign ourselves to the inevitable: it is the real which makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real” (CM, 85).

What is at stake in this discussion is how we understand novelty. Mechanistic thinking sees the future as a possibility in the present, the ghost of potentiality that lingers in the wings, waiting to be realized. This is tantamount to saying that the present totally contains or structures the future, and a sufficiently powerful computer could literally predict the future by analyzing the present. This mechanistic view collapses time into space, and forgets that duration is the engine of difference and creativity. “Time is what hinders everything from being given at once. It retards, or rather it is retardation. It must therefore, be elaboration. Would it not then be a vehicle of creation and of choice? Would not the existence of time prove that there is indetermination in things? Would not time be that indetermination itself?” (CM, 75). Bergson wants us to realize that duration has inertia. It never stops moving, and the false view of the future being possible in the present is nothing more than a backward glance, a retroactive recognition that what has happened was once possible. Time produces novelty, and Bergson’s “images such as the *élan vital*, the *fusée* [flare or rocket] of becoming, along with the notion of the virtual, are strategies for conveying what concepts cannot say; the real force of time as production of novelty” (Guerlac 2006, 189 emphasis in original). That which is not actual, the

multiplicity that is the constant movement of duration, is the virtual. The virtual is meant to replace the possible in our movement from spatial to temporal thinking.

Possibility functions on a logic of extrinsic spatial difference — the possible is that which is not *here* in reality. Virtuality, on the other hand, explains that what happens in the future is intensively contained within the flow of time, both unified in the totality of time, but also divided and actualized in each new moment.⁷ The virtual is a kind of *pure difference*. It is a concept that is always in a state of actualization, which means that it is simultaneously in a state of qualitative change.⁸ The virtual is the movement of duration, it “is not simply indivisible since it is a *multiplicity*, but it is one which has the potential to change in kind since whenever it is actualized the actualization requires and involves a qualitative differentiation” (Ansell Pearson 2002, 4). The virtual is intensive multiplicity, and as reality moves through time these multiplicities change as well. The virtual is always differing from itself.

This shift in thinking, from the possible to the virtual, resonates across all of Bergson’s texts. In *Time and Free Will* it is what guarantees that a mechanistic universe does not predetermine our actions. In *Creative Evolution* it reorients our understanding of biological evolution by describing the creative force of the *élan vital* as it encounters matter. Deleuze takes this idea and extends it into an ontological claim about causality and the nature of Being. While these all merit sustained consideration, for the purposes of my dissertation I am most interested in how the virtual functions in Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, where he claims that all of memory exists virtually and is actualized in bodily actions. To that end, I will briefly describe the *psychological* ramifications of claiming that memory is a virtual, rather than spatial. In *Matter and Memory* Bergson makes the bold claim that all of the past exists in the present, but it does not exist like a material object—it exists virtually. He is arguing against the spatial claim that memories are stored within the brain like files in a cabinet. How can memory exist anywhere except inside the brain? To wrap our minds around this strange claim that memory exists virtually, we need to grasp that the difference between actual and virtual is not that the actual is present and the virtual is absent (this would still admit to spatial logic). We must start thinking of existence in terms of effect, or *utility*, not in terms of presence or absence. The actual is that which is happening (something that is being put to use) while the virtual is that which is having

⁷ The relationship between virtuality and actualization is complicated, and largely determined by which register we locate our discussion. Deleuze and contemporary Deleuzians like Manuel DeLanda argue that this is an ontological process that resonates with contemporary insights in theoretical physics, set theory, and mathematics. While I find this work compelling, as I will make explicit below, I am interested in the virtual as a way to rethink memory as virtually existent, so my definition of actualization will be limited to the movement from memory to embodied action.

⁸ Deleuze describes it like this: “divides up... but it does not divide up without changing in kind, it changes in kind in the process of dividing up: This is why it is a nonnumerical multiplicity... There is *other* without there being *several*” (Deleuze 1088, 42). Keith Ansell Pearson says “what differentiates itself is first what differs with respect *to itself*, and this is the virtual (whether in terms of a virtual multiplicity, life as creative evolution, or memory)” (Ansell Pearson 2002, 5).

no effect on the present moment. This is because the present is never present to itself, it is always moving forward. We ought not think of the present as presence, but as propulsive movement. The present is a *doing* not a *being*, and the virtual is every part of the past that is not acting in the present. Deleuze explains:

We have great difficulty in understanding a survival of the past in itself because we believe that the past is no longer, that it has ceased to be. We have thus confused Being with being-present. Nevertheless, the present *is not*; rather, it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It *is* not, but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or useful. The past, on the other hand, has ceased to act or to be useful [...] this is why it is called *virtual*, inactive, and unconscious. (Deleuze 1988, 55 emphasis in original)

The present does not exist as static self-presence, the present only exists inasmuch as it acts. As I will elaborate in chapter two, Bergson argues that the past becomes useful or actualized when it impinges upon our present perceptions. When we read memory images of common words help us identify text without pausing to trace each letter. The material objects around me call forth certain images from the virtual past that then become actualized in the moment of recognition. All of the past exists virtually, it exists in such a way that it has no effect on the real. As Suzanne Guerlac explains: “[the virtual] involves a mode of being that is not actual in the precise sense that it cannot act in the present. The present is sensory-motor; it concerns the introduction of movement—or change—into the world... ‘Virtual’ involves a mode of existence of the past; it also participates in a process of becoming present, or of self-actualization, in the process of attentive recognition” (2006, 187). We must be careful to avoid thinking of the virtual as a repository of memory images. It is incorrect to think of the virtual as a box containing memory images that are used in particular situations, like socket wrenches selected to fit particular bolts. Instead, we must remember that we are always moving through time, and our experience is always growing like a snowball rolling down hill. When a memory is actualized, that present moment will eventually become a memory, it will become virtual and qualitatively alter the form of the virtual past. Each new moment is colored by the experience of having lived up-until that moment. The virtual, as it is actualized, differentiates itself.⁹ The entirety of our past exists, and as it is actualized in each new moment that actualization alters the form of the virtual. The past is virtual being and becoming.

In sum: the past exists virtually and is actualized through bodily movement which in turn qualitatively alters the virtual multiplicity that is my past. I can attempt to predict my future, but the actual lived experience of time will always be exponentially richer than whatever I could predict. This means that my experience is indeterminate, and while we can find ourselves locked

⁹ Two simple examples: the first time I drive a specific route it requires concentration, but subsequent trips require less and less attention because my memory more quickly actualizes in relation to my perception. Likewise, the fact that I am capable of remembering the action of remembering (“I remember remembering that”) demonstrates that memory, as an intensive whole, is always changing.

into routines and patterns, we are never doomed to the kind of mechanism that would obliterate free will or self-determination.¹⁰

What I have described is the way that the virtual becomes actualized and morphs across time. Affirmation is the process through which this process *tends* in certain directions. When something is affirmed back to me, that affirmation becomes a memory that is then more likely to be actualized in the future. This is most clearly seen in the kinds of repetitions that lead to what we could call muscle memory or habit. As I spend more and more time in a new neighborhood my memory images combine fluidly with my environment to help me move quickly and thoughtlessly to my destination. Affirmation is certainly at work in this process inasmuch as my movement becomes increasingly fluid. I am, however, more concerned with how our identities come to be affirmed. In what follows I will argue that aspects of our sense of self are affirmed in a positive or negative way by our environments. For example, a person of color who moves from an all white environment to a place with other people of color will find their identity *as a person of color* suddenly affirmed by their environment. This new affirmation will become stronger over time, creating what I call an *affirmative feedback loop*, and making this person *tend toward* actualizing positive memories of their racial and ethnic identity over negative memories of otherness or isolation. Likewise, an environment hostile to one's identity can affirm only negative stereotypes about that person, making them tend toward the actualization of negative or traumatic memories. The first kind of affirmation results in increasingly fluid mobility in a given environment, while negative or harmful affirmations lead to stilted, stunted, and protective immobility.

What follows will contain more elaborations of the virtual, affirmation, and fluid mobility. Chapter one will describe the method we use to intuit these affirmative feedback loops. Chapter two describes how affirmative feedback loops are formed and impact mobility. Chapter three argues that affirmation is the process that forms and changes all identities. Chapter four is a summation of my concept of affirmation and argues it is a form of care. Finally chapter five applies affirmation to the problem of anti-LGBT bullying in the United States.

¹⁰ In restricting my account to how the virtual helps us reconsider the connection between memory and embodied mobility, I will ignore the virtual's more metaphysical and ontological dimensions, the things that fascinated thinkers like Deleuze. The scope of this dissertation certainly involves transgressing certain accepted boundaries between the human and non-human, but I am fundamentally interested in how human beings can be better, more affirming, flourishing creatures. Keeping my focus on the psychological dimensions of the virtual will help me to keep this ethical goal in the forefront of his work. I ask the reader to draw their own connections between my description of the *virtual* and those of other thinkers.

Chapter One

Queer Feminist Intuition

As I begin to think about a topic like affirmation, I find myself drawing from feminist theory, philosophy, queer studies, Marxism, critical disability studies and post-colonial studies, but I am unable to fully commit to any one discipline. I think this shifting between different homes is the result of doing theory in a climate where intersectionality has finally become the norm, and doing justice to our multifaceted selves is an essential goal for our work. To paraphrase Patricia Williams, life is complicated, and we need to figure out how to focus on its complexity without flattening difference into sameness. This requires constantly answering and re-answering certain questions: What is my object of study? How do I bring it into focus? In what field do I stake my claim? To whom am I arguing? Which method of research, analysis, and writing will best convey my insights?

At the beginning of this project it is crucial that I determine which method is most appropriate for my analysis. What should guide my analysis of affirmation? While many researchers may think that one method (often their method, often a form of quantification) can be applied to any object, I hold that certain objects are best approached through certain methods. I have taken to heart a line found early in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "... for it belongs to an educated person to look for just so much precision in each kind of discourse as the nature of the thing one is concerned with admits" (Aristotle and Sachs 2002, 2) Surveyors and musicians have different methods for analyzing their objects. It is true that they could swap methods, perhaps a surveyor could analyze an opera according to spatial distances, or a musician could try to help construct a building by writing a symphony inspired by the terrain. These unorthodox approaches may inspire us or refresh our perspective, but we cannot say that any method is equally applicable to any object. It is simply not true that a musician's method is applicable to music in the same way that it is to construction. Wavelength distances will not help a music novice appreciate opera any more than a symphony will help a developer draft a blueprint. We must recognize that knowers, objects, goals, and methods all interact in qualitatively different ways, and must be judged and coordinated by a thoughtful and educated mind. There is no single method equally applicable to all objects.

A similar suspicion of a universal method is at the heart of much of feminist science studies, and a growing constellation of work known as feminist new materialism. In addition to recognizing that certain methods are suited to particular objects, these thinkers ask us to consider the ways in which our methodologies make visible, or even create, the objects we seek to examine. Critical of the neoliberal, ecologically unsustainable, racist and sexist worldview starkly captured in the Baconian desire to rape nature of her secrets, these thinkers ask us to understand the connections between the "observing" subject, the object being "observed," and the method of vision mediating this relationship. Said simply, any method makes visible or invisible certain facets of the complexity of life. The purpose of this chapter is to situate and outline my contribution within this constellation of thought. What I want to discuss is an

expanded version of Bergson's method of intuition, a method that I am calling queer feminist intuition.

My search for a method is guided by several criteria. These are criteria that emerge from the work of feminist new materialists, queer feminists, postmodern philosophy, and the nature of affirmation. These criteria serve as the outline for a method that will be able to attend to the role of affirmation in the constitution of ourselves and our worlds. First, this method must be capable of examining the agential qualities of the material and immaterial forces that constitute our world. It must take into account the forces of time, matter, imagination, affect, emotion, memory, etc. in the constitution of what we think of as subjective and objective reality. Second, it must be able to think in time. It must be sensitive to the fact that life is never static but rather a constant evolution and indeterminate unfolding. Third, it must be epistemologically modest, contextually bounded, and rooted in specifically queer feminist political motivations. Fourth, it must be a method that functions as attunement. Rather than a procedure, or a list of specific steps to be repeated, one must become attuned to this method and attuned to its application to particular instances and objects. For example, there is no one method of appropriate and successful parenting, but rather each family must become attuned to the needs and development of its members. It must avoid what Donna Haraway calls the "god trick" by never claiming omnipotent vision or total certainty. This means that it is a method that changes according to actors and objects involved, while still being recognizable as a methodology. It also means that to employ this method requires a personal sensitivity, a willingness to change and be changed.

Because the method must be enlivened by application and can only be realized through use, my abstract outline is necessarily incomplete and gestural. I will make this gesture by bringing Henri Bergson and Donna Haraway into conversation, drawing out several points of similarity between the two thinkers. First, Haraway and Bergson develop systems of thought meant to counteract the dogmatic positivism and scientism that dominate industrialized and neoliberal society. Bergson's method of intuition is a corrective against the importation of mechanistic thinking into the realm of life. Intuition is a way to think about life as duration instead of space. Haraway's situated knowledges is a feminist response to masculinist scientific claims to "objectivity" that cover over their own patriarchal ideological convictions and commitments. She seeks to ground feminist objectivity in practices of contextualized vision. Second, both thinkers are committed to a situated, embodied, and modest epistemology that aims at particular instead of universal knowledge. Finally, epistemology and epistemological method are intimately bound up with certain moral or political concerns. For Bergson this is to be found in his concern for justice at the heart of what he calls "good sense," for Haraway it is in positioning oneself in such a way as to produce knowledge capable of creating a more just and sustainable world.

I am convinced that Bergson and Haraway have a lot to say to one another. By bringing these thinkers together I hope to demonstrate what Bergson's method of intuition may look like in practice, while dispelling readings of his later work that dismiss intuition as a kind of spiritualism or mysticism. Additionally, this comparison will foreground the role of duration in

Haraway's thought, using Bergson to bring out the place of time, memory and most importantly the immaterial in her articulation of situated knowledges. Bergson's influence allows Haraway's method to be extended beyond our physical situations to include our historical, affective, and imaginative situatedness.

I am not claiming Bergson as a feminist, or arguing that Haraway is actually Bergsonian. I am primarily focused on describing a certain relationship between the knowing subject and her world. Both thinkers are concerned not only with vision, but with seeing differently, and, I will argue, seeing justice. To that end, the last section of this chapter brings together features of both intuition and situated knowledges to describe a methodology that I see present in much feminist and queer work, and that I employ throughout the remainder of the dissertation. It is a modest method attendant to our radical situatedness temporally, physically, materially, immaterially, and one that requires constant introspection and dialogue to remain true to its feminist and queer political commitments.

Bergson's Intuition and Good Sense

Bergson's entire body of work can be read as an elaboration of two key insights: the distinction between space and duration, and the claim that life is irreducibly temporal and therefore indeterminate. According to Bergson, anything static, stable, clearly defined or quantifiable is an abstraction. These are the products of a mental process in which we cut objects out of the flow of time, arranging them in literal or abstract space. Anything that is understood as separate and separable from its physical or conceptual surroundings, including numbers and language, is the result of spatial thinking. We do this out of practical necessity. It would be very difficult to survive in a world where we could not make distinctions between different objects, states, times, or ideas. Our ability to act upon objects by predicting their movement in a stable world is made possible by our ability to transform the flux of duration into a spatialized scene with clearly defined objects.¹¹ We are so accustomed to thinking in this way, and it is so necessary for our survival, that it is easy to believe that the world really is filled with distinct objects thrown out into a perfectly measurable homogenous space. We forget everything is always moving through time, experience is always evolving, and nothing is ever repeated in exactly the same way. The prioritization of spatial thought is particularly problematic when we apply it to phenomena that can only be understood in their unique temporal duration. One of Bergson's favorite examples is that of a melody. If we condense or prolong the melody's duration it becomes unrecognizable, it must be experienced in its proper duration to be experienced at all. Bergson's critical work builds on this insight to argue that seemingly intractable problems in philosophy and psychology are caused by analyzing temporal phenomena in spatial terms. His generative work thinks through freewill, memory, the body, evolution, morality, and religion from a temporal perspective.

¹¹ Chapter two will pay special attention to how our perceptual faculties perform this task, particularly the ways in which we must solidify objects in order to act upon them, perceiving only those aspects of an object most salient to our virtual action upon that object

In this chapter I am less concerned with his earlier texts that make the distinction between duration and space, and more with his later work that takes this distinction and describes two different ways of thinking: intellect and intuition. Intellect and intuition are completely different forms of intelligence; the first being the hallmark of human beings, the second a kind of self-conscious instinct or lived connection to duration. Intellect is spatializing, intuition re-approaches duration. Intellect is mechanistic, intuition evolves. Intellect is the main method of science, intuition that of philosophy. Bergson develops these terms in *Creative Evolution* and in what follows I will chart the main differences between intellect, instinct, and intuition, to demonstrate what it means to say that intuition is an epistemological method. All this leads to my analysis of Bergson's concept of good sense, which I will argue is an early application of his methodology to the question of ethics and demonstrates his commitment to social justice.

Intelligence and instinct are complementary and opposite ways of encountering the world. All life exhibits a combination of both tendencies, but each living being clearly favors one over the other. Intelligence is the ability to manipulate objects in general. It is "the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, especially tools to make tools, and of indefinitely varying the manufacture" (CE, 139 emphasis in original). Many animals use tools to achieve a specific goal, but the construction of a tool intended for the construction of another tool requires the ability to decompose and recompose distinct objects divorced from any single pragmatic goal.¹² If, on the other hand, the organization of the body produces an instrument or tool, instinct is what tells me how to use it. In their sharpest form then, "instinct perfected is a faculty of using and even constructing organized instruments; intelligence perfected is the faculty of making and using unorganized instruments" (CE, 140)¹³ Casting this distinction in an epistemological vocabulary, intelligence is knowledge of a form (something abstract, spatial, out of time), instinct is contact with matter (something present, tangible, temporal) (CE, 149). Intellect is capable of understanding the spatial or formal relationships between objects, de- and re-composing them as it sees fit. Instinct is the knowledge of how to use a given object in the most effective way possible. They are two tendencies that, although divided, retain traces of the one another. Emerging as divisions of the same movement of life they both "retain something of their common origin... they haunt each other continually" (CE, 135-6). Indeed, "there is no intelligence in which some traces of instinct are not to be discovered, more especially no instinct that is not surrounded with a fringe of intelligence" (CE, 136). Our most intelligent actions rest on a set of bodily instincts (movement, perception, etc) and instinctual activities are purposeful in a way that belies intelligence.

¹² This is the difference between using a stick to extract termites from a termite hill, and understanding that same stick as a potential component of an infinite variety of other objects.

¹³ Expanding this, we see that intellect is the ability to make choices and to consider a variety of possible actions, evaluating and ranking them in terms of preference and effectiveness. Grosz explains intellect as "the ability to discern a preference for one mode of activity over another in a particular situation, the capacity to reframe a situation through the use of external tools... Intelligence is the capacity to shape and remake nonliving matter" (Grosz 2004, 227)

Intellect is spatial, it relies upon our ability to see objects as distinct from one another and capable of being combined in an infinite number of ways. Anytime we divide the flux of experience into static objects or moments (indeed any act of differentiation at all) we are using the intellect. Think of a computer simulation used by physicists or engineers. All the variables are set, the objects placed, coordinates programmed, the world of the simulation is perfectly still until we hit the “start” button and witness the simulated event unfold. The simulation can be played out in “real time” (which often means human time) or it can be calculated in a matter of nanoseconds. It can be replayed infinitely and reviewed at different speeds; but the result is always the same. Just like a film composed of a large number of static images, the illusion of movement is the result of quickly juxtaposing static states. “Intelligence starts ordinarily from the immobile, and reconstructs movements as best it can with immobilities in juxtaposition” (CM, 22).¹⁴ This spatialization can also be applied to abstract or immaterial phenomena. For example, I can consider my mental life to exist as a timeline, drawing distinctions between how I felt this morning and how I feel now. This permits me to have a sense of self in which I do not confuse who I was yesterday with who I am today. Intellect is static, stable, mechanistic, and it is the foundation of the sciences. Because the intellect can only think in spatial terms all movement must be explained according to laws and systems that tell us how discrete objects interact.¹⁵ All events happen in the generality of homogenous space, and what is true in one place must be true, and repeatable, in another.

Because intelligence relies on stability and discontinuity, it is unable to understand movement or duration. Intellect is “at ease only in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead. The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life” (CE, 165). Instinct, on the other hand, is knowledge or action that happens within the flow of time. What does that mean? One answer is that an instinctual activity is one that happens alongside and within events as they unfold. Instinct is not contemplative, it does not take a step back; it is reactive to environments and situations as they change. As we saw above, instinct is that faculty that allows us to use a given object in the most effective and efficient way possible. Instinctual activity does not stop to consider different options, I simply know what to do. If I see a child about to fall from a ledge I do not hesitate to consider how to extend my arms to catch the child, or if I should move to catch the child, I simply try to catch the child. Instinct is geared toward the speedy and effective accomplishment of specific actions in response to my environment as it changes. Bergson often describes instinct as interested. To be interested is to be focused on the aspects of an object most salient to my interaction with that object, and often performs that action without the intervention of deliberate thought. As I move to catch the falling child I do not notice objects

¹⁴ One of Bergson’s favorite examples of intellectual thinking is Xeno’s Paradox: given that a line can be infinitely divided into smaller and smaller sections, if I shoot an arrow at a target how can I know that the arrow ever hits the target? This is only a paradox for an intellectual view in which space is infinitely divisible.

¹⁵ “Of the discontinuous alone does the intellect form a clear idea... Of immobility alone does the intellect form a clear idea” (CE, 154-5).

in the background or periphery, I am not concerned with the song I've had stuck in my head all day; I am wholly focused on catching the child.

Yet we must be careful to not collapse instinct into habituation or simple repetition. It is difficult to describe instinct because language, a system composed of distinct words, is itself a function of intellect. When we think of instinct as habituation or as a skill that is the result of repetition we "resolve instinct completely either into intelligent actions, or into mechanisms built up piece by piece like those combined by our intelligence" (CE, 174). This reduces instinct to an unthinking intelligence where events mechanistically trigger accumulated behavioral habits.

Instead of habituation we must focus on instinct as a form of knowledge tied to a particular context and particular goal. It is the knowledge, seemingly pre-reflective, of exactly how to act in a given situation. Still, instinct seems an impoverished companion to the complexity of intellect. It is intuition, instinct made reflective and disinterested, that is the real counterweight to intellect, moving beyond the reactive speed of instinct toward a distinct epistemological method. If intelligence approaches matter from the outside, providing an infinite series of spatialized views of an object, intuition allows us to enter into the object, or as I prefer to say, into a dynamic relationship with the object. "It is to the very inwardness of life that intuition leads us--by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely" (CE, 176). Whereas intellect is mechanistic and static, and instinct is immediate and unreflective, intuition is a method for observing how an object endures through time and gaining an appreciation of its own proper duration. Intellect freezes the object to analyze it, instinct simply acts along with the object, intuition strikes a middle balance by taking a step back from the object and observing it across time. It is a way of being carried along with the object as it endures. That is to say, intuition is Bergson's method for thinking along with the movement of time. I find it worthwhile to quote Bergson at length:

The intuition we refer to then bears above all upon internal duration. It grasps a succession which is not juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into a present which is already blending into the future... to think intuitively is to think in duration... Intuition starts from movement, posits it, or rather perceives it as reality itself, and sees in immobility only an abstract moment, a snapshot taken by our mind, of a mobility... Intuition bound up to a duration which is growth, perceives in it an uninterrupted continuity of unforeseeable novelty. (CM, 20, 22)

Movement is primary and stasis is only a temporary abstraction.¹⁶ Intuition allows me to understand my own internal duration, the unfolding of my own experience, and by extension gain an appreciation for durations other than my own.

¹⁶ This is Bergson's elegant solution to Xeno's paradox. Xeno's paradox is only a paradox if one considers movement to be the juxtaposition of static states linked by scientific laws. An intuitive standpoint sees the movement of the arrow from bow to target as a single gesture. To escape the

Intuition is a different way of looking at the world around us. Bergson often aligns intellect with scientific thought, and intuition with an aesthetic or literary sensibility. He acknowledges that intellect will always obtain a particularly clear and distinct knowledge of its object, but it is intuition that can provide the affective, emotional, and visceral knowledge that helps to both fill out intellect, and let us see when rigid intellectual molds are not applicable to a given object (CE, 177). Intellect functions by limiting the object, carving out its distinct contours according to our virtual action upon that object (MM, 35, 37). Intuition is more capable of discerning the object in its indeterminacy, as something multifaceted and polyvalent, something that seeps into its surroundings and is part of what Bergson calls the undulations of the real. Instinct is interested in the object's potential use. Intuition is disinterested, it allows the object to reveal itself as multifaceted.¹⁷ This is what he means when he describes instinct that has become disinterested—the object is no longer delineated by the sharp contours determined by my potential interaction with that object—instead I let the object present itself as a part of a milieu or context, and not as a discrete object presenting itself for my use according to my interests.¹⁸

paradox we must stop trying to analyze movement, an irreducibly temporal phenomena, in terms of static space.

¹⁷ A concrete example will help us to get a sense of the difference between intellect and intuition. When I look at a sculpture I can understand what it is intellectually. It is distinct from the other objects around it, separable from its surroundings, I can place the artist and the sculpture in a specific temporal location and understand its place in the narrative of the history of art. I do not risk confusing it with another piece of art, and I can give it my full attention. Instinctively I can see the borders of the object, I can avoid walking into it, I understand my body in relation to the spatiality of the object. Now, if my attention is intuitive I enter into a very different relationship to the object. I become disinterested, meaning I no longer see the sculpture accordingly to my possible interactions with it. Perhaps it becomes meaningfully situated in its context, it gains interest in its relationships to the other sculptures, the floor, its pedestal, etc. I may allow the sculpture to recall memories or associations, I may allow myself to engage in a bit of imaginative wandering, and then associate the sculpture with these personal reflections. I may begin to experience the sculpture emotionally, allowing the affective charge of the piece to combine with my own musings and create an association between the artwork and my own sense of self. I start to gain an intuitive sense of what the artist must have felt while creating this sculpture, I get a feel for the rhythm of its creation. All of this is an intuitive approach to an object. You allow yourself to be-with the object, to see its connectedness, to endure with it and see how your relationship changes over a given period of time. To put it poetically, intellect would take a snapshot of the sculpture to be consulted later, intuition would take the time to walk around it.

¹⁸ On this note Jacobs and Perri state: "For Bergson, the partial experience of isolated objects mediated by our practical interests, is only possible because the richness of the totality they partially represent could be neglected for practical purposes... A disinterested attitude... would yield an unmediated intuition of reality (or ourselves) in its infinitely varied fullness" Hanne Jacobs and Trevor Perri, "Intuition and Freedom: Bergson, Husserl and the Movement of Philosophy," in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, ed. Michael R. Kelly (UK: Pelgrave MacMillan, 2010), 108.

An intuitive approach requires two main changes to how we look at objects. First, we stop thinking of time as a linear movement and start to understand it as additive. Because intuition resists spatialization or linear time, it recognizes that the past is in the present and that both past and present are prolonged into the future. We get a sense of the thickness of time and the indeterminacy at the heart of duration. To think intuitively is to recognize that moments do not succeed one another on a timeline in a predictable fashion. My experience simply continues to endure, each moment coloring the entirety of my experience. “My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing—rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow” (CE, 2). The past is never really over; it colors and freshens each new present moment. Duration is the “unceasing creation, the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty,” an “evolution whose continuous phases penetrate one another by a kind of internal growth” (CM, 8-9). To think spatially is to see myself moving across a timeline, inching from the past to the future. To think in terms of duration is to conceive of my experience as an ever-morphing field with no one moment totally separate from another. Being that each moment is radically new and indeterminate, we have no certain knowledge of what our experience will be like in the future. Looking back into the past we can discern the circumstances and actions responsible for our current situation, but the present cannot be determined in advance because each moment of the present is colored by the experience of living up until that moment. We may be able to predict the empty outline of future activities (e.g. “Tomorrow I will go to the library!”) but the actual, tangible, specific details, the lived experience of performing that action, cannot be known in advance. This constant indeterminacy is what Bergson means when he says that the future is virtual. Thinking back to my discussion of the virtual in the introduction, this term is meant to help us stop thinking of the future as a set of possibilities contained within the present awaiting actualization, and begin to experience time as constant change, evolution, or my preferred word, *unfolding*. Chapter two will argue that our perceptions and bodily mobility are also marked by the virtual, and chapter three will examine the overlap between the virtual and queerness, demonstrating that all identities require navigating the dual movements of spatialization and the reanimation or indeterminacy of duration and the virtual.

Second, we must conceive of uniqueness in temporal rather than spatial terms. When we think spatially things are made distinct because they occupy different spatial locations, they are impenetrable and therefore unique. When we shift to a temporal register, things are made unique because of their duration in two different ways. First, there is the uniqueness that comes with memory. This means that everything is differentiated inasmuch as nothing can share its entire past with another being. My experience of each moment is colored by the entirety of my past, and even if I share much of that past with another person, it cannot be the same for both of us. Objects have a similar kind of memory; the dings and notches on my desk reflect an accumulated history that resonates in the present, distinguishing this desk from others like it. Second, different objects exist in different durations, or at different tensions of life. My experience of time will differ enormously from that of a hummingbird or a tree. Individual beings within a single

category are also differentiated in their duration—think of the way a child and an adult experience the feeling of anticipation. An adult’s birthday may come and go unnoticed, but a child can experience the days leading up to her birthday as an excruciatingly long waiting period. We cannot understand children’s behavior if we expect them to experience time in the same way as adults. An intuitive method is one that prioritizes and attends to these temporal distinctions instead of spatial distinctions. It seeks to understand oneself and the world according to different durations, and is sensitive to the role of the past in constituting the present in the face of an indeterminate future. As Deleuze says, “In short, intuition has become method... the movement by which we emerge from our own duration, by which we make use of our own duration to affirm and immediately to recognize existence of other durations, above or below us” (Deleuze 1988, 22-23). Whereas intellect tries to recompose the unity of experience from distinct objects, intuition recognizes the unity of everything in duration prior to the divisions created by the intellect.¹⁹

An intuitive approach to reality is, to say it plainly, messy! Distinctions collapse, the past haunts the present, we must be patient and open to temporalities that may not make sense to our anthropocentric perspective. It is intellect that both creates and rests upon solid states and distinct objects. Intellect is dissociative and static, and takes the fluidity of the real and freezes it into spatial objects. Intuition, on the other hand, recognizes that “reality is mobile” that “there do not exist things made, but only things in the making, not states that remain fixed, but only states in process of change” (CM, 222 emphasis in original). The shift to intuition is a shift away from our intellectual capacity to create stability in the service of action, and toward an intuitive being-with the interconnected becoming of our subjective experience and objective reality.²⁰

Why and how Bergson sees intuition as a method, and not simply a sensibility, is seen most clearly in his discussion of the proper roles of science and philosophy. What is the

¹⁹ Alia Al-Saji describes this in her analysis of intuition and vision: “On the one hand, intuition is the reversal of the tendency of objectifying vision to condense the enduring reality before its eyes in qualities and states, to immobilize movements into objects. A dilated vision sees according to temporalities other than its own, resisting the tendency to reduce and contract reality to its own rhythm. On the other hand, such a dilation cannot be obtained without a deeper connection to the past as a whole - the past as tendency. To see other rhythms and durations is to allow vision to go beyond the perceptual present and to avoid the reduction of the past to the immediate past that takes place in objectification... To see more must therefore be to see and to live differently” Alia Al-Saji, "Life as Vision: Bergson and the Future of Seeing Differently," in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, ed. Michael R. Kelly (UK: Pelgrave MacMillan, 2010), 170.

²⁰ Bergson describes an intuitive idea as having a radiant quality, “illuminating a whole region of thought” (CM, 23). Grosz says “This other mode of empiricism [intuition] is one that operates underneath the cuts, the division and discontinuities that intelligence imposes on the world, that calls attention to the fundamental interconnectedness of all ‘things,’ the fact that things do not occur in isolation from other things but are bound together in a continually changing series of streams that form a dynamic and continuous whole. Intuition is a mode of momentary, fleeting, and difficult-to-sustain access to this movement of continuity and flow” (Grosz 2004, 238-9)

relationship between intellect and intuition, or as Bergson will say in his later works, between science and philosophy?

There would not be place for two ways of knowing, philosophy and science, if experience did not present itself to us under two different aspects; on the one hand in the form of facts side by side with other facts, which repeat themselves more or less, which can to a certain extent be measured, and which in fact open out in the direction of distinct multiplicity and spatiality; on the other hand in the form of a reciprocal penetration which is pure duration, refractory to law and measurement... Let us then go down into our own inner selves: the deeper the point we touch, the stronger will be the thrust which sends us back to the surface. Philosophical intuition is this contact, philosophy is this impetus. Brought back to the surface by an impulsion from the depth, we shall regain contact with science as our thought opens out and disperses. (CM, 102-3)

Bergson's discussion of intuition is filled with language of entering into objects, enlarging them, penetration, and reaching deep into our own inner selves.²¹ I argue that this language of depth and penetration is meant to help us see that you cannot understand or intuit another duration without first understanding your own unique temporality. Bergson's language is mystical in tone, but what I think he is saying, and what I hope will be clear when I read him with Haraway, is that intuitive vision, the sensitivity to other durations, requires a deeply felt sense of our own duration. As long as I am blind to my own temporality it will function as an unquestioned norm, the baseline of "reality" that makes it impossible for me to see another duration. It is only when I reflect upon the contingency of my own experience, and its total particularity, that I will be able to intuit a sense of other durations or tensions of life. The other will always remain somewhat opaque, but through examining the propulsive force of time, of life, in my own experience I can intuit it at work in another. That is why Bergson considers intuition a method. It is something that can, and must, be practiced and improved. It is not an intelligent observation of the world, nor is it a kind of spiritualism or mysticism. Intuition requires effort. Unlike the scientific method which must necessarily be repeated in the same way each time, intuition is not a method that can be written down into bullet points; it requires practice to become attuned to the method itself. To utilize intuition poorly would be to impose my desires on my intuitive approach to an object, not allowing a different duration to emerge but rather twisting what the object presents to me to fit my own desires.

There is no doubt that Bergson, across his work, emphasizes intuition over intellect. Human beings, specifically humans raised after the Enlightenment and industrial revolution, are disproportionately weighted toward the intellect. Yet, "just as there subsisted around animal instinct a fringe of intelligence, so human intelligence preserved a halo of intuition" (TSMR,

²¹ This masculinist language has not gone unnoticed and rightfully criticized by Bergson's feminist readers. See especially Rebecca Hill's 2012 text *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle, and Bergson*. New York: Fordham University Press.

249-50). His writing style, use of images, and lengthy discussion of literature and the arts all seek to reactivate this halo—to engage and develop our intuitive capacities. Bergson’s emphasis on intuition is not hierarchical, intuition is not superior to intellect, and his prioritization on intuition is a reaction against the scientism of his day and a corrective to the dominance of mechanism and spatial thought in philosophy.²² By contrasting science and philosophy Bergson is trying to reinvigorate a method of philosophical thinking that is not a side-kick to science, but instead a method for attending to the temporal aspects of life. A method that can stand on its own and think through irreducibly temporal phenomena.

Finally, we must ask what guides this intuition. What are the norms of this method? How can we determine if we are using intuition well or poorly? Both intellect and intuition have a place, but if these are two opposite epistemological methods, how do we decide when one method is more appropriate than another?²³ Often the choice is simple, science or intellect is that which is best suited to understand inert spatialized matter, and philosophy or intuition is meant to follow the movement of time. But rarely are we presented with a clear-cut moment in which a problem is strictly spatial or strictly temporal. In our everyday life we freeze objects to understand them, and also allow these objects to move back into duration. How are we to decide which approach to take in a given situation? What guidelines can help us develop this intuitive approach to the real? How do we learn this attunement to balancing intuition and intellect? We will see that Haraway provides the most satisfying answer to this question, but for now I want to examine Bergson’s concept of “good sense” as one possible response to this difficulty.

In 1895 Bergson gave a speech at the award ceremony for the Concours Général. The topic of his speech was the value of a classical education, more specifically the role of education in cultivating what he calls good sense.²⁴ Bergson describes good sense in a way very similar to

²² I think Deleuze and Guattari are similarly misread as philosophers of speed, infinite reconfiguration and total mutability. The emphasis on flux in Deleuze and Guattari’s works is a reaction against dominate ways of thinking, a necessarily extreme presentation of a system that seeks, ultimately, a kind of balance of poise.

²³ Indeed, intellect and instinct must work in tandem. Intellect is capable of abstraction but may lose it’s grounding in the material world. Instinct can grasp at matter, but may not have the perspective from which it can understand what its doing. “There are things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them” (CE, 151).

²⁴ Deleuze is very critical of the manner in which “good sense” functions in philosophical discourse. He argues that philosophers have an implicit universal image of what constitutes proper thought, “postulates in philosophy are not propositions the acceptance of which the philosopher demands; but, on the contrary, propositional themes which remain implicit and are understood in a pre-philosophical manner. In this sense, conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense” (Deleuze 1994, 131). This unquestioned image of what it means to think makes it difficult if not impossible for philosophy to break with *doxa*. For Deleuze, the critique of common sense and good sense requires a reevaluation of our notions of representation. For the purposes of my discussion, I recognize that appeals to a notion of good

how he describes intuition; it is a corrective against a disproportionate prioritization of the intellect, it “partly consists in an active disposition of the intellect, but also partly in a certain and quite particular distrust on the part of the intellect with regard to itself” (KW, 345). Good sense is very much like Aristotelean virtue, it is the ability to know the best course of action in a given situation. Bergson defines good sense as follows:

Foreseeing these consequences, or rather having a presentiment of them; distinguishing the essential from the inessential or indifferent in matters of behavior; choosing from the various possible courses of action the one which will produce the greatest amount of attainable rather than imaginable good: this is, it seems to me, the role of good sense. It is thus indeed a sense in its own way; but while the other senses place us in relation to things, good sense presides over our relations with persons. (KW, 346)

If our five senses situate our body in space, good sense is what situates us in social space. It is the ability to make quick decisions, to act when we do not have enough time to try to predict all of the consequences of our actions. It is a “subtle presentiment of true and false, which is able to discover secret incompatibilities or unsuspected affinities between things well before any rigorous proof or decisive experiment” (KW, 346). It does not depend on ready-made ideas but instead “wants us to take each problem as new and do it the honour of a new effort” (KW, 346). Good sense rejects cookie-cutter solutions or legalistic thinking; it “has less in common with a superficially encyclopedic knowledge than with a self-aware ignorance, accompanied by the courage to learn” (KW, 346-7). What can be considered good sense will change in each different circumstance—it cannot be abstractly defined or distilled into a principle, but we know it when we see it.

Just what is the relationship between good sense and intuition? On the one hand, good sense seems to be an intuitive capacity to simply *know* how to act in each situation. Reminiscent of the phrase “women’s intuition,” it is the ability to know and act appropriately. Additionally, like intuition, good sense strikes a balance between the precision of scientific intellect and the automatism of instinct. It is concerned with determining the best course of action in specific contexts, “it is distinguishable by the kind of truth it seeks, for it does not aim... for universal truth, but that truth of the present hour... and stops the development of a principle at the precise point that an excessively brutal logic would ruffle the delicacy of the real” (KW, 347). Not captive to the necessity of instinct, nor to the rigor of a rigid scientific intellectualism, good sense

sense can amount to a naturalization of a specific *form* of thought that then underlies philosophical inquiry. An intuitive perspective on right and wrong action can be fertile ground for the propagation of bias. For example, in patriarchy certain forms of misogyny or misogynistic thinking may appear to be natural and obvious, functioning at a pre-conceptual level until they are unearthed and challenged. I will discuss the ways in which Bergson is vulnerable to this criticism, and how bringing good sense together with Haraway’s explicitly progressive political project can help safeguard against the re-inscription of dogmatic thinking into intuitive evaluations of what is the proper action in a given situation.

allows behavior to match the contours of specific contexts. “In the end, good sense is more than instinct and less than science; it should be seen rather as a certain bent [pli] of the mind, a certain inclination of attention. We could almost say that good sense is attention itself, oriented in the direction of life” (KW, 347, note in original).

Second, good sense and intuition are both temporal phenomena. If intellect is predicated upon spatialization, good sense and intuition are in touch with duration. To see this we need to ask what then guides this sense? How can it be developed, maintained, and fostered? Bergson admits that some people appear to be born with good sense (KW, 345) but for the rest of us, education can provide one method of cultivating it. Remember that Bergson believes we are predisposed or trained to prioritize the static over the mobile. Like a tourist who spends more time looking at her guidebook than the objects she has traveled to see, we exist in a world of ready-made ideas and laws rather than attending to the real things around us. Education provides a place to try to intellectually and emotionally reconnect with the real things, passions, and emotions that are the vital force behind great ideas and great achievements. Bergson sees the work of a classicist, the translation between very different languages, as a way to get back to the “warmth and mobility” of the idea that is “chilled and congealed in language” (KW, 350). By learning how to translate the idea or impulse behind a word into another language we become attuned to the “direct vision of the real” an author tried to pin down into that single word. By learning how to intuit this impulse we gain an appreciation of the “thousand lessons from history and from life” that demonstrate a “force of the will and the passion for great things” (KW, 353). Education is meant to inspire us, and present us with examples of great people who have let a passion drive their actions. A purely intellectual life will not come into contact with the real, will not have an impact, will remain hollow. An intellect combined with a feeling of passion will make a difference, and Bergson says, “it is this strength of feeling that I believe can be seen in good sense” (KW, 353). Good sense is animated by an intuitive grasp of the movement behind any great work, action, or thought. It is the passion inseparable from the dynamism of action.

Yet good sense is not only a sensitivity or receptivity to passion. Good sense is fundamentally an “instrument of social progress” that can “only draw its strength from the very principle of social life, the spirit of justice”. Indeed Bergson later calls good sense “the mind tempered by character” (KW, 348-9). Across his work Bergson is frustrated with theoretical or abstract notions of justice that never touch reality, that don’t actually change human behavior. When Bergson says justice, it is not a deontological or legalistic justice, he is arguing for a “justice embodied in the just man [sic], living and acting justice, attentive to its insertion into events... a delicate sense, a vision or rather a tact of practical truth” (KW, 348). Bergson is describing a good person, a person who is attentive, guided by morals but not inflexibly tied to them, a person who can intuit what is at play in a given situation and quickly determine what is the best course of action. Someone who combines intellect and intuition to make good judgments.

We can see that cultivating good sense is similar to cultivating our intuitive capacities. They both require we see things in their appropriate context. Objects must be viewed according

to their own temporality, and decisions must be made with sensitivity to their specific contexts. Likewise, both intuition and good sense recognize the limitations of any static rules or analyses that claim to be applicable to all instances of a given phenomena. The contextual knowledge that animates good sense, the ability to know how to apply one's moral commitments to a given situation, is acquired through the method of intuition. I must be in a specific context, with specific others, and face specific demands in order to know what to do. Finally, just as we can use our intuition well or poorly, by bringing in justice as the heart of good sense, Bergson provides us with a way to judge whether someone is exercising good or bad sense. Although Bergson says tantalizingly little about what he means by justice, I think we can understand this as the conventions surrounding acceptable and worthwhile behavior in a given society. It is the same intuitive criteria we use to recognize that somebody is a "good person." We often do not have a rigid set of criteria for making such an assumption; rather, we recognize that person's ability to exercise good sense, at least most of the time.²⁵

Bergson ends his speech with these words, "Be in no doubt, young pupils: clarity of ideas, strength of attention, freedom and moderation in judgments, all this forms the material envelope of good sense; but it is the passion for justice that is its soul" (KW, 353). We all know people like this. People of principle who are supple enough to respond to particular contexts. People with the intuitive capacity to know how best to apply abstract morals and norms to the messiness of everyday life. People who appreciate the passions of others and understand their place in a harmonious social order. It is these people who are the ultimate demonstration of Bergson's method of intuition, and it is their passionate drive for justice that guides the development of their intuitive capacities and their character.

Bergson's notion of intuition is not mysticism or obscurantism; it is a rigorous methodology that is at the heart of his epistemology and ethics. We judge our intuitive ability, determining whether we are intuiting well or poorly, in two ways. First, by seeing if our intuitive philosophy is helping us understand the world around us, if it works to bring clarity to our experience. Second, we use the demands of justice, in concert with intuition, to become people capable of exhibiting good sense. Bergson is vague about what he means by justice, and his language is oftentimes opaque and mystical in a way that is provocative and open to interpretation. In the following section I want to bring Bergson's intuition together with Haraway's situated knowledges, linking Bergson's emphasis on justice with Haraway's insistence that epistemology is always already a political endeavor.

Intuition and Haraway's Situated Knowledges

²⁵ This definition of justice could be used to justify the status quo, evacuating Bergson's discussion of good sense of any progressive political force. I do not think this is necessarily the case. "Good people," people of obvious integrity and empathic ability described by Bergson are often at the vanguard of progressive political movements. Combining Haraway and Bergson will give me an explicitly progressive intuitive method, but I think the beginnings of this method are already present in this speech by Bergson.

I would like to ground my analysis of Donna Haraway in her classic essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” Haraway begins by describing the various feminist reactions against the “imagined... invisible conspiracy of masculinist scientists and philosophers replete with grants and laboratories” (Haraway 1990, 183). Haraway, in her characteristically tongue-in-cheek style, is poking fun at feminist paranoia, but she is also clear that this is not at all an unjustified paranoia. We do live in a world where scientism has coupled with neo-liberal economics to make quantifiable productivity, often measured in dollars, the ultimate justification for any human activity.²⁶ Haraway’s work is a polemic against the commodification, corporatization, and quantification of our experience at the expense of sustainable, just, and diverse ways of being. She writes about women, people of color, cyborgs, and animals in an effort to get us to think of science outside of the rigid, masculinist, and financially motivated framework it rests in today. Given the gravity, scope, and immediacy of her feminist political concerns, Haraway takes seriously the feeling of fighting against a masculinist conspiracy. The point of her humor is to point out that this feeling of paranoia and the urgency of fighting a well funded machine, has produced two extreme ways of thinking about objectivity: social constructionism and feminist critical empiricism. In its extreme form, social constructionism leads to the feeling that “gender, race, the world itself—all seem just effects of warp speeds and plays of signifiers” (Haraway 1990, 184). The second is a feminist empiricism that uses a combination of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and sociology in an attempt to “insist on a better account of the world” where “it is not enough to show radical historical contingency and modes of construction for everything” (Haraway 1990, 187). Social constructionism provides the tools necessary to denaturalize sexist, racist, ableist, and misogynistic ideas about objective reality, but risks dissolving our ability to make claims grounded objectively in the real. Feminist empiricism attempts to maintain this connection with objectivity, but loses some of the radical elasticity of social constructionism. Faced with the real power and threat of a masculinist technoscientific world, what’s a feminist to do?

Similar anxieties have sprung up in many other fields in the wake of post-modern and post-structuralist critiques. It is not only feminist scientists who worry about balancing a sensitivity to the constructedness of our experience, with an ability to make claims grounded in objective reality. Most importantly for my project is the debate between social constructionists, in particular Judith Butler, and trans theorists, notably Julia Serano, Vivien Namaste, and Jay Prosser. These trans theorists contend that understanding gender as socially constructed does not do justice to the depth and conviction with which trans people experience their gender dysphoria, nor does it account for the urgency and importance of physically changing one’s body. As Serano says in her essay “Performance Piece,” “don’t you dare dismiss my gender as construct, drag, or performance. My gender is a work of non-fiction” (Serano 2010, 88). Butler has long

²⁶ Just ask any student of feminist theory, philosophy, literature or another discipline in the “soft” humanities how many times they’ve been asked “But what are you going to DO with that degree.” Indeed, we should question just what makes a field of inquiry “hard” or “soft” in the first place.

argued that her position does account for the materiality of the body, and does not present gender as a costume to be changed at will, but trans theorists, in particular Jay Prosser, have still pushed for a materiality that can ground our certainties and experiences in a way foundational or prior to any social inscription. As is often the case, these positions become polarized and caricatured, with Butler standing in for gender as an infinitely mutable and ungrounded play of signifiers, and trans theorists trying to return to a pre-linguistic essence, a certainty based in a materiality that cannot be questioned or interrogated.

Rather than take a side, I want to focus on how these debates demonstrate the need for marginalized populations to walk a very fine line. Do we emphasize the constructedness of the natural and risk losing our footing to make strong claims, or do we continue to try to articulate politically just forms of objectivity? Are we “born that way” or can we be self-determined in our genders, sexualities, and identities? How are we to make sense of, perhaps even synthesize or balance, these seemingly contradictory positions? Haraway casts the problem as follows:

I think my problem and ‘our’ problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared and friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom. (Haraway 1990, 187 emphasis in original)

Rather than continue to walk this fine line and risk collapsing into a “self-induced personality disorder,” Haraway presents us with an answer as simple as it is profound: “time to switch metaphors” (Haraway 1990, 186, 188). We need to get away from binary thinking by developing a new metaphor, a new way to understand the feminist project. Haraway does this through a re-prioritization of vision. The feminist critic of objectivity is a reaction against what Haraway calls “the god trick,” which is the claim to see from a position that is unmarked, disembodied, and objective; a vision that is a “conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway 1990, 188). Think of watching a documentary about animals in the wild. We gaze at the animals as they go about their lives, but all the while we, the audience, are never implicated in these interactions. We are tricked by the illusion of disembodied vision. It’s a shock when the cameraperson records their own shadow, or when the foot or arm of another crew member enters the frame. We are suddenly forced to remember that real people, on a specific day, in a specific place, recorded that footage of specific animals. This shocking realization—that my ability to observe animal behavior from the comfort of my living room is the result of an entire network of real people, animals, technologies and temporalities—is precisely the kind of realization Haraway is trying to bring about. My view of the animals is not actually objective or god-like; it is from the perspective of the cameraperson and then mediated by the camera, film, broadcast technology, my ability to pay my cable bill, my television, and my eyes.

In the next chapter I will combine Bergson's account of the body in *Matter and Memory* with Karen Barad's notion of intra-action to extend Haraway's method beyond vision understood as a strictly ocular phenomenon. For now, I will remain faithful to Haraway's discussion of vision, hinting at the ways in which her account can expand to include other (even all) ways of relating to the world. Scientific objectivity attempts to universalize knowledge by separating it from any specific context. Facts are visible from any perspective, any vantage point, because they are objectively true. Masculinist objectivity escapes ethical responsibility by hiding under the claim that the scientist is not responsible for her findings; she is simply reporting on the real. In her later work Haraway refers to this figure as the "modest witness... whose accounts mirror reality—[and] must be invisible, that is, an inhabitant of the potent 'unmarked category,' which is constructed by the extraordinary conventions of self-invisibility" (Haraway 1997, 23). The modest witness must disappear, becoming the limpid conduit for the collection and transmission of objective scientific data. Relativism falls prey to the same god-trick. "Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally" indeed "relativism and totalization are both 'god-tricks' promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully" (Haraway 1990, 191). The hyperreality of a total relativism cannot be held accountable for its constructions because responsibility requires the traction of normative claims, those wrinkles or striations on Deleuzian smooth-space that would slow us down long enough to be held accountable for our actions.

Insisting that vision be reclaimed as always embodied "allows us to construct a usable, but not innocent, doctrine of objectivity" (Haraway 1990, 189). A feminist account of situated knowledges recognizes that all vision is embodied, all knowledge is particular, and all knowers are located in a context. "So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (Haraway 1990, 190). All knowledge is located in specific bodies, moving through time, in specific places, performing specific actions. Whereas masculinist objectivity and postmodern relativity appear transcendent and incontrovertible, situated knowledges require that we "become answerable for what we learn how to see". If "irresponsible means unable to be called into account" then a situated knowledge must take "responsibility for the generativity of all visual practices" (Haraway 1990, 190-191). The manner or method according to which we look at the world around us will generate different knowledge, and we must acknowledge and reflect on this generativity.

The person who practices this situated objectivity, who is responsible for her knowledge, is what Haraway calls the mutated modest witness. This witness can come in many forms, and all modest witnesses must strive to work for the liberation of all oppressed populations, no one fight is totally separable from another. That being said, we do speak from specific positions and goals and throughout this dissertation I will be focusing on the person who is concerned with feminist and queer liberation. Witnessing is not simply seeing, but seeing as an embodied practice producing situated knowledges:

Witnessing is seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and physically vulnerable to, one's visions and representations. Witnessing is a collective, limited practice that depends on the constructed and never finished credibility of those who do it, all of whom are mortal, fallible, and fraught with the consequences of unconscious and disowned desires and fears. (Haraway 1997, 267)

The witnessing of the mutated modest witness, this position that strikes a path between masculinist objectivity and relativism, still requires certain normative guidelines. If our scientific practices are not simple reflections of the real, nor are we sliding around a smooth-space unable to gain traction, how do we guide our self-reflection? If we must constantly call ourselves to account and take responsibility for the ways we witness, on what basis do we evaluate or judge ourselves? How should we position ourselves? What norms should guide our practices of vision? Bergson approached this question in his discussion of good sense, but Haraway states that “we are bound to seek perspective from those points of view, which can never be known in advance, which promise... knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination” (Haraway 1990, 192). Later she describes this as the ‘yearning’ experienced by the mutated modest witness:

I want a mutated modest witness to live in worlds of technoscience, to yearn for knowledge, freedom, and justice in the world of consequential facts... Yearning in technoscience is for knowledge projects as freedom projects--in a polyglot, relentlessly troping, but practical and material way--coupled with a searing sense that all is not well with women, as well as billions of nonwomen, who remain incommensurable in the warped coordinate systems of the New World Order, Inc. (Haraway 1997, 267, 269)

The creation of this mutated modest witness then necessarily involves collapsing the distinction between the technoscientific and the political.²⁷ The practices through which we generate knowledge must be tied to a politics of liberation, one centered on sustainability and the increasingly just distribution of what Dean Spade calls life-chances.²⁸ “The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean” (Haraway 1997, 36).

This mutated modest witness also recognizes that objects outside of the knowing subject, even the most “inert” of material objects, are not resources for appropriation but are instead

²⁷ “Queering all or any of these distinctions depends, paradigmatically, on undoing the founding border trace of modern science - that between the technical and the political. The point is to make situated knowledges possible in order to be able to make consequential claims about the world and on each other.” (Haraway 1997, 268)

²⁸ Spade, Dean. 2011. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Brooklyn, NY: South End Press.

agential beings. That is to say, if our positions and visions generate knowledge, we must also recognize the agential qualities of what we take to be our objects of study. “Situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally a slave of the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (Haraway 1990, 198). We cannot think of objects as resources to be manipulated, understood, and deployed. We require a method that is capable of understanding the ways in which an object looks back at us, our co-constitution with the object through interaction. “Accounts of a ‘real’ world do not, then, depend on a logic of ‘discovery’, but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation’” (Haraway 1990, 198).

There are many avenues open to us to learn how to witness responsibly. Through fiction, careful listening, artwork, conversation, and an openness to dialogue we can become attuned to the impact our practices of vision have on others, and how another’s witnessing can influence us. Additionally, like Bergson’s insistence that we come into contact with the movement of life inside ourselves, we must examine our own temporality in order to appreciate that of other and objects in the world. Here we see the importance of forces we commonly call immaterial or abstract. My memory, imaginative capacity, emotional and affective attachments will all influence my perspective and also serve as means to begin to understand the situatedness of an other. It is through these immaterial means that we can learn to see from other perspectives, and let those perspectives speak to and inform our own. In sum, situated knowledges are embodied, contextual, mutually constitutive, and informed by practices of responsible witnessing guided by the desire for a more just world.

Situated Queer Feminist Intuition

Bringing these two thinkers together has led us to what I think of as queer feminist intuition. To be as clear as possible, I would like to explain how Bergson and Haraway can help us satisfy the four criteria I laid out at the beginning of the chapter: that this method take into account the agential qualities of both the material and immaterial, that it is capable of thinking in time, that it is epistemologically modest and rooted in queer feminist politics, and, finally, that it functions not according to rules but as a kind of intuitive attunement.

Most people are comfortable considering the agency of animate creatures, especially those that appear to deliberate before acting. We are, however, less likely to analyze inanimate, inert or immaterial objects as having any form of agency. What does it mean to consider the agency of things like microscopes, poems, memories, or even time? How can something that is not conscious, or not even materially present, have agency? *I argue that to consider something’s agency is to stop holding it to the standard of human duration, and allow the thing to determine our perspective.* Remember that for Bergson it is intellect that cuts out specific objects from the duration of the real, and it is intuition that allows us to gain a sense of objects as they endure in their own temporality or tension. This is a method that does not universalize but instead attends to each thing in its particularity: “how much more instructive would be a truly intuitive metaphysics, which would follow the undulations of the real! True, it would not embrace in a

single sweep the totality of things; but for each thing it would give an explanation which would fit it exactly, and it alone” (CM, 19). Whereas intellect would explain an object according to universal and standard rules, intuition teaches us that an object must be approached from a particular perspective, on its own terms, and situated in its own duration. Thinking of each object as having its own duration helps us understand what Haraway means when she asks us to consider objects as having agential force. For Haraway, denying an objects agency is to treat it as a resource, as a *use-object*. When we treat objects as resources we are using intellect to delimit that object according to our own duration and our own needs. If I look at a tree as “potential-paper” I am blind to the duration of the tree’s own life cycle, and by extension the ways in which the tree is connected to its environment. As a resource it is simply an object waiting to be cut down and transformed according to my needs. Here we see the overlap between Bergson’s account of intellect, and Haraway’s practices of vision. Intellect and vision are both particular ways of delimiting the outlines of an object, and they must both be balanced by intuition. We must always be self-reflective and aware of the ways in which we stabilize our experience, and the contingency or illusory nature of that stability.

Each time we assume a position, using our eyes or another technology of vision, we are making a distinct cut into the world. To see an object as a bounded entity, separate from its context, requires that we spatialize that object. Likewise, the use of different vision technologies will create different objects. The decision to use a camera or an electron microscope will freeze your object into two radically distinct spatialized forms. Like intellect, our practices of vision make things distinct in different ways.²⁹ Becoming accountable for our vision, and consciously seeking perspectives that afford opportunities for vision that promote justice, or reveal injustices, counters the solidification of a given perspective, much like how intuition balances our intellect. We must learn to intuit, to sympathize with, other perspectives.

Just as intuition allows us to move closer to different durations, Haraway proposes we move into “conversation” with the objects around us because “the world neither speaks for itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder” (Haraway 1990, 198). I have outlined two valences of Bergsonian intuition above: first, it is the effort of mind to see the world from other durations. I understand the child, the tree, or the ecosystem from their own unique temporal frame and duration. This allows me to see how a child’s day is much longer than my own, how the tree exists in long cycles of growth, dormancy and regeneration, and how environmental protection must take the long view by rejecting immediate profit or utility. Second, Bergson explains how developing our intuitive capacity can help us see the motivation behind an idea, can get at the movement of mind that then becomes spatialized in language. This intuition then provides us with knowledge of particular circumstances, giving us access to ethical information outside of the realm of legalistic universals. Haraway is also concerned with seeing objects in their own

²⁹ Here one could expand this discussion to Annemarie Mol’s text *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Duke University Press, 2003. Her discussion of how the body becomes multiple and then is made to cohere seems to fit nicely with discussions of the multiple objects created by multiple visions.

right, and not simply appropriating them for human consumption. Her notion of witnessing also involves a commitment to justice as the primary mechanism for learning how to witness. Both thinkers argue that this intuitive capacity, this witnessing, is a method that must be learned and can be done well or poorly. Both intuition and witnessing produce knowledge bent upon correct action in specific circumstances.

Here Haraway can help deepen Bergson's account. Bergson's language often privileges the perspective of the philosopher as that which moves toward or away from other durations. There is the sense that my duration as philosopher can change through intuition, but little sense of how others or objects may alter my being without my intention or consent. Haraway points out that it is not only I who intuit the specific duration of another, but that by approaching the object from an intuitive perspective I enter into a conversation with the other and am changed in the process. To say that objects have agency is not to posit a fantasy world in which all the objects in my apartment start walking and talking. It is to approach each object as a being that exists at its own duration, and recognizing that objects influence their surroundings in a way often occluded by our own (unacknowledged) duration and practices of vision.

Likewise, and this will be further elaborated in chapter two, we must consider immaterial forces as having agency. Intuition takes seriously those moments where an absence feels like a presence, or when the past floods the present. For example, my past, my identity and self-confidence, my emotions, the music I'm listening to, the process of writing—all these things influence how I approach this object that is my dissertation. These immaterial forces have a direct impact on the way in which my intellect sharpens its definitions or my intuition softens them. Love may make us blind to the negative impact a being or object has on its surroundings, but it may also convince us to tarry with the object and see its connectedness. So too discomfort or hatred toward an object may make me overly critical. While Haraway is certainly not blind to the role of the immaterial in our situated knowledges, Bergson's articulation of how the entirety of our past continually bears upon our present will help us get a greater appreciation for the immaterial in Haraway's approach. Haraway is clear that we must become the *kind* of people who can be accountable for their practices of vision, and it is through Bergson's connecting good sense and intuition that we see how that process comes about. Good sense is the set of norms that guide our ability to become better or worse at utilizing our intuitive ability. My explicitly taking up, for instance, a feminist position, our intuitive capacity becomes more carefully attuned to the material and immaterial forces at work in the oppression of women. Haraway says that we must *mutate*, but Bergsonian intuition as the effort of intuiting the pre-linguistic force, the *élan vital*, behind action, gives us an account of how that mutation actually happens.

It is not simply a question of which tools I use to augment or alter my vision, I must also be concerned with my relationship to those tools and to my object. Chapter two will expand on this point, arguing that the agential and affective qualities of the immaterial world quite literally influence our embodied motility, and our perceptions. That chapter will explain how and why something immaterial can stop us in our tracks and feel as real as a concrete wall. For now

suffice it to say that a queer feminist intuition is sensitive to the force of the immaterial in the constitution of what we consider reality.

Second, this is a method that must always take into account the continuous movement of time, the constant unfolding of duration. If all life, indeed all matter, can be characterized in terms of different tempos or tensions of duration, we must always be attendant to the movement that is the flow of time. This method prioritizes making distinctions according to duration instead of spatialization. The most salient aspect of an object may be its temporal situatedness and not its discrete borders, edges, or outlines. Likewise, something that is no longer materially present, something we may situate as existing only in the past, can still bear upon the present. Finally, while we may be able to predict events that will happen in the future, we cannot assume that the future will unfold in a predictably mechanistic fashion. We have to keep an eye out for novelty.

To understand how queer feminist intuition answers the third and fourth criteria, we must look at the process of developing this intuitive capacity. What both authors are trying to describe is something very similar to our colloquial notion of “woman’s intuition.” It is the ability to simply know that something is true, to intuit what is at work in a given situation, and often to know the best way to behave. For Bergson this is most clearly articulated in his discussions of how to get at the core of a philosopher’s thinking. In much the same way that we can only see the movement of air as it disturbs the dust floating in a ray of sunlight, so too a “thought that brings something new into the world is of course obliged to manifest itself through the ready-made ideas it comes across and draws into its movement” (CM, 92). Each philosopher must attempt to express their ideas in the language and concepts of their day, and we see the movement of their thought as it rearranges these ideas, like motes in a sunbeam. Bergson’s intuitive method is trying to make contact with that original thought, the movement or impetus that animates these ideas and makes Plato’s thought so Platonic, or Bergson’s work feel so Bergson-y.

The truth is that above the word and above the sentence there is something much more simple than a sentence or even a word: the meaning, which is less a thing thought than a movement of thought, less a movement than a direction. And just as the impulsion given to the embryonic life determines the division of an original cell into cells which in turn divide until the complete organism is formed, so the characteristic movement of each act of thought leads this thought, by an increasing sub-division of itself, to spread out more and more over the successive planes of the mind until it reaches that of speech. (CM, 99-100)

This can be extended to our experiences with living beings. When we say that someone is intuitive we mean that they can sense the movement of thought and emotion behind another’s actions. Regardless of what their interlocutor says, they can get a sense for the impetus behind those words. We do not take a series of parts to recompose the whole (move from the words to the meaning), we start from the whole and see how it divides and solidifies into parts (intuit the

impulse and see how it congeals into language). The “philosopher did not arrive at unity, he started from it. I am speaking, naturally, of a unity which is at once restricted and relative, like the unity which marks off a living being from the rest of the universe” (CM, 103). I do not observe and catalogue my partner’s actions to understand his motivations, I intuit how he thinks and feels to gain a sense of how that motivation will be expressed in words and actions.

Whether we are dwelling with another person, a living creature or an inert object, developing ones intuitive capacity requires attention to the particular. My intuitive knowledge is tied to the particular object I am knowing, and in a very real sense I must become intimate with that object. I must come into conversation with it, dwell with it, to gain a sense of its duration and the movement behind its words, actions, affects or effects. In this sense queer feminist intuition satisfies the criteria of being epistemologically modest - it is impossible to universalize intuitive knowledge. But, as we have seen above, we need some guidelines for how we approach, see, and interact with the world around us. While Bergson does say that justice is at the heart of good sense, and we do get a sense for the kind of just person he is talking about, he is vague and refuses to concretely outline what it means to be just. Haraway is much more explicit. As we saw above, her mutated modest witness, the person who takes responsibility for their practices of vision, is someone who yearns for a more sustainable world where fewer people exist under axes of domination. A just world is one organized along queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist and ecological convictions. If intimacy and conversation allow us to be attuned to another, it is our political commitments that make us attuned to how we are interacting with strangers, objects, etc, and crucially how we *ought* to act in these various contexts. This is the work of consciousness raising.

Both authors seek to strike a balance between objectivity and relativism, between intellect and intuition. I think that Bergson provides a metaphysical language that emphasizes the role of duration in Haraway’s account and describes how specific political commitments change our intuitive capacities, mutating us into modest witnesses. Haraway gives us a concrete sense of what intuition may look like, and provides the feminist and political sensitivity woefully lacking in Bergson’s text. Bergson is concerned primarily with the individual philosopher, and Haraway gives us a way to see how Bergson’s method of intuition could be extended to a community of knowers, each developing and transforming their own partial perspective as part of a feminist ethical practice. Good sense can simply be the status quo or comfortable social mores. This is why we must be in community with oppressed populations. Only through these conversations will we develop a critical perspective that can develop our intuitive capacities in progressive directions, intent on maximal liberation.

Crucially, both Bergson and Haraway are developing conceptual tools for understanding that life always endures, and that our thought must attend to this fact. Different visions attend to different durations, and Haraway’s notion of responsibility requires we always be self-reflective and “answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway 1990, 190). We can avoid the god-trick, the universalizing and a-temporal objectivity of masculinist science, and instead endure with other thinkers, objects, and partial perspectives.

I end this chapter with a long quote from Bergson, one that captures the philosophical and affective richness of intuition.

Intuition doubtless admits of many degrees of intensity, and philosophy many degrees of depth; but the mind once brought back to real duration will already be alive with intuitive life and its knowledge of things will already be philosophy. Instead of a discontinuity of moments replacing one another in an infinitely divided time, it will perceive the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible. Let us... grasp ourselves afresh as we are, in a present which is thick and furthermore, elastic, which we can stretch indefinitely backward by pushing the screen which masks us from ourselves farther and farther away; let us grasp afresh the external world as it really is, not superficially, in the present, but in depth, with the immediate past crowding upon it and imprinting upon it its impetus; let us in a word become accustomed to see all things *sub specie durationis*: immediately in our galvanized perception what is taut becomes relaxed, what is dormant awakens, what is dead comes to life again. (CM, 105-6)

I can't help but read this as a description of consciousness raising – the process of expanding your worldview to become more self-conscious, politically minded, and intuitively attuned to those around you. Getting the feel of queer feminist intuition is a difficult, sometimes frustrating but often joyful process, and it is both the method and goal of this dissertation.

Chapter 2

Bergson's Entangled Bodies: The Tangible Immaterial and Fluid Embodiment

In the previous chapter we saw how Bergson and Haraway can be brought together to provide an epistemological method based on our embodied relationship to time. Queer feminist intuition, when in balance with intellect, gives us the resources to understand how both material and immaterial factors are impacting the object of our consideration, helping us become sensitive to the seen and unseen forces at play in a given context. It is a method that realizes how we look at the world determines what we can see, and queer feminist intuition is committed to examining our surroundings in terms of systemic oppression and revealing opportunities to create a more just world. In so doing we become more empathic, just, and attuned subjects. Queer feminist intuition is only possible because we are all particular embodied beings. It is only through a sensitization to my own duration that I can intuit other durations. Because my body, and the bodies of others, are so essential to this process, in this chapter I clearly describe what I mean by “the body” and its relationship to the immaterial, specifically memory.

We are beings that take great pride in our ability to separate the material and the immaterial, the physical and the mental. We strive to live dualistically with a gap between the body and our mind. Plato believed the body “and its desires cause war, civil discord, and battles,” arguing that “if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself” (Plato 2002, 103). Descartes made the cogito, not sensory experience, the foundation of epistemological certainty. “I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect” (Descartes 1998, 65). Many arguments that attempt to define human beings point to our ability to separate our cognitive ability and mental experiences from our physical body, needs, and desires. On a practical level, the ability to discern thought from matter, imagination from reality, or language from action, is essential to human survival. We encourage children to develop rich and imaginative interior lives, but train them to distinguish between “make-believe” and “real-life”. We teach them the phrase “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Similarly, we would be worried if a friend started to confuse her own reality for that of a work of fiction. Shifting into Bergson’s language, we habitually divide existence into two distinct realms. The realm of tangible, empirical, or objective reality, what Bergson calls *matter*, and the realm of interior life, personal experience, and memory, what Bergson calls *spirit*.

We often talk about the immaterial as if it can have a tangible effect. A sharp word can feel like a slap, a kind compliment can warm you up. We talk about spaces having ambiance, a vibe, or energy. This chapter will argue that this is not simply a linguistic or metaphorical convention. Instead, our nature as temporal beings endowed with memory makes it such that the material and immaterial do interact in our experience, and immaterial forces can have tangible effects on the material world. To accomplish this I am bringing together Bergson and the feminist theoretical physicist Karen Barad. Both thinkers share a desire to re-think the limit between the material and immaterial, and the interactions between both realms. I will argue that

taken together we can find a concept of the body that is explicitly entangled in a web of connections that includes material and immaterial forces.

Much western philosophy is concerned with determining which of the realms is more real. Do we go with Plato and put our trust in the invisible, universal Forms? Or take a fleshier stance and trust the objectively real world “out there.” For Bergson, this question is at the root of the debate between Realism and Idealism. Is the world composed of objects that exist completely outside of my mind? If so, how do these objects become mental representations, and what is the ontological status of those representations? Or, is reality fundamentally an act of mind, and if that is the case what can be said to exist independent of my experience? His text *Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relation of Body and Spirit* is both a trenchant critique of Realism and Idealism, and a systematic elaboration of his own view. Bergson questions the distinction between material reality and the reality of memory by shifting the emphasis from epistemological questions to the category of *action*, and he provides an analysis of the body that links these two realms on a continuum.³⁰ This image of the continuum is essential; it captures the fact that matter and memory are distinct from one another, opposite poles, but also connected, co-implicated or mixed to varying degrees in our embodied experience.³¹ Bergson is explicitly resisting our tendency to think of matter as real (material, tangible), and memory as less real (spiritual, psychological).³² He is providing an argument that explains how both matter and memory bear upon our experience as we endure through time.

Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* is also concerned with articulating a third way, but she is stepping between the competing claims of representationalism and social constructionism. Barad holds that the world is neither a simple material fact awaiting our discovering gaze, nor is it something constructed through language, culture, or social conventions. Barad’s text outlines what she calls *agential realism*. According to Barad, subject and object are created in each moment of interaction (what she calls intra-action, to maintain the hermetic sense of the engagement as an event that delimits itself and thereby becomes meaningful). When I look through a microscope at

³⁰ Frederic Worms characterizes the movement of the entire book as follows: “*from the action of the body as opposed to our representation, to the action of the body as mediation between our representation and that of things, between our mind and matter*” (Worms 1999, 89 emphasis in original)

³¹ That is to say, one is not more real than the other - both matter and memory are qualitatively changing in each moment of our duration, they are radically independent from one another, and yet they are completely co-implicated, fused together, in our embodied experience. “*We must replace the difference of substance between mind and matter with a difference of degree within a single scale of reality, allowing us to understand their respective and irreducible independence from each other, as well as their analogy or even their mutual participation*” (Worms 1999, 96 emphasis in original)

³² Another point of overlap between Bergson and feminist empiricism is that we often think of memory as being less real, or less epistemologically valid, because it is always particular. Feminist empiricism would be able to say that particularity does not diminish, and in fact can augment, knowledge’s importance.

bacteria I am not a subject observing an object. Rather, the bacteria, instrument, and I create a specific intra-action in which we are temporarily created as distinct objects. That very same kind of bacteria may be living within my large intestine at that moment (arguably part of my self) and would only become an object of analysis in a very different configuration of material-discursive agents. If it turns out I am being observed through a one-way mirror, I suddenly become the object of another subject's analysis. While this is a silly example, it captures the fact that our common delineations of subject and object are much more fluid than most scientific world-views would like to believe. The material and immaterial are *entangled* into this complicated web, and it is only through specific material-discursive arrangements that we make delineations or "cuts" that create discrete and meaningful objects. I will describe Barad's project in more detail below, but suffice it to say she wants to replace our overly static conception of how matter comes to matter, the connection between ontology and epistemology, with a much more vibrant, entangled, confusing, and lively picture of the world around us. Similar to Haraway, Barad's entire view is ethically charged, and it should become apparent to the reader that both Bergson and Barad's account of the body have normative consequences for our behavior. This will be more fully discussed in Chapter 4, where I explicitly outline my theory of affirmation.

In what follows we will see that both thinkers are joined by a commitment to questioning the limits between matter and spirit, between epistemology and ontology. In this chapter I will argue that for both Bergson and Barad, the point of connection between matter and memory is the living body. Although both thinkers are explicitly moving beyond humanism, for the purposes of this dissertation I will focus their thinking on the living human body, and the relationship between the material of the body and the immateriality of memory. So, what *kind* of body is this? How can we characterize Bergson and Barad's concept of the body? What kind of body will be winding its way through this dissertation? How does it constitute, and how is it constituted by, its physical, historical, social, affective, and temporal position? Bergson and Barad both describe a body totally entangled, woven into, and positioned in not only its physical environment, but also in the immaterial forces of memory and time, the body is part of a network of material and immaterial forces. What is unusual about this body, and what this chapter strives to make clear, is that the immaterial does not hover over or haunt the material, it is not something "less real" than the tangible by virtue of its invisibility. The material and immaterial compose the context for our embodiment and literally impact our bodily motility.

My analysis will progress in three stages: entangling the body in the material world, entangling the body in the immaterial, animating this entanglement with duration. I begin this chapter by examining Bergson's curious concept of *the image* in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*. I argue that *the image* is a way to understand that the material body is completely connected to its material environment. This includes the mind, which according to Bergson is oriented toward action and not knowledge. My second section works to extend this tangle unto the realm of the immaterial, the invisible forces of memory. I accomplish this through an examination of Bergson's full account of perception. I will explain how matter and memory interact in order to argue that both physical environment and memory impact embodied mobility

as part of the same circuit of experience. This will provide the crucial framework for how material environment and immaterial forces impact our embodied mobility. I offer a description of why a word, an image, a memory, or a thought can be as physically powerful as a material object. Third, I will explain that conceiving of memory as virtual means that our embodied mobility in the world is *indeterminate*, evolving, or unfolding. This allows us to understand that the wovenness or entanglement of the body is something whose shape is always in flux, always in movement. This is what I mean when I say that duration *animates* this entanglement, and this dynamism will be the animating force of Chapter Three, where I bring Bergson into conversation with queer theory. Each body is part of a fabric that is constantly morphing and re-working itself, and it is this body that will weave its way through, and become entangled in, the rest of my analysis of affirmation. This, we shall see, is precisely the place at which affirmation comes to affect embodied mobility.

Barad and Bergson on Entangled Bodies

To see what is unique about Bergson's view of the body we must start with his concept of the *image*. In the first pages of *Matter and Memory* Bergson defines matter as "an aggregate of 'images'" by which he means "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*—an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and 'representation'" (MM, 9). Bergson starts his analysis midway between Idealism and Realism by denying the gap that would separate the extended object from my mental representation of that object. He describes everything, the object, my body, my brain, as an *image* existing in a world of images. He claims that this conception of matter as a collection of images "is simply that of common sense... For common sense, then, the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image" (MM, 10). To think of matter as an image is to grant it existence independent of any observer, while simultaneously accounting for the fact that all objects are experienced, and experience other objects, from a specific perspective. Looking at my coffee cup I can only see the side that is facing me, and yet I do not deny the existence of the cup's other side, nor do I make the cups existence dependent upon my perception. Likewise, I recognize that I am always seen from particular vantage points. These images exist in themselves, and they interact according to predictable laws that Bergson calls "laws of nature." If my cat pushes my coffee cup off the desk it will fall to the ground, likely shattering. As an observer fixed to a particular position, I experience this domestic catastrophe as a series of images, like frames of celluloid film taken from a fixed position, but these images are simply facets of objects that interact regardless of my perceiving them. Had I not been in the room, the cat's push would still result in the cup falling to the floor. Gravity's effect on the cup is automatic, repeatable, and calculable.

The body is a special image known to us as the source of our perceptions (the zero-point of those perceptions) and also known from within by affections. The living body is also special because it is the source of new and unpredictable movements; movements that cannot be

anticipated by the laws of nature that control inert objects. I may know that my cup falling to the floor will result in it breaking. This is a predictable sequence of events, but I cannot know for certain whether my cat will give my cup the initial push. As a living being she is a source of indeterminacy in the world. The actions of a living body are not governed by mechanistic laws of cause and effect, they depend upon the volition of the living being. Living bodies add “something new to the universe and to its history,” something that could never be “rigorously deduced from antecedent phenomena” (MM, 18). Bergson describes this as a halo or “zone of indetermination.”

This leads us to Bergson’s definition of the body. He says, “my body is, then, in the aggregate of the material world, an image which acts like other images, receiving and giving back movement, with, perhaps, this difference only, that my body appears to choose, within certain limits, the manner in which it shall restore what it receives” and because the body is both an image and a material object in and of the material world, Bergson concludes that “my body, an object destined to move other objects, is, then, a center of action; it cannot give birth to a representation” (MM, 20). This is a crucial point. It is not my body that produces the images. My body *is* an image among others (in other words, a material thing that is only partially experienced by other objects) and it cannot be the cause, or somehow contain, those images. My body will appear to another as an image. Indeed, it appears to me as an image, as *the* image around which all others are organized. What distinguishes my body from other images is that I can control how it interacts with other objects and I experience it from within.

If the brain is an image among other images, “then it cannot be reified into the condition upon which the *whole* image of the world depends” (Asnell-Pearson 2002, 145). If the working of my mind, my perceptions or representations, are not caused by the material world (Realism), nor are they projected out from my mind (Idealism), what is the relationship between the image that is my brain and the other images surrounding it? To understand the brain’s function, and to escape the false binary between Realism and Idealism, Bergson stops treating the brain as an epistemological organ, and starts seeing it as something geared toward action. Suzanne Guerlac explains:

Bergson’s first step is to deconstruct the opposition between idealism and realism. As different as these two positions may appear to be, Bergson points out that both share a fundamental assumption: that perception occurs in the service of truth or knowledge about the empirical world. Bergson refuses this premise. Perception, he maintains, serves action, not knowledge. It functions so that we might protect ourselves, or satisfy our needs. Action, driven by need, occurs as movement. (Guerlac 2006, 107)

When I perceive matter, I am not seeing that object perfectly as it exists, nor am I creating my representation of the object. When I perceive an object, seeing it as an image, I see those aspects of an object most salient to my potential interaction with that object. Bergson says, “*I call matter the aggregate of images, and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body*” (MM, 22 emphasis in original). The object exists apart

from my perception of it, but my perception of that object will reflect my body's possible action with regard to that object. Things appear closer and more distinct as they move toward my body. Distant objects cannot impact my body, nor can I act upon these objects, so they appear indistinct and fuzzy. Matter is *virtually* representable, meaning it can be viewed as any number of images. When I actually observe matter, when it becomes delineated and something I can interact with, what I am doing is subtracting from this virtual representability those aspects of the material object most salient to my interaction with that object. "Perception is an activity that subtracts from a mobile whole in accordance with its interests and functions" (Ansell Pearson 2002, 154). The virtuality of the object becomes actualized in my specific representation or perception of that object.

Couldn't it still be said that these perceptions rely upon the mental processes of synthesizing and understanding sensory perception? How are we to understand the brain on this model? This is where we see the genius of Bergson's bizarre discussion of *the image*. To explain the function of the brain we must remember that it is *just another image*. It cannot produce images, nor does it exist in a different way than other images. My brain is an image and like all other images, it occupies a specific place in the world, that is, inside my skull, which is a part of my head, which rests on top of my body. My brain does not contain or project the image of my body or the material world. Here we start to see the radically entangled nature of Bergson's concept of the body. By making the brain an image among images he affords it no special status, no ability to create perceptions or other images. The function of the image that is my brain is simply to mediate the relationship between the image that is my body, and the images outside of my body. The brain is simply part of the material world. Bergson says, "in our opinion, then, the brain is no more than a kind of central telephonic exchange: its office is to allow communication or to delay it. It adds nothing to what it receives... in other words, the brain appears to us to be an instrument of analysis in regard to the movement received and an instrument of selection in regard to the movement executed" (MM, 30). The brain is not the source of mental life, nor is it something that generates representations, imaginings or richly textured interior worlds. The brain is not the seat of my emotion, nor does it generate my desire or contain my consciousness or unconscious. The brain is simply a way to delay the cycle of action/reaction. "There is, then, only a difference of degree—there can be no difference in kind—between what is called the perceptive faculty of the brain and the reflex functions of the spinal cord" (MM, 23-24).

For a being with little or no cerebral function there is little or no distance between action and reaction. An amoeba will come into contact with a threat and immediately move in a different direction; the action is reflexive. When I come into contact with a threat, for instance a busy New York City intersection, my behavior is not limited to reflex. I am capable of both perceiving and willing different reactions to the situation. What is crucial is that Bergson sees the gap between amoeba and anxious pedestrian as a difference of degree, not of kind. My mind is simply a more complicated system that allows for greater indeterminacy with regard to how I

react to a given stimulus.³³ Perception is defined as “a *variable* relation between the living being and the more-or-less distant influence of the objects which interest it” (MM, 33 emphasis in original). My mind does not produce perceptions, perceptions are part of the things I am interacting with. The brain, and my perceptions, are completely entangled with my environment. Crucially, these perceptions are *always* tied to action. The mind, perceptions and material world are all linked through movement. We will get a full account of this relationship when we discuss the role of memory in perceptions, but for now it is enough to understand that the brain does not create anything—it is a component of the material world that acts to extend the space between stimulus and action. We must start to understand and appreciate the materiality of our cognition, the total entanglement of our mind and the world.

If the brain is an image among other images, it cannot create the images I observe, meaning it cannot create representations of the material world. “This is as much to say that there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between *being* and *being consciously perceived*. The reality of matter consists in the totality of its elements and of their actions of every kind. Our representation of matter is the measure of our possible action upon bodies” (MM, 40).³⁴ This means that perception, in addition to movement and consciousness, is embedded and entangled in the material world:

“Where is [my perception]? I cannot hesitate to answer: positing my body, I posit a certain image, but with it also the aggregate of the other images, since there is no material image which does not owe its qualities, its determinations, in short, its existence, to the place which it occupies in the totality of the universe. My perception can, then, only be some part of these objects themselves, it is in them rather than they in it” (MM, 228-229).

My consciousness cannot be dissociated from this context, its material placement in the universe. As we saw in Chapter One, Bergson cannot fall into the god-trick, erasing the specificity of the body and context from epistemology. This is a picture of the world where everything is quite literally connected to everything else. The world is a “whole that changes like a kaleidoscope: there is no centre since everything is bound together in relations” (Ansell Pearson 2002, 144). Guerlac explains:

³³ “From the humblest Monera to the best endowed insects, and up to the most intelligent vertebrates, the progress has been above all a progress of the nervous system, coupled at every stage with all the new constructions and complications of mechanism that this progress required. As we foreshadowed in the beginning of this work, the role of life is to insert some *indetermination* into matter... A nervous system, which neurones placed end to end in such a wise that, at the extremity of each, manifold ways open in which manifold questions present themselves, is a veritable *reservoir of indetermination*.” (CE, 126 emphasis in original)

³⁴ “I see that my perception appears to follow all the vibratory detail of the so-called sensitive nerves; yet I know that the role of their vibrations is solely to prepare the reaction of my body on neighboring bodies, to sketch out my virtual actions. Perception, therefore, consists in detaching, from the totality of objections, the possible action of my body upon them” (CE, 229)

“Bergson’s conception of matter involves a dynamic energy system in which each point is always acting on all the others. It implies embeddedness. An element of matter necessarily acts on all the others, ‘transmits the totality of what it receives, opposes an equal and contrary reaction to every action, is finally nothing but a path along which all the modifications which propagate themselves in the immensity of the universe pass in every direction’ (MM, 29). This is what Bergson understands by presence, as opposed to representation. Representation requires the isolation and immobilization of a particular feature of this totality: ‘I would convert it to representation,’ he writes, ‘if I could isolate it’ (MM, 33).” (Guerlac 2006, 109)

The mind is not separate from this entanglement, and the stability of our perceptions is due to the exigencies of our material need to act.

Karen Barad seeks to describe a similarly complex world in her *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Barad is calling into question the Newtonian view of science in which particular, discrete, and ontologically irreducible agents study and manipulate interactions between objects. She questions the view that there is simply a world out there awaiting our investigative gaze to give up its secrets. This *representationalist* view would say that the real world exists, out there, and our ideas, words, and images of it reflect that reality. Barad is equally critical of certain postmodern views that would give too much agency to discourse, forgetting the effects of the facticity of matter. This *performative* view goes too far in the other direction. Basing her analysis in the onto-epistemological work of physicist Niels Bohr, Barad argues that the way in which we establish the subject/object divide, bodily boundaries, and the manner in which we attribute agency to other animate and inanimate beings is simultaneously ontological, epistemological, and ethical. That is to say, we must take responsibility for how we make these distinctions and the knowledge produced by these distinctions.

The quantum phenomenon at the base of Bohr and Barad’s work is the fact that, depending on the kind of apparatus and measurement used, a photon can appear as either a wave or a particle. Wave-particle duality confounds a Newtonian worldview that posits a physical world with irreducible and unchanging physical properties (to be both a wave and particular would seem to violate the law of non-contradiction) and that measurement can reveal different qualities of a given object but cannot *change* those qualities. Moving away from this view, Barad posits *phenomena* as the basic unit of existence, a unit that captures the quantum wholeness or “lack of inherent distinction between the object and the agencies of observation” (Barad 2007, 196). She explains:

In my agential realist elaboration, phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of observer and observed, or the results of measurements; rather, *phenomena are the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intracting ‘agencies.’* That

is, phenomena are ontologically primitive relations—relations without preexisting relata. The notion of *intra-action* (in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and that particular concepts (that is, particular material articulations of the world) become meaningful. (Barad 2007, 139)

In a vision strikingly similar to Bergson’s, all of the material world is in relation, and it is only through what Barad calls the *agential cut* that we create discrete boundaries that *mean* anything. For Barad, agency is not something possessed only by living beings, agency is the dynamism of intra-acting phenomena. “Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurations of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming” (Barad 2007, 141).

Matter comes to matter (by which Barad means exist as a discrete and bounded entity, and carry meaning or semantic content) as a part of the interaction between subject/object/body/apparatus. Like in Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, the mind is neither the passive receptor for objective reality, nor does it project or create that reality; instead, “‘minds’ are themselves material phenomena that emerge through specific intra-actions” (Barad 2007, 361). The kinds of boundaries that we take to be primary or fundamental to interactions (mind/body, subject/object, observer/apparatus/object) are not permanent or ontologically given divisions, they are the result of specific intra-actions. Barad is rejecting our classical and geometric view of distinct boundaries, in favor of a more dynamic or topological perspective. “Agential separability presents an alternative to these unsatisfactory options. It rejects the geometries of absolute exteriority or absolute interiority and opens up a much larger space that is more appropriately thought of as a dynamic and ever-changing topology. More specifically, *agential separability* is a matter of *exteriority within phenomena*” (Barad 2007, 177). It is not the case that discrete agents act upon inert matter as the sole source of causality. Rather, agents are enacted (intra-acted) and created in particular configurations.

Matter and what Barad calls “externality in phenomena” are created in intra-action, but this is also an epistemological and ethical activity. There is no god trick or “view from nowhere” from which to gain knowledge of a passive nature. Knowing is another intra-action within phenomena. “Knowing is a matter of intra-acting. Knowing entails specific practices through which the world is differentially articulated and accounted for” (Barad 2007, 149). Likewise, *how* we make these cuts takes on an ethical dimension in Barad’s work. Objectivity is not observation without interaction, it is repeatability and responsibility. I can say that my work is objective if I know how to communicate my method with sufficient detail to be repeated, and if I take responsibility for the effects of, and knowledge produced by, the intra-action.

Similar to my discussion of Haraway in chapter one, according to Barad we can contract or dilate our perspective to any degree we like, altering the phenomena we are intra-acting within in a given moment. I can use a microscope to look at a slide, creating an agential cut that makes me the subject and the object is whatever I am looking at. However, we can dilate our view to

include the context within which I am performing this act of observation. Perhaps I am an environmentalist, but later I learn that I am working in a lab funded by Halliburton. We see that the phenomena that created me as subject and the slide as object is supported by a set of material decisions, discourses, and practices, that come to bear upon how I create the phenomenon that create me as an observing agent, and the object being observed. To understand this phenomenon would require an analysis of funding, laboratory conditions, the goals of each scientist as they collaborate, the exigencies of publishing, etc.³⁵

By entangling the brain in the material world, Bergson is moving us beyond the dualism that vacillates between realism and idealism (MM, 226-227). Barad similarly entangles the human body into the material world. But Barad has already moved beyond Bergson inasmuch as intra-action always involves both material and immaterial or discursive forces. “Apparatuses are *material-discursive practices—causal intra-actions through which matter is iteratively and differentially articulated, reconfiguring the material-discursive field of possibilities and impossibilities in the ongoing dynamics of intra-activity that is agency*” (Barad 2007, 170). It is clear that for Barad discourse, memory, emotion, and other immaterial forces are constituted and made meaningful in these different intra-actions. To expand Bergson’s account to include these forces, thereby entangling the body in the forces and flows of the immaterial, we must include time in our analysis of perception, and see the effect that memory plays in our entanglement.

Perception, Memory, and the Tangibility of the Immaterial

To briefly recap: we have seen that the body is a special image among images, known from the inside through affectations and as the center of my actions. The brain is also an image, incapable of generating representations but instead acting as a kind of telephonic exchange, simply delaying the time between stimulus and action. Objects exist in the world, and they are perceived with greater or lesser distinction according to my potential action upon them. I likened this view of the material world to that of Barad’s *phenomena*, in which the world is not reducible to discrete objects, but instead to intra-actions or phenomena that create the (temporary) divisions between subject, object, agent, and apparatus. We have seen that for both thinkers, our bodies are totally caught up in their material contexts. We must see ourselves as *part of* the world around us.

How are we connected to what we think of as the immaterial world? What is the body’s relationship to memory, emotion, time, discourse, culture, thought, and the spiritual? According to Barad phenomena include the material and the immaterial in the same way. It is only through intra-action that we can distinguish between materiality and immateriality in the first place. She says:

³⁵ For an excellent example of this kind of analysis that predates Barad but is resonate with her method, see Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body*, especially her discussion of the material, discursive, and affective forces that combined to influence research on sex hormones.

Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, *the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity*... Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. (Barad 2007, 152)

Barad uses a bit of fabulous wordplay across her text, making use of the two meanings of the word matter (as a physical substance in general, and to have significance). For her, discourse comes to matter through intra-action, it gains significance but it also materializes itself by making the material world meaningful in a particular way. She understands her view as a way to deepen Butler's arguments about performativity, and she strives to show that the material and immaterial are co-constituted within phenomena. To understand how this can be the case for Bergson, how the body can be entangled in a world that includes material and immaterial forces we need to examine the role of memory in perception. In what follows I will analyze the relationship between perception, memory, and mobility in order to extend the tangle catching Bergson's body to the realm of the immaterial, bringing him back in line with Barad's view of the body.

Were we to somehow observe an image outside of time, in an eternal present, we would experience what Bergson calls pure perception. Pure perception is a thought experiment in which we imagine perceiving something in the immediate and instantaneous present. We abstract a perception from the flow of time, bracket memory, and simply absorb perceptual data.³⁶ The analysis of pure perception, like Bergson's entire way of describing the body, is meant to show that the body is totally linked to the material world. Perceptions are not mental phenomena, they are material phenomena. "For it is possible to sum up our conclusions as to pure perception by saying that *there is in matter something more than, but not something different from, that which is actually given*... between this perception of matter and matter itself there is but a difference of degree and not of kind, pure perception standing toward matter in the relation of the part to the whole" (MM, 71). My perception of the image is not different in kind from the matter that is the aggregate of these partial images. My perception is but a part of the whole that is the material object. This is why Bergson says that your perception is *in things*, radiating out from the material world of which we are a part, and oriented toward action.

Rather than a view that says the material is tangible and real, while the immaterial is intangible or psychological, Bergson has placed both extremes on a spectrum. Pure perception occupies one extreme, and pure memory is on the other. Turning to the extreme of memory, we must follow Bergson in making a distinction between two forms of memory: habit memory and

³⁶ In this sense, it is impossible to ever experience pure perception. We are always "in-time" and memory always impinges upon experience in one of two ways, recognition or durational synthesis.

what he calls pure memory or “memory par excellence.” We will see that pure memory is useless or virtual, while habit memory is located between the extremes of pure perception and pure memory. Bergson explains the distinction between pure memory and habit memory through the example of memorizing a poem. When I memorize a poem I read and repeat the text to myself many times, saying the lines over and over until eventually I know them “by heart” and am able to repeat them without consulting the text. I repeat the poem ten times before I have it memorized. There are two forms of memory at work here. First is pure memory, my specific memory of each of the ten repetitions of the poem. I engage this memory when I close my eyes and remember all the details about the second time I repeated the poem. Each repetition is a distinct moment in my personal history, a recording of a particular moment in time. This is contrasted with the memory *of the poem*, the actual ability to recite the poem, what Bergson calls *habit memory*. Habit memory is:

Always bent upon action, seated in the present and looking only to the future. It has retained from the past only the intelligently coordinated movements which represent the accumulated efforts of the past; it recovers those past efforts, not in the memory-images which recall them, but in the definite order and systematic character which the actual movements take place. In truth it no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it; and if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment. (MM, 82)

Pure memory is like a recording of each repetition of the poem. Habit memory is the condensation of those memories into something useful in the present (the ability to recite the poem). Let’s take another example, learning a choreographed dance. The dancer will attend a number of rehearsals where she will practice the dance, slowly repeating each movement until they are memorized. Each of these meetings will have their distinct form, context, color and memories attached to them. These memories are recorded in images that then float off into our memory, into the past, and away from our present action. They are totally personal, particular to the dancer’s life, and useless because as they do not impinge on action. The fact that I remember what color shirt my instructor wore during our fourth rehearsal will not help me perform the dance. The second kind of memory is not concerned with these representations—it takes from them only what it needs to coordinate movements. While the dancer may have distinct memories of learning each step of choreography, it is this second memory that knits them together into the activity of the dance. What is crucial is that representational memory can be stretched or compressed to fill any amount of time. We can remember the dance class in an instant, like a snapshot, or we can re-play the entire afternoon in our memory. Habit memory, on the other hand, requires the exact amount of time required to perform the action *in the thick or extended present*. To perform the dance, or to recite the poem, requires a specific amount of time, a specific duration. “The past appears indeed to be stored up, as we had surmised, under two extreme forms: on the one hand, motor mechanisms which make use of it; on the other, personal

memory-images which picture all past events with their outline, their color and their place in time” (MM, 88). I think of the first memory, pure memory, as archival, simply noting and recording everything that happens even if it’s never consulted again. The second memory is useful; it compresses a multiplicity of past experiences into an ability performed in the present. It is as if all of my memories of practice bear down upon my body whenever I dance.

On the one hand, you have pure perception of the material image. On the other hand you have pure memory, totally useless inasmuch as it does not impinge upon action. Pure perception is impossible because we cannot perceive out of time and it is totally useless because it does not bear upon movement. The space between these two extremes is that of bodily habit and perception. Bergson says, “Our distinct perception is really comparable to a closed circle, in which the perception-image, going toward the mind, and the memory-image, launched into space, careen the one behind the other” (MM, 103). Bergson gives the example of reading. When quickly reading a text we do not trace each letter to identify it, “our mind notes here and there a few characteristic lines and fills all the intervals with memory-images” (MM, 103).³⁷ It would be debilitating if understanding our surroundings required examination of all contours of each object in our perceptual field. Our ability to fluidly engage with our surroundings relies on our ability to use memory images to fill out our perceptions, freeing up time and energy for whatever task we must accomplish. The world around us is stabilized and made comprehensible because it is overlaid with these memory images, “your perception, however instantaneous, consists then in an incalculable multitude of remembered elements; in truth, every perception is already memory. *Practically, we perceive only the past*, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future” (MM, 150, emphasis in original). Our ability to move through the world, to perceive and understand the objects around us, relies on the mutual interpenetration of our perception of images and the surging forth of memory images. Lived experience is the enaction of habit memory. The pure present always slips away and when we see a stable perceptual field we are looking at the past which is the just-lapsed present.

Returning to the spectrum, on the one hand we have pure perception, the memoryless/timeless snapshot of an image. In this case, a text. On the other side of the spectrum we have pure memory, all the moments of our life perfectly preserved in images carrying time-stamps and all the details of our experience. In the intermediate areas we have perceptions and memory-images. Remember, the contours of a perceived image, the distinct aspects of an object, are dictated by our virtual action upon that object. Likewise, memory images appropriate to our circumstance move from pure memory toward action, coloring our perceptions. Which memory-images are applied to the perception, and the resulting perception, is dictated by material needs. Encountering the text of *Matter and Memory*, I do not contemplate specific moments of having viewed a text; the appropriate memory images meet with the perceptual images to make the black marks on the page meaningful as text, perceived as words instead of markings. What this

³⁷ I am reminded of chain emails that claim that “it dseno’t mtaetr in waht oerdr the lltteres in a wrod are, the olny iproamtnt tihng is taht the frsrit and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae.” The fact that we can read this jumbled text speaks to the role of memory images in aiding our perception.

means is that it is our material needs, our bodily situation including environment and bodily attitude, that dictate which memory images are appropriate for a given act of perception.

The impossibility of engaging in both contemplative and useful or action oriented memory at the same time speaks to the fact that our environment and “bodily attitude” determine which memory image will insert itself into the present and be actualized in perception. When we try to remember something in full detail we relax our bodies, close our eyes, and concentrate on the memory. When we relax and enter this dreamy state, seemingly disconnected memories glide into our mind and become increasingly immersive. These memories are *useless* because we simply observe them; they have no bearing upon our movement or perception. Indeed, once we open our eyes or move our bodies they fade back into the unactualized past. This is very different from an activity that requires concentration. When we concentrate, our bodily attitude and attention limit which memories are inserted into the present. When concentrating on a text, only memory images of letters or of the text become actualized. When I am reading *Matter and Memory* I do not suddenly remember the exact color of a shirt I wore ten years ago, or directions to my elementary school. If the content of the text brings forth other associated memories, I will likely stop reading, or my comprehension will diminish to the degree to which I concentrate on this useless memory:

“Past images, reproduced exactly as they were, with all their details and even with their affective coloring, are the images of idle fancy or of a dream: to act is just to induce this memory to shrink, or rather to become thinned and sharpened, so that it presents nothing thicker than the edge of a blade to actual experience, into which it will thus be able to penetrate” (MM, 106).

Action always involves assuming the bodily attitude that calls forth the appropriate memory image and inserting it into the present in the service of fluid movement. We tend to think of memory as a strictly mental phenomenon, but Bergson gives us arguments to understand that this is not the case. Not enough attention has been paid to Bergson’s insight that it is the movement of the body that both selects appropriate memory and brings that memory to life in our bodily movement.³⁸ He says:

For, though the whole series of our past images remains present within us, still the representation which is analogous to the present perception has to be *chosen* from among all possible representations. Movements, accomplished or merely nascent, prepare this choice or at the very least mark out the field in which we shall seek the image we need... So we may say that the movements which bring about mechanical recognition hinder in one way, and encourage in another, recognition by images. In principle, the present supplants the past. But, just because the disappearance of former images is due to their inhibition by our present attitude, those whose shape might fit into this attitude encounter

³⁸ One notable exception is Ed Casey’s *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. 1997. University of Indiana Press. See in particular chapter 8 “Body Memory” 146-80.

less resistance than the others; if, then, any one of them is indeed able to overcome the obstacle, it is the image most similar to the present perception that will actually do so. (MM, 95-6)

To act is to configure the body in such a way that a memory can be inserted into perception and aid in future action. Memory is practical, not simply something to be meditated on. We can see the dynamic and cyclical relationship between the body, its “attitude” or position, the mind, memory, and perception. This provides us an explanation for how immaterial forces, especially memory, can have dramatically tangible effects on our embodied mobility. I will make this point by analyzing the following long quote:

“For instance, I take a walk in a town seen for the first time. At every street corner I hesitate, uncertain where I am going. I am in doubt, I mean by this that alternatives are offered to my body, that my movement as a whole is discontinuous, that there is nothing in one attitude which foretells and prepares future attitudes. Later, after prolonged sojourn in the town, I shall go about it mechanically, without having any distinct perception of the objects which I am passing. Now, between these two extremes, the one in which perception has not yet organized the definite movements which accompany it and the other in which these accompanying movements are organized to a degree which renders perception useless, there is an intermediate state in which the object is perceived, yet provokes movements which are connected, continuous and called up by one another... *It is, again, the performance of the movements which follow in the movements which precede, a performance whereby the part virtually contains the whole, as when each note of a tune learned by heart seems to lean over the next to watch its execution.* If, the, every perception has its organized motor accompaniment, the ordinary feeling of recognition has its root in the consciousness of this organization” (MM, 93-4, emphasis added)

The speedy and effortless actualization of appropriate memory images is what makes us feel comfortable and fluid. When you move to a new neighborhood you require significant concentration to find your bearings and make your way around town. Eventually you accrue more and more memory images that effortlessly make sense of your perceptual field, until eventually you can navigate your neighborhood while simultaneously talking on the phone, drinking a coffee, and trying to find your keys in your bag. Bodily attitude, movement, memories, and perception are all linked, and our embodiment becomes more fluid and comfortable as environments become more familiar. The opposite is also true. If we have a series of negative memories associated with a given space or activity, our bodily attitude will be such that these negative memories come to color our perception and our movement. The environment becomes familiar, but familiar in a hostile way. Imagine a gender non-conforming individual continually confronted with sexed bathrooms. Because some gender non-conforming people are sometimes not immediately read as male or female, they often experience bathrooms as places of

heightened scrutiny. The memories that present themselves for actualization are negative, associated with discomfort and fear. It becomes habit or second nature to feel anxiety when approaching a bathroom and this individual's bodily attitude responds accordingly, their movement becomes guarded, stuttering, closed.

This means that positive or traumatic memories are not only psychological associations, they become actualized in the way we move our bodies. *We can literally feel the effect of these memories in our flesh; they influence our bodily attitude.* This circular relationship between memory images, environment, and bodily attitude explains how it is that memories can have tangible effects in the material world. Walking around a familiar town, my environment, memory images and bodily attitude work together fluidly to make my navigation effortless. Likewise, if I am surrounded by the spatializations of my identity, perhaps in my bedroom surrounded by meaningful objects or other spatializations of pleasant memories, I will experience that space as a home, a place that holds me in my sense of self even as I continue to age and change. If, however, I am in a space or surrounded by objects hostile to my sense of self I will experience that space as threatening. If I am a closeted homosexual in a very conservative town surrounded by anti-gay propaganda and messages, I will likely spend much of my life feeling literally paralyzed, anxious, or self-conscious. We seek out, cultivate, and thrive within environments that allow us to experience what I call *fluid mobility*, the kind of easy, effortless, and comfortable movement of one familiar with one's surroundings or who is at ease in a particular environment.³⁹ Fluid mobility is the result of situations calling for neutral or positive memories which in turn are actualized within certain bodily attitudes. The opposite of this is the feeling of being threatened, anxious, or scrutinized. In such a circumstance one literally moves differently, becomes uncoordinated, closed down, and unable to move fluidly. Because our bodily attitude, what I think of as our movement and visceral feelings, are engaged in this circuit with memory images and perception, the immaterial forces of memory literally structure how we move and feel our bodies. These circuits are what I call *affirmative feedback loops*. Different things within my environment affirm either positive or negative memories back to me, and this in turn changes which memories will come to insert themselves in a given situation. It is not the case that memories are strictly psychological and that the atmosphere in a given space is mental. Instead, the very space is constituted by how our memory comes to be actualized in our perceptions and movements. Returning to Barad, we can say that memory is both created as memory, and as an agential actor in the constitution of, a given phenomena.⁴⁰

³⁹ In using the term *fluid mobility* I am not positing a normative set of capabilities. Fluidity can only be defined in reference to a specific person's embodiment. Fluid mobility for someone who can walk will be very different from that of someone who uses a wheel chair.

⁴⁰ This is where we start to see the connection between specific memories and embodied fluidity. (esp 84).

We should note here that these two kinds of memory are to some extent mutually exclusive. Said simply, we cannot contemplate and recollect when we are engaged in some kind of habitual,

The feeling of comfort and safety we experience in certain environments, the unclenching of the stomach that comes when we enter an affirmative environment, is not the result of psychological associations. To dismiss these experiences as “all in your head” or simply some form of habituation does not get at the profundity of these experiences. Such dismissive accounts also make it difficult to argue that we must take material and immaterial forces into account when understanding our fluid mobility in a given space. We must recognize that the fact that people experiences the same space in such dramatically different ways reflects their own intuitive understanding of the way their body is entangled in the phenomenon that is that space, in the material and immaterial forces at work. With this account of our entanglement in one complex web, I now turn to a discussion of the virtuality of memory to outline the mutability of this process and its normative political implications.

Virtual Perceptions and the Indeterminacy of Embodied Mobility

We have seen two distinct but remarkably similar views of the body’s entanglement in what we commonly consider material and immaterial contexts. I have argued that we can extend Bergson’s account to explain that experiences like vibe, energy, ambience, or mood are the result of the interaction between material context, bodily attitude, and memory in our perception and habitual motion. The material world, the aggregate of images, only becomes stable and meaningful as it is overlaid by immaterial memory in the service of action. Likewise, Barad argues that it is only through specific phenomena that objects become bound and discrete, and that knowledge of these objects is an intra-active achievement as well. Bergson and Barad would agree that if our goal is to understand why we feel and move differently in the same space, we must give equal weight to both material and immaterial forces, because they are co-constitutive of our experience.

In this final section I want to accomplish two goals. First, I show how this perspective helps us understand how it is that discourse shapes bodies. Second, I want to take this framework and animate it by reintroducing time into our thinking. I accomplish this by demonstrating that because memory exists *virtually*, we must understand the relationship between perception, memory, and fluid mobility as one that is permanently mutable. This is crucial for my interfacing this conception of the body with queer theory in chapter three.

One of the animating claims behind Barad’s project is that Foucault, and by extension Butler, cannot theorize the relationship between matter and discourse in a way that satisfyingly “recognize[s] matter’s dynamism.” (Barad 2007, 64). For Foucault, material configurations (for example, the Panopticon) support particular discursive practices. These discursive practices are “the material conditions that define what counts as meaningful statements” (Barad 2007, 63); they are how matter comes to *matter*, to be invested with meaning. Material and immaterial forces are brought together in his notion of the *apparatus*. For example, the medical apparatus (understood as both material things like hospitals, drugs, textbooks, journals—and immaterial things like professional standards, biases, professional culture) has created a set of diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria, which then creates and supports a legible (“meaningful”) trans

motor action. Likewise the intrusion of a representational memory will cause our habitual, fluid action to stutter (MM, 85).

identity. Barad claims that Foucault does not ultimately give us a satisfying account of the connection between the materiality of the body and apparatuses of power. “For all of Foucault’s emphasis on the political anatomy of disciplinary power, he fails to offer an account of the body’s historicity in which its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power. This implicit reinscription of matter’s passivity is a mark of extant elements of representationalism that haunt his largely postrepresentationalist account” (Barad 2007, 65, emphasis in original). According to Barad, Foucault’s account of matter is haunted by an implicit stance that matter is fundamentally a passive surface upon which the activity of culture is inscribed. He cannot account for matter as truly generative. Barad sees Butlers work as “extend[ing] Foucault’s analysis of the formation of subjects and bodies by attending to the exclusions that regulatory practices enact... there is indeed an outside to discourse, but not an absolute outside” (Barad 2007, 64). Matter comes to matter through a “process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” and that it must be “thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory practices” (Butler qtd. in Barad 2007, 150).

The above discussion of *Matter and Memory* has also led us to an account of the relationship between discourse (understood both as the immaterial things like culture, speech acts, etc., and the material support and practices that create intelligibility) and matter. The matter of my body and an apparatus of power interact in the following way: *all power and discourse exerts force through memory, which is actualized in the movement of specific bodies that exist in specific contexts*. All of the ways we talk about discourse producing or materializing matter require that we are temporal beings with memory. Habituation, enculturation, interpellation, ideology—all of these can only be performed on a subject endowed with memory, specifically with memory as it interacts with perception. In this way the material components of an apparatus (for example, the Panopticon) require memory in order to have any power. The force of the social (prioritized in social constructionism), the materiality of my body (prioritized in essentialism) and the materiality of discourse (prioritized in Foucault and Butler’s account) are all linked together in the circuit by which perception (which is located *in* matter) and memory (which is particular to each living being) structure and are structured by our bodily attitude. This also includes how matter comes to be discrete, or bounded, in a specific way. Bodily boundaries, for instance, are created by our need to act. We create matter in the form in which we interact with it through our perceptual faculties. In short, I want to claim that in bringing together matter and memory, Bergson has given us a way to understand how it is that discourse becomes materialized, and the effects the vibrant material world has on discourse. My interest in showing that Bergson can account for the interaction between matter and discourse is to show how this loop impacts fluid mobility. What Foucault and Butler lack, in my view, is an explanation for how immaterial things like utterances can have such dramatic physical effects. By linking perception, memory, and bodily attitude we can see how culture gets written onto the body. These forces are actualized in bodily attitudes, which are directly linked to the material phenomena of perception.

Crucially, this is a process that happens across time, which means that it is mutable.⁴¹ Remember that pure memory, the entirety of the past, exists alongside the present moment.

⁴¹ In this sense Bergson provides a nice antidote to some work on social constructionism that becomes totally suffocating. There may not be anything outside of discourse, but discourse in its

“How can the past, which, by hypothesis, has ceased to be, preserve itself? We reply that the question is just whether the past has ceased to exist or whether *it has ceased to be useful*” (MM, 149, emphasis added). It is not that the past falls out of existence, for Bergson all of your memory exists snowballing onto the present at all times. The past does not cease to exist; it simply ceases to be useful. For a memory to be “useful” it must insert itself into the present moment by influencing our perception and bodily attitude.

Thinking back to the discussion of the virtual in the introduction, we can understand memory as something virtual that is actualized in particular actions. When the virtual is actualized the present takes a particular form, and the qualitative virtual future no longer contains that particular configuration. The virtual is a qualitative multiplicity that differentiates itself as it becomes actualized. Each new present is not the realization of a potential present. The present is constantly morphing like a rotating kaleidoscope.⁴² Our memory continues to increase in each new moment, and while our bodily attitude (and therefore which memories will be actualized) certainly moves in predictable tendencies, it is never the case that the same bodily attitude and the same memory will always construct our perception. To say that memory is virtual is to highlight that we can never escape the fact that we carry with us the memory of having lived up until each new moment. This makes our future, and our future experience of fluid mobility, always open to restructuring.

To say that memory is virtual is not to say that it exists on a different plane or dimension from material existence. The virtual allows us to understand that memory comes to bear upon action while always holding open the possibility for novel engagement in an environment as we endure through time. Memories do not preexist experience waiting to be realized in perception. They are differentiated by virtue of being actualized, and always come to bear upon our perception in a qualitatively different manner as we endure through our environments. Our enduring through the world, our perception of that world, is not circumscribed from the beginning but instead unfolds along ever changing paths. Returning to a quote from Bergson we can now see its full meaning, “spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on which it feeds and restores them to matter in the form of movements which it has stamped with its own freedom” (MM, 249). Our interactions with our environments are plastic, and it is my belief that conscious intervention in the accumulation and actualization of memories, creating affirmative feedback loops, can allow us to create zones welcoming and hospitable, places that allow our identities to form and reform. Whatever is affirmed back to us over and over again in specific environments, will make our memories *tend* in a certain direction. If my environment and the people in it affirm my gay identity, memories of those affirmations will be actualized in the form of embodied fluidity. Likewise, negative affirmations will create a space where fluid movement is impossible.

interactions with matter is always moving through time, and therefore is indeterminate. The relationship between discourse and matter is not mechanistic, and therefore cannot be predicted.

⁴² The future is not something stretched out before us, cannot look into the future to predict what will happen, we must accept “the continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty which seems to be going on in the universe” (CM, 73). The virtual is precisely this qualitative movement of life as it endures through time. To say something is virtual instead of possible is to say that the present may morph into any number of configurations, and we will only be able to understand why it took the form it did once that moment has passed.

Chapter three will discuss the connection between time and identity formation, and chapter four will knit all of these elements together into a coherent theory of affirmation.⁴³

I think that Bergson is vulnerable to Barad's criticism of Butler. Barad argues that despite Butler's deepening of Foucault to include the constitutive role of what is excluded from discourse, and her arguments that matter has a historicity, she still maintains a passive view of nature. First, she does not significantly re-think causality to be able to account for the agential force of matter. Second, her focus on the materiality of discursive regulatory regimes reveals the fact that her account is limited to the materialization of human bodies. This humanist view cannot provide a theory that fully elaborates the role of matter and materialization. "In other words, while Butler correctly calls for the recognition of matter's historicity, ironically, she seems to assume that it is ultimately derived (yet again) from the agency of language or culture" (Barad 2007, 64). Barad understands her model of agential realism as providing "an understanding of materialization that goes beyond the anthropocentric limitations of Butler's theory" by "recognizing matter's dynamism" (Barad 2007, 151). I believe agential realism is a necessary and important way to deepen Bergson's thinking. That being said, because my focus lies squarely on human affective relationships to space and the resulting effect on flourishing, I will not attempt to push Bergson himself any further into post-humanism. Instead, in the following chapters we will see how Bergson can be combined with the post-humanist sensibilities of Haraway and Barad to provide a robust account of affirmation.

What Barad and Bergson give us is a way of thinking about the body's position as involving both material and immaterial forces and contexts. It allows us to understand the deep and constitutive connections that link us to our material environment, culture, discourse, and our own personal memory. It also provides a way to understand how immaterial forces can have a tangible impact on our bodily fluidity. In the next chapter I will link the idea of the virtual to contemporary queer theory, in order to discuss how we form and re-form our identities. All of this leads to chapter four, where I argue that *affirmation* is the activity that constitutes our identities, and allows for fluid mobility and flourishing in specific contexts.

⁴³ This is why visibility is so crucial to creating a healthy and vibrant LGBTQA community. One interesting example is the University Safe Space Initiative. This program provides LGBTQA sensitivity training to university faculty and staff. After completing the program participants are asked to post rainbow stickers, pins, or flags on their office doors, signaling that their office is a safe space for LGBTQA students. The presence of these visible markers of LGBTQA affirmation can begin to qualitatively change the way LGBTQA folks experience that space. Seeing symbols that signal a safe environment, we build more and more positive memories of that space, those memories alter the entirety of our past and therefore the way in which that past bears upon our perception and, most importantly, our bodily attitude and movement in space. Seeing a part of ourselves, especially a nascent part of our identity, spatialized and reflected back to us is more than a nice gesture, it literally makes us more fluid and comfortable in that space, and in turn allows us to experiment with and explore that aspect of our personality.

Chapter Three

Queer Duration

The preceding two chapters have argued for a specific methodology that allows us to see how the past, present, and future impinge upon our embodied fluidity. Additionally, I have argued that out conscious commitments, the things we choose to see or become sensitized to around us, have somatic effects on embodied fluidity. That is to say, the project of consciousness raising is both epistemological—we can access knowledge that was previously ignored or unarticulated—but also somatic—the way we move in the world literally changes as we become more sensitive. In chapter two I described how affirmation is the mechanism through which we become more or less fluidly mobile. This chapter describes the role of affirmation in the development of an identity. By identity I mean a term, category, or other marker understood to be essential to our sense of self. I will argue that in the same way affirmation changes the actualization of memory in embodied fluidity, so too affirmation is the mechanism that creates, solidifies, and alters our identities.

My account can be applied to any identity, but in this dissertation I am specifically concerned with LGBT and queer identities. The terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender point to a generally stable set of identities.⁴⁴ Queer, on the other hand, is often employed as an umbrella term for a constantly expanding set of identities or sexualities that fall outside of what Gayle Rubin has termed the “charmed circle.”⁴⁵ Crucially for my discussion, queer can also mean an intentional rejection of stable identities or identity politics writ large. When I use the word queer to describe myself or my experience, am I saying that queer is something I *am*, a part of my *being*? Can LGBT and queerness be brought together? Can the motivations behind queering and the machinations of identity politics be reconciled, or are they different in kind?

I will answer these questions by applying Bergson’s notion of the virtual to contemporary attempts to define “queer temporality.” It may seem strange to take the work of Bergson, a man who never explicitly wrote about gender identity or sexuality, and apply it to the work of contemporary queer theorists. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that queerness is both a stable identity and unending process, and that these two positions seem mutually exclusive only if we fail to understand the distinction between spatial temporality and duration. In the course of making this argument I will describe the ways in which *all* identities require negotiating two competing tendencies; that of spatialization and sedimentation, and the unraveling or change inherent in the indeterminacy of duration. This distinctly Bergsonian take on identity will provide a definition of queerness that can serve as both a political identity and process.

The chapter has three main sections. I begin with a review of how some contemporary queer theorists understand the connection between time, queer methodology, and queer identity. I am not attempting to give an exhaustive review of queer theory, but rather to understand how the term “temporality” is being used by some key contemporary queer theorists. I then discuss Bergson’s concept of the *virtual* and its relationship to personality. According to Bergson, personality develops in the interplay between the spatialization of our identity and its reanimation in moments of reinvention or change. This means that our personalities are

⁴⁴ Transgender, as a kind of umbrella term, is much more ambiguous, but my point here is that these four terms point to political recognized and relatively stable identities.

⁴⁵ Heterosexual, cis-gendered, married, monogamous, procreative, private sexual encounters. See Rubin, Gayle “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”

potentially open to novelty and reinvention, and Bergson's concept of the person has the potential to be very queer. I take his discussion of space and duration and re-cast it into queer theory in order to present a way we can conceive of a queer identity that is both faithful to queer methodology and also a tenable personal and political identity.

Different Definitions of Queer Temporality

To be queer is to be “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric” (OED), somehow outside of the norm, atypical, or bizarre. There is nothing in particular to which queer necessarily refers. It is a word without an essence, always defined by what it is not; it “demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative” (Halperin 1997, 62). In contemporary usage it is sexual stigma that makes you queer. As a slur it is used to bash people who are not (or not perceived to be) cis-gendered heterosexuals, and is occasionally applied to those who engage in sexual practices considered kinky or abnormal. Like certain racial slurs, queer has been reclaimed as a positive identifier, a source of pride. People self-identify as queer to build a sense of common identity across various sexualities and gender identities.

Yet queer is more than an umbrella term, and certainly not everyone in the LGBT community identifies as queer. It is best approached as a *process* rather than an *identity*. It is the name for a certain instability, a troubling of categories, a willingness to change and be changed. Queerness is always redefined according to shifts in what is considered normal or acceptable, and I think of this dynamic as one of *ontological contrarianism*. In a technical sense, queer will always be that which marks the edge of the acceptable and intelligible. It is both pushed out, excised from the acceptable to create the category of acceptability, but it is also in the process of constantly queering itself, cleaving off its mainstreaming elements to further radicalize its position as queer. This is why queer can only be understood as a process, as something with a temporality or duration. Queer temporality is not something possessed or experienced because one is queer. Instead, it is a name—one among several—for the fact that all stability comes undone over time, that nothing can remain perfectly consistent, that all repetitions are repetitions with a difference. Time is the modality of queerness; to be or identify as queer is to engage in the process of *queering*.

If queerness is this constantly shifting, slippery, and elusive movement the question becomes, how can one inhabit this state of ontological contrarianism? Can this be the basis for an identity, a politics, or an affirmative stance towards experience? If I identify as queer, am I existing in a state of bad conscience because I am required to renegotiate my identity vis-a-vis social norms? And if so, at what pace, what temporality, does this renegotiation occur? Identities, egos, and personalities are all to some degree stable, they exist in order to give coherence and permanence to our experience as we endure through time. What, then, is the relationship between queer temporality, our sense of self, and our political identities? How do we resolve this seeming contradiction?

One solution is to restrict queer temporality to the level of broad historical changes where the process of queering takes place over long periods of time. This view sees queer as an umbrella term for any sexual or gender identity that falls outside of the mainstream. One can identify as a queer person assuming one's identity cannot be considered “normal,” and while certain identities may become less queer, this is a slow process that never accelerates sufficiently to unsettle any single individual's identification. This is the definition of queer most commonly

found in popular writing, and it is the basis for thinking of queer as an umbrella term. The temporality of this sense of queer moves at the glacial pace of changing social mores.

Some queer theorists think of queer as an identity, but rather than identifying *as* something (a lesbian, a queer, etc.), they identify as people committed to critique.⁴⁶ The content of the queer identity is a commitment to queering themselves and their surroundings. Known broadly as anti-social queer theory, this strain of queer theory understands temporality on the scale of the individual life. One is committed to constantly queering oneself, one's perspective, and one's environment over the course of a lifetime. To be queer is to remain critical of social mores and be committed to making queer decisions. For example, "queer temporality" can mean a way to resist any normative approach to timelines, stages of life, development, or structuring of time. Judith Jack Halberstam's work on this is very rich and clear:

Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early childhood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way to being in the world and a critique of the careful scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity (Halberstam 2007, 182).

In Halberstam's hands queer temporality is the rejection of the normalizing push of heterosexual temporality, a rejection of the teleological narrative that begins with your first crush and ends surrounded by grandchildren.⁴⁷ Queer time also entails resisting the sedimentation of normative temporalities within the queer community. As Nguyen Tan Hoang points out, "there is also a homonormative timeline. We pity those who come out late in life, do not find a long-term partner before they lose their looks, or continue to hit the bars when they are the bartender's father's age. We create our own temporal normativity outside the heteronormative family" (Hoang 2007, 183-4). Queer temporality is the constant critique of any cemented or solidified temporal organization. It keeps the emphasis on queerness as a process, resisting normalization, including its own queer forms of identity. Anti-social queer theory is closely aligned with punk, anarchist, and other cultural and political endeavors committed to critiquing the status quo.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ While they may not see themselves in my characterization of their approach, here I am thinking of Lauren Berlant, Lisa Duggan, Judith Jack Halberstam and Michael Warner, among others.

⁴⁷ This resistance to normative temporal organization extends to any normalizing standard, including academic and disciplinary norms. Halberstam has taken this contrarian stance to develop an epistemology of failure, and has developed what she calls "low theory" as a queer methodology for interpreting lowbrow cultural objects. See "The Queer Art of Failure" Duke University Press 2011

⁴⁸ In the same way that anti-social queerness critiques normative temporalities, it is also critical of the other explicit or implicit norms that guide our social and economic organization. This sector of theorists has provided trenchant critiques of gay marriage, neoliberalism, and the mainstream gay and lesbian movements' inability to deal critically with issues of race and non-cisgendered experience.

Anti-social queer theory finds its most extreme and provocative form in the writing of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. Both thinkers use a psychoanalytic approach to discuss the relationship between queerness and psycho-sexual identity. Bersani's text *Is the Rectum a Grave?* takes Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon's analysis of sexual violence to propose a model of sexuality that is self-shattering and non-relational. He admires both feminists for their "courage to be explicit about the profound *moral revulsion*" that undergirds any desire to make sex "less disturbing... abrasive... violent, and more respectful of 'personhood' than it has been in male-dominated, phallogocentric culture" (Bersani 2009, 22). He differs from Dworkin and MacKinnon in that he does not think sex can be improved, rejecting their "pastoral, redemptive intentions" and instead thanks both women for pointing out sex's "ineradicable aspects -- anticomunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving" (Bersani 2009, 22). Drawing a link between Dworkin and MacKinnon's discussion of the denigration of women and the historical disdain for the passive or receptive partner in male-male sexual couplings, Bersani argues that the active / passive distinction, and consequent sexual hierarchy, is instantiated whenever identity comes into the sex act:

[T]he self which the sexual shatters provides the basis on which sexuality is associated with power. It is possible to think of the sexual as, precisely, moving beyond the hyperbolic sense of self and a loss of all consciousness of self. But sex as self-hyperbole is perhaps a repression of sex as self-abolition. It inaccurately replicates self-shattering as self-swelling, as psychic tumescence. If, as these words suggest, men are especially apt to 'choose' this version of sexual pleasure, because their sexual equipment appears to invite by analogy, or at least to facilitate, the phallicizing of the ego, neither sex has exclusive rights to the practice of sex as self-hyperbole. For it is perhaps primarily *the degeneration of the sexual into a relationship that condemns sexuality to becoming a struggle for power*. As soon as persons are posited, the war begins. It is the self that swells with excitement at the idea of being on top, the self that makes of the inevitable play of thrusts and relinquishments in sex an argument for the natural authority of one sex over the other. (Bersani 2009, 25)

Bersani argues that neither the male or female (active or passive) position is responsible for the violence inherent in sexual intercourse. It is our insistence on *selfhood* that makes sexual intercourse a violent act, and it is also the experience of radical passivity, of self-shattering, that he sees as opening the way for new methods of sociality. As Michael Snediker says, "sex, for Bersani, becomes a spectacular, radical literalization of deconstruction. The 'shattering' of sex undoes persons the way queer theory undoes persons" (Snediker 2008, 11). We are no longer able to conceive of sex as teleological, something that can be improved or bettered as the world becomes more feminist. Sex is instead the way to break up our identities and begin to think through relationality outside of the domination of the ego. The temporality of sex is no longer the long-term relationship, it is the temporality of encounters, undoings, one-night stands.

Bersani has somewhat revised his position in recent years. In his essay "Shame on You" he sees barebacking⁴⁹, especially the intentional transmission of the HIV virus⁵⁰, as the "literalizing of the ontology of the sexual" as masochistic and self-shattering. (Bersani 2011,

⁴⁹ Barebacking refers to unprotected anal sex.

⁵⁰ The intentional desire to become infected with the HIV virus is known as bug-chasing.

107). Recasting self-divesture or ego-annihilation as a form of ego-dissemination, Bersani reminds us that “self-divesture is a politically and morally imperative ascesis” but that “any such training has to be the psychic condition of possibility rather than the praxis of, to quote Foucault, “new relational modes”” (Bersani 2011, 107). Barebacking is self-shattering taken as praxis, and if barebacking’s affirmation that the rectum is a grave “repels us, it should lead to a rethinking of self-divesture, one in which potentially catastrophic self-shattering is replaced by an ego at once self-divesting and self-disseminating” (Bersani 2011, 108). The experience of self-shattering, and I would say the imperative to think through forms of impersonal intimacy, are not meant to be taken literally, but rather as a kind of psychic training or openness to “new modes of relating and relationality” (Bersani 2010, 200). His later book *intimacies*, co-written with Adam Phillips, is one such attempt to re-think relationality that is untethered from the ego and the object-relations view of love and desire. As Tim Dean says of Bersani, “What I find crucial here is that the shattering of the civilized ego betokens not the end of sociality but rather its inception. This point has been missed by many of Bersani’s readers too. The movement of coming together only to be plunged into an experience of the nonrelational represented by the first step in Bersani’s account of relationality. The second, correlative step is to trace new forms of sociability” (Dean 2006, 827).

Going further than Bersani, Lee Edelman ties queerness to Freud’s notion of the death drive, the impulse that must be constantly and violently disavowed to create and maintain the realm of the political. He criticizes what he calls the terms of reproductive futurism, “terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable... the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principal of communal relations” (Edelman 2004, 2). According to Edelman, politics is always concerned with the figure of the Child. We must work and sacrifice now for the children of tomorrow. We must focus on giving these spectral children a stable, safe, and welcoming future. We are unable to imagine a politics that is unconcerned or even antagonistic to this figure of the child, and we view non-procreative people (especially homosexual men who criticize or malign children and family life) with great suspicion. Queerness is the place that resists reproductive futurism, it is the “place of the social order’s death drive” that society must disavow to become coherent (Edelman 2004, 3). The role of queer theory is to stand in that space of otherness, pointing out the violence that creates the very possibility of politics, the disavowal of the death drive that subtends teleology. He says, “queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (Edelman 2004, 3). Edelman calls this queer person the *sinthomosexual*.⁵¹ The *sinthomosexual* is the person who accedes to the position of society’s death drive and has the courage to resist the constant appeal to the child in the name of reproductive futurity, to reject the idea that politics must survive and that we must structure our behavior for the benefit of, indeed to ensure the existence of, future generations. This is the person brave enough to stand up and shout “Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif

⁵¹ “Bringing together the Lacanian *sinthome*, which defines the specific formation of the subject’s access to jouissance, and a homosexuality distinctively abjected as a figure of the antibiotic, a figure opposed, in dominant fantasy, to life and futurity both, the *sinthomosexual* conjures a politically unrecognizable as such by virtue of its resistance to futurism’s constraining definition of the political field” (Edelman 2011b, 113)

from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital *l*s and small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop” (Edelman 2004, 29).

While Bersani is concerned with self-shattering as a step towards new forms of community and relationship, Edelman is clear in his total opposition to this endeavor. He is deeply suspicious of any claims that queerness could be anything except this radical anti-social contrarianism, and rejects the idea of queerness forming the basis for political or cultural community:

[The drive] gives no cause for the optimism I hear in efforts to associate queerness with community, or a transformative future, or new forms of relationality. If queerness marks the excess of something always unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing normativity, we should expect it to refuse not only the consolations of reproductive futurism but also the purposive, productive uses that would turn it into a ‘good.’ (Edelman 2007, 189)

The death drive cannot be harnessed to create any social good. Queerness is that which is always excessive, that remainder that cannot be absorbed into our systems of meaning, sense of history, or narrative. The extreme presentation of this vision of queer (“Fuck little orphan Annie”) is certainly provocative, and captures a vision of what it means to be queer that is exclusively deconstructive and critical. “Radically opposed to normativity and so to the order of identity, queerness confounds the notion of being as being at one with oneself. It attests to the impossibility of a concept’s or an entity’s survival in anything other than a state of exception to its nominal consistency” (Edelman 2011a, 149). Edelman does recognize the value in certain identity-based political struggles, but his project is what he acknowledges as the impossible task of divesting oneself from any form of identity, sociality, or politics.⁵² This includes rejecting thought that seeks to explain our actions in terms of narratives, or make them a part of any messianic system. For Edelman queer as a theoretical or ontological contrarianism can never, by definition, be an identity or component of political praxis. It is defined as that which cannot be made sense of and that cannot be integrated into the narrative of history, the *sinthomosexual* is someone out of time, atemporal. For Edelman this means the *sinthomosexual* cannot be contextualized within historical or political narratives. For me, as I will describe below, this atemporality means that the *sinthomosexual* is an illusory, unsustainable, and in fact impossible subject position. Queer temporality for Edelman is a temporality that literally cannot make sense or be made sense of, and it can never work in the service of the future or our systems of meaning.

By contrast, Jose Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean are two theorists who do think queerness affords us new modes of relationality, and a critical perspective on the present that seeks a better future. Muñoz is very sympathetic to Edelman’s critique of reproductive futurism. He is especially critical of how the mainstream LGBT movement abandons trans issues, racism in the LGBT community, LGBT homelessness and income inequality because they have a “pragmatic” focus on “winnable” or “realistic” goals, such as Marriage Equality or Anti-Discrimination legislation. Most queer theorists would agree with Muñoz that the LGBT

⁵² See Edelman 2011b, 114.

movement's focus on the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and the legalization of gay marriage are not pragmatic decisions but instead deeply ideological and startlingly conservative.⁵³

Despite his sympathy for Edelman's political critique, Muñoz parts with Edelman's insistence on relentless negativity and his disavowal of the political. Muñoz's methodology is based in the Frankfurt school and Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*.⁵⁴ He calls his approach a utopian methodology of hope, saying "my approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (Muñoz 2009, 4). He looks to the past to find inspiration for present day political struggles. Muñoz's analysis of artistic and literary texts is an effort at both charting and creating a feeling that is very difficult to describe: it is the sensation of hope, more specifically the feeling of standing in front of an indeterminate future and hoping for the arrival of a different world, the exhilaration of thinking things can be other than they are now. Muñoz says that queerness is this futurity — it is that which never arrives but has a structuring impact on our being in the present. "Queerness as a utopian desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (Muñoz 2009, 26). This not-yet-conscious (a term he borrows from Bloch) queerness is "knowable, to some extent, as a utopian feeling" (Muñoz 2009, 3). Muñoz examines art, objects, writings, and performances to try to retrieve the traces of queer futurity located in these objects. By looking to that past and tracing this feeling, Muñoz hopes to enliven the present moment with just such an affective relationship to hope and potentiality:

Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense... I see the past and the potentiality imbued within an object, the ways it might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening. Bloch would posit that such utopian feelings can and regularly will be disappointed. They are nonetheless indispensable to the act of imagining a transformation. (Muñoz 2009, 9)

In almost diametric opposition to Edelman, here queerness is the always-arriving horizon, a feeling of excitement that can galvanize our relationships, our political imaginations, and our desires for the future. It is a feeling of utopia essential to overcoming the pessimism of the present moment and gaining a vantage point from which we can be critical of the present. By locating traces of this queerness in the past we can reactivate that affect and feel enlivened by a hope for the future. "Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of

⁵³ "The aping of traditional straight relationality, especially marriage, for gays and lesbians announces itself as a pragmatic strategy when it is in fact a deeply ideological project that is hardly practical. In this way gay marriage's detractors are absolutely right: gay marriage is not natural -- but then again, neither is marriage for any individual" (Muñoz 2009, 21)

⁵⁴ It may seem that Edelman and Muñoz are speaking from such different traditions, Edelman psychoanalysis and Muñoz critical theory, that they ought not be compared to one another. Yet both thinkers are concerned with what it means to be queer, and have engaged in a heated debate on the relationship between queerness and identity. I use this political concern as the basis of my comparison, leaving aside questions surrounding the relationship between psychoanalysis and the Frankfurt School.

political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present” (Muñoz 2009, 49). This queerness is still located in the area of unintelligibility, or mad creativity, outside of the orthodox. The gay pragmatist who only advocates for attainable or realistic goals is “in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to a forward-drawing queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining queer futurity. The not-quite-conscious is the realm of potentiality that must be called on, and insisted on, if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of the here and now” (Muñoz 2009, 21). The temporality of queerness for Muñoz is a difficult one to describe. Queer is nostalgic inasmuch as he is seeking out examples of hope in objects from the past, but also utopian and future-oriented in that this nostalgia is in the service of imagining and animating new political organizations. Queerness is a way of becoming unmoored in time, and letting the past, present, and future have resonances that go beyond our typical ideas of causality, influence, or chronology. In the final section of this chapter I will argue that Muñoz’s position is very close to Bergson’s analysis of the virtual, in particular is analysis of possibility and potentiality.

Tim Dean’s work is similarly invested in discovering alternative modes of sexual and social relations. His *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* looks at the experiences of homosexual men who have sex without condoms, and their relationship to the HIV virus and AIDS. He is interested in the practice of “bug-chasing,” intentionally seeking out partners to infect you with the HIV virus. What is marvelous about this text is that Dean is not attempting to explain or humanize this behavior—he is interested in looking at barebacking as an alternative to our politics and ethics based on *identification*. Any act of identification creates an ideal image that can never be reached. Similarly, recognition requires recognizing a part of myself in another and then identifying with that familiarity. When I try to see myself in another’s shoes, to empathize with them, I am seeking out a recognizable image of or in that person with which I can identify. This is precisely what Dean is arguing against. “Enlarging my estimation of others until they seem as worthy of consideration as I seem to myself represents, in fact, a diminishment of otherness” (Dean 2006, 25). We must avoid flattening out another until we find ourselves in them:

The alternative to what I am calling the politics of identification is an impersonal ethics in which one cares about others even when one *cannot* see anything of oneself in them. I describe this ethics as ‘impersonal’ because it entails regarding the other as more than another person... and of seeing how otherness remains irreducible to other persons... Thus in contradistinction to the politics of identification, we have the ethics of alterity. (Dean 2006, 25)

The purpose of Dean’s text is not to humanize barebackers until we can see ourselves in their actions, but rather to call us to see how bareback culture embraces an impersonal ethical stance, what Dean comes to identify with cruising.⁵⁵ Dean also argues that bareback culture has

⁵⁵ Cruising is an “ethics of the stranger in modernity” - a way of understanding not only our relationship to others but to their *otherness*. “Needless to say, the notion of intimacy at stake in one barebacker’s characterization of his erotic practice as ‘unlimited intimacy’ cannot be anything but impersonal. This perspective on erotic impersonality qualifies as ethical by virtue of its registering the primacy not of the self but of the other, and by its willingness to engage intimacy less as a source of comfort than of risk” (Dean 2006, 211). This is a form of contact

produced a critique of normative temporality, inasmuch as barebackers have reconfigured their relationship to illness, mortality, and kinship. HIV/AIDS is no longer seen as an immediate death sentence, and certain forms of community, rationality, and connection are prioritized over and above the maintenance of impermeable bodily boundaries. Part of an ethic of cruising is giving others the space to exist in these other temporal configurations and figuring out how to relate across these differences.

All of these thinkers are struggling with the relationship between queerness's ontological contrarianism and the demands of identity politics. Bersani and Dean take the experience of queer sexuality as the starting point of imagining other ways of relating to identity and others. Edelman places the queer permanently outside of legible identities, arguing that queerness must stand in for a rejection of all forms of sociality. There can never be a relationship between queerness and reform. Muñoz argues that queerness is the necessary precondition of critique and the basis for reform. Queerness functions as a never quite present horizon, a feeling of utopia that can generate new ways of being. Dean provides an ethics based on total alterity and replaces heteronormative temporalities with the temporality of anonymous sex and cruising. In order to sort out these competing claims, I want to provide a philosophical analysis of the connection between queer contrarianism, temporality, and identity. In what follows I read Bergson's writings on personality, possibility, and the virtual to demonstrate that queerness can be both a mode of criticism and a stable component in the world of identity politics. The final section is a rejection of Edelman's view for two reasons. First, I argue that the atemporality of the *sinthomosexual* is metaphysically untenable and does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. Second, following Muñoz's criticism of Edelman, I argue that Edelman's rejection of the political is dangerous and ignores the experiences of the most vulnerable members of the queer community. Edelman is unable to recognize that it is our political situatedness (race, class, ability, etc.) that makes us vulnerable to violence, not our queerness understood as a psychoanalytic stance or rejection of sociality. I conclude by showing that Bergson's work gives further support to Muñoz's description of queerness, and helps us understand how queer ontological contrarianism and queer identities can coexist.

Bergson's virtual as queer tendency

Chapters one and two tangentially touched on Bergson's concern with personality. As we saw in chapter one, our personal sense of self and of our own duration informs our ability to intuitively engage with the world. Without a self-conscious relationship to my own duration I cannot intuit that of another being. This intuitive capacity is an important component of my character, and essential to the ongoing project of becoming increasingly just in our actions and dispositions. Chapter Two discussed how my personal understanding of duration is not metonymically related to the general temporality of our shared world; rather, my own personal past and experience is embedded directly into that the material world.⁵⁶ The most particular and

(rather than networking) that is aimless inasmuch as it prioritizes openness and does not instrumentalize the other.

⁵⁶ "This reality is mobility. There do not exist *things* made, but only things in the making, not *states* that remain fixed, but only states in process of change. Rest is never anything but apparent, or rather, relative. The consciousness we have of our own person in its continual flowing, introduces us to the interior of a reality on whose model we must imagine the others. *All reality*

unique things about my being are literally actualized within our shared world, and have a direct role in structuring my relationship to space. Now I will look to moments where Bergson explicitly discusses personality, arguing that he conceives of personality as something that happens in the interplay between fluidity (duration) and rigidity (spatialization). We develop coherent and stable personalities to the degree to which we spatialize our sense of self, psychologically and materially, in the face of an indeterminate future. The indeterminacy at the heart of our experience is what Bergson calls the *virtual*, and I will argue that virtuality has much in common with the ontological contrarianism of queerness. In what follows I argue that there is something queer about all personalities, and that any stable personality requires a disavowal of that queerness.

It is telling that in English we treat our personalities as either possessions or ontological states. We say, “She *has* a nice personality” or “She *is* kind,” and while we like to think that people can change, we tend to consider someone “set in their ways” once they reach adulthood. The view of our personality as something we develop and then possess, like clay that must be formed before it dries and hardens, makes it difficult to understand Bergson’s view that personality is not something you *have* but something you *do*. Certainly our personalities do solidify into preferences, identities, and characteristics—but these are spatialized abstractions cut out of our fluid psychological duration. That is to say, Bergson approaches personality intuitively, and not in terms of ownership or ontological states.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson argues that it is an error to conceive of our mind as either a series of psychological states, or as the ground upon which these states rest. Either view is spatial and immobilizes the actual flow of consciousness, which cannot be understood statically. He summarizes this argument beautifully in an essay published in 1903 where he says, “the truth is that there is neither a rigid, immovable substratum nor distinct states passing over it like actors on a stage. There is simply the continuous melody of our inner life,—a melody which is going on and will go on, indivisible, from the beginning to the end of our conscious existence. Our personality is precisely that” (CM, 124). My self is not a substrate upon which emotions and thoughts occur, nor am I these thoughts. I am the entirety of my psychological life as it endures. In the same way that lingering on a single note qualitatively alters the melody, so too naming and focusing on one psychological state alters the flow of our consciousness.⁵⁷ “A violent love or a deep melancholy takes possession of our soul: here we feel a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permanent one another without any precise outlines,” but when we try to analyze and name these feelings we extract them from this indescribably complex and changing sensation, replacing that complexity with “a juxtaposition of lifeless states that can be translated into words” (TFW, 132-3). My personality is this movement through the day, my fluid state of being before I explicitly thematize and reflect upon any single decision, emotion, or mental state.

My personality may be the self that flows in time, *but it is also* those spatialized aspects of my identity, the things that give my identity a coherence or stability across time. Despite Bergson’s insistence on the fundamentally temporal nature of personality, we are not

is, therefore, tendency, if we agree to call tendency a nascent change of direction” (CM, 159 emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ Whenever we name a psychological state we change what it is that we were feeling. For example, when I take a moment to name my feelings as anger, it is likely my feelings will change, perhaps resolving themselves into frustration, irritation, or resentment.

wrong to treat it spatially or in terms of solids. Like all spatializations, this is a necessary and pragmatic abstraction; it is what allow us to develop stable, coherent, and predictable personalities necessary if we are to recognize one another across space and time and predict one another's actions.

First, how do we abstractly or psychologically spatialize our personality? In *Creative Evolution* Bergson describes what happens as we grow into adulthood:

For life is tendency, and the essence of a tendency is to develop in the form of a sheaf, creating by its very growth, divergent directions among which its impetus is divided. This we observe in ourselves, in the evolution of that special tendency which we call our character. Each of us, glancing back over his history, will find that his child-personality, though indivisible, united in itself divers persons, which could remain blended just because they were in their nascent state: this indecision, so charged with promise, is one of the greatest charms of childhood. But these interwoven personalities become incompatible in course of growth, and, as each of us can live but one life, a choice must be made. We choose in reality without ceasing; without ceasing, also, we abandon many things. The route we pursue in time is strewn with the remains of all that we began to be, of all that we might have become. (CE, 100).

A child is faced with a more open and indeterminate future, and contains more potential personalities, than an elderly person. When I look back on my life I can understand how choices I have made, and those that were made for me, have resulted in my being where and who I am today. I can also remember wanting to be an astronaut, a novelist, an Olympic athlete, a linguist, and a wealthy entrepreneur. As I grew into a myopic young man, my potential astronaut self was abandoned in the realm of unrealized potentiality; likewise, my aspirations of becoming wealthy died with my entrance into graduate school.

We come to identify with these past potentialities as markers in our personal history, and we have emotional ties to “the remains of all that we began to be.” We think of what “could have been” as a part of who we are today, especially when we consider how those past decisions have structured our current situation and future possibilities. This is an intellectual spatialization of the temporality of my personality. I cast my life out onto a timeline, marking certain decisions as watershed moments and tracing an etiology of my present state. I identify myself with the decisions that have created my current situation, and I have emotional attachments to those foreclosed possibilities abandoned in my past. I can identify in a similar manner with my anticipated future. If our personality is a tendency, I spatialize that tendency into a *thing*, a *state* or *disposition*. I can reify this temporal tendency into a kind of static matrix or a lens that I think influences all my behavior. That is to say, I can abstract and solidify this tendency, adopting it as my identity. For example, how often have we heard homosexuality whispered about as a “homosexual *tendency*” a proclivity for certain actions that then becomes reified into a stable identity? Historical accounts of the concept of homosexuality demonstrate how stigmatized sex acts became solidified into an identity; ontologized into a kind of being called “the homosexual.”⁵⁸ No longer do individuals commit homosexual acts; homosexual acts reflect a homosexual being. Rather than understand ourselves as beings whose personalities are being created in each action, we see ourselves as having a personality that influences our actions.

⁵⁸ See Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage, and Halperin, David M. 1990. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*. New York: Routledge.

In addition to this psychological spatialization, aspects of our personality both create and are controlled by our material environments, the concrete spaces and contexts in which we live. Our movement through the world creates behind it a stream of material objects, markings, records, and other concrete evidence of our lives and impact on others. Like the tail of dust left behind a comet, our passage through the world creates, rearranges, and otherwise alters our environments. From my bronzed baby shoes, to a favorite rocking chair, my childhood room to my college dormitory, my movement through time and space leaves behind it objects and evidence of my existence, and this movement resonates through this material long after I am literally present in a given space. My personality becomes spatialized in this evidence. I understand that objects and spaces record and reflect my being, and I continue to identify with that person. I can no longer wear my first pair of shoes, but I understand that they were mine and as they sit bronzed on my parents mantel they remind me of my baby self (or perhaps more accurately, they represent that self). A photograph from ten years ago makes present my previous self, and I see a linear connection between that person and the person looking at the photo.⁵⁹

These traces of my personality may be material (photographs, diaries, letters) or immaterial (emotional influence, digital records, memories) but we interact with them as if they are material; as if they are concretized aspects of our being that we can possess *intellectually*. Understanding my identity intuitively is to see myself as an enduring tendency. To see myself intellectually is “to abstract from varied and changing things a common aspect which does not change or at least offers an invariable hold to our action,” creating a stable identity to which my intellect “attaches itself, in its penchant for regularity and stability, to what is stable and regular in the real, that is to say to materiality” (Bergson 2007, 77). I abstract from all of this material and immaterial evidence the existence of this being that is myself. Following Bergson, I am arguing that both the narrative I use to make sense of my personal history, and the objects and spaces around me that solidify and buttress my personality, *are material inasmuch as I think of myself as possessing them*. They function according to the logic of spatiality. These abstract and material spatializations keep me thinking that I *possess* my personality, rather than seeing it as something I *do* in each and every moment. And it is through this possession that these things affirm aspects of my self or my identity. Bergson is not interested in overturning this habit of mind, but he does want us to understand that it is an abstraction away from the fact of our temporal nature. Indeed we value having a strong sense of self and a coherent identity, but we must always remember that every move toward further stabilization closes off other possibilities for identification, action, or embodiment.

Affirmation is at work in two difference senses. The spatialization of my identity is achieved through the repetitive affirmation of a specific identity. This is especially obvious when we consider identities that seem intrinsic or permanent. For example, my entire environment, both material and immaterial, constantly affirms my racial or gender identity. For example, my gender is affirmed to me by my clothing, others interactions with me, gender-segregated spaces, ticking an M or F on every form, pronouns, expectations, etc. This constant and consistent affirmation makes it difficult, if not impossible, to develop a stable identity different from the one that is being affirmed to me. Indeed, this explains the difficulty encountered by people

⁵⁹ Certainly we may feel very detached from these artifacts, experiencing a sense of disconnection or distance from our previous selves. Even this experience serves to solidify our present sense of self, inasmuch as my presents self is further concretized in opposition to my previous self.

transitioning from one gender to another; the sheer volume of affirmative material that needs to be shifted to their self-determined gender is truly overwhelming. Second, affirmation can act as the mechanism that enacts a shift in our identity, and we can intentionally alter the way other people and environments affirm us in order to bring about this change. After coming out, our environment hopefully begins to reflect the revealed identity. This gradual shift in affirmations loosens a previous identity and begins to stabilize and develop a new identity. It is in this way that affirmation can be both a solidifying tendency, while at the same time act as the mechanism that unravels and re-weaves our identity.

As affirmations solidify and repeat themselves, they form affirmative feedback loops. As I am affirmed as a gay man, I feel more comfortable acting as a gay man and this action then changes others' perceptions of my identity and they interact with me as a gay man. Affirmations strengthen and become almost automatic. This explains why, when someone asks us to think of them differently, the process starts slowly but gradually becomes second nature. For example, at first it may be difficult to refer to someone with different pronouns, but eventually it becomes more fluid as their sense of self, and my perception and consequent affirmation of that self, becomes more established. We are caught in innumerable affirmative feedback loops, they are the structures that glue us together as coherent beings existing across time.

Much of Bergson's work, especially his method of intuition, is an effort to break our tendency toward solidification and get back to the duration at the heart of our personality. But it would be a mistake to think that Bergson is against all spatial thinking. We need to think spatially in order to survive, and we need a stable sense of self to be meaningful to ourselves and to others. The affirmations and stabilizations of a more comfortable or authentic identity are a wonderful comfort, and we can see people become happier and healthier as they are affirmed in their new identity. It is impossible to imagine a society in which people are not at least somewhat coherent subjects. Bergson's concern is with finding a balance between our nature as temporal beings and our need to spatialize our experience. We must strike a balance between the two, "it is then right to say that what we do depends on what we are; but it is necessary to add that also that we are, to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually" (CE, 7). What is crucial about tendency, and the conceptualization of personality as duration, is that it maintains a picture of the self that is flexible, creative, and indeterminate. A psychologically healthy person will inevitably become spatialized, but a psychologically flexible and adaptable person will recognize this spatialization as a tendency capable of gradual or sudden reconfigurations. Additionally, a healthy environment or set of relationships will remain open to reconfiguring how and what they are affirming. Inflexibly holding someone to a single identity will inevitably be damaging to that person inasmuch as they are not able to grow and transform as they age. While not everyone experiences a dramatic shift in identity (for example, coming out), nobody remains perfectly the same throughout their entire life, and we all need environments that affirm us *as we are* at each stage of life.

Bergson says, "it is undeniable that any psychological state, by the sole fact that it belongs to a person, reflects the whole of a personality. There is no feeling, no matter how simple, which does not virtually contain the past and present of the being which experiences it" (CM, 142). To have the present contain the entire past is not the same as saying that the past controls or structures the present and by extension the future. The past's virtual existence in the present is the source of constant novelty and creativity. To understand how this is the case, and the ramifications this has on the development of personality, I now turn to a discussion of Bergson's notion of *the virtual* to see what it can teach us about queerness.

I'm virtually queer.

In the introduction I provided my more complete discussion of Bergson's use of the word *virtual*, but a short review will be helpful. Remember that Bergson is always trying to get us to think in time, to understand that because we endure through time the world is constantly changing, and any stability or predictability is the result of spatial thinking. We have a tendency to think of the present moment as structuring or making possible different configurations of the future, we project our anticipations ahead of us in an attempt to make the future more determinate. Bergson wants to reorient our thinking toward an understanding that the future simply continues to unfold in sometimes predictable, sometimes unpredictable ways in every moment. We think of possibility as a potentiality in the present, but Bergson argues that when we say that something is possible we actually mean one of two things; there is no impediment to its realization (it is not impossible), or we observe something that has already happened and retroactively place its possibility in the past. When I say that it is possible I will write my dissertation, I mean that at present there is no insurmountable impediment to its completion, and although I cannot predict the exact form it will take, once it does exist I can say that its final form was a possibility before its realization. This is important because it allows Bergson to escape the trap of mechanistic thinking. If I think of possibility as a bloodless potentiality in the present moment the future becomes contained within the present, and we lose any sense of novelty, surprise, or spontaneity. If, as Bergson suggests, we recognize that the future is indeterminate and that possibility is a retroactive mental phenomena, then we can see that life is always taking unforeseeable forms, and Bergson is able to account for the constant creation of novelty in the world. In lieu of possibility Bergson uses the term *virtual*. The virtual is the unactualized set ways in which the future may unfold. Once something virtual becomes actualized, the virtual itself undergoes a qualitative differentiation. As we saw in chapter two, memory exists virtually. To say that it is virtual is to say that it is useless, but once a memory becomes actualized in action, the entirety of our memory changes and therefore the virtual differentiates itself qualitatively. That memory now involves the memory of having remembered that memory, altering how you will experience future moments of remembering that memory.

The relationship between the virtual and actual should remind us of that between queerness and normativity. The virtual is the preserved past, it exists in a state of disuse, unactualized and without effect. Queer, at least according to anti-social queer theorists, is similarly virtual inasmuch as it has no positive definition and cannot be made sense of in the present. Reading the virtual into queerness, we can understand how queerness has a structuring influence on the present moment, but in exerting this influence it necessarily changes in qualitative character.⁶⁰ For queer to become actualized it must become legible. In so doing that newly legible identity can no longer be considered queer, if queer is that which marks the outside

⁶⁰ “But the antisocial is never, of course, distinct from the social itself. The ideological delimitation of an antisocial agency, one that refuses the normalizing protocols that legislate social viability, conditions the social order that variously reifies and disavows it, condemning that localized agency as the cause of the suffering for which the social order disclaims its responsibility. Whatever body or bodies that find themselves chosen to flesh it out, this antisocial force absorbs the repudiated negativity without which community is never imagined” (Edelman 2011b, 111-2)

of legibility. Just as the virtual changes when it is actualized, so too the queer is altered as aspects of it become legible. We can say that if the queer is that which is unacceptable, as certain identities enter the mainstream (are actualized), what it means to be queer is qualitatively altered. Rather than the excised Other that makes the political intelligible, I think we can understand queerness as the source of novelty within the political, as that realm from which newness emerges. Elizabeth Grosz is one of the few thinkers who appreciates the political ramifications of the virtual:

[The past] is the inexhaustible condition not just of an affirmation of the present but also of its criticism and transformation. Politics is nothing but the attempt to reactivate that potential, or virtual, of the past so that a divergence or differentiation from the present is possible. Bergson is one of the few theorists to affirm the continual dynamism, not of the present, but of the past, its endless capacity for reviving and regenerating itself in an unknown and unpredictable future. (Grosz 2004, 178)

Queerness functions as the virtual to the political.⁶¹ This intuition that queerness marks a place of critique, and is a source for new ways to imagine our potentialities going forward, is very much in line with Bergson's discussion of the virtual's relationship to the actual and the constant creation of novelty. Politics is a temporally thick phenomena. On the one hand, it is meant to respond to the current situation and create fair and stable systems of organization. On the other hand, politics is the space within which we can look to the past in order to envision a different future. It is the realm of human interaction that attends to the virtual with an eye toward seeing how the past will be "reviving and regenerating" itself into new political formations. The visionary, that imaginative or utopian thinker who articulates radical and unique solutions to problems, is in touch with the creativity inherent in our movement through time. We are led to ask – is the virtual that which is permanently outside the political, or is it the motor of novelty, indeterminacy, and creativity that propels the political?

Examining queer theory from this perspective can help us move beyond the impasse between anti-social and utopian queer theory. In what follows I will argue that Edelman's insistence on relentless negativity is an attempt to maintain the complete distinction between virtuality and actuality. His theory attempts to safeguard the queer virtual as that which can never be self-present, as that which can never be actualized. I argue that this requires an artificial rejection of time; it requires forgetting that queerness and the virtual are both processes with distinct durations. I will use the distinction between the virtual and actual to show that Muñoz's account can both maintain an anti-social critical capacity while still rooting queer praxis in the political.

Edelman's queer theory and Bergson's virtual are similarly suspicious of spatializing time. In a roundtable on queer temporality Edelman said:

I'm less interested, then, in the 'turn toward time' than in turning or troping by which we're obliged to keeping turning time *into* history. Whether polyphonous or univocal,

⁶¹ This can be understood in two ways. First, queerness is the virtual with regard to our gender identity, sexuality, etc. We can, however, understand the instability of the virtual as present in any and all political formations, identities, or actions. Here I am not attempting to extend the queer/virtual dyad beyond the scope of LGBT and queer identities and politics.

history, thus ontologized, displaces the epistemological impasse, the aporia of relationality, the nonidentity of things, by offering the promise of sequence as the royal road to consequence. Meaning thus hangs in the balance... a meaning utterly undone by the queer who figures its refusal. (Edelman 2007, 181)

Edelman is concerned that turning events into “history” covers over the non-identity or queerness that must be excised to create coherent meaning or historical consequence. Life is messy and contradictory, and history sanitizes it into a single process leading to a meaningful conclusion. This ontologization of history is similar to Bergson’s notion of spatialized time. Reproductive futurity needs to figure time as a teleological narrative in which we are bit players in a production moving toward a healthy and happy finale. The queer is that “epistemological impasse” that refuses to be made understandable within the symbolic, it is the *virtual* that cannot be actualized into the real but yet has a structuring influence on it. Just like how the virtual influences the actual without being in any way reducible to the actual, so too that thing which “doesn’t conduce to the logic of periodization or identity. Call it the queerness of time’s refusal to submit to a temporal logic—or, better, the distortion of that logic by the interference, like a gravitational pull, of some other, unrecognized force” influences the social (Edelman 2007, 188). Both queerness and the virtual influence the actual world like a gravitational pull or magnetic field propelling the real, or a sinkhole continually opening under our feet.

Here is where Edelman appears to want to have his subject position and to critique it too. Can we inhabit this space of queerness or not? If we can, what would that look like? Edelman more than any other thinker, takes queer negativity to its logical conclusion and dogmatically refuses the possibility of queer positivity. Responding to Halberstam’s charge that his relentless critical negativity could become an “epistemological self-destruction” Edelman says:

Why not endorse, to the contrary, ‘epistemological self-destruction’ for all? Why not accept that queerness, taken seriously, demands nothing less? The fantasy of a viable ‘alternative’ to normativity’s domination—a fantasy defended as strategically necessary when not affirmed as unquestionably good—offers nothing more, as Judith and Hoang Rod implicitly recognize, than futurism’s redemptive temporality gussied up with a rainbow flag. Maybe we need to imagine anew, ‘We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it,’ not as the positive assertion of a marginalized identity but as the universal condition of the subject caught in structural repetition. That’s what makes queerness intolerable, even to those who call themselves queer; a nonteleological negativity that refuses the leavening of piety and with it the dollop of sweetness afforded by messianic hope” (Edelman 2007, 195)

Taking queer seriously amounts to a total rejection of identity. For Edelman, any group requires the expulsion of an Other; this is the antagonism at the heart of sociality. What threatens reproductive futurism “is queer negativity’s refusal of positive identity through a driveline resistance to the violence, the originary violation, effected, as Adorno writes, by ‘the all-subjugating identity principle’” (Edelman 2006, 822). Or, as Edelman notes elsewhere, “the universality proclaimed by queerness lies in identifying the subject with just this repetitive performance of the death drive, with what’s, quite literally, unbecoming, and so in exploding the subject of knowledge immured in stone by the ‘turn toward time’” (Edelman 2007, 181). It’s hard to imagine what this queerness could look like. How can we exist, for longer than the

amount of time it takes to kill ourselves, without any kind of identity or impulse to continue on into the future? What does it actually look like to be this queer? Even if we forgo the various political attempts at creating a queer identity and focus on queer as “a project whose time never comes and therefore is always now,” what does it mean to perform that project (Edelman 2007, 189)? How is it possible to have a critical project without identifying ourselves with that project, without people relating to one another?

It is clear that Edelman believes that queerness is a critical capacity, but not the source of any new form of community or sustenance. We cannot inhabit this queerness, all we can do is try to maintain it as a critical capacity or perspective. “We’re never at one with our queerness; neither its time or its subject is ours. But to try to think that tension, to try to resist the refuge of the ‘good,’ ... that is a project whose time never comes and therefore is always now” (Edelman 2007, 189).

What remains unclear is how we can maintain this critical perspective while also denying ourselves the mechanisms for sharing, instituting, and identifying with the products of queer critical reflection. Other thinkers have touched on this question by asking about the relationship between queerness and other forms of political alienation, specifically race and class. Muñoz has criticized Edelman for not paying attention to the intersection of queerness and race and class. Muñoz says:

Theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now... Imagining a queer subject who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience is an ineffectual way out. Such an escape via singularity is a ticket whose price most cannot afford” (Muñoz 2009, 95, 97)

In Muñoz’s view, Edelman’s ability to reject the political comes from a place of privilege. He is unconcerned with the ways in which queer people of color literally cannot afford to give up on political solidarity or struggle. What I want to pick up on is Muñoz’s characterization of Edelman’s subject as *atemporal*. Edelman posits the queer as that which exists outside of the legible, and he does not provide an account of how the content of this queer can change over time, because the queer is precisely that which resists signification, meaning, or historicization. What this means is that the category of queer becomes monolithic and startlingly atemporal. It is an excess that troubles intelligibility, but it cannot be delineated, described, or given any kind of positive content. Edelman urges us to join the side “not ‘fighting for the children’” saying that “queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place [of abjection] accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (Edelman 2004, 3). Queer people are invested in reproductive futurism, but it is our job to queer these institutions and lessen our investment in the denial of the death drive.

I agree with this emphasis on queering, and I agree with Edelman’s reluctance to attempt to achieve some “*essential* queerness” (Edelman 2004, 18), but I do not think that Edelman can both recognize that queer people are in a *process* of divesting from the politics of reproductive futurism, and still hold that queerness can never be the basis for any kind of reorganization of the political. Neither the virtual nor the queer can be delineated or given an essence, but they also cannot be understood atemporally. Edelman wants us to try to become queer in the blink of an eye, but queerness is a process that unfolds and morphs across long swaths of time, or exists in

multiple and flexible temporalities. He is asking us to cut away at the symbolic and literal foundations of our lives, without offering any new form of community, meaning, or support. Queerness must be understood instead on a model like Bergson's view of personality, where moments of fluidity and critique are experienced before and after sedimentations and spatializations. What Edelman lacks is an appreciation for the fact that we, and by extension queerness, are always moving through time. Here are two moments in his text where he describes the role of the queer person, or the *sinthomosexuals*, in the society of reproductive futurism:

This, I suggest, is the ethical burden to which queerness must accede... to inhabit the place of meaninglessness associated with the *sinthome*; to figure an unregenerate, an unregenerating, sexuality whose singular insistence on *jouissance*, rejecting every constraint imposed by sentimental futurism, exposes aesthetic culture... as always already a "culture of death" intent on abjecting the force of a death drive that shatters the womb we call life. The death drive as which the queer figures, then, refuses the calcification of form that is reproductive futurism. (Edelman 2004, 47-8)

We, the *sinthomosexuals* who figure the death drive in the social, must accept that we will be vilified as agents of that threat. [...] Attempting to evade the insistent Real always surging in its blood, [reproductive futurism] lovingly rocks the cradle of life to the drumbeat of the endless blows it aims at *sinthomosexuals*. Somewhere, someone else will be savagely beaten and left to die -- sacrificed to a future whose beat goes on, like a pulse or a heart -- and another corpse will be left like a mangled scarecrow to frighten the birds who are gathering now, who are beating their wings, and who, like the drive, keep on coming. (Edelman 2004, 153-4)

Queers are ethically obligated to figure as the death drive and resist the machine of reproductive futurism. This entails the rejection of any kind of political identity or solidarity; indeed, it involves a rejection of sociality itself. If queerness entails the rejection of all forms of sociality, then becoming queer is not something one can do by degrees, and Edelman implies that we can become completely queer in an instant. Once we adopt this position we become *the* threat to the political order, a kind of queer bomb ready to "shatter the womb we call life" with our very *being*. Edelman presents queerness as making an impossible demand: we must queer ourselves away from reproductive futurism, but in a way that does not create new forms of sustenance or sociality. He gives no space or recognition to the fact that some people need their identity, social relations, and hope for the future in order to survive. The truly queer person, the *sinthomosexual*, must be someone who is already untouched by other vectors of difference, someone who can afford (symbolically and financially) to deny the political and social webs that sustain *both* reproductive futurism *and* human life. Muñoz characterizes this queer as an atemporal crypto universal white gay guy. Just like the able-bodied white man of universal "humanity," Edelman presents us with an imaginary ideal category to which we can all strive, but never reach.

While I am sympathetic to Edelman's desire to maintain the radicality of queerness, the second quote clearly demonstrates what is so pernicious in his rejection of the political. Queerness is threatening to reproductive futurism. When we take the side of queerness we are immediately marked as a threat that must be stamped out at all costs. Once marked you risk

being the next “sacrifice” on the altar of reproductive futurism, strung up “like a mangled scarecrow” warning off other potential queers. This shockingly insensitive allusion to Matthew Shepard’s brutal murder implies that his murderers were motivated by Matthew’s queer rejection of sociality and reproductive futurism. This turns Matthew into an atemporal crypto universal gay white guy, it makes him into a faceless *sinthomosexual* threatening in his very being. This move, which is the final line of Edelman’s *No Future*, completely erases the specificity of Matthew Shepard and his life, while capitalizing on his murder and ignoring the fact that violence against Matthew Shepard and against queer people is motivated by the very social factors that Edelman is claiming queer people must reject. To claim that queerbashing is the result of our rejection of sociality callously ignores the racism, classism, ableism, and social contexts that motivate hate crimes. In his rejection of the political *tout court* Edelman is unable to see that it is not our rejection of sociality that makes us marked or vulnerable to these attacks, it is our position *within* our political and social world that makes us targets. Ignoring this is not only insensitive, it makes us unable to see the situation facing the most vulnerable members of the queer community, and offers them no support, understanding, or validation in their fight against oppressive forces.

I admire Edelman’s analysis and critique of reproductive futurism, but his refusal to understand queerness as a process is as troubling as it is useless for a queer praxis. Asking someone to accede fully to the place of queerness amounts to asking them to exist virtually. What must be remembered is that the virtual, and the queer, are defined as that which has no effect on the real world. We cannot exist in the purely virtual—likewise we cannot exist in the queer. We can only participate in the process of actualization, the continual reconfigurations of both what we affirm and what affirms us. Edelman’s extreme articulation of queerness and his constant insistence that it can never become something positive or meaningful is at best a polemic meant as a thought exercise to keep our thinking extreme, and is at worst a form of academic dogma, disconnected from reality and only useful in insular arguments on the pages of academic journals. Virtuality can only become *useful* (in Bergson’s sense) in actualization, so too queer can only become useful as it becomes a legible identity, as it settles down into the kinds of material and psychological spatializations that endure through time and can be the basis for meaningful political claims. It is through this temporally moving dynamic of actualization, the morphing the virtual as it is de- and re-spatialized, that we can maintain anti-social queer theory’s critical edge while still talking about queer people and identities.

I read Muñoz’s descriptions of utopia as a description of the affect generated by the fact of indeterminacy and the functioning of the virtual. There is tremendous overlap between what Muñoz calls the futurity of potentialities and what Bergson calls the virtual:

Agamben underscores a distinction made by Aristotle between potentiality and possibility. Possibilities exist, or more nearly, they exist within a logical real, the possible, which is within the present and is linked to presence. Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity. Potentiality is and is not presence, and its ontology cannot be reduced to presentness... Reading for potentiality is scouting for a “not here” or “not now” in the performance that suggests a futurity” (Muñoz 2009, 99)

This scouting for potentialities is the search for utopian thinking, a kind of thinking that is intuitive in Bergson's sense of the word. Utopian thinking is not the intellectual effort of prediction, it is the intuitive sense of how the indeterminate future may unfold, "utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be" (Muñoz 2009, 97). The emotion that Muñoz is trying to capture and galvanize is the hope at the heart of the virtual, the fact that indeterminacy can be both terrifying and tremendously exciting as it hints at new ways of living and being. The temporal disorganization initiated by queerness is precisely the kind of mult textured temporality discussed in chapter one, the many durations caught up in the push of the past into the future, this thick view of time that affords us a language to discuss how the past haunts the future, and how different beings and ways of being experience different durations.

Thinking through both of these thinkers in terms of Bergson's analysis of personality, I think we can understand *both* the relentless criticality of Edelman's position, *and* Muñoz's attempt to trace queer utopianism, as ways of reanimating calcified identities. I suggest that we see queerness as that unforeseeable novelty created by the movement of time, and normativity as the forms of spatialization or sedimentation that try to stabilize or ignore that indeterminacy. Edelman wants us to realize that the disavowal of this indeterminacy is the basis for sociality and identity; he pushes for a critical perspective that requires the undoing of all normativity. His error is his failure to understand the temporality of his own project, and the fact that queerness always exists in tandem with the normalizing tendencies of spatiality. Muñoz's work is explicitly temporal and dynamic, trying to unlock the affective and political power of these moments where a new future glimmers into existence. He is trying to trace those moments in which we realize, affectively, that the tendency that marks our movement into the future is mutable. This is why I claim that while we may not all identify as queer, there is something queer about all personalities. Even the most conservative of individuals, those people who see their character as set in stone and immovable, can be profoundly changed by the indeterminacies of life around them. Bergson's account provides a similarly sobering cautionary note to queer identified people—no matter how committed we are to the project of queering ourselves and our contexts, we need certain spatialized and normalized traits in order to have a stable identity and be able to interact with others across time.

If my middle path between anti-social and utopian queer theory sounds like common sense, it should. This is the way that most of us live our lives, trying to strike a balance between a stable sense of self and an appreciation that life can dramatically change how we think about others and ourselves. We get caught into strong and weak tendencies, and while something like sexuality may feel like a trait that we possess, we are better off if we recognize it as a pattern across time, one that becomes spatialized psychologically and materially as we endure through the world. This view highlights the role of affirmation in both maintaining and changing the ways in which we identify. Personality and identity are not possessions, they are tendencies that find support in our affirmative structures. The next chapter will describe in detail how affirmation functions. Building on the previous chapters, I will argue that affirmation is both a heuristic or methodology for understanding the effect of material and immaterial forces on one another, and that affirmation also serves as the primary mechanism through which we create identities. It is essential to care, flourishing, and political engagement.

Chapter Four

Affirmation and Practices of Care

This chapter draws from the previous three chapters to present my fully elaborated theory of affirmation.⁶² We will see that affirmation is rooted in particular engagements between embodied beings, requiring the methodology outlined in the first chapter. Discerning how affirmation is functioning and what is being affirmed involves sensitivity to the complex entanglement of material and immaterial forces as described in chapter two. Finally, affirmation is the essential factor in the spatialization of our identities, but it can also be a factor in the undoing or transformation of our sense of self as we change across time.

I begin this chapter by briefly reviewing what I have established in chapters one through three. Tying together my methodology, my way of conceptualizing the relationship between the material and immaterial, and my view of identity will provide the complete picture of how affirmation, identity and mobility are interrelated. This section culminates in my discussion of affirmation as the phenomenon that stabilizes our sense of self and influences how we engage bodily with specific spaces. Next, I examine how it is that we intuit the affirmative feedback loops at work in another's experience. I turn to the work of Sara Ruddick and Luce Irigaray to demonstrate what this affirmation looks like in action, and answer two lingering questions: how do we know what we ought to affirm, and how do we know the form our affirmations should take? Finally, I explain why LGBT and queer experiences necessitate my discussion of affirmation. I describe why my model of affirmation is the preferable way to understand how our identity impacts our relationship to public space, and I present my argument that all of our shared spaces need to become more explicitly affirming of LGBT and queer people.

The Field of Affirmation

Taken as a whole, the preceding three chapters present a view of our being in the world that is much more complex than that which we have inherited from enlightenment thinking. In chapter one I argued for a specific methodological approach to both theoretical analysis and ethical deliberation that I termed queer feminist intuition. It is queer because it is sensitive to the manner in which time de- and re-solidifies knowledge and knowers (as outlined explicitly in chapter three), feminist because it is committed to the notion of witnessing and the importance of

⁶² The word affirmation carries a positive connotation, and I have certainly let the connotation resonate throughout my use of the term, and throughout the dissertation. While I am primarily interested in forms of affirmation that have positive effects (i.e. that increase fluid mobility) it must be noted that affirmation can be used to opposite effect. We can imagine many scenarios where something negative and harmful is being affirmed by ones relationships or environment. This is to say that affirmation and affirmative feedback loops are neutral with regard to content, it is a description of a process. While I will argue that we, as people, have a moral obligation to affirm one another, there is nothing inherently positive or negative in the functioning of an affirmative feedback loop. I will say more about the intentional manipulation of both positive and negative affirmative feedback loops in my analysis of bullying in the next chapter.

situated knowledges as outlined by feminist theorists,⁶³ and intuitive in Bergson's sense of being able to understand the dynamism that underlies any form of physical or conceptual stasis. Queer feminist intuition provides an account not only of how we solidify, clarify, and delineate the boundaries between subjects and objects (the agential cuts that are part of phenomena), but also, crucially, the inherently ethical dimension of this activity.

Chapter two demonstrated the deep affinities between Bergson and Karen Barad in order to argue that our bodies are completely embedded or entangled in both material and immaterial worlds. We should understand the material and immaterial as part of the same world, and this distinction is the result of particular practices of epistemological delimitation. Linking these two thinkers we have a strong account for the way in which memory impinges on fluid mobility, and it allows me to account for the tangible effects the immaterial can have on our experience and environments. Said another way, chapter two provides a philosophical account of mood, vibe, ambiance, and the fact that memory is an embodied phenomena that impacts our mobility.⁶⁴ In keeping with Haraway's discussion of situated knowledge, we must not only attend to the manner in which we make distinctions like material / immaterial, subject / object, but also become accountable for the knowledge that is generated because of those decisions. My primary goal in that chapter, and what will be most important for my discussion of affirmation, is my explanation of the force of ideas, language, or the immaterial on our physical embodiment and fluidity.

Chapter three brought Bergson into conversation with queer theory to describe a view of personhood in which all stasis, stability, or predictability is the result of affirmation stabilizing our experience and self-conception. Crucially, as temporal beings this process is always susceptible to undoing, becoming, and change. This is the *ontologically contrary* aspect of queerness that I locate at the heart of all temporal becoming. The purpose of this chapter is to present the view that what we find stable in our experience is an accomplishment, and the mechanism for achieving that stability is the institution and maintenance of affirmative feedback loops.

We are temporal beings whose movement is influenced by material and immaterial forces. We live in a world of flux that is given stability through repetition and our intellect. We also have the intuitive faculties to attend to the flux that is part of our experience, and to attend to the indeterminacy at the heart of duration. We can strive for maximal stability, or we can become totally committed to and comfortable with indeterminacy. Both approaches have their benefits and drawbacks, and the mark of a mature and healthy individual is, among other things, the ability to balance the two tendencies of stasis and dynamism. It is through affirmation that we achieve stability or predictability, and it is through affirmation combined with intuition that we balance stability and indeterminacy, or space and time.

I must then describe affirmation in two distinct senses: first as the mechanism that creates stability across time and is determinative of our embodied fluidity. Second, as a part of an

⁶³ As I have said throughout, obviously other foci and interests can also satisfy my methodological goals. Queer feminism does not have an exclusive epistemological or political advantage; it is one perspective among many.

⁶⁴ Obviously there is a rich history of phenomenological work to provide a similar account. I do not see my work as significantly different than this research, but whereas phenomenologists start from the experience of a knowing subject, my account is grounded in an analysis of the metaphysics of memory and duration.

intuitive approach to one's own duration and that of others, that is to say an inherently ethical intuitive capacity that demands we strive to affirm others as a practice of care.

Affirmation in the first sense, as that which spatializes our sense of self and consequently impacts our embodiment, is what I outline in chapter three. I am choosing to define an affirmation very broadly as any thing, idea, or behavior that can be grasped intellectually and stabilizes an aspect of our identity or sense of self. By intellectual I mean *spatial*—a defined and isolable idea or object that affirms a particular fact about yourself. A family photo affirms my membership in a family structure, a diploma affirms my education, an encouraging word from a teacher affirms my efforts in my studies, a co-worker using my preferred pronouns affirms my gender self-determination. Whether they be physical objects, the actions of another, or my own spatialized thoughts, these affirmations are things that can be grasped and pertain to certain aspects of my sense of self.

Crucially, material and immaterial affirmations function in the same way inasmuch as they are both grasped intellectually. As I argued in chapter two, we must consider the material and immaterial as having equal importance and gravity with regard to our embodied fluidity. Affirmations bear upon our experience when memory is actualized in bodily action. As something is affirmed, that thing becomes more easily and fluidly actualized, like a kind of muscle memory. Any form of affirmation, as it becomes incorporated into the totality of our memory and qualitatively alters the way memory overlays and makes sense of sensory experience, affects our embodied fluidity. As we become comfortable with an identity, or with a place, we move more fluidly. This means that we must recognize that a warm embrace and a caring comment can both have a dramatic effect on not only the affirmed person's emotional self but also on their embodied fluidity. While we must teach children how to ignore verbal violence and contextualize negative comments, we cannot fault someone for their inability to simply "buck up" and ignore verbal abuse. The view that verbal abuse is something that can and ought to be simply ignored does not recognize the dramatically somatic effects it can have on another's embodied fluidity. Obviously we ought to take seriously the difference between a physical and verbal attack, but we must recognize that they both function similarly with regard to memory and movement.

Affirmative feedback loops link together our material and immaterial environments, our sense of self, and our ability to move through the world. It is incorrect that my sense of self is a coherent object that I possess and take with me into different environments. Rather, our sense of self, our fluidity, and our environments are completely linked to one another through affirmative feedback loops. Our self is an intersubjective accomplishment, and relies in so small degree upon our whether or not our physical and immaterial environments affirm that self.

Another point I want to make very clear is that affirmation is not merely associationism. Associationism is the view that we associate things (places, objects, smells, sounds, etc.) with certain memories and this association impacts our behavior. For example, the negative memories I have of my elementary school classroom make me feel uncomfortable whenever I enter a classroom. What I am proposing is much more complicated. Each experience of an affirmation may be tied to a location, but it also qualitatively alters the entirety of my memory, and the way that my memory can come to bear upon my perception in the future. Associationism implies that there is a neutral or general way of perceiving the world, and associations are a kind of idiosyncratic coloring or flavor to those perceptions. There is simple and uninfluenced perception, and we are not able to intuit how another person's specific associations are coloring their perception (unless, of course, the person has communicated this to us). My view argues that

everyone's ability to interact with any kind of stable perceptual field is the result of the specific memories we bring to bear on our perceptual horizon. There is no neutral or "true" perception; instead, every person experiences a stable perceptual field by virtue of their personal memory. Situated knowledge is not just about seeing phenomena from the perspective of an oppressed population—we literally experience the world differently according to our own personal histories. This is particularly important when we recall the connection between memory and fluid mobility.

I do not want to overstate the case here. It is true that much of Bergson's account of the relationship between memory and perception is a discussion of the very basic way that our perceptual field is stabilized, and the way in which we ignore aspects of our perception that are not tied up in purposive action. Recall his example of reading a text, or navigating a familiar neighborhood, where memory functions to free my attention by ignoring things unrelated to my action. While it is certainly the case that each individual will be sensitive to and notice different aspects of the same scene, I do not mean to claim that different people literally see radically different things when looking at the same horizon. Where there *is* considerable variation in individual experience is in the relationship between memory, perception, and fluid mobility. It is my memory that allows for fluid movement, and as I argued in chapter two, positive memories will enhance fluid mobility, whereas traumatic or negative memories will create stilted, frozen, or closed movements. It is easy to think that there is a neutral way of perceiving and moving within the world, and that particularly well-adjusted people, or those who have experienced trauma that makes their movements stilted, are happy or unlucky deviations from that norm. What is unique and important about my elaboration of fluid mobility is that we must recognize *there is no neutral baseline from which people deviate*. Everyone's movement is the result of how our memory influences our perceptual field, and how those memories prepare our body for actions. By recognizing the fundamental importance of this process, and the lack of any neutral or universal form of perception or movement, we can avoid the risk of comparative value judgments and claims that everyone ought to see or move in a specific way. Instead, we can focus on affirmations as the mechanism through which these perceptual patterns become strengthened and stabilized.

What I have described above is the mechanism or process of affirmation. Affirmation can also be a form of attunement, and as I will elaborate below, we can use affirmation as a heuristic to intuit whether or not another is being affirmed in a positive way. I argue that intuiting affirmative feedback loops is an essential aspect of care. We often sense affirmations as they happen around us, sensitive people pick up on subtle changes in demeanor, the small effects of a comment, or the more obvious ways in which another person is either made fluid or stilted in a given environment. Once we understand that it is affirmation that subtends all of these either obvious or fleetingly intangible phenomena, we will be able to more easily identify and intervene in these feedback loops. Chapter five will explicitly take up the idea of intuiting and intervening in affirmative feedback loops as a way to guide bullying prevention programs.

Affirmation requires developing a certain intuitive capacity.

We have seen the way that material and immaterial forces impact our perceptions and fluid mobility. Through Haraway and Barad I have also argued that we are ethically responsible for *how* and *what* it is that we see. I have tried to demonstrate that we are located in a network of forces that extends from the physical to memory, from affect to bodily context. Precisely because

our being in the world is located in such a complex and particular set of circumstances, it is incredibly difficult to understand how we can change those contexts for ourselves or for another. I took so much time developing a methodology of queer feminist intuition in chapter one precisely because I think it is through cultivating this sensibility that we become able to see affirmation at work in our own lives, and in the lives of those around us.

How do we become more sensitive, and what is the relationship between sensitization to affirmative feedback loops and care? While it may sound obtuse or touchy-feely to argue that we all need to “develop our intuitive capacities,” what I am proposing is not significantly different from the feminist project of consciousness raising or becoming a sensitive ally to oppressed populations.

Consciousness raising groups became a popular form of feminist political action in the late 1960s. Women would gather together and discuss their experiences as women, with the goal of discovering the common struggles they faced *as women*. Catharine MacKinnon describes the way in which consciousness raising groups allowed women to understand that their experiences were not idiosyncratic, but instead revealed the nature of systematic oppression:

What brings people to be conscious of their oppression as common rather than remaining on the level of bad feelings, to see their group identity as a systematic necessity that benefits another group, is the first question of organizing. The fact that consciousness-raising groups were there presupposes the discovery that they were there to make. But what may have begun as a working assumption becomes a working discovery: women are a group, in the sense that a shared reality of treatment exists sufficient to provide a basis for identification—at least enough to begin talking about it in a group of women. This often pre-articulate consensus shapes a procedure, the purpose of which becomes to unpack the concrete moment-to-moment meaning of being a woman in a society that men dominate, by looking at how women see their everyday experience in it. Women’s lives are discussed in all their momentous triviality, that is, as they are lived through. (1991, 86)

Here MacKinnon touches on a difficulty raised by feminist epistemologists. How can consciousness raising presuppose the consciousness it is meant to create? How can we perform a feminist analysis, if the activity of performing the analysis is meant to give us a feminist perspective in the first place? Judith Grant captures this when she says, “feminism cannot simultaneously be the lens through which experiences are interpreted, and also find its grounding in those experiences. That is, the feminist interpretive lens cannot be grounded on women’s point of view ... To ground feminism in women’s experience and then to look to feminism to interpret those experiences is a tautology. To the extent that feminist standpoint theory accepts this tautology, it cannot accomplish what it sets out to do” (Grant 1993, 101). We can rephrase this in terms of affirmation as follows: if the ability to see affirmative feedback loops at work requires a developed account of, and sensitivity to, the function of affirmation, how can we begin to see them at all?

This tautology or impasse is very quickly resolved when we see the connection between affirmation (as a temporal process) and consciousness raising. To say that consciousness raising presupposes the discovery it sets out to make (here I cannot help but think of Meno’s paradox) would require that discovering a feminist consciousness is an all-or-nothing event, that it must be discovered whole and fully formed, or that a fully formed feminist perspective is necessary to

begin to see our experience in a feminist light. Instead, we can envision consciousness raising as the development of new intuitive capacities, and also the formation of new affirmative feedback loops that support those intuitive faculties. As women became more able to see the systematic nature of their oppression, the group also became a place to have their feminist identities affirmed and strengthened, which in turn allowed for the creation of an increasingly coherent and shared feminist consciousness. It is in this temporal process, this interaction between intuitive capacity, affirmation, memory, and time, that something like a feminist consciousness can be both method and object, both basis and interpretive lens.

While consciousness raising is intended to elevate one's own understanding of structural oppression, the task of becoming a sensitive ally involves developing the ability to intuit the situation of another different from myself. An ally is someone who is not a member of a certain oppressed population but is sympathetic to their struggles. For example, white feminists can be allies to feminist women of color. Uma Narayan has written about the risk of standpoint epistemology becoming de facto white women's epistemology, and describes how oppressed groups (in this case non-western feminists) both "need to criticize members of a dominant group... for their lack of attention or concern with problems that affect an oppressed group" and also experience "frequent hostility toward those who express interest, even sympathetic interest, in issues that concern groups of which they are not a part" (Narayan 2003, 219). The fear is that these members of the dominant class, regardless of how sound their goals and well intentioned their actions, will end up *speaking for* the oppressed, effectively silencing this population. For Narayan, these sympathetic outsiders ought to try to understand the complexity of the oppressed person's perspective (she argues that fiction and poetry are particularly rich resources for this sensitization) but must also be aware of their own limitations, behave modestly when making claims about another group, and keep in mind the risks of speaking for another.

This form of sensitization is difficult to describe epistemologically. It requires that the well-intentioned ally become sensitive to forces that are not immediately, or perhaps not at all, apparent from her perspective. Central to this is the ability to listen carefully, be observant, and not make assumptions about another's experience. Because many forms of oppression are not visible to the ally, she must become comfortable negotiating and respecting the limits of her knowing, and recognize the privileged perspective afforded by marginalization.

What both consciousness raising and becoming a sensitive ally reveal is the transformative nature of developing this intuitive capacity to see and experience forces that might not be obvious from your particular embodied perspective. Doing so will necessarily change you, and I argue we ought to have that change be in the direction of a queer feminist consciousness, as described in chapter one. This is a never-ending process, but we should commit ourselves to this process rather than see our opinions or perspectives as universally valid.

We can talk about becoming more sensitive, empathic, or intuitive until we are blue in the face, but how do we actually accomplish this goal? A satisfying answer must focus on affirmative feedback loops. By centering our attention on discerning, detecting, and influencing these loops, we have a much more concrete sense of how to develop these intuitive capacities. This provides us with an object (particular affirmations) to seek out, interrogate, understand, and change. It is often difficult to know where to start when we want to become and ally or foster a community, and I think centering our attention on affirmation is a tangible, understandable, and powerful way to initiate personal and political transformation. Look for the things that make another joyful and fluid, while also paying attention to moments when that person becomes guarded and stilted. Seeing these patterns, these affirmations, is the first step toward caring for

that person. This process reveals things about ourselves and our personal situation, the affirmations that make up our identity, while also providing a language to discuss structural and political issues and experiences, the affirmations that lock entire groups into particular patterns.⁶⁵

Once we become sensitive to discerning and detecting affirmative feedback loops, we must start to determine the best ways to create, maintain, and strengthen these loops. *Attention to affirmation is at the root of care*. To make this point I want to discuss the similarities between, Sara Ruddick's discussion of *attentive love*, and Luce Irigaray's formulation *I love to you*. This will allow me to answer two difficult questions: how do I know what I should affirm, and what form should that affirmation take?

Ruddick's text is a sustained analysis of the particular kind of *thought* that is required in the work of mothering. Thinking arises from, and is evaluated according to, the norms inherent to the practice in which one is engaged. Ruddick explains, "to engage in a practice is, by definition, to accept connections that constitute the practice. To be recognized as a jockey or a scientist means to evince or to pretend a commitment to crossing the finish line or replicating by experiment" (Ruddick 1995, 14). It follows that we do not judge the actions of scientists and jockeys according to the same criteria, we judge each according to the norms of their practices. Ruddick contrasts this with legislating thought, or the application of an abstract law or principle without consideration of particular concerns. In other places she discusses this as concreteness (thinking) versus abstraction (legislation): "Concreteness is opposed to 'abstraction' — a cluster of interrelated dispositions to simplify, generalize, and sharply define. To look and then speak concretely is to relish complexity, to tolerate ambiguity, to multiply options rather than accepting the terms of a problem" (Ruddick 1995, 93).

Central to maternal thinking is the recognition that beings grow and develop across time. Ruddick is careful to define development as a kind of quasi-teleological phenomenon, striking the balance between our individual tendencies and the mutability and fragility of all development—that is, between the impulses that seem embedded in our very being and the force of socialization. "I mean by 'development' something closer to the dictionary meaning: to develop is to 'unfold more completely,' 'to unfold gradually, as a flower from a bud'" (Ruddick 1995, 82). Each being has a tendency upon which it is likely to unfold, and to cherish this development is to allow this process to occur in the best way possible, to aid the child in her flourishing. Whether we adhere to strict essentialism or social constructionism, we cannot deny that growth occurs in ways that seem both destined and contingent—the kind of balance between tendency and novelty we have seen at play in Bergson's work and across this dissertation.

The work of mothering is in large part to witness, guide, and sustain this development. While we can provide general guidelines, the particularity of each child and mother makes it impossible to guide the practice of mothering with strict, legislative rules. Mothering requires *thought* and this thinking must be coupled with love. This marks a special attitude or intuitive ability that Ruddick labels *attentive love*: "'attentive love,' which knits together maternal thinking, designates a cognitive capacity—attention—and a virtue—love [...] Attentive love, or loving attention, represents a kind of knowing that takes truthfulness as its aim but makes truth serve lovingly the person known" (Ruddick 1995, 119-20). Attention can easily become negative, transforming into criticism, smothering, or controlling hyper-vigilance. Loving

⁶⁵ One such structural affirmation could be stop and frisk. As young men of color become habituated into stopping for officers and spreading their legs for search, they have their identity as assumed criminals affirmed again and again in their home.

attention may be probing, exacting, and critical but all of this must be in the service of helping the beloved, with their best interest at heart.

I want to focus on how attentive love alters the way we approach temporality. Part of thought, and by extension maternal love, is understanding the loved one as she changes over time, and has different needs at different points in her life. Tied up in this understanding is acknowledging that one's own specific relationship to the beloved also changes across time. An important part of mothering is to remember the child with a specificity the child cannot know herself. Mothers are aware of their child's preferences, temperaments, and personalities long before a child can understand herself as a coherent being with these attributes. The risk, however, is that we will try to freeze the child, to continue treating them as if they are not maturing. "A nurturing mother must at the same time hold close and welcome change. This welcoming attitude, comparable to the humility of preservative love, is the most exigent intellectual demand on those who foster growth" (Ruddick 1995, 89). We must hold children close while letting them grow into themselves. This kind of thought resonates powerfully with my discussion of intuition:

...[T]hose who change with change and welcome its challenges acquire a special kind of learning. What one learns one day or in one phase of a child's life cannot be applied exactly, often not even by analogy, to a new situation. If science agrees to take as real the reliable results of repeatable experiments, its learning is quite different in kind from maternal thinking... the maternal experience with change and the kind of learning it provokes will help us to understand the changing natures of all peoples and communities. (Ruddick 1995, 90)

Like intuition, attention must move with the contours of duration. It does not generate universal or abstract knowledge, it generates knowledge about this child in this moment. It is not knowledge that is perfectly repeatable or universally applicable. It is particular to our relationships and our position in both time and space. Intuition requires attempting to understand experiences that occur at durations different from our own. So too responding to a child requires getting a sense for the temporality of childhood. The goal of intuitive thought is to understand what is the case in a specific context, not to generate universal or legalistic knowledge equally applicable to all circumstances. Unlike atemporal universal knowledge, with intuitive maternal thinking we allow knowledge to shift across time and shift according to the changes in whatever it is we are considering (here, the child as she grows).

Reflecting on the role of mothers, we can answer two troublesome questions: what should I affirm and how should I affirm it? While this answer may not satisfy a more legislatively inclined reader, the answer is that there is no procedural, universal, or abstract answer to this question. Take, for example, a mother who is trying to understand their child's homosexuality. Oftentimes parents do not know how to respond to a child coming out, and may wonder if their child's homosexuality is something they should affirm, and if so, how best to do so. While there are persuasive moral and emotional arguments that homosexual identities should be affirmed, the form that affirmation takes will be particular to the relationship. A more vexing question is that of young children who come out as transgender and want to take medications to prevent puberty. Mothers are in a unique position to understand what their child is saying, to evaluate the child's affirmation of their own transgendered feelings, and help the child navigate their social situation. Maternal thinking requires assessing the benefits and risks of medical interventions, which forms of affirmation will help the child flourish, and which forms may make the child's life more

difficult. The simple fact of the matter is that we can only know what ought to be affirmed by meditating on our specific relationships, and there is absolutely no guarantee that we will get it right. Ethical laws and normative frameworks give the comforting illusion that we can always know the correct answer—but helping another living being create and change their sense of self across time does not allow for such answers. We can always get it right, we can always get it wrong, and will often do both in quick succession.

Affirmation is also a way to care for people during moments of transition, rupture, trauma, or when their sense of self or situation is radically altered. Affirmation is a crucial component of helping people through periods of transition, or when developing a nascent and fragile sense of self. The everyday functioning of our affirmative feedback loops goes largely unnoticed until we experience a dramatic change. It is these moments when we realize the fragility of our coherent self, the ease with which we can become unraveled, and the importance of consistent affirmative feedback loops in maintaining our psychological stability. This helps explain both why we feel more vulnerable (unraveled, disoriented, out of sync) in moments of transition or in unfamiliar environments,⁶⁶ and also helps us to aid people who are experiencing this feeling of transition. If we see someone struggling in a new environment, or with a new identity, or in a new relationship, the answer is not to encourage that person to tough it out or “buck up”—but instead to attend to that person and aid them in their effort to feel affirmed in their new circumstances. One of the reasons people in Alcoholics Anonymous stay sober is that the program gives them the support to create feedback loops that will affirm their sober identity in both the present moment and into the future. The Twelve Steps are meant to alter existing loops by asking people in the alcoholic’s life to affirm their now sober identity, while forming new friendships and entering new environments that reflect their sobriety. Our identities change and move through time by building new affirmative loops that carry us into the future. Affirming another being is not simply a nice gesture; it is participating in a process that is foundational to their sense of self. Admitting that we need affirmation is not (necessarily) “neediness,” it is the recognition that we are all vulnerable to becoming undone, and we all need to ask for help sometimes.

Both of these examples – the situation of AA and maternal understanding -- suggest that the person in need of affirmation does not have to explicitly articulate that need. Coming out is usually a request for acknowledgement and affirmation. Oftentimes people are in need of affirmation but are either unable or unwilling to articulate this need. We can often sense that something is wrong before the other can articulate what is bothering them, and gentle questioning can help pinpoint the exact source of another’s discomfort. Strengthening our intuitive capacities will help us to care for another’s affirmative feedback loops, even if that other is not capable of asking for needed affirmation.

Once we are sensitized to affirmation, how we choose to affirm the other is indeterminate and particular. Ruddick’s meditations on mothering provide a very specific instance of how we are to intuit and shape affirmative feedback loops:

Attention lets difference emerge without searching for comforting commonalities, dwells upon the other, and lets otherness be. Acts of attention strengthen a love that does not clutch at or cling to the beloved but lets her grow. To love a child without seizing or

⁶⁶ The total denial of any form of affirmation, for example being kept in solitary confinement, dramatically hastens this unraveling of a sense of self.

using him, to see the child's reality with the patient loving eye of attention — such loving and attention might well describe the separation of mother and child from the mother's point of view (Ruddick 1995, 122).

There is not, nor can there be, one size that fits all criteria for how to affirm another. *The only thing that I can suggest with confidence is that affirmation should work to increase and support the affirmed person's fluid mobility.* Feeling threatened, stilted, or uncomfortable is inimical to flourishing. Affirming another ought to have positive psychological and somatic effects, letting that person exist in a state of unselfconscious fluidity.

Lest we think that affirmation results in a total love fest, we must also be aware of the ways that affirmation can go awry. Specifically, we must remember that our intuitive ability arises from our embodied and intimate relationship with another, and that we are physically, psychologically, and emotionally invested in that relationship. A clinical counselor may be able to intuit facts about her patient while remaining detached from that patient, but we are unable to maintain this detachment in our everyday lives. We must recognize how affirming another implicates that person within our own affirmative feedback loops. Our affirmations cannot become suffocating or oppressive; we need to give the other space to be themselves. Irigaray captures this space (or what some Irigarayans call the *interval*) in the marvelously simple phrase: "I love to you." She explains, "*I love to you* means I maintain a relation of indirection to you. I do not subjugate you or consume you. I respect you (as irreducible)... The 'to' is the guarantor of indirection. The 'to' prevents the relation of transitivity, bereft of the other's irreducibility and potential reciprocity" (Irigaray 1996, 109). To say simply "I love you" is to collapse the space of the other into myself, it is to relate to the other inasmuch as they fulfill my needs, provide support for my identity, and are possessed by me. It is to say "I love you because you're mine, don't ever change." Instead, the space opened up by the "to," this interval, prevents me from denying the temporality of the other, and her space to dwell within herself.

This interval helps us avoid making another's need for affirmation into a form of self- or auto-affirmation. Taken together, Ruddick and Irigaray show us that while affirmation has certain identifiable contours and guidelines as a form of care, it is also easy to affirm someone poorly or for the wrong reasons, and part of becoming attuned to the working of affirmation is knowing oneself well enough to avoid these pitfalls. When we turn our attention to another, become mindful of duration, and try to intuit knowledge about that person, we must be very careful we are not just projecting our own desires, opinions, or hopes on to that person. Universal or legislative knowledge has the advantage of being easily confirmed or denied, whereas intuitive knowledge is necessarily much messier and less clear-cut.

Affirmation and LGBTQ vulnerability

I have argued that affirmation is essential to human flourishing, and that we ought to become attuned to affirmative feedback loops in an effort to care for one another. This care involves creating, maintaining, and repairing affirmations that enhance another's fluid mobility. Being affirmed is essential to human flourishing. It is what builds a healthy sense of self that endures through time. It helps us through moments of transition, and it creates the conditions of possibility for our fluid and comfortable movement. It is crucial to understand that affirmation is not something *nice* but dispensable by the strong or stalwart. *Affirmation is the essential process*

whereby we integrate a coherent sense of self with our interpersonal relationships and environments. Nobody can do without affirmation.

But, affirmation is not equally or even equitably distributed or available to all people. The history of the LGBTQ struggle for acceptance can be read as a history of building affirmative feedback loops for LGBTQ people. Being closeted is a stark example of how an identity atrophies without affirmation. The demand that gays and lesbians “keep their sexuality in the bedroom” is an explicit attack on their right to be affirmed in their sexual orientation, similarly trans and gender non-conforming people are routinely denied access to affirming language, spaces, clothing, etc. When members of any minority group push to have their experience accurately represented politically, professionally, and in the media they are often accused of asking for special help or special rights. What I hope is now obvious is that demanding LGBTQ people and relationships be represented in the media is not asking for special treatment, it is demanding access to the same kinds of affirmations that have always been available to members of dominant groups. White cis-gendered heterosexuals see their identity affirmed back to them in every aspect of their existence. People of color, LGBTQ people, the disabled and many other groups rarely see their experience reflected back to them, and often it is in a negative light.

If we really want to help LGBTQ people improve their quality of life, we must make affirmation a conscious priority in the construction of our physical, political, cultural, and digital spaces. This involves many different actions, including but not limited to:

Physical Spaces: Provide gender neutral bathrooms and changing rooms, provide LGBTQ groups with space to meet, include LGBTQ people in advertisements, place a rainbow flag in spaces that encourage LGBTQ openness, give LGBTQ people comfortable access to clinics, government services, and public spaces, allow trans people to access gender segregated services according to their self-determined gender.

Political Spaces: Encourage LGBTQ participation in public office, train public officials to be sensitive to LGBTQ issues and language, make respect for LGBTQ people the expected norm of public discourse, censure individuals or groups that spread anti-LGBTQ animus, stop treating LGBTQ rights to representation as special rights and recognize it as genuine enfranchisement.

Cultural Spaces: Accurately represent LGBTQ experiences in the media, encourage the careers of LGBTQ identified actors, artists, authors, musicians, etc., treat LGBTQ characters with moral complexity, teach LGBTQ history and tolerance in schools, include LGBTQ people in advertisements and promotional materials.

Digital Spaces: Maintain and expand websites that provide information, community, and networking opportunities for LGBTQ people, make social media platforms flexible enough to allow for gender self-determination and designation (multiple gender options, multiple sexuality options), protect online speech from undue search, maintain digital spaces as a safe space to disclose one’s LGBTQ status and find community.

These changes emerge from an ability to understand the functioning and importance of affirmative feedback loops. This will have a dual effect. First, allies will be able to see the positive and negative affirmations effecting LGBTQ and queer people more clearly. By being confronted with affirmations of LGBTQ and queer identities, allies will become more sensitive

to and familiar with these populations. Second, these changes will have a positive effect on the embodied fluidity of LGBTQ and queer identified people. Many LGBTQ people move through public spaces with heightened vigilance and discomfort. Making these public spaces affirming of LGBTQ identities is the first step toward enhancing the fluid mobility of LGBTQ people, which I argue is absolutely essential to our flourishing as human beings.

Many of the reforms sought by LGBTQ people are punitive in nature. Anti-discrimination legislation and hate-crimes legislation are deterrents; they use the threat of increased punishment to protect the rights of LGBTQ people. Many argue that this approach is misguided, ineffective, and only serves to increase the jail time faced by offenders. Combined with a prison system that disproportionately incarcerates people of color, thinkers like Dean Spade have argued that this approach to protecting LGBTQ people only serves to strengthen a prison system that is fundamentally corrupt. This is why I argue we ought to prioritize affirmation as the mechanism for enhancing LGBTQ quality of life. By increasing the number, quality, and variety of spaces that affirm LGBTQ and queer people, we create more opportunities for these people to flourish while at the same time familiarizing and sensitizing non-LGBTQ or queer identified people to the situation faced by the population.

Finally, LGBTQ experiences provide a unique opportunity to understand and reflect on the role of affirmation in all identity formation. Because many LGBTQ and queer identities *can* be hidden (as opposed to race, for instance) these people are often closeted and must reveal their identity. This means that LGBTQ and queer people have a somewhat unique experience of transitioning from inauthentic or negative affirmations, to positive affirmations that reflect their real self. Likewise, the LGBTQ population has a long history of creating underground or hidden affirmative networks and alternative kinship structures. All people, no matter their identity, exist in affirmative feedback loops, but I think its worth reflecting on how LGBTQ and queer experiences provide a unique insight into the importance of affirmation in developing and sustaining an identity.

With this discussion and description of affirmation complete I want to apply this concept to the problem of bullying. In the final chapter I will argue that bullying is best understood and treated through an examination of affirmative feedback loops. The purpose of this chapter is to further explain my concept of affirmation through its application to a pressing political issue, while also shedding some light on the problem of bullying and possible solutions.

Chapter Five

Affirmation in Action: A Holistic Approach to the Causes of, and Solutions to, Bullying

In this chapter I am going to demonstrate how my concept of affirmation can be used to make sense of bullying. I have pedagogical and political goals for this chapter. First, it is my hope that seeing my account of affirmation applied to a social issue will help the reader to solidify their understanding of affirmation and this entire dissertation. Second, using affirmation as an analytical methodology and as embodying a set of prescriptive norms will clarify our thinking about bullying and help devise effective and understandable solutions to this problem. I will argue that affirmation provides a coherent account of both the nature of bullying and why certain anti-bullying programs are more effective than others. Affirmation also provides severally necessary corrections to the literature on bullying. Specifically, I will argue against the use of biological sciences to normalize bullying, the view that our behavior or identities are “hard wired,” and finally I will use affirmation to differentiate bullying from systematic oppression.

Bullying

The past ten years have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of popular and academic attention focused on bullying. Bullying used to be dismissed as a part of normal maturation, even as a healthy way to develop the thick skin and competitive nature necessary for academic or professional success. As the saying goes, “boys will be boys,” and some teasing simply needs to be endured as part of life’s unpleasantness. Protecting children from bullying may make them “soft,” or otherwise disadvantaged. Today, academics, educators, parents, and students are starting to recognize bullying as aggressive, intentional, and harmful behavior that must be treated as a serious problem, with the Centers for Disease Control going so far as labeling bullying a public health crisis (CDC 2012). Bullying has taken on a special urgency for those concerned with the particular vulnerabilities of the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ youth are much more vulnerable to bullying. In 2011, 81.9% of the youth surveyed were verbally harassed due to their sexual orientation, 38.3% were physically assaulted (GLSEN 2011). According to the 2009 report, nearly 9 out of 10 LGBTQ students experienced some sort of harassment (GLSEN 2009). While high profile tragedies, like that of Tyler Clementi’s suicide, have dominated the news cycle, it seems that nearly every week another LGBTQ identified teen commits suicide to escape unrelenting bullying.

The literature on bullying can be divided into roughly three areas. First, there is descriptive work meant to define bullying in terms of characteristics of the bully and victim, and to generate methods to quantify bullying behavior. This work is meant to delineate the scope of the problem and to bring some measure of scientific clarity to the topic. Second, there is work that explains how bullying functions and its effects on both the victim and perpetrator. Third, there is material aimed at educators and parents that provides guidelines for effectively dealing with or preventing bullying. This work is often written for a popular audience or as a curriculum meant to be adopted by school administrators and teachers.

The literature agrees that an act of bullying is defined by the following three attributes:

1. There is a real or imagined imbalance of power between the bully and victim.
2. Bullying is an intentional act intended to harm the victim.

3. The violence occurs multiple times and includes the threat of future harm.⁶⁷

With these three characteristics in mind it is fairly easy to differentiate between bullying and teasing, sassing, or roughhousing. These latter, benign forms of play take place between people in a similar position of power, and it is the positive relationship between friends that prevents teasing from going too far. Likewise, a single instance of violence, like lashing out in frustration, cannot be considered bullying unless it carries the threat of future violence.

This violence takes many forms. Physical aggression includes attacks such as hitting, pushing, punching, tripping or pinching. Relational aggression includes indirect aggression (social manipulation to attack the victim in a circuitous way, such as spreading a false rumor). Social aggression (damaging the victim's sense of self or self-esteem). A third form of bullying behavior is cyberbullying, which involves the use of technology to bully the victim. This could include hateful or threatening text messages, creating a hate website, posting unflattering, inflammatory, or sexual pictures of the victim online, etc. Bullying can take many forms but with the three-part definition above we can fairly easily intuit a family resemblance between actions intended to bully, and other unpleasant but more benign harms.

Defining the attributes of bullies and victims directly is considerably more difficult. Bullies are often characterized as aggressive, brutish, and lacking in empathic ability. They are often themselves the victims of bullying or abuse, and may take to bullying to hide insecurities or low self-esteem. While this picture is easily recognizable, it certainly does not apply to *all* bullies. Bullies can have high self-esteem, are often quite popular, and relational bullying requires a very refined ability to understand another's state of mind (Orecklin, 2000). There is no one set of characteristics that apply to all bullies.

Victims are similarly difficult to define or describe. They are typically outsiders, either by virtue of being "different" or as the result of consistent social exclusion. The victim often displays an obviously minoritizing trait such as being or being perceived to be LGBTQ, having a disability, or being otherwise different.⁶⁸ While we can try to identify traits that make students vulnerable to bullying, often it may be that the bully simply targets a peer whom they consider less powerful, especially someone who obviously lacks social, familial, or institutional support. Finally, bullying may be an act of retaliation, or a response to what is perceived to be bothersome or inappropriate behavior on the part of the victim. The bully may harm the victim because they are "annoying" or "weird," or the bully may believe they are using violence to enforce valuable social norms and mores. For example, anti-LGBTQ violence is often animated by the claim that the bully is protecting their space from the unwelcome presence of an LGBTQ "other," and this behavior is often explicitly or tacitly encouraged by adults.⁶⁹

67 This tripartite definition is nearly ubiquitous in the literature, but it was first and most clearly articulated by Dan Olweus in his *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* 1978

68 Walter Roberts echoes many other researchers when he argues that the most vulnerable students are those made different by their social needs, special needs, or sexual identity (Roberts 2006, 21).

69 Olweus characterized these kinds of victims as either passive or provocative. A passive victim is chosen "randomly" and does not appear to deserve their bullying, whereas a provocative victim may be more hot tempered or anxious, and is more likely to be combative and respond to bullying.

As bullying gained recognition as a serious problem, teachers and administrators felt enormous pressure to find fast and effective solutions, and many schools quickly instituted zero-tolerance policies. A zero-tolerance policy mandates that any infraction, any form of bullying, violence, or intimidation, must be met with severe and uniform punishment. These harsh penalties, the thinking goes, will deter bullies from tormenting their weaker peers, solving the problem in one fell swoop. Zero-tolerance policies are appealing for a number of reasons. When we see a victim tormented by a bully we feel the urgent need to stop the harm, to reach out and protect that victim as soon as possible. Zero-tolerance policies can be instituted quickly, they make administrators look tough on bullying, they require no additional resources or money, and they do not force a school to reckon with the deeper causes of bullying.

Zero-tolerance policies have proved not only ineffective, but counterproductive. To understand why these policies do not work, we need to see that they are grounded in an individualistic view of the self. As individuals we are presumed to possess certain immutable dispositions, temperaments, abilities, and traits. Bullies target their victims because of one or more of these traits, such as a disability, sexual orientation, race, demeanor, etc. The bully is presumed to be morally culpable for their actions because this person could have behaved otherwise, and if the punishments are severe enough the bully will decide it is not worth harming the victim. This presupposes that we are reasonable creatures and that our actions are the result of a cost-benefit analysis. This ‘one-size fits all’ approach may sound fair, but zero-tolerance policies are not at all effective, often doing more harm than good. Horror stories, like the student suspended for having a small paring knife in her lunch,⁷⁰ or the student suspended for pointing a chicken finger like a gun,⁷¹ have led the American Bar Association to publicly oppose zero-tolerance policies, and left administrators and educators looking for better responses to bullying. This is especially worrying when you consider that even one suspension increases a student’s risk of falling behind, or dropping out of school entirely.⁷²

The difficulties in defining bullying or finding a single effective solution are leading people to understand that bullying is a phenomenon that requires a variety of analytic and explanatory frameworks. Researchers are shifting toward the “view that the complexities are such that ‘bullying’ is not open to explanation on the basis of a single set of theoretical concepts, nor can it be defined in a manner that fulfills scientific criteria” (Randall 2001, 17). Theorists are now developing models that are sensitive to the effects of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that lead to bullying. Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer summarize this *ecological* view saying, “in a nutshell, bullying does not occur in isolation. This phenomenon is encouraged and/or inhibited as a result of the complex relationships between the individual, family, peer group, school, community, and culture” (Espelage and Swearer 2004, 3). This shift toward an ecological perspective has been important in diagnosing bullying and creating solutions and effective interventions. In fact, studies have shown that the most effective bullying prevention programs are attuned to the complexity of the ecological perspective. (Birdthistle et al. 1999; Ttofi and Farrington 2009; Vreeman and Carroll 2007).

⁷⁰ <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/12/29/nc-high-school-senior-suspended-charged-possession-small-knife-lunchbox/#>

⁷¹ http://thecabin.net/stories/020101/sta_0201010050.shtml

⁷² <http://www.npr.org/2013/06/02/188125079/why-some-schools-want-to-expel-suspensions>

The ecological approach situates bullying within these nested concerns, with the most particular relationship (that of the bully, victim, and bystander) contained within increasingly general patterns of social or cultural interaction.

The ecological approach helps us understand why it is so difficult to define or assign attributes that apply to all instances of bullying. Each bully-victim relationship is unique and contained within a unique set of nested contexts. While space does not permit a full comparative analysis of different anti-bullying programs, the ecological perspective has led to programs and curricula that often recommend a combination of: bullying awareness and recognition training, clarifying disciplinary rules and enforcing them consistently, training teachers to recognize bullying and effectively intervene through active listening and dialogue, including information about marginalized communities into school curriculums and materials, providing clear and anonymous mechanisms for reporting bullying, loosening zero-tolerance policies and harsh punitive measures, providing parents clear and continuous access to school personnel, and enhancing student self-esteem and effectiveness. These interventions are meant to change school culture by changing everyone's ability to perceive bullying, and their expectations for what is and is not acceptable behavior and why.

What is lacking in the literature, and what I will provide below, is a systematic account of *why* this ecological perspective is both preferable and more effective than other ways of looking at bullying. We intuitively recognize that factors like parents, community, teachers, and school culture are important in causing or preventing bullying, but without a more holistic explanatory account it becomes difficult to know *how* to take these disparate factors into consideration. The ecological perspective can be overwhelming in its complexity, and it is difficult to know what concrete actions we can take to move from the ease of zero-tolerance policies, toward the complexity of this new perspective. Building on the notion of affirmation elaborated in Chapter four, I will highlight the constitutive function of *affirmative feedback loops* in the creation of the self across time. Affirmative feedback loops will allow me to explain three things simultaneously: why bullies bully, the harm they cause, and why ecological approaches are more effective than zero-tolerance policies. I will then argue that my holistic account corrects several troubling aspects in the literature and reinvigorates the *moral* claim that we *ought* to create climates that prevent bullying. It is my hope that this perspective will help us both understand bullying and become better at dealing with it in its full complexity.

Bullying and affirmative feedback loops

It should be obvious that my concept of affirmation is in line with the ecological approach to bullying. To understand bullying we must be in an embodied relationship with the bully, victim, and any bystanders. Additionally, we must have the political and ethical attunements necessary to be able to *witness* bullying in Haraway's sense of the term. We must choose to see it, and make ourselves able to understand the material and immaterial forces at play, including our own particular relationship to the people involved. If bullying is a pattern of behavior that always manifests in particular interactions, we must become able to see those manifestations in their specific forms. The idea that bullying is natural and inevitable makes us literally unable to see the subtle forms of bullying that are harming children today, whereas a commitment to witnessing bullying will help us intuit its more subtle and insidious forms.

How can affirmation provide a holistic picture of bullying and its preventions? We have seen that our sense of self is fundamentally fluid but tends to be solidified in various material and

immaterial ways through affirmative feedback loops. An aspect of my self is externalized, and in being affirmed by those around me that aspect becomes a recognized part of my self. Developing a coherent sense of self is the result of having that self affirmed back to me over time. Coming out is a particularly dramatic example of this process. I affirm my own identity as a gay man, and I ask those around me to affirm that identity back to me. Additionally, my environment will shift to affirm my identity as I become increasingly comfortable and fluid as a gay man. I create increasingly strong affirmative feedback loops. These loops strengthen my identity and give me a sense of coherence over time.

This brings us back to bullying. I define bullying as an intentional action that destroys the victim's affirmative feedback loops, or prevents them from creating new affirmative feedback loops. This leads to isolation, an inability to be grounded, and a feeling of claustrophobia or helplessness. If a young man is constantly called a worthless fairy, he can never try to have his gay identity affirmed back by his social or material environment. If a young woman is relentlessly teased because of her interest in sports, she can never allow that part of her personality to flourish. If a transgender person is not allowed to wear clothing of their choice, they cannot have their gender identity affirmed back to them. Teasing, joking, and good-natured sassing are different from bullying because these lighthearted interactions are in effect forms of affirmation. Sassing a friend requires being intimate enough with that person to know how to get a rise out of them, without going far enough to hurt their feelings or damage the relationship. It demonstrates, and affirms, the intimacy between these two people. Bullying is the intentional decision to cut or prevent another's ability to create affirmative feedback loops with that person's community, environment, or internal sense of self. It's no wonder that victims of bullying have such a difficult time reporting their abuse. Their self-worth, the loops that connect them to others and would give them the strength to reach out for help, are being actively damaged. Oftentimes victims fear retaliation or being further ostracized if they report the bully. In cases of extreme bullying the victim may feel so helpless they do not even realize they are being harmed, thinking that they *deserve* the abuse. Barbara Coloroso captures this very well when she says:

If a kid succumbs to the attack—gives the bully what is demanded by showing distress, fear, or apathy; or fails to respond assertively (or aggressively)—he changes both emotionally and physically. He becomes someone he was not before the attack; and all future attacks will be against this ever-weakening target. The guilt, shame, and sense of failure felt by a target unable to cope with the brutalization contribute to the destruction of his sense of wellbeing. As he becomes more isolated from his peers, has trouble concentrating on schoolwork, and develops survival strategies instead of social skills, his life changes radically. (Coloroso 2003, 46)

Affirmation is at work here in two senses. First, the bully is destroying the victim's positive or healthy affirmative feedback loops. This happens in two senses: the affirmations the victim receives from his surroundings, and his self-affirmations or self-image. In the first instance, the bully cuts off the victim's social circle, teases the victim about nascent or sensitive aspects of their identity, and makes them feel isolated. In the second sense, the bully may damage the victim's self affirmations by actively affirming negative or harmful things about the victim. The bully may relentlessly point out an "unusual" physical trait, disability, etc. in such a way that identifying with this trait becomes a kind of vicious affirmative feedback loop. The victim becomes unable to see themselves as other-than this reviled trait. In the literature, this

phenomenon is called toxic shame.⁷³ This is not the shame that encourages appropriate behavior, but rather a shame that imprisons the victim in an increasingly negative and *limited* self-image. It is experienced as the all-pervasive sense of being flawed and unworthy in the eyes of others. The only thing being affirmed to the child is their worthlessness, and the child now lacks other affirmative feedback loops that could serve as checks or balances against this hurtful message. The bullied person loses the perspective from which to gain distance from the bullying, and increasingly believe that what is being said about them is true.

There is a scene in the 2011 film *Bully* that poignantly captures this point. Alex is a young man living in Souix City, Iowa. As the filmmakers follow Alex, they witness him being constantly and mercilessly tormented on the bus ride to school. He is routinely insulted, harassed, slapped, punched, and stabbed with pencils. Alex's affect is very flat, he has a hard time connecting with others and he has become totally isolated from his peers. At times, he seems to think that he deserves this treatment, or that it is normal. One of the few moments you see Alex light up with joy and act like a carefree kid is when he sits down with his parents to watch family videos. His mother plays a video of Alex as a baby, and as she describes her memory of the scene, we witness Alex finally relax. The change in his demeanor, the restorative effect of this familial affirmation of his unique value and their connection, is palpable and extraordinarily touching.

Bullying is violence across time. This is because for bullying to be effective as such, these loops must be weakened and destroyed as the child grows and moves through time. The isolation experienced by the victim is the isolation of seeing their peers move coherently into the future creating new relationships, interests, and self-conceptions that are carried forward by being affirmed. The victim, on the other hand, is increasingly frozen in the moment when the bullying began. Bullying denies the victim the ability to have their sense of self evolve through time, the very process I argued is essential to any identity in chapter three. Their horizon looks limited at best, hopeless at worst. Some theorists have argued that a single attack can be considered bullying, and this makes sense when we understand that a single attack can have lingering effects that continue to destroy affirmative feedback loops or make it difficult to develop new loops.⁷⁴ The victim may be so shattered they become frozen or static, unable to move forward past the trauma. We can see that bullying may be repeated or a single event, but to be bullying it must have a temporal effect on the victim's ability to create affirmative feedback loops that bring their sense of self coherently into the future.⁷⁵

73 The term toxic shame was originally coined by John Bradshaw, but discussed with regard to victimization and violence by Garabino 1999.

74 This claim that a single event can be considered bullying is controversial, but I think my account provides the best support for such a claim. Take, for example, the explanation that "one physical attack or threat to an individual who is powerless might make a person frightened, restricted or upset over a considerable length of time, both because of the emotional trauma following such an attack but also due to the fear of renewed attacks" (Arora qtd. in Rigby 2002, 32). This seems to fit nicely with my discussion of affirmative feedback loops.

75 I think the distinction between bullying and trauma is the intention of the bully. Someone can traumatize me, but to bully me they must want to damage my participation in affirmative feedback loops. In this sense something like rape can be considered bullying if the rapist wants to destroy the victim, as is often the case when rape is used as a weapon of war.

This perspective can also help us understand the causes of and solutions to bullying. While there can be no one single explanation for bullying, I think it is often the case that bullying is a way of establishing the bully's own affirmative feedback loops. Each time the victim cowers or shrinks at the bully's attack, the bully sees their identity as a more powerful individual affirmed back to them, and often affirmed by the bystanders witnessing the bullying. The more control they have over the victim's well being, the more this identity is affirmed back to them. Why bullies choose this mechanism for creating affirmative feedback loops will depend on each individual bully. Some may have been victims themselves, and turn to bullying to reestablish the loops that were damaged by harms in their past. Others may not have positive and affirmative reinforcement coming from parents or teachers, so they seek it in their own aggressive actions and power relations. I think the need for affirmation can provide a framework for understanding what motivates these disparate behaviors, and help us understand the fact that bullies can be strong-willed, aggressive, but also themselves hurting, insecure, or anxious. The meaningful question to ask is why the bully has turned to this kind of hurtful self-affirmation, instead of being able to reach out and develop healthier affirmative feedback loops.

This perspective also gives us insight into why ecological approaches are the best method for reducing bullying. A zero-tolerance policy is based on the view that our personalities are immutable, and that to prevent bullying we need to expand the list of protected identities and increase punitive measures. This approach does not understand that the bully and victim are both engaging in behavior that qualitatively alters their sense of self. This view assumes that bullying is motivated by the bully's animus toward the victim (or certain qualities of the victim), instead of looking at the variety of factors that make bullying a tempting way to behave. Likewise, increasing punitive measures alone does nothing to address the reasons that the bully may be engaging in this behavior. Finally, simply expanding protected categories to include all victims renders these categories meaningless and does not provide the victim sufficient room to grow with their identity. As I will argue below, protecting young people's identities, especially LGBTQ people, requires fostering the ability to explore new identities, not assigning a label to someone and only protecting them inasmuch as they fit into that category. For example, a masculine cisgendered heterosexual woman does not fit the category of LGBTQ, nor is she a traditionally feminine woman. Such a person needs to have her right to self-determination and exploration protected, not her participation in a distinct identity. Ecological approaches are sensitive to the myriad affirmative feedback loops that need to be repaired, developed, and maintained in order to give the bully other options for affirmation, and provide the victim with the support they need to flourish.

Correcting the literature

Having established that a model of affirmative feedback provides the most holistic account of bullying available, I now want to demonstrate how this account allows us to correct four troubling aspects of the literature on bullying.

First, we can critically confront the risk of inadvertently using biology, neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology to naturalize bullying. Some researchers have begun to study the relationship between testosterone levels and peer victimization in an effort to understand both the effects of hormones on behavior, and the impact of bullying on the victim's own hormone levels (Hazler et al. 2006, Vaillancourt et al. 2009). While these researchers recognize the complexity of how hormones influence behavior, there is a real danger, especially when we move from

research to the popular press, that we will equate the presence of testosterone with *inevitable* aggressive behavior. Many feminist scholars have pointed out that the research into sex hormones (indeed even calling these omnipresent, multifunctional hormones “sex hormones”) has been guided by sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic biases, and that we must not conflate biochemistry with behavior (Fausto-Sterling 2000, Fine 2010, Jordan-Young 2010). If we put too much simplistic faith in these studies, we risk reinforcing the adage “boys will be boys” and remove any responsibility for the role of human-created affirmative feedback loops in the genesis of bullying behavior. To be clear, I am not saying that researchers are yet making these claims. I am warning that in the translation from research findings to popular understanding, this work could be used to naturalize and thereby excuse bullying behavior, especially among adolescent boys.

Using evolutionary psychology to explain bullying presents similarly troubling problems. This view posits that we are naturally predisposed to use violence to establish and maintain hierarchical organization (Kolbert and Crothers 2008). While space does not allow a full analysis of the problematic assumptions that guide this research, we risk naturalizing once again what are in fact historically contingent social forces. This literature is often quite sexist, casting male competition in terms of obtaining scarce resources and a fertile mate, and female competition as “relating to key issues of reproductive fitness, including management of sexual reputation and competition over access to resource-rich adolescent boys” (Kolbert and Crothers 2008, 82). This relies on a narrative of human social evolution that has been questioned by feminists (Haraway 1990; 1997 Ryan and Jetha 2011). These feminists argue that evolutionary psychologists often smuggle misogynistic bias and attitudes into research. Methodological questions aside, it seems clear that if we want to explain why teenage girls are anxious to control their sexual reputation, the answer lies in an account of what its like to live in a misogynistic culture where rape is almost never prosecuted, rather than in speculative evolutionary psychology. Indeed, such naturalizing discourses runs the very real risk of further normalizing behaviors that can be understood and corrected through social criticism and political intervention.

I am not claiming that these scientific investigations are not useful. I am saying that we must be vigilant in questioning the presuppositions that guide both the methodology being employed and the communication and interpretation of scientific findings. Without this critical view it is much too easy to dismiss violent behavior as inevitable and therefore outside of the realm of moral consideration or accountability. One article on summarizing research into using biological measures (often hormone levels) to understand bullying behavior ends by saying:

The addition of hormone responses to the evaluation of intervention and prevention efforts would add substantial scientific confidence to the primarily self-report and observational methods that now form the bases for support of current techniques and programs. This increased confidence, based on the addition of biological findings, should increase the involvement of current skeptics who still see bullying as something less than an important interpersonal issue. (Hazler et al. 2006, 304)

While I sympathize with the desire to convince skeptics, we do not necessarily need the veneer of science to be convincing, especially when that science risks reinforcing pernicious social biases. If we simply appeal to science for explanations and prescriptions, we will not develop the interpersonal and intuitive sensitivity that is necessary to identify and prevent bullying. Science can be a powerful tool, but it can also make us lazy and render us inactive in combating bullying.

Second, my model gives us critical tools to keep moving beyond the idea that people are born as LGBTQ. This may sound like a surprising goal. The claim that we are “born that way” certainly resonates with many LGBTQ people struggling to come to terms with their identity, and it is also essential in the political struggle to obtain civil rights for the LGBTQ community. I do not want to deny the personal and political power of this view, but ultimately the notion that something as dynamic and complicated as sexual orientation or gender identity is present from birth is overly simplistic and naturalizes what many consider stereotypical, narrow, and otherwise limiting notions of what it means to be LGBTQ. Many people within the LGBTQ community find the very idea of labels (and, by extension, the view that they are born with a sexual or gender identity) to be limiting. Psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams has recently argued that LGBTQ-identified teenagers are relying less and less on labels, instead seeing their sexual and gender identity as fluid and context-dependent (2005). This is certainly in line with my discussion of identity as tendency, and I think this is a better way to understand the process of coming to terms with a non-normative sexual or gender identity.⁷⁶ The response to anti-LGBTQ violence is not to force tolerance for a group of people who cannot control who they are. The response is to recognize that we are all in a process of growth, that all of our identities are relational, and that we all deserve the space to become our most fluid and comfortable selves. LGBTQ youth need protection, but they also need to be seen as resources for understanding the mutability of identity. Being at odds with the most fundamental assumptions about how we “should” be, LGBTQ, queer, trans, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people are forced to understand this fluidity at an earlier age, and in a more direct way, than their cisgendered heterosexual counterparts. They are also forced to seek affirmation outside of the mainstream, making them more vulnerable to bullying but also tremendous resources for understanding the process of creating affirmative feedback loops, even in environments hostile to their identities. Rather than seeing one’s identity as an immutable fact that either needs protection or correction, we should look to the vibrant communities formed by LGBTQ people as examples of how to support people as they come into new, more comfortable and genuine ways of being. We should see how these communities make sense of the fluidity of identity, striking a balance between recognizing and creating identity categories, and allowing people to develop new descriptions for themselves and their experience. We need to celebrate, not malign, the ever increasing categories and acronyms such as LGBTQAI-etc. Administrators are already understanding that LGBTQ students need to be included in anti-bullying discussions:

Across the country, there has been a growing shift in perspective: school officials no longer see our students and our educators as problems that have to be dealt with but instead regard them as valuable resources who can play important leadership roles at local school sites... such an approach can be particularly beneficial in areas that are often the most challenging, such as curriculum reform, school sports, and issues relating to transgender youth. (Biegel 2010, 202)

LGBTQ people provide a uniquely insightful standpoint for understanding the importance of affirmation loops in the dynamics between fluidity and sedimentation. As I argued in Chapter

⁷⁶ Also, because we are talking primarily about middle-school and high-school aged people, it is important to develop a perspective that appreciates the fluidity inherent in all identities at that age.

Three, these perspectives demonstrate what is queer about all identity, and can provide resources for helping other marginalized populations feel themselves affirmed by their environments.

Third, the discourse of being “born that way” or “hard-wired” can make us blind to the role of social forces in the formation of identity and bullying.⁷⁷ One difficulty with the ecological approach is that we know we ought to understand the effect of culture on bullying, but it is all too easy to think of culture as an amorphous, undefined, bubble floating around our particular interactions (see figure 5.1). Likewise we understand that certain biochemical factors and deep psychological dispositions influence bullying, but we don’t know how to take these factors into account. If we focus on affirmative feedback loops, we realize that “culture” is not some external force or abstract context. *Culture is actualized in our behaviors*. Culture takes effect in our actions, beliefs, judgments, and intuitions. Empathy training requires one to understand the tangible effects of culture in people’s interpersonal interactions.⁷⁸ Focusing on the ability to intuit and respond to affirmative feedback loops will help us all become attuned to the way that culture is infusing and being created within particular relationships. This view also helps us to avoid the intellectual laziness inherent in claiming that we are “hard-wired” for certain behaviors. Once we recognize the complexity of these affirmative feedback loops, and their constitutive role in forming and maintaining our identity, we are morally obligated to become attuned to this process in its full complexity. We cannot reduce behavior to something exclusively cultural, biological, hormonal, or natural—we must see how all of these things combine in the circuits that link all of us together.

Finally, this definition of bullying can help us understand how bullying is different from trauma and systematic oppression. As discussed above, a traumatic event can certainly have the same effects as bullying—damaging the victims affirmative feedback loops by making it difficult to move past the trauma. I think the salient difference between bullying and trauma is the specific intention to destroy another’s affirmative feedback loops. Bullying is marked by the desire on the part of one person to cause this particular kind of harm to another. Trauma can be accidental or intentional. Similarly, the distinction between bullying and systematic oppression has to do with intention and scope. Bullying functions on the level of the particular, with specific people harming and being harmed. Certainly systemic racism, misogyny, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and classicism contribute to bullying; but the harm caused by bullying is different from that caused by these systemic problems. All of these things cause damage to the victim’s ability to flourish and to be affirmed, though in different ways. Keeping this distinction clear is important if we are to avoid treating bullying in a vacuum, unable to see the ways that victims

77 One handbook for parents cautions, “respect your child’s nature. Your child came ‘pre-wired’ and her ‘bags were half-packed.’ This means she was born with a certain temperament and characteristics... Respect and appreciate your child’s nature. Don’t make her feel that she must transform her nature to be like one of her siblings or you” (Beane 2008, 51). While it is true that certain aspects of our disposition have biological causes, the complexity with which our bodies and environments interact to actually influence behavior are much more complex than the metaphor of “hard-wiring” would have you believe.

78 My emphasis on the epistemological importance of affirmation as a way to intuit bullying has support in the literature on bullying. For example: “A significant number of teachers only recognize physical bullying behavior, and require empathy training before recognizing more subtle, hidden forms of intimidation” (Doll et al. 2012, 168)

are also harmed by systematic forces. For instance, administrators may be concerned with bullying but pay increasingly little attention to gun violence in predominately African American neighborhoods. We must see these forces as they function in tandem and individually.

Bullying and Care

In sum, if we concentrate our energies on seeing and cultivating these affirmative feedback loops, we can become better listeners, advocates, and allies. There is no easy, quick, or simple solution. Bullying cannot be stopped by dangling a carrot or threatening punishment. It can only be approached through the same complex tangle of relationships, context, culture, and emotions that form our identities in the first place.

As I argued in chapter four, creating, tending to, and repairing affirmative feedback loops is one of the primary ways we care for one another. Protecting youth against bullying is not coddling, it is ensuring that they have access to the forms of affirmation that we all depend on to develop into mature and stable individuals. It is only once we reorient our thinking to understand that affirmation is foundational to wellbeing that we can begin to see bullying in its particularity and complexity, while also devising effective remedies.

Conclusion

It should be obvious by now that affirmation is fundamental to how one develops a healthy, stable, coherent sense of self. Affirmative feedback loops both keep us feeling anchored, and also provide the mechanism by which we gradually change, creating new identities through the institution of new affirmative feedback loops. Affirmation connects us to other people, other animals, objects, and environments. It is the process through which we gain stability in our identities, and also allow those identities to grow and change as we move through time.

Affirming another is much more than simply being nice or encouraging. The necessity for affirmation arises from our nature as temporal beings and the deep structures of how we exist in, and make sense of, our shared world. Precisely because we are beings that exist across time, who never truly stop growing and changing, we must create the structures that will preserve aspects of our self and relationships we wish to maintain, while working to change affirmations that are not conducive to flourishing. Affirmation is a form of emotional and psychological care for another human being, and inasmuch as we have an ethical obligation to care for one another and maintain relationships of care, so too we are ethically obligated to affirm one another and tend to the affirmative feedback loops around us. Legalistic ethics cannot provide a set of rules for determining what to affirm and how, but as I have argued, if we intentionally develop the capacity to intuit the affirmative feedback loops at work in another's experience we can care for that person. We have a moral obligation to foster and develop affirmations that enhance fluid mobility, whatever that means for each individual.

By focusing on affirmation we learn how to become sensitive to the experiences of others, and we can devise concrete, pragmatic, and effective ways to help people develop the affirmative feedback loops that will allow them to move toward fluid mobility. We must recognize that all people deserve the ability to feel affirmed as their best selves, and that this ability, the opportunity to see oneself affirmed, is not distributed equitably. We must give minority groups the tools to create their own spaces, to tell their own stories, and to become visible.

Protecting minority groups through increased punitive measures and threats, for example zero-tolerance policies, anti-discrimination legislation and hate-crimes legislation has two negative effects. First, these policies are often ineffective, both in terms of protecting vulnerable minorities and reforming offenders. Second, they implicitly assume that identity is something fixed, stable, and the same across time. They rest on the view that a bad individual attacks a minority member only because of their minoritizing trait. This overly simplistic view is blind to the myriad forces that go into each and every one of our encounters. These policies treat us as homo economicus, nearly robotic creatures making simple cost-benefit analyses before performing any action.

Focusing on affirmative feedback loops is preferable for several reasons. First, it attends to the reasons why someone may harbor animus directed toward a minority group. By looking at how bias or hate functions as a form of auto-affirmation, we are able to see the causes for this damaging behavior and intervene in such a way that the perpetrator or bully can move beyond this behavior. Second, affirmation helps us understand why minority groups are more vulnerable in the first place; namely, they do not have the tools or resources to create strong affirmative feedback loops. Third, my view provides the philosophical foundation for the kinds of responses to violence and bullying that are really effective. We must make spaces affirming of minority

identities and deal with violence or bullying in a way that gets to the root causes of this behavior rather than simply separating and punishing.

Finally, I hope this dissertation has demonstrated the importance of affirmation in the formation of all identities and as the backbone of care work. The luxury of not recognizing the importance of affirmation is the result of living a life where your environment has easily and consistently affirmed your identity. Any person in a minority group or anyone who has struggled with a dramatic life change has an either explicit or implicit knowledge of the crucial importance of developing and sustaining affirmative feedback loops, often in the face of a society that is hostile to the creation of those loops. It's really hard to know how to be a good person. The simple message of this dissertation is this: *being a good person involves the ability to intuit, form, and repair affirmative feedback loops that enhance fluid mobility*. This is not the final word on ethics, nor is it the only way to be a good person. My point is that if we take affirmation as a guiding thread in our personal interactions and as we construct policy, create artwork, and live our lives, we will be caring for one another in one of the most important ways we can.

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