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Political Poverty as the Loss of Experiential Freedom

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to design a conception of political poverty that can address the loss of the experience of political freedom. This form of political poverty is described as separate from poverty of resources and opportunities, and poverty of capabilities required for participation. The study aims to make intelligible how a person or a group can suffer from a diminishing and fracturing of social experience, which can lead to the inability to experience oneself as a capable and credible political agent, political engagement as a meaningful field of action, and democratic politics as a meaningful avenue for changing things for the better. This is a phenomenon which has been heretofore neglected by political theorists.

The study presents a heuristic diagnosis of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom that involves four aspects of experience that have specifically political relevance: loss of trust, loss of expressivity, loss of a sense of access to the public world, and the loss of future temporality in experience. Diminishing and fracturing of these aspects of social experience can lead to politically impoverished persons and groups to become complicit in their own marginalisation by remaining unmotivated to challenge it. These aspects of social experience are approached through phenomenological portraits, chosen from literature on social exclusion and poverty. The diagnosis remains open to further development through exploration of other aspects of experience.

The study draws on the thinking of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt to present an account of political freedom as only experienced in co-existence with others. Through a critical discussion of their work, a more comprehensive account of political agency is developed. The experience of having political

agency involves not just the cognitive and communicative capacities of the subject, but also the entire perceptual and motor intentionality of their lived body. The experience of meaningfulness is approached by exploring the intersubjective constitution of the self in a dialectical process with their social environment. This experience is described as a form of faith in oneself as an agent and in the meaningfulness of political engagement. Such faith is a practical, meaning-giving intentional relationship of a lived body to their social environment.

This study emphasizes the experience of being a capable and credible political agent, and experiencing politics as a meaningful field for engagement, as important aspects of political freedom that should be considered alongside inclusivity of democratic processes, the equality of opportunity to participate, and the equality of the cognitive and communicative capabilities required for effective participation. In order to discuss political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom, we must go beyond objectivist models of social critique and approach the problem with the tools of existential phenomenology.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 General Claims and the Research Question	1
1.2 A Short Outline of the Dissertation	7
1.3 Main Sources Used in This Work	10
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	17
2.1 Emancipatory Critical Theory and Disclosure of Suffering	17
2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique.....	25
2.3 Experience and Objectivity	32
2.4 Sedimentation and Freedom	46
2.5 Freedom and the Public Realm.....	58
3. POLITICAL POVERTY AS INEQUALITY OF EFFECTIVE FREEDOM.....	77
3.1 Exclusion or Poverty?	79
3.2 The ‘Sofa Problem’	86
3.3 Equality of Effective Social Freedom	89
3.4 What Is Missed by the Capability Approach?.....	96
4. HOW FREEDOM BECOMES MEANINGFUL	103
4.1 Experiential Freedom as Meaningful Engagement	103
4.2 Faith as a Sense of Practical Meaningfulness.....	109
4.3 The Building of the Intentional Arc	116
4.4 The Intercorporeal Context of Freedom	121
4.5 Towards an Experientalist Account of Political Poverty	132

5. LOSS OF EXPERIENTIAL FREEDOM	136
5.1 Four Aspects of Experiential Freedom.....	136
5.2 Complicity and Sociological Concerns	144
5.3 Loss of Trust	151
5.4 Loss of Expressivity	159
5.5 Loss of Access to the Public World.....	167
5.6 Loss of Future Temporality	179
6. CONCLUSION	189
6.1 Epilogue	189
6.2 Concluding Remarks	200
REFERENCES.....	207

1. Introduction

1.1 General Claims and the Research Question

In this dissertation I develop a heuristic diagnosis of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom. My aim is to make intelligible how a person or a group can suffer from a fracturing and diminishing of social experience, which can lead to the inability to experience political engagement as a meaningful field of action, and democratic politics as a meaningful avenue for changing things for the better. This is a phenomenon that has been heretofore neglected by political theorists. In order to do this, I develop a more comprehensive view on political agency. I emphasise experiencing motivation and the experience of meaningfulness as important aspects of political freedom that should be considered alongside inclusivity of democratic processes, the equality of opportunity to participate, and the equality of the cognitive and communicative capabilities required for effective participation. I develop a critique of prior accounts of political agency, which are unable to include within themselves such phenomena as the experienced inability to express oneself in public, loss of trust in society, loss of faith in oneself as a political agent, and the loss of faith in the ability of democratic processes to bring about meaningful change for the better, among others. I show that in order to discuss political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom, we must go beyond objectivist models of social critique and approach the problem with the tools of phenomenology.

I develop a set of thinking tools for putting into words heretofore neglected social experiences which often result in the withdrawal and silence of those suffering them, erasing them from public view. I draw from the tradition of existential phenomenology to describe how the experience of having political

1. Introduction

agency involves not just the cognitive and communicative capacities of a subject, but also the entire perceptual and motor intentionality of their lived body. I describe how the experience of meaningfulness is intimately connected to the intersubjective constitution of the self in a dialectical process with their social environment. The experience of political freedom is a practical, meaningful relationship between lived bodies and their social environment, or the social field. Loss of experiential freedom can be understood as the shutting down of this dialectic between the body-subject and the field.

I frame my own conception of political poverty in contrast to a prior conception by James Bohman (1997). Bohman argues that politically marginalised groups can suffer from a specifically political form of poverty, which he terms 'inequality of effective freedom', or unequal access to the capabilities required for effective participation in public deliberative democratic processes. This is a form of poverty that is separate from poverty as inequality of resources, or poverty as inequality of opportunities for democratic participation. Bohman's account of inequality of effective freedom describes well how political marginalisation has both material and cultural aspects that must be attended to. However, it does not discuss a vital aspect of the phenomenon, the subjective experience of lacking the motivation to become politically engaged. When such particular experiences are properly attended to, another kind of picture emerges. I show how the loss of motivation can be interpreted as an intersubjective phenomenon, one which cannot be approached as inequality of resources, opportunities or capabilities. I approach such loss of motivation as the diminishing and fracturing of social experience, which leads to the inability to experience oneself as an authorised and capable political agent and being able to experience the world as a field for possible political engagement.

I discuss this motivational component of political agency as a matter of *faith* in oneself as an agent and in democratic politics as something that can change things for the better. I describe such faith as a practical relationship to the world and others which allows the world to appear as a meaningful field in which one can engage with. Such faith forms an affective, intentional component of

1.1 General Claims and the Research Question

experience, an aspect of its *intentional arc*. My heuristic diagnosis identifies four specifically political aspects of experience. These are the trust in other citizens and public institutions; the sense of embodied expressivity which allows one to project oneself in public engagement and action; the sense of access to the public realm, and finally, the sense of future temporality in experience, which could also be called *hope*. My diagnosis remains open to other possible aspects of experience which could be treated separately from these four.

I approach political poverty as the diminishing and fracturing of social experience in these aspects. These aspects are best approached through a negative diagnosis, by investigating their absence in experience. When one suffers from loss of experiential freedom, political engagement does not appear as a meaningful possibility and the practical aspect of social experience becomes diminished. This can be described as losing faith in both oneself as a capable and credible political agent, and faith in the capacity of political engagement to change things for the better. I discuss how meaningfulness in experience is the product of sedimentation of experiences into habits of acting and perception. Our lived, habitual bodies are a historical product of constant dialectical interaction with their social environment, a social field already teeming with significance and meaning not initiated by ourselves. However, this field can also become closed to interaction. The closing down of the dialectic of experience can become incorporated as a lived sense of restriction and failure, a closing down of the field of possibility in experience.

This dissertation is both an attempt to give a diagnosis of political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom as a phenomenon, and an attempt to provide thinking tools to critically approach such political poverty. I believe that I have identified an important phenomenon which, if I am correct, is a real threat to contemporary democracies. If citizens lose their faith in the capacity of public institutions to deliver favourable political outcomes and in their own ability to politically influence these institutions to bring about meaningful change, democracy begins to lose its meaning in the eyes of citizens, and with it, its ability to function. The language of faith and belief underlines the way that such

1. Introduction

loss of experiential freedom should not be approached as a question of having or lacking the freedom to choose to become politically engaged. Instead, such faith forms an aspect of our practical, embodied relationship to others and the world, a part of the pre-personal, pre-reflective intentionality of experience which allows the public world is experienced as an open field for action, something which solicits us to project ourselves towards it and act upon it. This is the source of the experience of motivation, making political engagement a meaningful possibility present in one's own experience. The fracturing of this social aspect of the pre-reflective intentionality of experience can leave a person with the sense that they are not authorised to become public actors, that they do not belong on the same public stage with other political actors. This means losing the experiential basis of political freedom as something we encounter in political engagement with equals.

Loss of faith in this sense is not limited to persons and groups who live lives marked by economic and cultural impoverishment. However, something of the loss of experiential freedom can be revealed by attending to testimonies from persons living in precarious circumstances. Loss of faith in the ability of political action to change things for the better is a phenomenon rarely explicitly put to words, and instead is usually lived through as frustration, apathy, shame, and the resulting political demoralisation. It can also show up as a cynical, if understandable, detachment from public affairs brought about by repeated disappointment in the capability of institutions and politics to change things for the better.

In order to discuss political poverty in this experiential sense, I develop a more comprehensive account of political agency. I present an account of political freedom as rooted not in the cognitive capacities of a subject, nor in their free will, nor their capability to communicate, but in having faith. I defend an embodied conception of growing into, developing, and becoming aware of freedom and one's own political agency in interaction and coexistence with others. Much of social and democratic theory revolves around the relatively abstract questions of hegemony, democratic legitimacy and the inclusiveness

and epistemic quality of deliberative institutions and processes. Focusing solely on the procedural and formal qualities of democratic debate and communication brings the danger of blinding us to the fact that political agency, or freedom as the experience of political subjectivity, is always rooted in the everyday experience of living in a society. The increased connectivity that new technologies afford to some well-positioned groups in society mirrors the increasing political isolation felt by many among the economically and otherwise marginalised. Political theorists have not adequately explored effect that negative social experiences can have on experiencing oneself as a credible and authorised political agent and perceiving the public realm as a welcoming and receptive field for political engagement. This effect is especially pronounced among those living in economically precarious conditions.

I engage with theories of deliberative democracy, as it forms a part of the philosophical context in which James Bohman and other critical democratic theorists presents their own ideas. However, while I discuss themes that are often associated with the field of political theory called ‘radical democracy’, I do not engage with the tradition of radical democratic thought as exemplified by the works of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and William Connolly. While the agonist and post-foundationalist theories of radical democracy which often focus on the logic of hegemony are important tools for broader political analysis, this dissertation focuses on phenomena of a different order. My interest lies almost exclusively in the intersubjective nature of political subjectivity and its roots in a practical sense of meaningfulness which involves the entire pre-reflective intentionality of the lived body. I want to describe how faith in oneself as a political agent, in others as possible partners in that engagement, and in the capacity of political engagement to change things for the better, is instituted in a primordial coexistence with others with whom we share a social world. Democracy, as I understand it, is the political form of organising this coexistence on the normative basis of plurality and equality, the political expression of *isonomia*, of being an equal among political equals. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom can also be understood

1. Introduction

as losing faith, the diminishing and fracturing of this experience of meaningfulness in social experience.

Critical political theorists have rightly been suspicious of subjective experience, and have often argued that it should play little, if no part in political theorising. Focus on individual experiences of suffering has been seen to lead to a politics of 'suffer-mongering' as the repeating of individual trauma, a poisonous politics of resentment, or a politics with an overt focus on experiences of suffering and grief, instead of a positive politics of coming together to overcome domination and oppression (Brown 1993; Honig 2013). These have been seen to lead to the rise of what is commonly called identity politics, both in its feminist and generally liberal and leftist, as well as ethno-centric and identitarian forms. However, foregoing particular social experience has often led to democratic theorists taking up models of social criticism which are focused on rationalist, objective measures of social justice and freedom. I believe that such approach neglects an important aspect of political poverty. I want to bring to light the way political poverty is lived through in social experience. I turn towards the tradition of phenomenology, which gives me tools to examine the pre-reflective embodied relationship between self, others, and the world, as intersubjective coexistence. We coexist with others in the world as embodied beings. I follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty in examining how our lived bodies are the site of sedimentation of meanings initiated outside us. The incorporation of shared meanings through sedimentation and their reactivation in experience provides us with the invisible affective background against which the objective world of the visible then emerges in perception.

I describe political poverty as loss of experiential freedom: losing faith in oneself as a capable political agent and in the capability of politics to change things for the better. This means that the public realm of politics is experienced as presenting little to no possibilities for meaningful political engagement. Persons and groups suffering from political poverty can experience themselves as the kind of people who are not political, and the public realm of politics as a place they do not belong to. Prior accounts of political poverty are unable to account

for this subjective, affective aspect of social and political marginalisation and exclusion. I show how we can understand such attitudes as the closing down of the horizon of experience in its public aspect. This leads to the inability to perceive oneself as a credible political actor and the public world as a field for possible action. When faith in oneself as a political agent who is able to engage with a shared public realm is lost, the experiential condition of democratic engagement, of being an equal among equals, disappears. Exploring the social constitution of experienced faith in oneself and the world makes it possible to approach the problem of political poverty from the point of view of what I will below describe as an experientialist model of social critique.

By adopting ideas from both the phenomenological tradition and different currents of contemporary political theory, I gather the tools to examine political poverty as it reveals itself in experience. The phenomenological approach reveals the individual political agent as an ambiguous intertwining of inner and outer, a *mélange* of self, others, and the world, always in a pre-reflective embodied relationship to the world outside them. This pre-reflective embodied relationship to others and the world is the enabling condition of all political agency. Political poverty means the fading away and fracturing of this connection to our shared world.

1.2 A Short Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters. After this introductory chapter I present my theoretical background. I begin from the tradition of critical theory, as my own approach is motivated by the emancipatory ethos of critical theory as it was formulated by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and especially Herbert Marcuse, as well as their followers. As my starting point is James Bohman's conception of political poverty, it is also necessary to acknowledge the way his work combines the theoretical traditions of pragmatism, critical theory, and different contemporary strands of political philosophy. I then discuss the methodological opposition between objectivist and experientialist models of social critique as it has been presented by Christophe Dejours et al.

1. Introduction

(2018). I show how deliberative theories of democracy and Bohman's work can be said to follow the objectivist model in many important respects, whereas my own diagnosis follows the latter model. This leads me to coin the term 'experiential freedom' to describe my own, more comprehensive account of political agency. Articulating political poverty in terms of the loss of experiential freedom leads me to draw theoretical tools from the tradition of existentialist phenomenology. I discuss the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his investigations of experience and perception as both activity and passivity, as a dialectical communication with others and the world. My need for a phenomenological conception of political freedom also leads me to engage with the political theory of Hannah Arendt. I use Sophie Loidolt's (2018) recent phenomenological reading of Arendt to show how Arendt's theory of the public sphere can be read as largely consonant with Merleau-Ponty's dialectical account of human experience and agency. It is also from Arendt that I draw the idea of human capacity of faith as the intersubjective root of political agency. These concepts will play a large part in my later diagnosis.

In Chapter 3 I discuss James Bohman's conception of political poverty as the violation of the principle of equality of effective freedom. I begin by first presenting the 'sofa problem', or the problematic outcome which results from describing the withdrawal of one's political participation solely as a result of personal choice. I then discuss problems in the theoretical tendency to discuss political marginalisation in terms of exclusion and inclusion. I then present Bohman's conception of political poverty as inequality of efficient freedom as a welcome alternative. Bohman's conception draws theoretical resources from theories of deliberative democracy and Amartya Sen's capability approach to justice to present an alternative to accounts of political participation which focus on equality of resources as equality of opportunity. Bohman seeks indicators which would allow us to recognise when some social groups have been excluded from full effective democratic participation, understood as participation in public deliberation. I then discuss how the capability approach

is, however, limited in respect to describing the experiential aspect of the phenomenon of political poverty.

In Chapter 4 I present an experiential account of political freedom. I follow Arendt and Merleau-Ponty in approaching political freedom as something which can only be experienced in practical engagement with an already existing social situation. I describe how practical meaningfulness of experience comes about and the motivation such experience provides. Arendt (2018, 239) argues that the human capacity to act freely is not rooted in the human capacity of will, but in the human capacity of faith. I give a reading of Arendt's account which emphasises the intersubjective nature of this faith and the role it plays in the experience of political freedom. Effective political agency becomes possible when a person both has faith in themselves as a credible political actor and in the capacity of democratic politics to change things for the better. With faith, the shared social world is experienced as a field of public action which presents possibilities for pursuing meaningful political change. I relate this conception of faith to Merleau-Ponty's conception of freedom as only possible in relation to an already existing social situation. Merleau-Ponty (1968) himself describes our perceptual relationship to the world in terms of perceptual faith (*la foi perceptive*). Our certainty of the existence of the outer world is the result of a dialectical relationship between the body-subject and the world which makes the world appear as meaningful to us on a primordial, pre-reflective level of operative intentionality, with both perceptual and motor aspects. I describe this relation in Merleau-Ponty's terms as the *intentional arc* of experience which is a product of sedimentation of meanings and significances into the lived body. Faith, then, is intimately related to the intercorporeal context of freedom.

In political poverty social experience becomes diminished and fractured, and one may lose faith in oneself as a political agent and in the world as a field for possible meaningful political engagement. In Chapter 5 I attempt to capture the intelligibility of this fracturing and diminishing of the intentional arc in experience. My heuristic diagnosis identifies at least four aspects of such loss of experiential freedom which highlight different aspects of the phenomenon: loss

1. Introduction

of trust, loss of expressivity, loss of access to the public world, and the loss of future temporality in experience. While these are all intertwined aspects of experience, I find it meaningful to separate them and discuss them in turn to show how they relate to each other. Drawing inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu's description of symbolic violence, I discuss such diminishing of experience as a form of complicity, a way those with least political power end up reproducing and upholding their own political domination. As the rest of society begins to appear as distant and indifferent to one's own political concerns, one also loses the ability to experience oneself as a credible political agent, and the resulting inability to experience political engagement as a meaningful possibility.

The concluding chapter contains an Epilogue and some concluding remarks. I present the story of a participation workshop by the Finnish sociologist Eeva Luhtakallio and journalist Maria Mustranta as an example of combating political poverty by engaging with those suffering it on their own terms. Their example provides a needed antidote against pessimism about the prospects of democracy in a world of deepening inequalities. I then finish this dissertation with some concluding remarks.

1.3 Main Sources Used in This Work

My main reference point on political poverty is the account of political poverty given by James Bohman in his 1997 article 'Deliberative Democracy and Effective Social Freedom: Capabilities, Resources, and Opportunities' by James Bohman. The term 'political poverty' appears to have been coined by Bohman in this valuable account of the inequality of effective freedom, or inequality of the capabilities required for effective democratic participation in public deliberation. Bohman draws in his wider work from many philosophical currents, chief among them the philosophical traditions of pragmatism and the work of Jürgen Habermas. These are reflected in his conception of political poverty, which also relies on theories of deliberative democracy and Amartya Sen's capability approach to justice (e.g. Sen 2009). I situate Bohman's conception in this wider context to show how it shares some important features

1.3 Main Sources Used in This Work

of what an objectivist model of critique. While there has been surprisingly limited theoretical engagement with Bohman's conception, I discuss literature on the capability approach to political poverty and political freedom, as exemplified by Srinivasan (2007), Jean-Michel Bonvin and Francesco Laruffa (2018) and Bonvin, Laruffa, and Emilie Rosenstein (2018).

I make use of what I refer to as the experientialist model of critique, a theoretical approach which begins not from formulation of universal philosophical principles of justice, but from particular experience. I draw from *The Return of Work in Critical Theory. Self, Society, Politics* (2018) by Christophe Dejours, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Emmanuel Renault, and Nicholas H. Smith, who present an opposition between objectivist and experientialist models of social critique. I make use of the experientialist model depicted by Dejours et al. which emphasises the examination of particular experiences and their immanent normative content, such as expectations about just deserts, just treatment, just social arrangement etc. which objectivist approaches often leave unexamined. However, since their model is formulated to investigate the normative content of particular experiences of the contemporary world of work, their model is not completely suited for my purposes. This means that I turn to existential phenomenology for the tools to investigate how political engagement comes to be experienced as meaningful.

I make use of the tradition of phenomenology as a philosophical account of the way lived experience becomes sedimented into our lived bodies as dispositions to experience the world as meaningful in certain ways, and to feel and act in certain ways instead of others. I mainly use the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and use other phenomenological literature as needed, drawing insights from the works of thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Dan Zahavi, Daniel Ratcliffe and Anthony Steinbock. I knowingly forego engagement with the work of Edmund Husserl, as I do not think it necessary, or even possible to engage in an analysis of his work within the narrow confines of this dissertation.

In this dissertation I mostly make use of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012) in its new translation by Donald A. Landers. I also draw much

1. Introduction

from the essay collection *Signs* (1964b) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), especially its last section ‘The Intertwining—The Chiasm’, in which Merleau-Ponty sketches out a materialist philosophy of the world as composed of a single element he calls *flesh*, in which agentic capacities of individual body-subjects emerge from ambiguous dialectical constellations. I also comment on certain passages in the preface to *Humanism and Terror* (Merleau-Ponty 1969) and the essay collection *Sense and Non-Sense* (1964a). I also make much use of Monika Langer’s accomplished commentary (1989) on the *Phenomenology of Perception*, which both summarises the arguments of the book in a more approachable form and clarifies many central passages of the work.

Merleau-Ponty’s work develops on Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology while also showing a deep concern for the material preconditions of the existence of the living body, a result of his relationship to political Marxism, with which he engaged with in different ways throughout his life. Merleau-Ponty’s work presents an original existentialist phenomenology, which understands experience as a dialectical relationship with the world in which the body is an active participant, engaging with the world on a pre-reflective level of embodied operative intentionality. Merleau-Ponty affirms the primacy of perception over reason as a starting point for philosophical reflection, as reason itself is rooted in the dialectical interaction of the lived body with its environment. The lived body is not a passive subject of perception but an active participant in the unfolding of experience, creating space and time around itself through pre-reflective perceptual and motor intentionality. Merleau-Ponty also presents a conception of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality which gives our freedom an irreducibly ambiguous quality: freedom is only possible as a conditioned freedom, as experienced against a situation. In many senses we are anonymous to ourselves, as our experience is always based on the way our body has been conditioned by prior interaction with a social world not constituted by us. Freedom is possible because of the presence of a shared social field in experience, a field which we encounter as already meaningful and shared by others. Most importantly for this dissertation, it is the presence of this field in

experience that makes experiencing freedom *as meaningful* possible; according to Merleau-Ponty (2012, 467), freedom must always ‘gear into’ a present social situation in order to not remain an abstraction. This social situation is the reality in which we act; we must always begin from a position of perceptual faith in the shared reality of our world. The experience of freedom flows from meaningful engagement with it.

Diana Coole’s reading of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology emphasises the political implications of his work and situates his ideas against the broader context of 20th century political theory. She reads Merleau-Ponty with and against post-structuralist and post-humanist thinkers like Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Luce Irigaray, among others. In Coole’s monograph *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (2007b) and in many of her articles (Coole 2001; 2005; 2007a) Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology provides the basis for a new humanist political philosophy, which refuses both the methodological individualism of liberal political theory, and the post-structuralist anti-humanism of thinkers like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Coole shows how Merleau-Ponty can be read as a political thinker whose work contains tools for interrogating current political thinking, evoking ‘a politics after liberal and Marxist humanism but also after poststructuralism and anti-humanism’ (Coole 2007b, 17). Coole uses Merleau-Ponty to explicate an ontology of the political field in which political agency is seen not to rest on individual subjects, social structures, or discursive constellations. According to Coole, agentic capacities emerge on a multitude of levels and nodes in the intercorporeal field which is the materiality of our existence.

Hannah Arendt’s political theory affirms the primacy of freedom as always rooted in, and only encountered in our coexistence with a plurality of others in a shared political realm. Alongside *Human Condition* (1998), I discuss Arendt’s essay ‘Freedom and Politics: A Lecture’ (Arendt 2018, 220–244), originally published in 1961. In the lecture Arendt states that human freedom as the capacity to act is not rooted in the human capacity of will, but in the human

1. Introduction

capacity of faith. Freedom, according to Arendt, is something we can only experience in intercourse with others, and which forces us to have faith in others in order to act in the first place. Arendt's political theory thus denies the link between sovereignty and freedom already established by the ancient Stoics, a view which grounds my own view of political freedom as something which is experienced in a practical meaningful engagement with the social world. Arendt's account of the public world as a shared space of appearance, and her strong disagreement with the traditional account of freedom as freedom of individual will intrigues me and has motivated much of this dissertation. In various points of this dissertation I discuss the similarities between her political theory and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought and draw on both to give an account of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom.

I draw examples of experiences of political poverty from sociological and ethnographical literature. There are some main works I cite frequently.

I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's work, especially the *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), to describe the way our experience of meaning in our lives flows from social engagement. Bourdieu's conception of 'human time' as something we unknowingly project around ourselves when we are successfully engaged in social tasks is especially important to me. *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) for examples of how language can become an instrument of power and an obstacle to political engagement. While I do not share Bourdieu's methodological outlook and find his theory of the *habitus* as leading to a political pessimism, my own approach has been influenced by his critical sociology.

I also have made use of Lois McNay's works, especially *The Misguided Search for the Political* (2014). In that work McNay criticises numerous theories of radical democracy for their 'social weightlessness', or the way such theories focus too much on abstract, ontological concerns instead of providing a disclosing critique of experiences of social suffering. McNay calls for a theory of politics which could discuss the way experiences of suffering can negatively impact the capability of politically dominated and marginalised persons to challenge their

domination, a phenomenon that is often not recognised by political theorists. This dissertation is, in part, an attempt towards filling that theoretical gap.

The Finnish book *Demokratia suomalaisessa lähiössä* (2017) ('Democracy in a Finnish underprivileged neighbourhood') by the sociologist Eeva Luhtakallio and journalist Maria Mustranta provides me with a hands-on account of encountering political poverty among culturally and economically marginalised residents of an underprivileged neighbourhood. They Luhtakallio and Mustranta describe how the democratic political system and public institutions are often, unwittingly or not, complicit in upholding the political marginalisation of the residents. Their work has provided me with many insights which I have tried to work through into theoretical form in this dissertation. Their book is also an inspiring story of a group of activists trying to do something about the problem through the medium of community theatre. Their descriptions of the frustration and loss of faith endured by the residents they encountered inspire many of my own reflections.

I also draw on Simon J. Charlesworth's study *A Phenomenology of Working-Class Experience* (2000), a blend of phenomenology, critical sociology, bitter political polemic, and proletarian ethnography. He provides many important phenomenological descriptions of the experiences of economic and cultural dispossession faced by the working-class residents of the South Yorkshire town of Rotherham during the 1990s. These experiences provide valuable material for my diagnosis.

I sometimes use the term 'precariousness' to describe a new class formation in contemporary Western societies, which is defined by an insecure position in the labour market and poverty of other social and cultural resources. These together contribute to social and political invisibility of certain groups in the public sphere. While the term was publicised by Guy Standing (2011), the main work I refer to here is *Social Class in 21st Century* by Mike Savage et al. (2015). The Great British Class Survey conducted by Savage's research group describes a new social class constellation in which the new middle classes lead increasingly separate

1. Introduction

lives from a wealthy elite which occupies the highest strata of society, and the precariat, a class of people defined by their cultural and economic dispossession.

While political poverty is not something that is caused by occupying a certain position in the class hierarchy, experiences of economic and social hardship contribute to it. While my diagnosis is a philosophical one, I refer to the above literature as necessary to provide real-life examples and context for my own diagnosis.

2. Theoretical Background

This dissertation is an attempt to identify and bring to discourse previously inarticulate experiences of political poverty. My aim is to provide a preliminary set of thinking tools, a heuristic diagnosis, which would allow other social actors to identify such experiences, think about them in their context, and to begin to bring them to discourse. This is the first step on the road to remedy them. This means describing the effects of the injustices of poverty and political marginalisation on individuals and democracy itself. Our economic and political systems are often complicit in upholding and reproducing these injustices. There is a philosophical tradition which has, since the end of the first World War, attempted to criticise the philosophical underpinnings of modern economics and social sciences, the aim being not just a better scientific understanding of social injustices, but also the political emancipation of those suffering from them. The tradition of critical theory, then, is the methodological starting point from which begin my critical diagnosis of political poverty.

2.1 Emancipatory Critical Theory and Disclosure of Suffering

Working as the leader of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, Max Horkheimer defined in 1937 critical theory in opposition to traditional theory, which was exemplified by the positivist social sciences of his day, as well as the immense effect of the philosophical legacy of Immanuel Kant in philosophical and scientific thought. According to Horkheimer, critical theory draws from Marxism in its opposition to traditional social theory which starts either from methodological individualism or a positivist image of a society. The subject of

2. Theoretical Background

critical theory is 'rather a definite individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature' (Horkheimer 2002b, 211).

According to Horkheimer, instead of focusing on the subject as a thinking Cartesian *ego* and attempting to explain its relationship to an objective social reality which functions according to its own laws, the subject of critical theory is always engaged in 'the construction of the social present' (Horkheimer 2002b, 211). The role of critical theory is to identify the ways the current social arrangements are oppressive towards a large majority of mankind. Critical theory reveals the potential for 'reasonable organization of society that will meet the needs of the whole community', already 'immanent in human work but [...] not correctly grasped by individuals or by the common mind' (Horkheimer 2002b, 213). In a later essay, Horkheimer sets the goal of critical theory as nothing less than the emancipation of the whole of mankind.

To that extent the critical theory is the heir not only of German idealism but of philosophy as such. It is not just a research hypothesis which shows its value in the ongoing business of men; it is an essential element in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men. [...] Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery. (Horkheimer 2002a, 245-6)

In his 'Philosophy and Critical Theory', also written in 1937, Herbert Marcuse describes the task of critical theory in similar terms. Critical theory sets itself against 'bourgeois philosophy' in dedicating itself to the struggle of taking seriously the emancipatory promise of philosophical truth. Instead of remaining content with achieving inner freedom while letting the outer world lie as it may, critical theory attempts to take philosophy's revolutionary promise seriously:

For here, unlike in philosophical systems, human freedom is no phantom or arbitrary inwardness that leaves everything in the external world as it was. Rather, freedom here means a real potentiality, a social relationship on whose realization human

2.1 Emancipatory Critical Theory and Disclosure of Suffering

destiny depends. At the given stage of development, the constructive character of a critical theory emerges anew. (Marcuse 2009, 105)

Critical theory sets as its goal the realisation of ‘freedom and happiness in the social relations of men’, without which even greatest economic development remains unjust (Marcuse 2009, 107). Critical theory remains open to constructing utopias to realise the possibility of emancipation immanent in every social situation, a possibility that Marcuse sees as closed to both the bourgeois philosophers and the positivistic social sciences. Freedom and happiness of individuals more than just words, they give direction to the political process that has as its aim the replacement of the current systems of oppression with a new social reality of emancipation:

They are constructive concepts, which comprehend not only the given reality but, simultaneously, its abolition and the new reality that is to follow. In the theoretical reconstruction of the social process, the critique of current conditions and the analysis of their tendencies necessarily include future-oriented components.
(Marcuse 2009, 107)

The role of critical theory is both disclose social injustice, to reveal the ideological, economic, and social structures that allow its reproduction, and to finally show their roots in the structure of bourgeois modernity. At the same time critical theory is also the normative project of constructing a utopian horizon of inclusive, egalitarian democracy which would allow for true freedom and happiness for the great masses of mankind (cf. Benhabib 1985). Such a horizon could serve as the motivational basis for a political project working towards the rational organisation of society along egalitarian lines.

More recently, Iris Marion Young has defined critical theory as ‘a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualised’ and which ‘rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society’ (Young 2011, 5). Critical theory, in her view, is a specific form of normative reflection on a particular social context in a particular time and thus ‘cannot avoid social and political description and explanation’ (Young 2011,

2. Theoretical Background

5). And as the philosopher is socially situated herself, her normative reflection begins from the experience of the lived reality of an oppressive society: 'Normative reflection arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself.' (Young 2011, 5) As Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse already stated, situated normative critique takes the form of identifying sources of oppression, but also possibilities for a better organisation of society. As Iris Marion Young writes, critical theory 'reflects on existing social relations and processes to identify what we experience as valuable in them, but as present only intermittently, partially or potentially' (Young 2000, 10). These normative possibilities might be 'unrealized but felt in a particular given social reality' (Young 2011, 6). It is the role of the philosopher to articulate them in a form which can serve as a conceptual starting point for further reflection, research, and political action. This dissertation is explicitly an attempt at such immanent criticism.

The work of Jürgen Habermas, a student of both Horkheimer and Adorno, and himself a former Director of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, has formed the basis for a large strand of contemporary critical theory and has been instrumental in the development of theories of deliberative democracy. Habermas' work shifts away from the cultural and political scepticism of his mentors. Instead, Habermas engages with American pragmatism, and is especially interested in the role the public sphere has played in Western modernity. His theory of democracy focuses on the normative potential of public communicative processes and how they can work towards furthering democracy. (see e.g. Habermas 1990; 1992; 1996a) Habermas' main contribution to critical theory has been his discourse theory of ethics, which has been instrumental for the development of post-Cold War democratic theory, especially in the form of deliberative democracy.

In the next chapter I will discuss James Bohman's conception of political poverty. The measure of political poverty given by James Bohman and from which I begin my own reflection begins from a critique of contemporary resourcist accounts of justice and political equality, such as that of John Rawls'

2.1 Emancipatory Critical Theory and Disclosure of Suffering

(1993; 1999). Bohman instead turns towards Amartya Sen's capability approach to justice, combining it with a Habermasian critical theory of deliberative democracy. He uses these tools to give an account of political poverty as inequality of effective freedom i.e. the cognitive and communicative capabilities required for effective participation in public deliberation.

While I do not engage much with theories of deliberative democracy in this dissertation, it is important to understand its prominent role on the field of contemporary political theory, as well as in Bohman's line of argumentation. Deliberative democracy traces its philosophical foundations to theories of participatory democracy (see e.g. Barber 1984; for a short historical overview, see Pateman 2012), to the Rawlsian moment on contemporary political philosophy, and the critical theory and communicative ethics of Jürgen Habermas. The main idea of deliberative democracy is summed by Joshua Cohen:

[Deliberative democracy] is about making collective decisions and exercising power in ways that trace to the reasoning of the equals who are subject to the decisions: not only to their preferences, interests, and choices, but to their reasoning. Essentially, the point of deliberative democracy is to subject the exercise of collective power to reason's discipline, to what Habermas famously described as "the force of the better argument," not the advantage of the better situated. (Cohen 2007, 220)

Deliberative democracy, then, is an attempt to develop more inclusive and legitimate political procedures. In inclusive and egalitarian political deliberation, it is possible, at least in principle, for the strongest argument to prevail over the influence wielded by economically or otherwise strongest parties in society. Deliberative democracy values the ability of communication to shift the preferences of those participating in it, allowing for increased understanding among the participants, as well as for the emergence of a form of public reason, inherent to the public deliberative processes of a vibrant civil society. The scope of such public spheres can vary from the small and local to

2. Theoretical Background

the transnational and even planet-wide, making it possible to at least hope for the emergence of democratic governance over ever larger social units (see e.g. Dryzek 2000).

The work of John Rawls is familiar to those working in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy, and it is against Rawls' theory of justice that Amartya Sen's capability approach contrasts itself. (see e.g. Sen 2009; on capability approach and deliberative democracy, see Bonvin and Laruffa 2018) The capability approach to justice challenges the insistence of many political philosophers on justice as the fair distribution of resources. Instead, the capability approach investigates the idea of social freedom as actually existing possibilities for achieving effective social functioning. Bohman's (1997) use of the capability approach to criticise the ethical foundations of the theory of deliberative democracy, however, also limits itself within the confines of the deliberative ideal of political participation. While Bohman's conception of political poverty is critical of the resourcism and proceduralism of deliberative democracy is warranted, it remains in the philosophical framework established by Rawls, Sen, and Habermas. The capability approach to political poverty sets a normative minimum standard for equal social functioning and calls for a sufficient provision of the capabilities required to achieve that standard. However, this functioning unfolds inside a concrete social situation that impresses itself upon political agents in ways that are not grasped by an objective measure of public functioning. This effect of concrete social situations on public functioning can only be examined by attending to how it is experienced by those living in them.

The problem with both the capability approach and theories of deliberative democracy is their inability to attend to the first-person lived experience of economically and otherwise marginalised groups. While I fully agree on the urgent need for critical diagnosis on problems of our democracy, it seems that the tools of theories of justice, critical theory and deliberative democratic theory are not best suited for my task, which is revealing the conditions of experiencing

2.1 Emancipatory Critical Theory and Disclosure of Suffering

political freedom, and the kinds of social situations which result in withdrawing from political engagement.

While I make my own points in contrast to the tradition of Habermasian critical theory and theories of deliberative democracy as broadly conceived, I want to acknowledge that which is important in the deliberative ideal. Deliberative democracy offers a vision of politics as a plurality of persons coming together to discuss political matters among equals, while remaining conscious of the way different kinds of social and economic power relationships can distort these discussions while often remaining unnoticed even by the participants themselves. The deliberative approach has remained viable due to its ability to productively work out philosophical and practical problems within different contexts from the systemic and transnational (e.g. Dryzek 2000; 2010; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012) to the particular and face-to face (e.g. Bonvin and Laruffa 2018; Clifford 2012; Young 2000).

Critical democratic theory is especially useful for me when thinking through the problem of exclusion from inclusive democratic participation. Above I defined democracy as the political project of organising our shared coexistence according to the principles of freedom and equality. Working within the critical theory tradition, Iris Marion Young sets the aim of democratic theorising to be an articulation the ideal of an inclusive democracy which can identify what we appear to hold valuable in our experiences with actually existing democracies, ‘experiences such as reasonable yet passionate persuasion, accountable representation, participatory civic activity linked to authoritative state action, or transnational institutions for discussing and addressing global problems’ (Young 2000, 10). The role of critical theory is to construct ‘accounts of these democratic ideals that render articulate and more systematic those feelings of dissatisfaction and lack which we normally experience in actual democratic politics.’ (Young 2000, 10) To render democratic processes more sensitive to such experiences and more able to articulate them, she puts forward a conception of *communicative democracy* which she defines as follows:

2. Theoretical Background

The ideal of communicative democracy includes more than deliberative democracy, because it recognizes that when political dialogue aims at solving collective problems, it justly requires a plurality of perspectives, speaking styles, and ways of expressing the particularity of social situation as well as the general applicability of principles. A theory of democratic discussion useful to the contemporary world must explain the possibility of communication across wide differences of culture and social position.

(Young 1996, 132)

Young's thinking on communicative democracy is at the background of my own reflection on how persons might feel unrepresented even when formally included within even well-meaning participatory democratic projects. Her work offers an example of how democracy can be made sensitive to the concerns of the concerns and the lived experience of marginalised groups. Her proposal for a communicative democracy is a framework in which to make democracy welcoming to persons not used to political situations and includes proposals for concrete institutional design which would allow for increased democratic oversight of large democratic processes of modern nations. She shows how through the actions of *greeting*, *rhetoric*, and *storytelling* political spaces can be made more welcoming, while also trusting in the disclosing capacity of action and speech to create understanding and common ground where there ostensibly was none before (Young 2000, 57 ff.). She proposes a third way between the realist understanding of politics as a competition of private interest groups, and a conception of politics focused only on achieving communal unity by focusing on a common good:

This third way consists in a process of public discussion and decision-making which includes and affirms the particular social group positions relevant to issues. It does so in order to draw on the situated knowledge of the people located in different group positions as resources for enlarging the understanding of everyone and moving them beyond their parochial interests. (Young 2000, 109)

2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique

I share with her the conviction that achieving this enlarged understanding should be a goal of democracy as a way of living and doing together, something that is lived through in experience outside the short intervals of casting one's vote in elections. Problems of democracy can only be mended through practicing more democracy. In this dissertation investigate further this lived and experienced aspect of political engagement.

2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique

However, I distance myself from critical theory and theories of deliberative democracy, and instead draw from other philosophical sources, chief among them the tradition of existential phenomenology. While my starting point is a philosophical discussion on political poverty by James Bohman that unfolds within the context of emancipatory critical theory, my own contribution takes a different approach. I begin by following the broad outline of an experientalist model of critique as formulated by Christophe Dejours, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Emmanuel Renault and Nicholas H. Smith in their *The Return of Work in Critical Theory* (2018, 130 ff.). Their study discusses problems with contemporary work by focusing on the specific character of the activity of working and experiences of injustice suffered within employment in contemporary Western societies. In the course of their study they observe that social critique has trouble addressing the kinds of experiences that they observe as being symptomatic of 'worries about work', worries which are specific to the activity of working and not directly related to abstract and universal norms of justice and autonomy. They conclude that this reveals a broader problem: contemporary ways of doing critical social theory offer few tools for engaging with normative demands present in particular experiences of particular social fields and activities. Instead, critique wishes to remain general and objective by discussing the norms of justice and autonomy which should rule over all particular fields of human activity.

...the whole contemporary discussion about the tasks of a critical theory of society and the foundations of social critique has been

2. Theoretical Background

premised on the presupposition that what is required is a *general* model of social critique. It has largely been assumed that the more general a model of social critique is, the better it is. [...] in contrast to a model of critique that applies generally to all contexts of social criticism, the model we favour is particularized, aimed in this instance at negative experiences of work. (Dejours et al. 2018, 115)

Dejours et al. dub this tendency to focus on formulating abstract and general moral principles, and then applying them to particular cases, the *objectivist* model of social critique. They set the objectivist model against their *experientialist* approach, presenting a defence of particular analysis that engages with real experience and reveals injustices present in that particular field of social activity, in their case contemporary work and employment (Dejours et al. 2018, 132).

The objectivist model of critique exhibits three characteristics: it is *general*, *unitary*, and *rationalist*. By generality Dejours et al. (2018, 132–3) mean that for criticism to be able to determine the legitimacy of a social practice or institution, there must be context-independent norms that can be applied to them. A model is unitary if it can provide a hierarchy between a plurality of valid norms which allows for determining their priority. And finally, rationalism means that ‘social critique has to be grounded in principles that could be considered as *justified by all*, or in other words, that could resist the test of rational discussions in which all those involved can participate’ (Dejours et al. 2018, 133). The paradigmatic case according to Dejours et al. is John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* which exhibits all of these characteristics, but most accounts of contemporary social criticism usually share some of the features of this account (Dejours et al. 2018, 134).

There are good reasons for taking up the objectivist position over an experientialist one. One of these is impartiality. According to the objectivist argument, normative reasoning cannot remain on the level of individual feelings and expectations and should be independent of any single point of view. As Dejours et al. describe the argument,

2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique

a critical theory must therefore have some recourse to some *independent* measure of the validity of normative expectations. Indeed, the construction of such a measure, or procedure of justification, can be seen as the first—and perhaps even the last—task of critical theory. (Dejours et al. 2018, 131)

The objectivist argument is that in societies marked by a plurality of conceptions of the good life, critical theory must take an impartial objective standpoint which aims to stay outside any one subjective conception of good (Dejours et al. 2018, 131). However, this objective standpoint tends to result in taking what Dejours et al. (2018, 136) describe as the ‘sideways on’ perspective on the human world which remains on the level of evaluating the legitimacy of social institutions instead of being able to describe how the activities that take place within them are experienced by those doing them. As Dejours et al. write in context of contemporary work, they give the example of objective theories of justice evaluating labour laws instead of focusing on the activity of working itself:

The principle of freedom to work could also be used to justify the claim that there is a right of open access to social and economic positions. And such a right could be used to ground a critique of all forms of discrimination in regard to employment. But while these criticisms are important, they do not exhaust the terrain, since they remain at the level of employment opportunity and working conditions without getting into the activity of working itself. (Dejours et al. 2018, 136)

Similarly, when political poverty is approached from an objectivist ‘sideways on’ viewpoint, the phenomenon gets conceptualised as a violation of some more general principle of justice, leading to attempts to find a measure of a just minimum amount of resources and capabilities required for political participation. This approach misses the particular character of political engagement as an activity, as well as the lived experience of political freedom as finding political engagement a meaningful possibility, as *feeling* able to participate in shaping public affairs. The objectivist model of critique remains

2. Theoretical Background

largely uninterested in the way social world is experienced by subjects from inside it, and as such, remains at an objectifying distance from the world it is supposed to be commenting on. Even the capability approach to political poverty remains similarly separated from lived experience. While speaking about freedom as possibilities for social functioning, the approach remains at a remove from the lived experience of politically impoverished groups and persons. In this way it cannot present a proper critique of the conditions that lead to informal disenfranchisement, the dispossession some groups of their sense of political freedom.

Noting the ways that the objectivist model falls short of their goal of giving an account of how different aspects of employment are experienced as unjust by those engaged in the activity of working, Dejours et al. (2018, 141–2) present their alternative, an experientialist model of critique. Such a critique must be *particular* to certain type of experience, *pluralist* or able to take the variety of normative stakes inherent to certain type of experience, and *pragmatist*, or oriented by practical demands presented by certain types of situations. Such a model attempts to find norms which are immanent to social experience instead of attempting to transcend that experience to find an objective standpoint for formulation of general, unitary and rationalist account of justice and autonomy.

Tending to particular experiences in particular contexts can reveal injustices that objectivist model of critique might remain inattentive to. Experiences of injustice have *qualitative* dimension that an objectivist definition of justice has problems grasping. Unjust situations are not experienced as such due to critical reflection against a broader normative standard; instead they are experienced as something *unbearable* in the here and now:

...from the objectivist point of view, the distinction between just and unjust is primarily the matter of a discursively formulated critical reflection, whereas in the experience of injustice it is primarily the matter of a spontaneous feeling of injustice that may subsequently elicit reflection about the injustice of the situation. And when such a feeling occurs, something has become unbearable for those who feel

2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique

it. “Unbearability” will typically not be a feature of the inequalities that become the subject matter of *impartial* reflection about justice and injustice. (Dejours et al. 2018, 145)

This unbearability is an important feature of the kind of experiences that characterise political poverty as a loss of experiential freedom. This unbearability is the source of feelings of frustration with society and appears to invite emotional strategies that invite either cynical detachment or taking an attitude of *ressentiment* and the seeking of scapegoats.

While the experientalist approach of Dejours et al. is explicitly formulated to approach how the norms of justice and autonomy are present in negative experiences of work and employment, their approach is also useful as a starting point for my own analysis of political poverty. However, their experientalist model of social critique is not completely suited to my purposes. Dejours et al. are working in the context of contemporary critical theory and the specific activity of work and employment, and their focus is on how even formally just working conditions can violate norms of autonomy and justice, something experienced as an unbearable injustice. Such norms immanent to the activity of working, then, are best revealed by attending to negative experiences of working and how such experiences violate immanent expectations of justice and autonomy as they relate to working. I am interested in a different field of activity, that is, political engagement and action. This means that instead of the norms of justice and autonomy I investigate political freedom as it is experienced. The problem of losing the experience of freedom presents a unique challenge that is better approached with tools given by the tradition of existential phenomenology. In contrast to the approach of Dejours et al., my diagnosis attempts to make intelligible the way our experience of political freedom as political engagement is constituted in pre-reflective embodied experience.

I approach political poverty as something that is suffered in concrete social situations and is best revealed by attending to the frustrations and expectations present in particular experiences. I focus on experience of political poverty and

2. Theoretical Background

work from there onwards, instead of beginning from a general theory of justice as equality in participation (Dejours et al. 2018, 141 ff.). While this runs the danger of focusing too much on singular cases at the cost of generality, the strength of this approach is in its ability to bring new subject matters into the fields of political philosophy and political theory. I aim to describe a phenomenon that has relevance to political theory but remains yet explored. Such experiences are best approached through a phenomenology of embodied being. As Lois McNay writes, 'A phenomenology of embodied being is invaluable because it reveals a substrate of 'ordinary violences' and unthematized suffering that often drops below the radar of mainstream political theory and that, given the concern with oppression, is important for radical democrats to take into account.' (McNay 2014, 216) According to her, the task of emancipatory theory is to reveal obstacles to 'emergence of effective agency amongst disempowered groups' through 'a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world and envisioning viable alternatives' (McNay 2014, 216). This dissertation is an attempt to provide some light on such experienced obstacles as they are lived through in the daily lives of those encountering them.

Philosophy and political theory must be brought to bear on experiences of suffering that too often remain unsaid. Nikolas Kompridis (2008, 301) notes the tendency of suffering to remain unarticulated by those suffering it. Instead, it is often lived through as inarticulate feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and shame. Suffering, then, is not simply a descriptive category of mute experience, or as Lois McNay writes, 'suffering is not a moralistic or existential category denoting the finitude and general vulnerability of the human condition. Rather, it is a political category, where certain generic types of social suffering are understood to be the outcome of asymmetrical relations of power, and, in so far as they are socially caused, are unjustified.' (McNay 2014, 210) Suffering from effects of poverty is, then, of immense political relevance: as McNay writes, 'When they are reproduced in the body, chronic inequalities may be realized as a habitus of disempowerment, as feelings of resignation, despair and vulnerability, which make it difficult for some individuals to act as autonomous

2.2 Objectivist and Experientalist Models of Social Critique

political agents in their own interest.’ (McNay 2014, 207) This tendency of material poverty to reproduce itself in the political realm as tendency to withdraw in those people who would have most to gain from political action is one of the dark ironies of life in conditions of increasing social inequality.

An important reason why I have chosen the words ‘political poverty’ to describe the kind of loss of experienced political agency is that unlike the rather abstract terms ‘alienation’ or ‘exclusion’, poverty is something concrete. Poverty is not an abstract process, but a suffered reality for those having to live with it. Political poverty is often connected to living in a harsh economic and social reality. While it is true that many of us often feel powerless and alienated in front of political systems which are ostensibly democratic, there are different kinds of feeling powerless. What this dissertation aims to diagnose is how experiences of suffering political poverty are often connected to broader social inequalities and how these experiences of suffering become incorporated as dispositions to withdraw instead of engaging, to treat politics with a detached cynicism born of out of disappointments, to become unable to project any sorts of political hopes into the future. McNay writes that

Domination is taken into the body and lived in the naturalized form of deep-seated, often debilitating, dispositions. Economic deprivation is not just brute material lack but may be lived as a lack of second-order agency, as feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness that often leave subordinated individuals unable to control their lives or do anything other than endure their oppression.

(McNay 2014, 184)

Such deep-seated learned disposition to remain passive cannot be revealed except through an examination of particular experiences which may reveal broader social patterns of domination and political poverty.

It is due to this that I move towards the other large 20th century Continental tradition of critical philosophy, the tradition of phenomenology. What is at question in political poverty the quality of the relationships between self, others, and the world, that is to say, intersubjectivity as the very the pre-subjective

2. Theoretical Background

embodied relationship we have to others and the world. This relationship can only be understood by moving beyond the third-person objective perspective to social criticism by attending to particular first-person experiences of experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. This methodological concern with the social nature of individual experience of the world *as public* also leads me to investigate the coming-to-being of the political realm as an experienced reality, a *world* unto its own.

2.3 Experience and Objectivity

What, then do I mean by experience? As I've tried to outline my argument of moving forward from an objectivist model of critique, and towards a mode of critique which turns its focus on experience, the very term has slowly become more than just the conscious act of living through an experience as a moment of sensation or perception by a conscious perceiver. Instead, the word 'experience' begins to point towards an embodied style of being, the process in which our lived bodies intertwine with their social environments and other lived bodies within a shared social field. This lived relationship with the world points towards experience as the ongoing process in which our lived bodies engage with the world to answer solicitations that the world around them presents to them.

I approach the theme of experience as another version of the dilemma of objectivity and subjectivity. Phenomenology approaches experience as a matter of intentionality: experience is always *about* something. The key to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception is what Martina Reuter (1999) calls 'pre-reflective intentionality'. In the introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty takes up Edmund Husserl's concept of intentionality. He notes that Husserl distinguishes between two kinds of intentionality, act intentionality 'which is the intentionality of our judgments and our voluntary decisions' and operative intentionality, 'the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, or evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than

it does in objective knowledge' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxxii). Merleau-Ponty is primarily interested in this latter, operative form of intentionality. He develops a philosophy of perception which attends to the movement between activity and passivity that is always present in human experience. As Martina Reuter writes,

Merleau-Ponty takes Husserl's notion of operative intentionality as his starting point and shows how this pre-reflective intentionality is embodied as a posture vis-à-vis the world. He continues the strain in Husserl's thinking that attempts to study consciousness outside a strictly intellectualist framework, shifting the emphasis away from the intentionality of beliefs and judgments towards the intentionality of perception and emotions. (Reuter 1999, 84)

This embodied form of intentionality is a pre-cognitive, embodied relationship to the world which is prior to our conscious reflection of it and grounds our conscious intentional acts. Understanding intentional acts in this way helps us understand the role the body plays in the process in which objects arise from the background or horizon of perception as we pay attention to them, and then fade away back into it as our attention shifts away from them.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses how our bodies relate to the world through operative intentionality, an embodied relationship to a world which precedes our cognition and reflection of it (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxxi–lxxxii). Operative intentionality is always a product of sedimentation of meanings and actions initiated by other human beings around us. We are born into a world which precedes us, and we become habituated to the world in bodily interaction with it. Our perception of the world is always conditioned by our place in it and our experiences of it. It makes little sense to approach perception either as pure sense data or a product of intellectual constitution, instead, our perceptual relation to the world is one of coexistence. As Merleau-Ponty has shown, this makes evident the insensibility of the sceptical argument against the capabilities of our senses to provide true evidence of the world: we have no option but to take the reality of the world as a matter of perceptual faith.

2. Theoretical Background

Perception is always rooted in a prior pre-reflective co-existence with the world, towards which we are directed; it is this directedness that allows objects and phenomena appear to perception (Reuter 1999, 75). Directedness is always tied to the body, both as it is lived as the centre point of our experience, as well as the physical object which is our residence in the world. As incarnate beings we find ourselves always already inserted into the world and oriented both within it and towards it. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the body is a being of 'two leaves', 'from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them', both a subject and an object which 'unites these two properties within itself' in a chiasmatic intertwining with the world (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 137). These processes happen on a pre-personal embodied level which is not that of our conscious reflection and judgment, but that of the anonymous habitual body and its perceptual and motor intentionality. (Langer 1989, 84)

The motor intentionality (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 113) of the body is always present in experience and gives perception itself an active quality, it's sense of interacting with the world as it presents to us as meaningful. Perception is not a passive process in which sensation presents itself for cognition to pass judgment on. Instead, the dynamic movement of the body is a part of perception, another aspect of it. As Merleau-Ponty writes, when I see a friend and wave my hand at him, 'There is not first a perception followed by a movement, the perception and the movement form a system that is modified as a whole.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 113). Perception is not passive observation, but as a process of moving towards the world, communing and co-existing with it.

We do not encounter a ready-made world outside us which we then interact with. Instead, our bodies make space into being by projecting our bodies into the world. An example used by Monika Langer is learning to drive a car. As we engage in learning to operate the pedals and knobs of the automobile, we soon become able to operate them without thinking: the car has become an expressive space and acquired a 'motor significance' which is not a case of rote memorisation of certain movements but an embodied relationship with the world that brings new 'expressive space' into being (Langer 1989, 47). Our body

has created a new mode of intertwining with our lived social environment, or to put it in more everyday terms, we have acquired a new *habit* which adds to our personal style of being in the world.

As a thing of the world which interacts with that world, our lived body is active in the production of space and time around itself as if by habit. As Monika Langer writes:

The former [habitual body] signifies the body as it has been lived in the past, in virtue of which it has acquired certain habitual ways of relating to the world. The 'habitual body' already projects a habitual setting around itself, thereby giving a general structure to the subject's situation. Since it outlines, prior to all reflection, those objects which it 'expects' to encounter at the other pole of its projects, this body must be considered an 'anonymous', or 'prepersonal', global intentionality. (Langer 1989, 32)

Habits are not just motor habits of comportment and doing things, or habits of thought. Sedimentation of past experiences and knowledge gives our comportment and perception a certain personal style: we are unlikely to let go of deeply held habits which we have come to acquire over time. The lived, habitual body does not merely find itself in objective space. On a more primordial level the body projects space around it and folds objective space into itself in a dialectical process in which the body comes to inhabit the world by achieving a synthesis of itself and its surroundings (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 149). Experience itself is a product of this habituation and involves the entire motricity of the body (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 152–3).

In fact, every habit is simultaneously motor and perceptual because it resides, as we have said, between explicit perception and actual movement, in that fundamental function which similarly delimits our field of vision and our field of action. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 153)

The body is an active participant in perception, constantly engaged in interrogating its surroundings, in 'acquiring the world'. Merleau-Ponty describes how the body 'throws itself into a thing and into a world by means of

2. Theoretical Background

its organs and instruments'; perceptual habits are motor habits that emerge from an 'organic relation between the subject and the world'. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 154) Even our vision is never a product of passive reception, but an active instrument which acquires its surroundings by prodding and experimenting with the world.

With the gaze we have available a natural instrument comparable to the blind man's cane. The gaze obtains more or less from things according to the manner in which it interrogates them, in which it glances over them or rests upon them. Learning to see colors is the acquisition of a certain style of vision, a new use of one's body; it is to enrich and to reorganize the body schema.

(Merleau-Ponty 2012, 154-5)

Pre-reflective or 'global' intentionality forms the affective milieu of experience, the background against which the things of the world appear as meaningful objects. It is a pre-cognitive posture towards the world, against which the separation of thought and body appears meaningful, resulting in our 'natural attitude' which holds the separateness of the two as an objective given. Approached as the bodily intentional background of perception, it also reveals how the seemingly separated body and cognition are indistinguishable from each other while remaining directed at the world (Langer 1989, 31). This embodied intentionality is a learned habitual style of encountering the world and being in it, a personal way of expressing oneself in one's embodied interaction with the world, a result of the open dialectic of sedimentation.

Embodied perceptual style gives the world to us as a unity, the natural world before our theoretical investigation of it, in which we exist as embodied, perspectival beings. Merleau-Ponty posits that the habitual body is the counterpart of the natural world as it is encountered in sensation before reflection, 'the given, general, and pre-personal existence in me of my sensory functions' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 345). The intertwining of the body with the world gives the sensory or perceptual field, already experienced as meaningful due to our already inhabiting it as our physical bodies. Merleau-Ponty insists

that our present perceptual field is always more than what is currently sensorially presented to us from our current point of view, as our every sensation is predicated on the world being there as the 'horizon of all horizons', into which our current point of view provides a way of inserting ourselves (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 234).

The pre-personal anonymous agency of our habitual body is the ground of freedom; it lies behind our lived experience and is at the root of pre-reflective intentionality. As our habitual body is always acquired in interaction with the social world we find ourselves born into, it also marks our being as a necessarily intersubjective phenomenon. We find within ourselves an anonymous, more general form of embodied being that is never completely present to our consciousness and that we cannot completely control; at the same time we are unable to completely communicate our singular experience of this generality to the world. Merleau-Ponty states that this makes our being doubly anonymous:

My life must have a sense that I do not constitute, there must be, literally, an intersubjectivity; each of us must be at once anonymous in the sense of an absolute individuality and anonymous in the sense of an absolute generality. Our being in the world is the concrete bearer of this double anonymity. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 474)

When we encounter others and the world, we do it on the terms of our already acquired habits of perception and action. Our lived body projects itself into the world as a historical being, already constituted in a dialectical interaction with others in the world. As we interact with the world, we also encounter our own body in its capabilities and limits. Our own being reveals itself to us in the style or character of our personal experience. It is our double anonymity that allows us to experience ourselves as a social agent which is in contact with others like itself; if our consciousness was a self-sufficient monad, the experience of this relationship could not take place for us in the same way as it does.

Our capacity for action emerges from the lived body's capacity to improvise on already acquired habits of perceptual and motor intentionality. These habits of acting and perceiving allow the materiality of the body become imbued with

2. Theoretical Background

significance, resulting in a distinctly personal way of perceiving and acting. As Diana Coole describes it, this is the way that a lived body acquires ‘existential significance as a particular manner of being-in-the-world’, or how ‘the materiality of the flesh becomes meaningful.’ (Coole 2007a, 425) The primordial meaningfulness of our own materiality, our embodied being, then, is the condition of our personal experience of the world as imbued with significance. The experience of meaningfulness is a result of ‘a fundamental dialectic between body-subject and world’ that allows us to acquire horizons on the most primitive level of experience, leading to the emergence of a world of stable objects and meanings (Langer 1989, 46). As Langer (1989, 47) explains, we acquire new habits, learn new things and become accustomed to our surroundings, we slowly become unaware of the functioning of our body in the world. For example, after learning the piano well enough, we stop thinking about the position of our fingers and can instead lose ourselves in musical expression. Our body is an expressive space that incorporates other expressive spaces like the piano within it. This leads to a fundamental redefinition of knowledge and meaning in terms of the lived body and its dialectic relationship with the world. She writes: ‘Bodily spatiality, inherently dynamic, is the very conditions for the coming into being of a meaningful world. Thus it subtends our entire existence as human beings.’ (Langer 1989, 47)

Our embodied being unfolds into space as much as we project space around us by inhabiting it. By learning new habits and skills we also change the ‘affective milieu’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 156) of our perception by allowing objects to present themselves to us in unfold in new ways as different kinds of things. Our perception is always shot through with this kind of affectivity, and it makes little sense to call this affective content of perception somehow superfluous when compared to seemingly more concrete physical qualities like colour and size. The qualities of our perceived milieu are as much a part of us as we are a part of them by projecting them into being.

This also goes for temporality and the experience of time, a theme to which I will return in Chapter 5 when I investigate the loss of future temporality as one

facet of political poverty. Merleau-Ponty (2012, 447) describes temporality as the originary horizons of past and future which are always a part of the present perceptual field. As he writes, 'Through my perceptual field with its temporal horizons, I am present to my present, to the entire past that has preceded it, and to a future.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 346). It is by taking a position in a situation and opening up towards it that we become conscious of ourselves, a subjectivity (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 450). This, however, is not subjective as an immobile, present self-identity; subjectivity only exists in its movement in time towards outside itself. Time, in a sense, *is* subjectivity in action, in its spontaneity, in its improvisation according to a certain style: because our perceptual experience has its roots both in the future and the past, we can engage in action as something which separates us from present selves. As Merleau-Ponty writes, 'Time tears me away from what I was about to be, but simultaneously gives me the means of grasping myself from a distance and of actualizing myself as myself.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 451) Time, understood not as the objective time of physics but as human time, as the sense of a meaningful engagement which is oriented towards a possible future, must be grasped from this perspective of performative subjectivity.

Instead of conceptualising time as objective, physical time, a measurable line directly extending from the past towards the future, time unfolds within our embodied being in the world, forming 'a milieu to which one can only gain access and that one can only understand by occupying a situation within it, and by grasping it as a whole through the horizons of this situation (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 347). This makes time a political matter. It is the lack of possibilities to occupy a situation in a meaningful manner, as taking a posture towards a future possibility of things being otherwise, which often comes in the way of perceiving the world as a field for political action. Time emerges from the dialectical relationship with the world in which a body-subject occupies a situation by becoming engaged with it. This engagement opens to the world as a field of possibilities and allows the world to present itself in lived experience under the aspect of future temporality, as 'going somewhere'.

2. Theoretical Background

According to Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology, our being-in-the-world takes the form of a pre-reflective, embodied coexistence with the world. This coexistence is the background horizon of our conscious experience and is all the more difficult to investigate due to its horizontal nature: it is this primordial horizon of the world which allows things to emerge in certain ways in our intentional relationships to them. Our sensation the world is already a coexistence in the sense of a perceptual relationship that is a creative expression of our bodies and an intertwining with a world outside us. The critical power of Merleau-Ponty's account lies in his insistence that this means that there simply no value-free objective sensory data from which we could constitute or interpret a value-neutral picture of a world outside ourselves, to which we could then have intentional attitudes of the form 'I want that x' or 'I believe that y'. Instead, our perception is always that of a *Gestalt*, 'a figure against ground', which means that 'the indeterminate and contextual aspects of the perceived world are positive phenomenon that cannot be eliminated from a complete account.' (Toadvine 2019, Section 3) One of those indeterminate and contextual aspects of experience is the way that our lived body forms a repository of our entire life history, the enabling condition of all our sensory experiences.

This is not to say that our experience is inherently completely relative and subjective, a mere function of our personal history and the beliefs and prejudices acquired along the way. This would confirm experience an inherently unreliable starting point for social theory, an argument made by a number of philosophers during the last decades (e.g. Scott 1992; Brown 1993). Instead, objectivity, and even reason itself, must be understood as only found by engaging fully with the intersubjective perceptual field in its affective modalities. When we do this, we find a world populated by others in the same predicament as us. We encounter others as already sharing the same world in common with us; moreover, we encounter others as opaque to us much in the same way as we encounter our own body as both a physical object in the world and as the intersubjectively constituted lived, habitual body with a memory and agentic capacities of its own. Even our various sensory capabilities present to us a plurality of

independent consciousnesses which escape our complete control. Our bodies already are conditioned by the meanings and practices of the social world and make possible our perceiving of others as like us on an intercorporeal level (see Heinämaa 2015). The uncertainty of the borders of our subjectivity and the fact of our sharing of the world on this primordial level leads us to encounter the problem of cohabitation, and the political organisation of the social world a which we already find ourselves directed towards and which our bodies already project themselves into.

A phenomenology of the habitual perceiving body shows how the social relationships of our lives become sedimented into our bodies and are lived through as expressive and perceptual habits. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical approach to sensation is to approach it as a matter of 'bodily inherence' in the world: instead of a subject perceiving an outer world separate from, or outside them, sensation is a case of 'coexistence or as communion' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 221). We are always implicated in the world on an anonymous, pre-cognitive level. This holds for both our lives as biological beings as well as social beings. Our anonymous, pre-cognitive embodied being becomes implicated with other human beings from birth onwards. Cultural meanings become sedimented to our bodies through our living in a human environment. This means that it is impossible to extricate an individual human subject from his social world; we are always implicated in the situation around us. This could be described in philosophical terms as *intersubjectivity as intercorporeality*: our body as an object in the world that is acted upon and as acting matter which constantly projects outside itself both founds our cognitive and reflective self-awareness while remaining ultimately opaque to it.

The idea of sensation as communication or communion, as finding oneself as an incarnate being within a perceptual field already populated by similarly incarnate others, leads Merleau-Ponty to conclude that our relationships with others unfold in a shared world, the social, which itself must be considered 'a field or dimension of existence' we cannot escape from: 'I can certainly turn away from the social world, but I cannot cease to be situated in relation to it.

2. Theoretical Background

Our relation to the social, like our relation to the world, is deeper than every explicit perception and deeper than every judgement.’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 379) This relation also allows us to understand others like us even if we are separated geographically or temporally, as we find the same ‘fundamental structures of history’ within our own lives: ‘The social world is already there when we come to know it or when we judge it. [...] Prior to this coming to awareness, the social exists silently and as a solicitation.’ (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 379) Our being always unfolds in a social field, whether we are reflectively aware of it or not.

Instead of being a product of a completely ignorant black slate connecting sense datum to each other, or the intellectual ruminations of a self-contained consciousness, our experience of the world proceeds in a dialectical fashion. Instead of the traditional dualism of the perceiving enclosed consciousness of the *res cogitans* and the perceived physical reality of *res extensa*, Merleau-Ponty approaches experience as interaction with an intersubjectively shared perceptual field. This also means admitting the fundamental ambiguity of lived experience as a part of any reflection on agency. As corporeal beings which can reflect on themselves, we remain always at a distance to ourselves, unable to come to complete self-understanding. Our lived bodies are repositories of our sedimented lived experience and exhibit an agency of their own while being responsive to others and the world on a pre-reflective intercorporeal level.

We project ourselves towards the world as our bodies, and it is through embodied being that our lived situations appear as meaningful. The habitual body ‘projects a habitual setting around itself, thereby giving a general structure to the subjects situation.’ (Langer 1989, 32) As Langer writes, the habitual body situates us into the physical world and natural space. It is also our only opening to the ‘human space’ ‘which encompasses the world of emotions, dreams, myths and madness, as well as the world of reflection.’ (Langer 1989, 87) The body is an opening towards a human world, allowing us to apprehend significances and expressively improvise on them. We as much project our world around us as we find ourselves within it.

This 'dialogue between the body and the world' is also the process which gives birth to objectivity and reason (Langer 1989, 97). The world as 'the primordial unity of all of our experiences on the horizon of our life and as the unique term of all our projects [...] is the homeland of all rationality.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 454) Our capability to reflect and deliberate is always rooted the expressiveness of our bodies and this primordial perspectival perception of the world as a field in which we are already situated, as are our complementary abilities of thinking and speech. (see e.g. Merleau-Ponty 2012, 183) The same dialogue also makes political freedom appear as a meaningful possibility in experience.

To return to the issue of objectivist critique, I also note that Merleau-Ponty presents his theory of perception as an criticism of scientific objectivism and its philosophical consequences, making it an especially fitting tool for my purposes. Merleau-Ponty presents an opposition between two traditional objectivist philosophical approaches to perception, to which his dialectical model of experience is a solution. Merleau-Ponty contends that most philosophical approaches conceive of perception in broadly Cartesian terms, but in two opposite manners. First approach is the empiricist fable of perception as reception of given sense-datum by our sense organs. The movement of atoms and photons caught by our sense organs as sense datum is then turned into a perception of an outer reality by an associative consciousness working inside our brains. The second, intellectualist approach then gives primacy to consciousness, which makes sense out of the chaotic *noumena* and gives our world order by making *judgments*. The first approach rejects philosophy of consciousness in favour of empiricist psychology, the second approach attempts to subsume reality in its entirety under the judgments of consciousness.

I propose that it is this latter approach which is at work in the kind of objectivist models of social critique described above, and by extension, in the model of deliberative democracy which has its philosophical roots in that model of critique. This is revealed in the importance to theory of deliberative democracy of ideal, universal criteria of equality, inclusivity, and justice that underlie deliberation, and to the proper procedure of normative judgment, be it

2. Theoretical Background

discovering principles of equal distribution of resources necessary for deliberation behind the 'veil of ignorance' proposed by Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* (1999), or the discursive process of public reasoning envisioned by Habermas as constitutive of deliberative democracy, something which Rawls (1993) also sees as integral to his account of political liberalism. However, these models remain uninterested in the way democratic participation is experienced as a meaningful possibility by differently situated subjects in different kinds of social situations and contexts. This is the problem of objectivism as observed by Dejours et al. (2018).

As Monica Langer writes, Merleau-Ponty's approach helps us see the limitations inherent in objective thought:

...we are primordially *of* the natural world and therefore fundamentally *at home* in it; that we similarly enjoy a pre-reflective *bond* with others and the human world; that by our daily lives we *participate* in shaping our world and determining the course of our joint history; that our commitments are never completely unsupported since our freedom is always *interwoven* with that of other people; and that the carnality and fundamental ambiguity of our being-in-the-world are by no means impediments to reflection or to communication with others. (Langer 1989, 151-2)

The phenomenological insistence on the embodied, intercorporeal nature of objectivity and reason itself is the key idea that runs counter to the objectivist model of critique and the discursive model of justification inherent to the deliberative democrat model. Focusing almost solely on the public communicative processes occurring in the public spheres of modern societies leads to a notion of political poverty as a form of exclusion from this communication as deliberation. When the problem is already defined in these quasi-transcendental terms, looking at it from the capability approach perspective leads to the defining of political agency as a form of social functioning. The result is an account of political agency which foregoes the subjective lived experience of those who find themselves excluded from the

2.3 Experience and Objectivity

public sphere. Such an account is unable to account for how political engagement presents a meaningful practical possibility for some, while remaining outside the experience of other groups.

An examination of experiences of freedom is best done through a phenomenological approach that pays attention to how freedom comes into being in experience as a sense of practical meaningfulness. What sets the phenomenological tradition apart from most other 20th century philosophical schools is its willingness to analyse the nature of intersubjective existence and togetherness as its own phenomenon. This is especially important when comparing phenomenological takes on what constitutes a political agent with the restrained methodological individualism of much of contemporary Anglo-American analytical political philosophy. As noted by Szanto and Moran (2015) while analytic philosophers have given much thought to the nature of human collectivity, the phenomenological approach is characterised by the attention paid not to just interactions between individuals, but also to the possibility of a *We*. As they write: ‘...phenomenology has always recognized that humans come to develop their intentional, meaningful, and meaning-constituting lives only in the context of a given socio-historical context, a common background, or a set of shared habits, and embedded in a world in which they participate, and which they possibly aim to individually or collectively transform.’ (Szanto and Moran 2015, 2) This theoretical commitment to a pre-personal intersubjectivity that we are always both constituted by, and participate in, is also the centre of my account of political poverty.

The phenomenological approach I have chosen approaches sensation and perception as a process of embodied communion or communication with the world, revealing to us the limits of individual subjectivity and its inherence in an intersubjective social field. This shifts my theoretical focus from examining the inclusivity conditions of public deliberation and towards the relationship between lived bodies and the social and political fields as they become intertwined in processes of sedimentation and reactivation of meaning. Phenomenology gives me the toolkit to approach lived experience as an open

2. Theoretical Background

dialectical relationship, an embodied communion or co-existence with the world. This dialectic can become diminished and fractured by negative social experiences. Our experience of the social world is always conditioned by the opaque nature of our bodies which become habituated to their environment in ways which are not always apparent to us. This lived relationship means we take up forms of bodily comportment and habit which also to a large degree form the background of our perception, constituting the horizon against which things of the world may appear and present either possibilities for action or their absence. Our experience is always conditioned by our interaction by the natural and social worlds around us.

This conceptual and terminological shift allows me to examine political agency as it presents itself in experience as a certain sense of meaningfulness. Below, in Chapter 5, I aim to make intelligible the loss of experiential freedom as a loss of faith in oneself as a political agent and in the world as a field for political action. In Chapter 4 I describe faith as the presence of a practical relation of meaningfulness in experience. Faith means experiencing the world in a certain way, as a field for possible political action. This means that experiencing freedom can denote a certain style of embodied being which allows for perceiving the world against the affective background of hope, trust, a sense of being able to access a public realm, and feeling, if not confident, at least able to express oneself in public life. Political poverty, then, can be understood as the diminishing or fracturing of this practical relationship to public affairs in experience. While politically impoverished persons may remain perfectly active in the social sphere of their lives, they remain outside situations which are seen as political. This loss of the public aspect of one's lived experience is something that objectivist model of critique cannot capture.

2.4 Sedimentation and Freedom

Sedimentation is the process in which experience becomes incorporated into the habitual lived body as the pre-reflective affective background of our perception and action. Perception is never a question of neutral observation of

an external world. Instead, the perceiving self emerges from a pre-personal primordial bodily relationship to the things of the world. It is important to understand that the lived body itself is a thing in the world, not separate from it, and thus is living matter which both perceives and becomes perceived. The organs of my body form a dynamic assemblage with a sense of its own. Sedimentation, the incorporation of meanings and lived sense into the body as layers of history which our entire experience of the world rests on, provides a way to understand how my sense of self is always an intersubjective experience. I become a self in an open dialectical give-and-take with meanings and projects which are not my own and have not been initiated by me. This includes the actions of those who have lived and died far before I myself was born.

In his study *Rethinking Existentialism* (2018) Jonathan Webber has outlined the importance of the term to French existentialist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Fanon, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who struggled with the problem that human habits presented to existentialist ethics. Early Jean-Paul Sartre famously declared 'existence precedes essence' and ended up defending an almost voluntarist form of ethics which affirms human freedom as the ability to always do otherwise. Radical freedom means being always able to engage in a new project, to cast out old ways of action and belief in favour of new ones. To give in to the force of habit or social pressure and coercion is to let outside conditions influence and coerce one's being. This would be a form of rejection of one's innate freedom which Sartre and de Beauvoir famously called *mauvaise foi*, 'bad faith'. One may not be able to choose one's material and social conditions, or the 'facticity' of one's life as lived in a certain situation, but one can always choose one's authentic attitude towards them and act accordingly. This thinking of human being in terms of authenticity and radical freedom is the form of existentialism popularised after the second World War.

The problem of outside conditions and inner habits influencing and even determining an individual or group's being was not, however, that easily exorcised, and both Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty articulated their reservations against the thesis that to act out of force of habit is to be

2. Theoretical Background

somehow inauthentic. Sartre also quickly acknowledged the problem and dedicated much of his later writing to the problem of sedimentation. As de Beauvoir says, 'one is not born but becomes a woman'. Through criticising Sartre's thinking on radical freedom de Beauvoir introduces the idea that our entire lived embodied being in the world is the product of learning and social conditioning. From our birth, we find ourselves in a social world already populated by others who involve us in their designs and projects, and we are habituated to become certain types of human beings. Our freedom is an *ambiguous* freedom, and we are often predisposed to escape it.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the very idea of human freedom only makes sense when considered against a perceptual field in which we already find ourselves situated in virtue of being bodily beings. In this sense our individual experience of freedom is perspectival: we experience some possibilities that can be asserted by *us*, rather than by some general other. Our experience presents the world to us as a field of possibilities and obstacles. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'freedom must have a *field*, it must have some privileged possibilities or realities that tend to be preserved in being.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 462) In virtue of our own historicity we are already inclined to act towards some goals which show themselves for us as future possibilities which are present in our world. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 462) We can only experience freedom when we are already committed to a project; freedom is neither a case of voluntary deliberation followed by a decision, nor a case of 'the volitional act', which Merleau-Ponty defines as the abortive capability to override our own decisions (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 460). The traditional forms of reflective analysis which investigate freedom as voluntary choice forget the question of *motivation*, the fact that there is already 'some acquisition available to me', that 'there must be an inclination of the mind' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 462). Before we exercise our freedom, we already encounter the world as a meaningful field of projects and possibilities which either solicit us to act upon them or appear to reject our designs to act upon them.

The question of motivation brings us to the question of meaningfulness, or how we come to experience some possibilities in the world as possible, as meaningful projects we can engage in. After Merleau-Ponty, I argue that this sense of meaningfulness is not simply a cognitive affair, of making deliberative judgments and then freely choosing to act according to one's deliberations. Instead, our sense of the world is constituted in the 'exchange between the world and our embodied existence' which 'forms the ground of every deliberate *Sinngebung* [sense-giving act]' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 466). My freedom is always conditional in encountering the world in some light, a result of the 'sedimentation of our life: when an attitude toward the world has been confirmed often enough, it becomes privileged for us.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 466) My perception of the world already contains within it an affective background which remains unnoticed precisely because it is *my* style of seeing and I am used to it by habit. This attitude can be consciously changed. However, this is usually a matter of undoing past habituation to a certain attitude or style of perception, often an onerous and even painful task. Our freedom is conditioned by the weight of our past experiences and even the lives of those who came before us. We receive from them the material out of which we fashion our own freedom, the signification of our own lives:

I am a psychological and historical structure. Along with existence, I received a way of existing, or a style. All of my actions and thoughts are related to this structure, and even a philosopher's thought is merely a way of making explicit his hold upon the world, which is all he is. And yet, I am free, not in spite of or beneath these motivations, but rather by their means. For that meaningful life, that particular signification of nature and history that I am, does not restrict my access to the world; it is rather my means of communication with it.

(Merleau-Ponty 2012, 482)

As Monika Langer (1989, 34) writes, our existence itself is 'imbued with meaning by our being-in-the-world.' It is a product of sedimentation: 'the acquisition of general structures by the habitual body' both makes the production of new cultural and mental life possible while presenting the danger of becoming

2. Theoretical Background

fixated in past experience. 'Thus the dialectic of freedom and dependence is part and parcel of the dialectical movement which characterizes our experience as incarnate beings.' (Langer 1989, 34) Our agency is not a matter enacting our free will, but a process of give-and-take in which we engage when we project ourselves to the world as body-subjects. Our body interrogates its world in a call-and-response which can be described as an endless dialectic: we act, we are responded to, and we come to incorporate the consequences as the ground for our further action. We cannot escape our history, as it is our already acquired history that forms the situation that our freedom acts and improvises upon. The objectivist model of social criticism can forget this historical aspect of our experience and the social field.

Existence always takes up its past, either by accepting it or by refusing it. We are, as Proust said, perched upon a pyramid of the past, and if we fail to see it, that is because we are obsessed with objective thought. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 413)

We cannot enter into a public realm of freedom without carrying embodied baggage which conditions our being in the world in ways which in our natural attitude remain invisible to us; 'we all carry our past with us insofar as its structures have become 'sedimented' in our habitual body.' (Langer 1989, 33) As embodied beings we always exist in a world shared with others: social meanings constitute our being in the world and make our subjectivities a part of an overarching situation which reaches from past towards the future. The world opens to our lived bodies as a field that we are inescapably intertwined with from our birth onwards.

The world is always already present to us and soliciting us to act upon it. Things of the world present themselves to us not just with their objective properties such as colour and size. They appear against an affective background, an intentional arc, which makes objects appear in a certain light, as soliciting us to project ourselves outside ourselves, to act upon them. Things are more to us than more than splashes of textured colour, they are also things to be interacted with it to achieve specific ends, and they solicit us to act upon them. This sense

of 'actionability' or 'motricity' in experience is not somehow external to objects of our perception as objectively real physical objects or *res extensa*, as compared to subjective mental phenomena, for example. Things of the world can only appear against an affective background which is the condition of perceiving them. Our perception is a form of communing and communicating with, and inhabiting a world, which already presents itself as a meaningful field of acting and doing because we have come to know it as such through our sensual communion with it. The results of this communion have become sedimented into the historicity of our being as body-subjects, building the intentional arc of our experience.

However, this communion is not necessarily always experienced as positive or affirming. The way we come to inhabit the social world also always contains the possibility of becoming shunned in the eyes of others, of being perceived as a being of negative value. One's own lived environment may lack in sources of social recognition, what Charles Taylor (1989) calls 'sources of the self', which might be the result of economic inequality or even violent forms of social discrimination. However, what is at hand is not simply the question of justice as the equal recognition of different social identities. Experiences of becoming devalued in eyes others can have a somatic effect, as described by Charlesworth:

The source of the disclosure of sense is the everyday being-in-the-world of the people among whom we live. From amidst this, persons and things resonate with more sense than we normally cognize; they become possessed of an affective hue. We find persons or things becoming or unbecoming, beautiful or ugly, and this affects our responses and relations, creating fields of force, or a dimension to human existence that is felt through affinity, distance or repulsion, whose processes lie deep in the socialised body; a kind of bodily kinetic sensitivity, of unerring logic, that has grave consequences for individuals whose world and being fall towards the negative pole of social valuation. (Charlesworth 2000, 18)

Being perceived as lesser social being, the object of stigmatisation, shunning and ridicule, can incredibly destructive effects on the way one inhabits their world.

2. Theoretical Background

Being at the receiving end of negative social valuations can also become sedimented into the lived body as a part of the affective hue of experience, its intentional arc.

As discussed above, our primordial situatedness within a social field means that the precise borders between others and ourselves will always remain ambiguous. However, only our participation in a social field opens us to the possibility of cultivating this field with others. Moreover, as noted also by Hannah Arendt (1998, 192), engaging with others in the shared realm of appearance is the means by which we discover and form *ourselves*. However, Arendt only partly addresses the embodied and dialectical nature of the way we become selves to ourselves. The social world is not simply a mirror which reflects an image of ourselves back to us. When we take the notion of sedimentation seriously, we come to a more interactive notion this process. We find our style of acting only in interaction with others; and by extension, our own interior sense of selfhood is constituted in a continuous dialectical relationship with other selves. As Diana Coole argues, while we remain as individual body-subjects, neurologically distinct from each other in virtue of our individuation at birth, we participate in a social field in which we can unfold as selves: ‘So it is that not every self *has* interiority and exteriority, but that selfhood is produced where these fold over another, where interiority is itself an intertwining of self and other.’ (Coole 2007b, 245) This dialectic of bodies and their social situation in the world is the experience of freedom, the opening up of a field of possibilities for action:

My *opportunity* for freedom resides in the openness (or closure) of my situation, but my *capacity* for freedom resides in the particular agentic capacities that emerge within my practical life and in my corporeal ability to help form my world. (Coole 2007b, 245)

According to Diana Coole, the properly political significance of considering political agents as embodied beings lies in the two-fold nature of bodies as both objects which exist for others in the outer world, and as the lived interiority of political agents:

The body situates them [political agents] in space and time and thus underlines the particular, passionate and perspectival nature of all claims. It also entails exteriority: having an outside whose intersubjective significance eludes conscious control while locating actors within a field of forces where intentions achieve efficacy through action and acts feed into the unintended consequences of collective life. (Coole 2005, 129)

It is this level of bodily intentionality, the affective context of perception, and the expressivity of the lived body which is always present in communication, even in televisual and virtual contexts. The body grounds agentic capacities 'inasmuch it is expressive, motivated, reflexive, efficacious, creative and communicative [...] there is a dense but lucid corporeal syntax whereby recognition and communication already occur and which provides discourse with an ineliminable sub-text.' (Coole 2007a, 416) We inhabit the world and project ourselves into it in a style of which is our own, but not entirely of our own making. Our own style of expression, speech, and comportment are already shot through with relationships of social recognition and power; both are productive of our embodied style insofar as we inhabit a social field.

In this sense citizenship itself should be considered as a product of intersubjectivity, as has been argued by Nick Crossley (1996, 150 ff.). According to him, citizenship must appear to citizens themselves not only as a formal, legal property conferred to them, but also as a *meaningful* role which provides motivation to participate in the democratic system:

In order to perform their role, citizens must have a shared sense of that role, a sense of citizenship. And they must have the know-how required to perform that role competently. 'Citizenship' must be meaningful to them as a group. It must be a constitutive feature of their shared interworld and an identity which each assumes therein. It must be embedded in the texture of taken-for-granted assumptions which comprise the meaning horizon of our everyday life; that is, in the (intersubjectively constituted) lifeworld (Roche 1987; Schutz 1964). (Crossley 1996, 151)

2. Theoretical Background

Crossley's position reminds us of the importance of these 'taken-for-granted assumptions' to any political system as a good reminder of the concrete political implications of a phenomenological examination of experience. These assumptions come to being through sedimentation of meanings in individual lived bodies and entire intercorporeal social fields.

Diana Coole observes that 'Just as actors are an indissoluble chiasm of mind and body, so one needs to appreciate the complex interplay of interiority and exteriority in their collective life.' (Coole 2001, 25) This approach argues that there is no pure subjectivity or objectivity, no outside from which one could look in and produce judgments that could rely on rational, universal norms. Instead, rationality comes into being as we communicate with the world through expression and experience in their cognitive, perceptual and motor aspects. This means that the very picture of the ideal politics as the deliberative exercise of communicative reason in a public sphere of a civil society needs to be adjusted for my own my picture of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom.

The deliberative approach to democracy downplays the embodied nature of all communicative acts, posing them instead in abstract, disembodied terms as phenomena which can be approached objectively. Every communicative act, however, is rooted in embodied expressivity. Our bodily presence in the world, our lived body which expresses itself in communication, is always both subject and object at the same time, of the world and outside it, making communication an inherently ambiguous matter. As Dan Zahavi writes,

For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity is essentially incarnated. To exist embodied is, however, neither to exist as pure subject nor as pure object, but to exist in a way that transcends both possibilities. It does not entail losing self-awareness; on the contrary, self-awareness is intrinsically embodied self-awareness, but it does entail a loss or perhaps rather a release from transparency and purity, thereby permitting intersubjectivity. (Zahavi 2001, 163)

This loss of transparency and purity is not to be lamented; instead, it forms the very basis for an experience of political freedom in coexistence with others.

Understanding how our bodies are both inner and outer, a chiasm of flesh and consciousness with neither separate from the other offers us the ability to see how our perception of the world as a political matter is conditional on our being as conditioned beings. Diana Coole argues that phenomenology offers us the possibility of reconceptualising the political itself: 'Just as phenomenology means suspending conventional theories in order to see how meaning emerges within existence, so the genealogy of collective life needs to be approached from the perspective of coexistence.' (Coole 2001, 25) Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception allows us to understand how the dialectical movement of our coexistence with the world as a perceptual field also opens up the possibility of better understanding of the embodied dynamics of political agency.

Simon Charlesworth argues that the phenomenological examination of the embodied grounds of both subjective reflective interiority, and shared objectivity, reveals how the lived body exhibits the temporal and existential structures of its environment. This includes 'the institutional positions and the social grounds which lead to the imbuing, and taking-up, of a form of comportment that makes the world meaningful in a certain way; open to a certain form of corporealized subjectivity: a subjectivity that makes certain things show-up in the social universe' (Charlesworth 2000, 15). The moving body allows the acquisition of language and the cultural world in experience (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 408). The acquisition of linguistic meanings is always an embodied process which involves the motor intentionality of the body. When we talk without premeditation, we do not first think the words and then present them in speech; instead, 'the speaking subject throws himself into speech without representing to himself the words he is about to pronounce.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 425) We acquire the motor presence of words in the same way as we learn behaviours and gestures, by observation and mimicry (ibid.). It is on the terms of our bodies that we become habituated to language and speech, the primary tools of democratic politics. As Langer notes, in this way language does form an important aspect of the intersubjective sedimentation of meaning into a shared world:

2. Theoretical Background

The primacy of the linguistic meaning has to do with its ability to become sedimented into an intersubjective acquisition for future use in the quest for truth—a never-ending quest whose origin lies in speech itself. (Langer 1989, 63)

Understanding even linguistic meaning as one form of sedimentation has consequences to the way we understand political engagement and agency. We can make use of intersubjective shared historical resources of meaning to express new meanings, revealing something about our own perspectival experience of the shared world. Our lived world, reality as it appears to us, is a result of cultural schemas we inherit and improvise on as we mature in a world already populated by other human beings. The social world we share is one aspect of this embodied world-building that our bodies continuously engage in without us often even noticing it. Our intentional relationship to the world is not a case of our cognition grasping and interpreting pieces of sense data given to us by sense organs, but grasping the world ‘in the flesh’, in its whole ambiguity as it presents itself to our lived bodies, themselves living matter, flesh that is both of the world and acting against it. As Merleau-Ponty writes,

this is to be taken literally: the flesh of what is perceived, this compact particle which stops exploration, and this optimum which terminates it all reflect my own incarnation and are its counterpart. Here we have a type of being, a universe with its unparalleled “subject” and “object,” the articulation of each in terms of the other, and the definitive definitions of an “irrelative” of all the “relativities” of perceptual experience, which is the “legal basis” for all the constructions of understanding. (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 167)

Freedom, then, is a process participating in the incarnation of the world, making it animate with us, an affirmation of our fundamental intercorporeality. When I shake another’s hand, it becomes animate, a part of my body as a ‘perceiving thing that is able to be stimulated (*reizbar*), just as my own hand becomes to me in reflexive touch. What I perceive to begin with is a different “sensibility” (*Empfindbarkeit*), and only subsequently a different man and a different thought.’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 168) Our lived bodies emerge as separate body-

subjectivities in a primordial sensory dialectic with the world which reveals the fundamental ambiguity of their own experienced borders.

Our being-in-the-world is always already being-with others in a meaningful social field, encountered as such prior to our cognitive appraisal of it. It is impossible to imagine living in a world without others; our perceptual machinery is always implicated in the lifeworld and conditioned by it. I follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty and hold on to the primacy of communality and the presence of the horizontal background of a common world as the condition for the encounter with the other subject (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 371–2). I also follow Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Fanon in noting that our concrete situation can also be experienced as an obstacle to freedom and even a threat to our sense of self.

Recognition theorists such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor (for example Honneth 1996; Honneth 2007; Taylor 1994; see also Deranty 2009) argue that intersubjectivity is best understood as recognition relationships that must obtain in society for the healthy development of personal identity and moral autonomy to be possible. Such a model focuses our attention on the Hegelian model of struggles for recognition as the normative model of political life, with its attendant shortcomings (McNay 2008, Chapter 4). I argue that while such a model is a good tool for analysing struggles for recognition by various social movements, it cannot grasp the intersubjective level of experience which is primordial in relation to other political and social relationships.¹ Instead of staying on the level of relations of social recognition, I propose an account of the political realm and political agency that focuses on the way how sedimented social meanings condition our bodily comportment, bodily expression, and perceiving the world as meaningful on a pre-linguistic, pre-reflective level of bodily intentionality (Reuter 1999). Such an account of bodily intentionality is necessary to grasp the ways in which suffering political poverty is not merely a

¹ The intersubjective sedimentation of signification into lived bodies could perhaps be approached as a step on the way towards the constitution of cognitive recognition relations, an idea I unfortunately have no room to investigate further here.

2. Theoretical Background

question of possessing material or symbolic resources. It is also a question of experiencing politics as a possible field of meaningful engagement. This experience is a result of the sedimentation of experiences, of cognitive, perceptual and motor significance and meaning in one's lived body.

2.5 Freedom and the Public Realm

In her 1961 essay 'Freedom and Politics. A Lecture' Hannah Arendt (2018, 201–19) argues for a conception of freedom as the human capacity to act, a capacity we only come to know in our coexistence with others. Action is always a new beginning, and as such always truly spontaneous and indeterminate, providing an antidote to social and political determinisms of all kinds. Interestingly, in this lecture Arendt adds that as all action has the character of a miracle, action is not dependent on the human capacity of will, but on the capacity of faith (Arendt 2018, 239). In Chapter 4 I show how this idea of political agency being rooted in the human capacity of faith can be given a phenomenological reading, and develop Arendt's remarks towards a conception of faith as an experience of practical meaningfulness, which is always encountered intersubjectively, and which allows political engagement to be experienced as a meaningful possibility in one's own life. In this section I discuss Arendt's theory of political action and the public realm and show how they form a part of my own diagnosis. I make use of the phenomenological reading of Arendt's political theory by Sophie Loidolt. Her *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (2018) emphasises Arendt's use of phenomenology, and the resulting intersubjective character of her account of the public realm and political agency.

I approach political poverty as the diminishing or fracturing of social experience, leading to the loss of the experience of freedom. I discuss freedom strictly in the sense of political freedom or liberty. I discuss specifically political agency as something one can lose while remaining ostensibly active in the other contexts of one's life. By experience of freedom I mean the ability to experience oneself as a capable and credible political agent and the world as a field for meaningful

political engagement. Such freedom can only be experienced in coexistence with others. Thus, a seemingly subjectivist focus on individual experience reveals that individual freedom is always intersubjective. Making sense of this claim requires a phenomenological conception of political agency as rooted in experience, and an account of how that experience is a function of our intercorporeal being. Experience itself must be understood as a fundamentally intersubjective dialectical process in which the three perspectives of self, others, and the world emerge together in the same movement.

There is a received reading of Arendt (see e.g. Pitkin 1999), according to which Arendt draws a strict line between ‘the social’ and ‘the political’ in order to keep the concern with the materiality of the body out of the public sphere. This is due to the anti-political nature activities associated with the body, such as its reproduction through labour. These must be cast out of the public sphere to keep it secure from the contagion of the private and social spheres of our lives that are focused on material reproduction of our lives. A public concern with the materiality of body would thus present a threat to the political freedom enjoyed in the public sphere. However, as shown recently by Ville Suuronen (2018), such a reading simplifies Arendt’s account and ignores the way that Arendt’s entire political theory appears concerned with the upkeep of the body in its materiality and the question of material poverty, as these are closely associated with the ability of states to deny persons of their ‘right to have rights’. In *Human Condition* Arendt is vocally critical of the way that in modern societies a bureaucratic mentality concerned with the administration of life can extinguish the spontaneity required by action. However, this should not be understood as a rejection of a concern with human welfare as such. Suuronen interprets Arendt as being critical of how bureaucratisation of welfare engages with the problem of poverty in the wrong way, in a way that is not conducive to furthering freedom:

...what Arendt criticizes is, more specifically, the reduction of politics to mere bureaucracy. By excluding the mere “whatness” of labor and human life from the public realm, her concern is to salvage our

2. Theoretical Background

“whoness,” which we can reveal only by inserting ourselves into the public realm through words and deeds—an event that, according to her, is like a “second birth.” Arendt’s ambition is to protect the public realm from being intruded upon by the facticity of private life and to secure a space where human uniqueness can appear.

(Suuronen 2018, 41)

Suuronen (2018, 40) argues that taking Arendt’s conceptual division between labour, work, and action as ‘ontological’, or prior to human thought and action, is to fundamentally misunderstand Arendt’s project: that of contributing to a political discussion about how we should conduct our political lives, and what are the material preconditions of being able to live such a life. According to this reading, Arendt holds that the eradication of poverty is the precondition of genuine freedom. Suuronen (2018, 47) reads Arendt as advocating minimum economic equality as an integral part of the fundamental ‘right to have rights’. Based on this reading of Arendt, I continue by asserting that there is no contradiction between an Arendtian concern for political freedom and the ‘social’ concern for adequate reproduction of bodies through provision of material welfare as the grounds of political freedom. The account of political agency developed in this dissertation asserts the need to account for both as a part of the enabling conditions of the experience of freedom.

In ‘Freedom and Politics’ Arendt sums up many of the main themes of *Human Condition* (1998) and makes some important further remarks on them. According to Arendt, true freedom is to be contrasted against philosophers’ accounts of it, and especially all accounts of freedom as inner freedom, a freedom of the will or of choice taken in internal deliberation. Freedom and its opposite are something encountered among others: ‘People can only be free in relation to one another, and so only in the realm of politics and action can they experience freedom positively, which is more than *not being forced*.’ (Arendt 2018, 220) Freedom as this political experience can only take place in a specific realm which allows its unfolding: the public realm.

2.5 Freedom and the Public Realm

Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance. To be sure, it may always dwell in men's hearts as a yearning, no matter what their living conditions may be; but it is still not a demonstrable fact in the world. As demonstrably real, freedom and politics coincide and are related to each other as two sides of the same medal. (Arendt 2018, 221)

There is no freedom without politics, and *vice versa*, and neither can survive without a public realm of appearance. Arendt berates her contemporaries for believing that there could be such a thing as freedom as the freedom *from* politics; however, she does note that the history of modern Western political thought is the history of instituting this belief into our common sense. She observes that we have since tended to equate freedom with security, according government the role of guarding not freedom but 'the uninterrupted process of life' (Arendt 2018, 222). In opposition to this belief Arendt sets forward her thesis that freedom is only to be found in action: 'Freedom [...] is located neither in the will nor elsewhere in human nature; rather, it coincides with the action: men are free as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same.' (Arendt 2018, 225) Action proper, then can only take place in a public realm, a shared space of appearance.

Since freedom is can only be experienced in intercourse with others and never flows from autonomy and sovereignty, but our dependence on others, it also remains conditioned as much as our own borders remain ambiguous and under change. As Arendt writes, 'What is so extraordinarily difficult to understand within this problematic relation is a simple fact, namely, that freedom is only given to men under the condition of nonsovereignty.' (Arendt 2018, 232) There is freedom only in coexistence in which human beings, revealing their non-singular character, that 'men's existence as a whole depends upon there always being others of their kind' (Arendt 2018, 233). Freedom means giving up sovereignty and inserting oneself into a public realm in which we can appear to others, allowing others the possibility to appear in turn.

2. Theoretical Background

I draw from both Arendt and Merleau-Ponty to discuss the emergence of this public realm as an intersubjective phenomenon. The public realm is the field in which political freedom may unfold. The distinctiveness of Arendt's account of action, speech, natality, and politics lies within the perspective it takes on the public realm as an intersubjectively constituted space of appearance, a shared in-between. According to Loidolt (2018, 196) Arendt refuses to reduce public life to either the first-person perspective of classical phenomenology or the objectivist third-person perspective. Loidolt notes that when compared to these approaches, Arendt's position is a genuinely intersubjective one, and can show how a political realm of 'being with' can emerge from individuals in their plurality:

It is not just an additional mode of being an "I," but the essential way in which our existence can meaningfully unfold in the world as *an experience of uniqueness in being together*. This is why I have described actualized plurality as the basic form of *political intersubjectivity*, which leaves an in-between for "whos" to appear and opens up a productive view on conflict, agonism, and power, but which nevertheless insists on the "with" of a "we."

(Loidolt 2018, 189)

According to Loidolt (2018, 200), Arendt starts from a new kind of 'we' as an actualised plurality in the very 'publicness of appearance' which integrates the multiple first-person perspectives of individuals into a new shared world which is not reducible to them. As she writes, this not a 'fusion of single first-person perspectives'; 'Rather, it forms an *in-between*, which is filled by stories, I-Thou relations, objectifying compartments etc.—but all perceived in this arena of multiperspectival public appearance.' (Loidolt 2018, 200) From separate perspectives emerges a 'We', a web of relationships which cannot be reduced to any single one of them while remaining dependent on all of them.

This actualised plurality is the public realm as it emerges out of actions and speech of men, the web of relationships which is knitted over the world as the space of appearance made of things, and which illuminates it with the

intentional arc of publicness. In Sophie Loidolt's reading, Arendt's conception of action is separate from any goal-orientation or first-person intentions precisely because she wants to underline how action can only take place in this intersubjective context: 'To appear is to appear before others, in a world and in a context. It both enlightens and (mostly also) alters the context. Furthermore, it reveals the agent *as partaker in the context* which means that the agent could not be revealed outside of the context.' (Loidolt 2018, 202) To act and speak politically is not possible outside the intersubjective context of the public realm: 'to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act' (Arendt 1998, 188). The public realm itself only comes into being through action and speech which allow us to insert ourselves into the world in the presence of others.

Arendt (1998, 9) famously underlines the capacity of political action to begin, its inherent natality. This capacity to begin is also connected to action's capacity to bring into being the public realm of politics. According to Loidolt, Arendt gives a phenomenological reading of Kant, resituating the faculty of spontaneity in the 'arena of appearance' instead that of discourse: what is important is acting out our plurality, without dissolving it into appearance (Loidolt 2018, 202). To act is to begin, to give birth to something truly new into the world, something made possible because we are all a unique perspective into it in virtue *of our birth*; to come to be with other men to act in concert is to give birth to the public world (Arendt 1998, 199). Action itself is only possible with others: 'Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act.' (Arendt 1998, 188) However, as Loidolt emphasises, being born, 'being a beginning,' must still be put into words, articulated; 'this means being received by others, thereby entering plurality and hence a space where unpredictability and the event can be received and conceived' (Loidolt 2018, 206). **Freedom can only unfold in a public realm shared with others.**

We can see how Arendt places the onus on the constitution of the public realm on action and speech, human activities which correspond to the human conditions of natality and plurality (Arendt 1998, 176) which are the ontological

2. Theoretical Background

root of the political aspect of our lives. Properly political power grows from action and speech, and due to their revelatory power they are not reducible to mere communication (Arendt 1998, 179). Arendt gives an account of how the human world, the in-between as the material stage on which action and speech take place on, comes into being through the other human activities of labour and work, while remaining irreducible to them. What Arendt sees in action and speech is their capacity to both reveal and disclose the political agent as a 'who', a distinct and unique human being instead of a 'what', the sum of their qualities and interests. Action and speech disclose and illuminate the actor and the world itself, building a second world of being together over the first material world of human artifice and interests:

These interests constitute, in the world's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most "objective" intercourse, the physical, worldly [sic] in-between along with its interests is overlaid, and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking *to* one another. This second, subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common.

(Arendt 1998, 182-3)²

² When discussing Arendt's texts in this thesis, I sometimes knowingly make use of her terminology and use gendered masculine pronouns to refer to persons and agents in general, instead of using feminine or gender-neutral pronouns. This is a choice I make knowingly as I believe doing otherwise would detract from the original text.

Arendt calls this other, immaterial in-between the 'web' of human relationships. Action, even when concerned achieving some material goal, inevitably discloses the agent, the 'who' whose physical body speech is tied to, like the web of human relationships is tied to the material world. Sophie Loidolt notes that when even Arendt is describing the fabricated world as our 'world of things', she never refers to just enduring and inert things; instead, the world always 'possesses a certain "power" or is capable of losing that power' (Loidolt 2018, 100). In Loidolt's reading, Arendt always

talks about a web of relationships and a qualified space of visibility, contextualization, and reference that can *present and hold together* that which *inter-est* (which is in-between in the literal sense) (cf. *HC* 204). This is a space that can be constituted only by a plurality of subjects who form an *in-between*. (Loidolt 2018, 100)

Loidolt (2018, 100) notes that by focusing on this somewhat ephemeral in-between Arendt rejects the notion of a shared horizon, used by phenomenologists in the Husserlian tradition. A shared horizon would imply a positive thing in the world like family, common culture, common history or any sort of *telos* and would come in the way of understanding our development of ourselves as a result of being with others. This would conflict with the capability of action to bring persons together to begin something genuinely new, the primary characteristic of action as natality (Arendt 1998, 9). As Loidolt writes:

But what holds people together as distinctively self-expressing beings are not positive characteristics of a homeworld or a certain cultural group, but becoming a self *with* others in the process of struggle with others, by taking active positions, reflecting upon these positions, and acting according to them. (Loidolt 2018, 100)

This essentialist account of horizontality can be compared to Merleau-Ponty's account of the horizon of experience, which is something open and indeterminate, but always dependent on our embodied style of being and perceiving as something already acquired. Arendt instead insists on the miraculous character of action and its capability to freely bring about something

2. Theoretical Background

new. This is connected to her tendency to disregard the role of the body in politics. To Arendt, the body plays in politics the role of that which appears in public to others through action and speech, marking us as unique beings in our plurality; to lose this ability to appear with others is to lose reality altogether (Arendt 1998, 199).

Loidolt argues that Arendt's account of the public realm should be understood as a phenomenological account of the conditions of political life. I note that these conditions also include the embodiedness of the 'who' revealed by participation in politics, a condition of the distinction and uniqueness of man as a political being. According to Loidolt, the key to Arendt's political theory is the concept 'plurality', the mode in which persons appear in public to others by acting and speaking in their unique givenness:

Plurality is not something that simply *is*, but essentially something we have to take up and *do*. Therefore, it manifests itself only as an *actualization of plurality in a space of appearances*. I take this figure to be the "core phenomenon" that presents the key to Arendt's related concepts of action, freedom, and the political, as well as to her new understanding of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and a distinct form of the "we" in a political sense [...]. (Loidolt 2018, 2)

Understanding the public realm as a shared space of appearance requires understanding the *world* as a phenomenological concept. Loidolt reads Arendt against Heidegger and Husserl, and proposes that according to Arendt's conception of different realms of human activity we inhabit three worlds at once: the primary 'appearing world' of perception, the 'first in-between' or *Dingwelt* of objects and built things, and the 'second in-between' or *Mitwelt*, the intersubjective public realm of humans as social beings. The primary space of appearances is the world of sensible experience in which we appear in our plurality as beings in the world. This is the way we exist to others and to exit this world means escaping either inside one's head to contemplation, or more concretely, dying. Loidolt proposes that in the Arendtian picture the reproductive activity of labour upholds, and the object-forming activity of work

produces, the shared objective human reality of lasting things, the world in its thingness or *Dingwelt*. This stable material social reality allows for the emergence of the ‘second in-between’ of the intersubjective *Mitwelt*, a public realm of significations and institutions in which we can express ourselves and which is the target of our political projects. (Loidolt 2018, 98–9)

In this sense the other human activities of labour and work serve as the enabling conditions of the emergence of the public world as the actualisation of plurality, the world of expression:

A condition is not “something” that, in any way, shape or form, exists separately and could not *then* be matched by an activity. Instead, it is actualized by an activity. One “side of the coin” cannot exist without the other. The condition side *is* the form of the respective activity, while the activity side *is* the actuality of the condition, the condition as it is *experienced*. Conditionality is thus not to be understood as a “limit”—as the notion of “human condition” might suggest—but rather as an *enablement*. It discloses fundamental modes of being and meaning to us. We are enabled precisely by the actualization of these conditions to *live* our life, to *build* our world, and to *express* our uniqueness in plurality: “before” that, neither are they “there” nor are we. (Loidolt 2018, 113)

Politics as public action emerged in a public sphere in which persons can appear in their plurality and embodied distinctiveness. Working is an enabling condition of the emergence of the public political realm, a condition which is not separate from human activity itself but is actualised within it (Loidolt 2018, 93, 113). What makes the public realm separate from the private and social realms is its quality as the *Mitwelt*, the in-between as an intersubjective perceptual field which is encountered by us as a part of our embodied pre-reflective intentionality. The public realm forms an intersubjective facet of our experience.

These notions of the public realm and political freedom as the freedom to act and speak in concert with others provide me with a conception of political

2. *Theoretical Background*

agency as it is encountered and exercised in a political world, experienced as a shared intersubjective perceptual field. Conversely, they point towards experiential features of political poverty: that which becomes diminished or fractured in lived experience when one suffers from political poverty.

In Loidolt's reading, Arendt's conception of the public realm is always connected to embodied, lived experience. The public realm, as described by Arendt, is dependent on the condition of plurality as embodied presence in the space of appearances, which also brings alongside it the affective dimension of experiencing the world as a field of possible and meaningful action. This affective dimension of experience leads me to ask for the social grounds for perceiving the world in the light of different affects, attitudes, and motivations. The phenomenological approach to political agency allows me to begin to investigate political poverty as the diminishing, or even loss, of the experience of freedom that is present when one feels free and able to become politically engaged.

The presence of lived bodies or body-subjects implies their primordial intercorporeal communication between each other and the world, and the sedimentation of social meanings and significations within them as well as into the web of human relationships, the political field. Merleau-Ponty's description of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality, the living-through of a 'primordial *We* [*On*]' in a perceptual field is evocative here (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 175). Where democracy is healthy, we partake in that that field already the level of pre-reflective intentionality, of the intentional arc of perception. Our lived bodies become habituated to their place in the political field and feel secure enough to attempt to stake claims on it through democratic participation. In short, we come to have faith in the meaningfulness of political engagement, that projects and tasks are not undertaken in vain, but that there is a political field or realm in which they can have an effect on the world, even as these outcomes are always outside our own control. This faith can never be complete and self-sufficient, but is itself a way of being reliant on others:

2.5 Freedom and the Public Realm

Man's inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all. (Arendt 1998, 244)

This, according to Arendt, is one of the defining characters of freedom: it cannot be enjoyed in isolation; in this sense freedom and sovereignty are not synonymous, but mutually exclusive (Arendt 1998, 234). We can only be free when we share a meaningful political relationship with others and can appear to act and speak in a public realm.

Arendt's account of action and the public world, however, does not consider the sedimented nature of this freedom. This results in a decidedly aleatory aspect in her thinking: the public realm is, in a sense, pure *potentia*, and can rely only on the power and shared narratives generated and upheld by its residents for its continued existence (Arendt 1998, 200). Arendt's account does not completely consider the way political engagement appears as *meaningful* on a primordial, pre-reflective level of experience.

When considered in its political sense as 'throwing oneself into' a situation with others and action and speech, freedom requires the presence of a sense of being able to access to the public realm in experience. Arendt appears to say as much when she says that 'freedom is, in essence, a political phenomenon, that it is not experienced primarily in will and thought, but in action, and that therefore it requires a sphere appropriate to such action, a political sphere' (Arendt 2018, 229). However, the political realm itself is a product of sedimentation of meaning and significance, results of action and speech, into social institutions and the relationships between human beings, revealed in the ability of the members of a community to perceive the world as a common realm shared with others. As such a realm opens in experience, we experience freedom as feeling allowed to throw ourselves into the political world. There is a sense of trust in

2. *Theoretical Background*

others and the world, a sense of a common future to be reached towards, feeling authorised to express oneself, to act and speak, feeling like the world will carry us even if we expose ourselves to danger, that we are able to face even stiff opposition with determination. In Chapter 4 I describe this sense of practical meaningfulness as faith in the world and our fellow men, that we can change things through public effort.

I also note how Arendt's thought also provides an interesting juxtaposition of freedom *against* justice. Arendt (2018, 204) cautions against the kind of overt focus on justice in political theory which animates the kind of social critique discussed above. Since freedom is only experienced in action in concert with others in a public world, it is rather inimical to the more philosophical ideals of justice and truth, even if 'it is precisely one of the outstanding characteristics of modern society that considerations of justice will tend to outweigh all others' (Arendt 2018, 204). Arendt considers politics to be a field of action which is not suited to such moral evaluation; taking a Machiavellian tone, she assures the only measure of virtue proper to freedom is glory. (Arendt 1998, 77) In this she also takes a decidedly different tack than objectivist theorists of justice, who are decidedly interested in the question of justice as a political matter and just outcomes as its measure, be it the just distribution of resources, capabilities, or perhaps even recognition. I detect this concern with objectivity and politics of justice even within most critical theory approaches to politics: a good example of this is the debate between Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth on the objectivity of politics of recognition and redistribution (see Fraser and Honneth 2003; see also McNay 2008 on a criticism of the objectivism in the Habermasian and Honnethian traditions of critical theory). As we will see in the next chapter, following Rawls, Habermas, and Sen, James Bohman is mostly concerned with the problem of justice; in his case, giving indicators of a politics which proceeds from a just situation of equality of capabilities for everyone to initiate and influence public deliberation. However, the Arendtian theorist would have to note that this concern with justice threatens to override any concern with freedom and truth. Being only concerned with justice as the proper distribution

of resources, recognition, or even capabilities required for participation, can efface the lived experience of freedom as action from view, leading to the inability to consider the own subjectivity of those presently excluded from political engagement.

Deliberative theories of democracy propose that democracy lives through communicative processes in the public sphere, i.e. a process of initiating public discussion, providing information to others and persuading them by the force of the better argument (Cohen 2007; Habermas 1996a; b). However, this position already contains a dangerous elision between communication, action, and speech. The deliberative thesis pays too little attention the world-constituting and self-disclosing aspects of action and speech. These are considered by Arendt as the very essence of action and emergence of political power, something which grows when people emerge from their private lives to appear in the public political realm. Power, then, must always be opposed to tyrannical and totalitarian modes of using force and strength to rule over isolated private individuals (Arendt 1998, 200–4). This is one way in which the deliberative hypothesis is unable to consider the way political poverty is also a question of losing a way of experiencing the world as meaningful under its public, political aspect.

Arendt's account of the heroic, disjunctive, event-like character of political action and freedom stands in contrast to Merleau-Ponty's account of freedom which always underlines its ambiguousness and its dependence on context, the result of its intercorporeal and sedimented character. My own approach attempts to find a way to see the usefulness of both accounts, something which Loidolt's more embodied reading of Arendt allows me to do. Ambiguity plays a productive role in both accounts of political agency. Arendt is adamant that political action is set apart from other human activities by the way it discloses us in our distinctness while remaining unable to account for its own consequences. However, I am partial to Merleau-Ponty's account due to the emphasis it places on the embodied and contextual aspects of action. We can only be free when we encounter a social situation that our freedom can act upon

2. Theoretical Background

from within. To rule beforehand some actions as political or non-political would be a mistake, as we simply cannot know in advance how our freedom will unfold in the world: 'It is the essence of liberty to exist only in the practice of liberty, in the inevitably imperfect movement which joins us to others, to the things of the world, to our jobs, mixed with the hazards of our situation.' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, xxiv). It is the very incarnate nature of our subjectivity which also makes change and authentic freedom possible. Our embodied being towards the political world is an unpredictable dialectical relationship which allows us to both sink into unreflective acceptance or even studied rejection of it, but also allows its re-kindling and opening up in perception when the conditions are right.

Above I discussed Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of pre-reflective operative intentionality, which understands perception as a mediated, dialectical process of co-existence with the world. This means that perception must not be reduced to the empiricist claim of it being a physical process of receiving sense-data of a mind-independent physical reality; neither should one reduce it to the intellectualist claim which attempts to reduce perception to the constitution of reality and the world by a world-independent mind. Merleau-Ponty attempts to bridge this dilemma by noting that we already take the existence of the world on perceptual faith, rejecting both objectivist alternatives as susceptible to the old philosophical scepticism which can only be superseded through paying proper attention to the role of the lived body. Our lived bodies are conditioned by the sedimentation of our pre-reflective experience of the world. Central to this view is his conception of operative intentionality, noting that the things of the world present themselves under an intentional arc, as always already inviting us to project ourselves towards them or pushing us away, already tinged with the possibility of interaction. Paying attention to the way all human agency is rooted in embodied, sedimented experience also allows us to understand how the kind of experience of political freedom as described by Arendt can become conditioned by prior social experiences.

Freedom requires a realm or a field in which it can unfold. Hannah Arendt gives a truly intersubjective account of political freedom as the human activity of action; as appearing before others and disclosing oneself through action and speech which can only take place in a political space of appearances, a public realm. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom, then, has two symmetrical sides. Just as our lived habitual bodies are beings of two leaves, an intertwining of inner and outer realms, political agency has two experiential conditions: the inner ability to experience the world as a public realm one can project towards, and the outer existence of such sedimented social significances and institutions which provide the space in which political agency can take root and unfold. Both come into being and are reproduced in the same movement of public action as a perceptual and motor ‘throwing oneself into’, becoming engaged with a field shared by others; both can become frayed and diminished as political poverty sets in.

In a sense, we are never alone: our singular being is a social event, a form of being with others. As Merleau-Ponty (2012, 379) observes: ‘Our relation to the social [...] is deeper than every explicit perception and deeper than every judgment.’ The world presents a field of possibilities for political agency that are a product of social constitution, even if they are experienced in a seeming isolation. The observations and activities of Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017) shows concretely how even when the motivation and possibilities for freedom appear as non-existent to those suffering from political poverty, this freedom as the ability to engage with the public world can be made to manifest itself if the suitable conditions are brought about. There is a story I will discuss further in the Epilogue to this dissertation. The field for action is never completely closed, never completely devoid of solicitations to action. For example, despite his bleak analysis of the possibilities for emancipation, Simon Charlesworth’s study (2000) shows how, even in their dispossessed state, his working-class interviewees retain a modicum of political freedom which is inherent and immanent in the potential contained in their social relations. This ability to be free is revealed in their ability to speak out their frustrations and misgivings,

2. Theoretical Background

and in the willingness to question the social bases of their dispossession and domination, even if they feel incapable to challenge their lot. This is not an absolute freedom of the will, but a possibility for improvisation, for doing and thinking otherwise, which is immanent to the human condition in its intercorporeality. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

What then is freedom? To be born is to be simultaneously born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is always already constituted, but also never completely constituted. In the first relation we are solicited, in the second we are open to an infinity of possibilities. Yet this analysis remains abstract, for we exist in both ways *simultaneously*. Thus, there is never determinism and never an absolute choice; I am never mere thing and never a bare consciousness. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 480)

This is especially important when considered against the deliberative democratic approach, which mostly focuses on the epistemic aspect of communication and foregoes the role action and speech have in disclosing the political agent and constituting the public realm, or the political field action can unfold in. Arendt states that speech is always more than communication of information, or an epistemic relation (Arendt 1998, 179). The specifically *political* meaning of speech is in the way they disclose a 'who', the agent who acts and speaks:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and the sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (Arendt 1998, 179)

Arendt continues by noting that the agent is disclosed not in his specific qualities or talents (or capabilities, even), but in that which makes him distinct, that which is implicit in everything he says and does (Arendt 1998, 179). It

should be noted that in addition to disclosing a 'who', this disclosure also opens the political agent to the gaze and judgment of others. This makes political engagement properly *personal*: becoming political is a question of gaining, keeping or losing one's face, of exposing one's self to the possibility of shame and violence of others.

Before this moment of emergence in a shared field, the agent also remains unknown to themselves: it is not before stepping into the public realm that its light can disclose our own character. We can only don the mask of personhood by emerging from our private lives and falling into intercourse with others; before that our real self remains a matter of speculation even to ourselves. This means that action and speech disclose in same movement both the agent and the public realm, with the outcome always unknown (Arendt 1998, 192). Action and speech allow the opening up of the political field just as much as they are contingent on the field's existence.

I also note how the concept of style, as discussed above, is instructive here. An individual style of speaking and acting can only emerge and develop *in* action and speech with others in a public realm. In a similar sense Merleau-Ponty underlines the role of *originary* speech as the way a subject comes to truly appropriate themselves by relating their thoughts to others. Unlike secondary speech which simply relates an 'already acquired thought', originary speech 'first brings this thought into experience for us just as it does for others.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 409) The expressive operation has the power to not just express thought, but to make new sense into being by creating a situation, 'opening new routes, new dimensions, and new landscapes to thought' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 423).

Any reflection on freedom must include first-person and second-person perspectives, 'to plunge into the world instead of surveying it' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 39–40). Freedom and its absence are experienced by subjects in lived first-person perceptual engagement in the world. Most importantly, political freedom can only be encountered in a social world already populated by others and their life projects. Freedom, then, also appears to be a fundamentally

2. Theoretical Background

intersubjective phenomenon, that is, we encounter freedom in a social field shared by others, making it also something to be approached from the second-person perspective of intersubjectivity. The way political engagement becomes experienced as meaningful can only be understood by retaining all of these perspectives as a part of an examination of freedom.

I will discuss faith as practical meaningfulness which grounds the experience of freedom in Chapter 4. After that I begin to put together my diagnosis of how faith in politics can be broken in various ways. To get this dissertation on its way, I simply want to underline the relationship of experiential freedom as encountered in the world, and faith in a shared political realm. Political poverty can also be experienced as a diminishing of experience in its social aspects. Freedom can only be encountered in being among others or *inter homines esse*, to use Arendt's phrase. This is something more than a case of poverty as social injustice, or an unjust distribution of resources or capabilities, however understood. Unjust distribution of objective and measurable goods is, of course, a part of the phenomenon. However, what I find to be central to political poverty alongside the lack of opportunities or capabilities is a diminishing of experiential freedom which does not lend itself to measuring. **Political poverty is experienced as a learned unwillingness or inability to put one's experiences to words, the loss of an embodied capacity to expression, the closing down of the world as the intersubjective field of political action, and the associated the loss of trust in public institutions and fellow citizens, and ultimately, the loss of hope for political change, a pervasive demoralisation.** All of these seemingly subjective affective attitudes can be understood as the diminishing of the intersubjective relationship to the social world.

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

The term ‘political poverty’ in the sense of a specifically political form of poverty, separate from poverty of resources, appears to have been coined by Bohman in his essay ‘Deliberative Democracy and Effective Social Freedom: Capabilities, Resources, and Opportunities’ (1997). Bohman develops a conception of political poverty as the violation of the principle of *equality of effective freedom*. This account of political equality demands that the capabilities required for effective participation in public democratic deliberation should be available to all citizens. Violations of this principle constitute a specifically political form of poverty. Bohman’s conception of political poverty forms the starting point of my own diagnosis. However, since Bohman is concerned with formulating objective indicators of capability equality, his conception does not capture the phenomenon I aim to make intelligible. My own contribution in the following chapters will engage only cursorily with the capability approach to justice. I focus on giving a phenomenological diagnosis of how political poverty can be understood as a diminishing or fracturing of social experience, damaging the ability to experience political engagement as a meaningful possibility.

Bohman contrasts capability equality to resourcist theories of justice, which are often married to proceduralist accounts of participatory democracy. The paradigmatic example of the first is John Rawls’ theory of justice (Rawls 1993; 1999). A resourcist account of justice conceptualises equality as the just redistribution of resources. Redistribution should ensure every member of a society the sufficient amount of basic goods necessary to ensure equality of opportunity, the ability to participate in just democratic procedures. The

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

paradigmatic example of ideal deliberative proceduralism, then, is the standard account of deliberative democracy, which focuses on defining just procedures for deliberative decision-making (e.g. Cohen 1997; Habermas 1996a; b). The capability approach criticises both approaches for giving a too ideal and weak account of justice which is unable to account for persistent forms of political inequality, such as discrimination based on race, class, and gender. Instead, the capability approach investigates what people are capable of achieving in the conditions they are faced with and with the resources they have. Often formal inclusion into public deliberation and the provision of adequate resources are not enough. Even under conditions of sufficient resource equality a lack of social recognition and the capabilities required for effective participation may result in the reproduction of persistent forms of political inequality.

This chapter proceeds as follows. I will first take a brief conceptual detour and discuss the difference between talking about exclusion and talking about poverty. I explain why I have decided to use the term 'political poverty' instead of the more familiar 'political exclusion'. Poverty and exclusion denote two different phenomena which are intertwined but should be kept analytically separate. Exclusion denotes a process of drawing borders, separating those who are in from those who are out. One of deliberative democracy's key tenets is a commitment to procedural equality and inclusiveness according to, for example, the all-affected principle, and the willingness to challenge situations in which such borders are unjustly drawn. However, one of the more insidious aspects of political poverty is precisely the tendency of marginalised social groups to become informally disenfranchised even while formally included in democratic processes. Presenting the problem in terms of exclusion and inclusion, then, fails to describe the way political poverty is something suffered by marginalised groups *within* the borders of formally inclusive communities.

I will then discuss what I call the 'sofa problem'. Theories of participatory democracy tend take for granted that democratic participation itself is a good thing, maybe even an intrinsic part of a good life, however one wants to define it. This may be so; when one is engaged in democratic theorising, it may have to

be accepted as a self-evident proposition. However, a question remains: what, exactly, is *wrong* with people choosing not to exercise their democratic rights? If we take individual freedom of action and thought to be a *sine qua non* of living in a democracy, why should we care about persons preferring to stay at home and relaxing on a sofa in front of the television instead of spending their evenings learning about social matters, attending citizen's meetings, or joining associations? In short: *When is remaining politically passive a choice, and when is it a case of political poverty?* I discuss below how the capability approach to measuring political equality gives one credible answer, which allows me to start building my own.

James Bohman defines political poverty as the violation of the principle of equality of effective freedom. I show how Bohman develops on Amartya Sen's capability approach and uses it to criticise theories of deliberative democracy for their overt proceduralism and reliance on insufficient accounts of equality between participants in deliberation. He observes that even under conditions of full equality of resources, forms of cultural marginalisation may lead to lasting political inequalities. Bohman argues that what is needed is an account of the minimum capabilities required for effective public functioning in a democracy. A group can end up under the political poverty line despite having sufficient resources at its disposal if they lack the relevant capabilities to make use of them. The capability approach to measuring political poverty has also been seen as an epistemological approach to improving the justness of democratic deliberation by challenging latent standards of epistemic competence (Bonvin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein 2018). After discussing the capability approach to political poverty, I begin the work of outlining my own position by noting what is missed the capability approach, the loss of motivation to become politically engaged among politically marginalized persons and groups.

3.1 Exclusion or Poverty?

There is a noted tendency in democratic theory literature to use the term 'exclusion' loosely to denote almost all forms of social injustice, from material

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

poverty to discrimination based on gender and race. As noted by Danielle Allen (2005, 29–35), talk about the injustice of exclusion can also become a byword for poverty and domination, and in contrast, the positive demanding of inclusion can become a better strategic alternative to the rather Marxist-sounding call for ‘end to domination’, economic or otherwise. Allen finds this worrying: it appears that even if we share a positive account of justice, the accounts we give of injustice can differ; and more importantly, our account of injustice defines the political means that should be used to mend that injustice.

Robert E. Goodin (1996) observes that talking about exclusion can hide injustices from view instead of making them visible. Describing dysfunctions of political participation in the language of exclusion works well when identifying systemic and structural dynamics that unjustly keep out some individuals and groups outside political processes that they should be able to take part in. This includes, for example, cases in which some groups are unjustly excluded from the full rights and privileges of citizenship, or cases of exclusion from democratic participation in deliberative processes on decisions that concern one’s own interests (See Allen 2005; Benhabib 2004; Young 2000). However, talking about exclusion is unable to completely identify and describe a phenomenon that is better understood as suffering a political form of poverty. Poverty is a concretely suffered phenomenon, something more than the abstract structural process of ‘being excluded from’. I wish to focus on the effects that a lack of symbolic and material resources can have on the way individuals and groups experience their possibilities to influence politics.

The language of inclusion and exclusion has had an especially broad adoption among scholars who have explored the post-1968 appearance of new social movements of different marginalised groups. The appearance of these movements seemed, at least in some Western countries, to signal the end of the old struggle between labour and capital over the redistribution of social goods, and its gradual replacing with a multi-dimensional field of different social struggles, often centred around the re-evaluation and recognition of marginalised social identities (see Honneth 1996). Emblematic of this change

was the new focus on cosmopolitan democratic processes, multiculturalism, and politics of difference in democratic theory. The normative goal of critical political theory became the inclusion of previously excluded groups into the public sphere, and the devising of more welcoming deliberative processes of democratic decision-making.¹ Talking about exclusion, then, facilitates a certain style of theorising that fits a set of broader theoretical and political concerns.

Robert E. Goodin (1996) observes that the problem with the language of inclusion and exclusion is not that it does not describe issues important to political theorists, but that it does so *too well*. Fighting social exclusion has become a byword for multiple struggles against a broad range perceived social injustices, including poverty and homelessness, being left out of democratic practices, and the marginalisation of migrants and refugees and their exclusion from citizenship (e.g. Bader 1995). The language of social inclusion and exclusion has helped make connections between multiple phenomena that otherwise would be kept separate. However, this language facilitates paying more attention to some injustices while occluding others. The very concern with the injustice of exclusion, the willingness to frame social injustices in the terms of some social groups being actively left out of an inclusive community, prods us to find solutions through the means of increasing inclusion.

Goodin (1996, 345 ff.) observes that speaking of injustice in terms of exclusion makes it hard to see what it is that the excluded are excluded from. It makes it difficult to distinguish between talking about exclusion as material poverty or exclusion from citizenship, political participation, or even free movement. In the context of participatory democracy this can have the effect of confusing inclusion with actual ability to participate. The participatory democrat argues that social institutions should be rebuilt from the ground up to encourage inclusive citizen participation. In this parlance inclusion becomes code for encouraging active citizenship, or participation in all areas of social life, politics, employment, and otherwise. (Goodin 1996, 352–3) As Goodin notes, the

¹ A broad snapshot of this moment in democratic theory can be seen in the 1996 volume *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, edited by Seyla Benhabib.

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

solution of inclusion, however, remains too passive and vague: it only manages to drag previously excluded groups 'over the line' inside the borders of the community, and is then content to leave them to their own devices. The ostensibly commendable solution of increased inclusion does not address the concrete nature of the inclusive community in question, and always threatens to end up committing the proponents of inclusion to a much more darker political outcome, the deepening other exclusions that result from unexplored and unreformed political practices and social conditions. (Goodin 1996, 349–51)

Goodin (1996, 349) also makes the purely analytical point that since exclusion is understood to be an injustice, the very existence of exclusion implies the desirability of inclusion. Conversely, talking about inclusion implies the desirability of the existence of the excluded. As he writes:

Talking about 'the excluded', in terms that imply that the problem is simply that those who have been excluded should be included, suggests that the boundaries of inclusiveness have been wrongly drawn. But on that way of looking at things, it is only the location of boundaries that is in question. (Goodin 1996, 350)

Goodin argues that as it is commonly used, the word exclusion focuses our attention on the borders of communities while completely ignoring the specific nature of the form of marginalisation that is being discussed. When one is included but only in a borderline fashion, one is still not enjoying from the full benefits of belonging, be it understood as participation in the labour market, political deliberation, or the full benefits, duties, and rights of citizenship. The language and logic of inclusion and exclusion offers little help: '...there is nothing in this language, or in the logic standing behind it, that would help us address our larger concerns about social marginality' (Goodin 1996, 348). I believe that the point stands: careless talk about inclusion and exclusion at best causes problems at the conceptual level, and at worst makes invisible the actual larger social problems behind the exclusion in question. As Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 121) observe, the single-minded focus on the ideal of inclusion can, ironically, end up deepening political exclusion by making those unable to

speak for themselves in public complicit in their own domination *through being included*. When decisions are made against the interests of marginalised individuals and groups, being able to point at them being included in a nominally democratic process amounts to a clever use of power that hides from view the domination inherent in the process. This only further disenfranchises the marginalised by robbing them further of legitimate avenues for refusal and protest, damaging their faith and trust in political institutions in the process.

Ultimately, talk about exclusion and inclusion remains talk about citizenship (see Bader 1995). Who are entitled to a full membership of a political community, what bundles of rights are accorded to those who are more than visitors but less than full members, and who are left outside and even pushed there? Whereas the language of exclusion describes well the kinds of injustices that result from unjust drawing of the borders of the *demos*, it does not provide analytical tools for examining what happens when it is the quality of the democratic process itself that is left wanting.

What talking in terms of inclusion and exclusion fails to include is an account of how and why some groups remain *informally* disenfranchised and without a political voice, even if they are in principle included in a community. Miranda Fricker has observed that such informal disenfranchisement can result from the internalisation of a negative identity stereotype about one's social group and making it a part of one's personal identity. As she describes,

we can imagine an informally disenfranchised group, whose tendency not to vote arises from the fact that their collectively imagined social identity is such that they are not the sort of people who go in for political thinking and discussion. 'People like us aren't political'; and so they do not vote. (Fricker 2007, 16)

Negative social stereotypes can make marginalised persons complicit in their own marginalisation through incorporating and acting out the negative social expectations of them. Pierre Bourdieu describes such processes as a form of symbolic violence, 'the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167). Political poverty can reveal

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

itself in the unwillingness or experienced incompetence to speak in public. Social hierarchies can work to impose a sense of shame and anxiety about the way one speaks and presents themselves on groups 'lower' in the hierarchy, while ensuring a sense of natural articulateness to those with the requisite education and social position, individual differences in temperament notwithstanding (see Bourdieu 1991, 81). I will return to the theme of complicity below in Chapter 5.

We should refuse painting economically or otherwise marginalised groups as helpless victims of structural operations power, with little to no agency over their own lives. However, we should not make the opposite mistake of presuming that human beings are naturally equally articulate political subjects who only require the opportunity to speak. Bourdieu notes that impoverishment in material terms also tends to result in poverty of the 'cultural instruments necessary [...] to participate actively in politics, that is, above all, *leisure time* and *cultural capital*' (Bourdieu 1991, 172). Exercising effective political agency requires more than just becoming included, it also requires the resources and competences necessary for public action. This is not even to mention the spread of new technologies of management and control that are used to monitor and discipline the least well-off members of society through practices of regimented and punitive unemployment, austerity cuts to social services across the developed world, and aggressive enforcement of increasingly draconian immigration and citizenship laws in developed countries across the world. All these factors combine to produce mistrust in public institutions among the marginalised that is hard to overcome.

This dissertation does not focus on the process of drawing boundaries between 'us' and 'them', nor attempt to chart the border between those included within the *demos* and their external other, the excluded. Instead, this dissertation attempts to grapple with a dysfunction of democracy that takes place inside the borders of community, processes of informal disenfranchisement and political marginalisation which often result in the seemingly voluntary withdrawal of participation by those who often would have most to gain from political

engagement. Political poverty in the way I approach it is best identified by exploring subjective experience of social realities. These experiences are rooted in systemic logics and dynamics that result in forms of systemically produced political apathy which remain largely unrecognised by political theory. Thinking about such processes in the relatively abstract terms of political inclusion and exclusion merely reinforces our tendency to think in terms of borders, of in-groups and out-groups, of already articulate individual and group subjects demanding to become bearers of legal and social rights, and social worlds that are understood as abstract legal communities defined by the rights and privileges of their members.

Talking about political poverty instead of political exclusion helps to bring forward the way that suffering from adverse social conditions can lead many to self-identify as ‘not political people’ while remaining frustrated with the way politics does not reflect their concerns. It lets us see that there are always larger social processes behind such self-ascription. To talk of political passivity as if stemming from a subjective choice to be passive is ultimately to subscribe to an ideological position that seeks to blame marginalised groups for their inaction instead of trying to understand its social causes and to address them. At the same time talking about poverty avoids a tendency with the language of inclusion and exclusion that turns the attention of theoreticians exclusively towards the systemic dynamics which define the borders that the excluded must cross into inclusion. As I will discuss below, one of the most insidious consequences of political poverty is exactly in the way it short-circuits the dynamic of exclusion and inclusion by a conceptual double bind, excluding politically impoverished individuals and groups from having power over their lives by nominally including them in decisions that are made about them. This is exactly the danger of thinking of political passivity in terms of exclusion that is best remedied by political inclusion.

Talking about unwillingness to participate in political processes in terms of exclusion would make it difficult to conceptualise the riddle this dissertation attempts to solve, the fact that those who would have most to gain from political

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

engagement often remain unwilling to do so. Speaking of such apathy in terms of political poverty offers a place to start, some tools for a diagnosis of the present moment. I hope it will help political theorists to address the problem outside the terms of an objectivist universalism that is often blind to inequality of the very capability to perceive political engagement as a meaningful possibility.

3.2 The ‘Sofa Problem’

I approach informal disenfranchisement and political passivity as a specific form of political poverty. This is a line of argumentation which must be able to head off a question: When are people politically impoverished and when are they just disinterested in politics? It is not simply enough to state that in an ideal world everyone would be naturally interested in public democratic engagement, a trap that theories of participatory democracy can fall prey to. We are often told the fable that there either was a golden age in which people were engaged with their communities that we have lost and should recover, or that when given the participatory institutions and the possibility to engage with them, people will naturally become exemplary participatory democrats. From this point of view it is hard to see how, when given the choice, we wouldn't want to be like de Tocqueville's community-minded farmer-democrats, the Greatest Generation of the post-World War 2 golden age of civic participation, or Arendt's fabled free men of ancient Greece (de Tocqueville 1969; Putnam 2000; Arendt 1998, respectively). Why wouldn't we want to spend our time in taking care of public affairs? After all, do we all not *know* that representative democracy is inefficient, and politicians are prone to forgetting the interests of their voters the instant they have secured their own election?

However, in a representative system politicians are elected for taking care of our affairs so that we do not have to. If someone would rather stay at home instead of spending their evenings in citizen's meetings and other public events, should they feel guilty about that? What, exactly, is wrong with just staying at home and sitting on your sofa instead of taking an active interest in politics? This is

the 'sofa problem': When is not participating in democratic processes a case of political poverty and not a freely made choice to not participate?

Why should we consider it a wrong if some people abstain from political engagement out of their own free will? Should we not have the explicit right to do so, and if we decide to use that right, who is to say that we are in the wrong? Sure, me being politically inactive means that my own specific interests might not get looked after. However, if I decide to abstain from looking after my own interests, it is no-one else's problem but my own. The problem appears strictly pragmatic, not moral. What, exactly, is *wrong* with abstention from politics? When is remaining politically passive a form of poverty?

First, we must distinguish the freedom to participate, in the sense of *having the right and opportunity to do so*, with being actually *able* to do so if one so wished. We must first separate two separate kinds of abstaining from political engagement that seem relevantly different. First, there is abstaining due to simply not caring about politics: many people, well-off or not, simply do not care either way. Some may even be happy with how things are going at the moment (such a person is possible to imagine, at least) and see little reason to participate in politics for pure participation's sake. Such persons are content to let others get on with the work of politics and focus their attention elsewhere, as is their right. By abstaining from democratic engagement they are content to let others make decisions for them. This does not mean that they couldn't change their mind later and start 'getting political,' just that they are content to do so *for now*.

It seems sensible to say that if democracy is, among other things, a political regime that aims to safeguard the individual freedoms of the citizens of the *demos*, then no citizen should be coerced to engage in politics against their will. However, voluntary withdrawal from political engagement seems qualitatively different from a situation in which some persons and groups experience themselves as unable to do anything else but abstain, even if they are frustrated or angry about the way politics are conducted. Instead of abstaining from

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

politics due to not being interested in politics, they have become demoralised by the way politics are conducted and are *resigned* to their lot.

While they are frustrated with their situation and the way politics is conducted, the politically marginalised persons interviewed by Bourdieu et al. (1999), Charlesworth (2000), Savage et al. (2015, 340 ff.) and Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017) are often eloquent commentators of their predicament and the reasons for it. What seems to be at issue is not a choice to abstain from political engagement but the frustrated belief that things will not change, and in any case, one would not even know where to begin with changing them. What an account of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom points towards is the experienced lack of credible possibilities for making a difference.

Something, then, is amiss in the painting of political passivity as either a product of social or ideological determinism or understanding it as a rational choice made by political subjects out of their own free will. While accounts of exclusion focuses our attention on abstract dynamics and boundaries and the sociological account places the blame on social determinisms, the painting of political passivity as a result of a freely made choice will end up blaming marginalised groups for their own marginalisation. The concept 'political poverty' manages to illuminate an important facet of such behaviour, as political apathy is not simply a subjective attitude or a misuse of one's own free will. Some remain on the sofa not because they have decided to ignore politics, but because they *know* (rightly or not) that the cards are stacked against them from the beginning. In Chapters 4 and 5 I discuss such attitudes in terms of a loss of faith in political institutions and in oneself as a credible and capable political actor.

The sofa question can be answered in different ways. I now turn to literature which approaches political poverty as a question of *capabilities*. We have seen that even when material factors are equal and there is a fair procedure in place for political participation, it seems that some groups can still be left without influence over decisions that impact their lives. What the capability approach argues is that what is at question is a violation of the principle of *the equality of efficient freedom*, a failure to provide every citizen and social group with the

social recognition and functional capabilities required for effective political participation. Such cases can be approached as a specifically political form of poverty.

3.3 Equality of Effective Social Freedom

James Bohman (1997) criticises philosophical approaches which define political equality as equal opportunity to participate in deliberative democracy, guaranteed by a sufficiently equal distribution of resources, or in John Rawls' terms, basic goods. Bohman argues that a resourcist approach to political equality, and the associated tendency of to rely on ideal proceduralism when considering deliberative democratic arrangements, is insufficient and inadequate for the task. Ideal proceduralism and resourcism do not consider the inequality in capabilities to participate equally in deliberative democratic processes, leading to violations of what he terms the principle of equality of effective social freedom. He instead develops and defends a more substantial account of political equality, drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach to justice (e.g. Sen 2009).

Sen has himself emphasised the connection between participatory democracy, public reasoning, and justice (Sen 2009, 326). Contrary to the more transcendentalist or *a priori* approach of theories of justice in the Rawlsian and Habermasian vein, the capability approach holds that universal norms of justice cannot simply be given by philosophers. Due to the way inequalities often result in differences in epistemological starting points to understanding social reality, the norms guiding democratic processes must also be the result of a participatory deliberative process in which those affected by them can have a hand in formulating them (Bonvin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein 2018, 959 ff.). The capability approach to deliberative democracy has recently also been advocated by Bonvin and Laruffa (2018; see also Bonvin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein 2018) due to its ability to include a plurality of various views and concerns arising from various social situations within deliberative processes, making them more responsive to forms of social inequality.

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

Bohman seeks to find a strong concept of political equality that works in the context of deliberative democracy. Conversely, he seeks to find a definition of political poverty which could provide guidance in practical contexts by defining objective indicators that could measure political inequality. He knowingly sets himself within a framework of deliberative democracy which is at odds with agonistic and realistic approaches to political theory. However, his approach is also a good example of political philosophy which is dedicated to finding a measure of political equality as equality of freedom which 'permits us to broaden the scope of political rights and liberties beyond procedural opportunities or access to aggregate resources' (Bohman 1997, 342). This is a good starting point for my own, experientialist approach to political poverty. Bohman's account illustrates many of the points of divergence I have with the objectivist model of social criticism that critical democratic theorists often subscribe to. After discussing the capability approach to political poverty, I will begin my complementary investigation of the subjective side of experiencing political freedom, the other side of the equation which is indispensable to understanding sides of political poverty not covered by the capability approach.

According to Bohman (1997, 323), approaches to political equality as equality of opportunity do not take into account the way that even if material factors are sufficiently equal, democratic deliberation can still produce unequal outcomes by privileging some groups at the cost of others due to cultural and other social reasons. Instead, there are other minimal conditions of political equality that should obtain. First, all citizens must be able to develop capabilities which allow them sufficiently equal access to public functioning, understood as the ability to initiate deliberation in the public sphere about their concerns and the ability to participate in public deliberation. Such participation is only possible when all citizens are afforded sufficient social recognition to be welcomed into the public sphere and to have their concerns taken into account (Bohman 1997, 323–4). Participants in deliberation must also be assured of the publicity of the deliberation, that is, their deliberative input is recognised as such within the public sphere and is not rejected for reasons not related to deliberative norms

3.3 Equality of Effective Social Freedom

themselves (Bohman 1997, 337). As the outcome of any political action is always underdetermined, the question of political equality must start from the ability of all participants to feel like they have the possibility and capabilities of initiating and influencing public deliberation.

In addition to these minimal conditions for equal participation there is also the issue of a maximum of political influence allowed by equality. Economically or otherwise powerful actors must not be allowed to keep any issues from the deliberative agenda simply by throwing their weight around by, for example, threatening withdrawal of economic cooperation (Bohman 1997, 339). These set the floor and the ceiling for Bohman's strong conception of political equality which he deems as necessary for the functioning of deliberative democratic politics. A strong account of equality focusing on provision of adequate capabilities and social recognition is necessary in the context of deliberative democracy, because a weak conception of political equality as both a minimum of basic goods, and of the necessary rights and opportunities for participation is unable to address many problems specific to the political realm. Political impoverishment can take place even when citizens are formally equal and have sufficient resources:

Poverty in this sense is a measure of minimal political equality in a democracy. It sets the threshold requirement of each citizen's being able to initiate deliberation and to participate effectively in it. The development of such public capabilities is the "floor" of civil equality.

(Bohman 1997, 333)

Bohman is worried that in cases of political poverty it is an unacknowledged capability failure that causes some groups to remain outside effective participation. He observes how political poverty appears to be curiously persistent even when economic resources become more equally available to marginalised groups. This is the case especially when political marginalisation connected to differences in race, class, and gender. The capability approach can both account for the existence of such persistent inequality while giving us 'distinct political responsibilities to the future' to make sure that such circles of

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

political impoverishment are broken. Striking a bleak tone, he notes that 'It is possible to impoverish whole generations as well as whole groups' and underlines the role of education in giving everyone the minimum of political functionality (Bohman 1997, 332).

Marginalised groups are often forced to 'challenge not only the prevailing public reasons, but also the prevailing definition of adequate public functioning.' (Bohman 1997, 336) Such definitions are culturally specific, and their marginalising effects can be separate from the question of material redistribution. As Iris Marion Young (2000, 55 ff.) also points out, seemingly neutral norms of public functioning are often guilty of privileging dominant groups and excluding the contribution of already marginalised groups while nominally including them within deliberation, a phenomenon she calls 'internal exclusion'. Political poverty is the phenomenon that makes challenging internal exclusions harder for already marginalised groups.

However, while the question of capabilities should be understood as separate from equality of resources, lack of capabilities tends to lead to inequalities in material terms: as politically impoverished groups fail to appropriate political power, they will also fail to appropriate the material resources necessary for their well-being (Bohman 1997, 334). As Amartya Sen has noted, democracy and economic development must be understood as co-constitutive: democratic representation is the best way to guarantee an equal distribution of resources (Sen 2009, 346). However, Bohman argues that the economic capability approach as formulated by Sen fails to translate completely to the political realm. The capability approach focuses on economic outcomes that are defined by autonomous individual choice, and thus defines 'agency freedom' as the capability to use resources to achieve one's economic goals (Bohman 1997, 335). However, since in the realm of politics there can be no direct relationship between capabilities, effort, and desired outcomes, the category of effective freedom fit for the political realm must be different from an outcome-centric approach. Bohman, then, draws a distinction between effective agency freedom and effective freedom in the political realm of public deliberation. The measure

3.3 Equality of Effective Social Freedom

of deliberative success is knowing that one's views have influenced the deliberation. The relevant form of capability equality for politics is then 'effective communicative freedom; that is, the capacity to participate effectively in public activities.' (Bohman 1997, 337) In a just society everyone should be able to obtain the social capabilities that allow them to initiate deliberation in the public sphere about matters of importance to them, and to influence the public deliberations of a democratic society, regardless of material wealth, cultural or ethnic background, or other social factors.

The capability approach has been criticised for its insistence on finding measures for freedom, a criticism I somewhat subscribe to and will outline further below. Knight and Johnson (1997) note that any account of political equality, even a capabilities-based one, must overcome the difficulty of measuring poverty of freedom, a task which appears doomed to failure, especially in intermediate cases where the exact amount of political effectiveness is impossible to distinguish as the measurement is prone to be reduced to a question distribution of material resources (Knight and Johnson 1997, 298–305). The measurement question includes two separate issues that must be assessed: '(1) how do we determine which politically relevant capacities are beyond the control of individuals? and (2) how do we rectify the inequalities in the context of a democratic process?' (Knight and Johnson 1997, 305) The capacities relevant to individuals often dependent on material factors well outside their own control. Knight and Johnson (1997, 306, 309) note that deliberation requires a whole suite of cognitive capacities, skills, and functions which are hard to distinguish in a relevant manner. These skills and functions are also not only threatened by cultural inequalities, but also by material poverty, which can be the result of political decisions to prioritise institutional redistribution of resources. Such decisions might then result in deliberative inequalities in the political realm.

Even more threatening to any measure of effective social freedom is the fact that measuring the effectiveness of political participation might be impossible:

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

Since political equality presupposes effective participation, such assessment presumes that we can determine with some confidence the effectiveness of participants within deliberative arrangements. Here effective participation is calibrated in complex ways to influence the outcomes of the democratic process. But in a deliberative scheme such influence is often hard to discern. Indeed, to the extent that deliberation entails the willingness of participants to revise their own views on issues, it may often be impossible to determine in a straightforward way how the interests of particular individuals relate to the collective outcome.

(Knight and Johnson 1997, 309)

Bohman accepts this criticism. He attempts to solve the problem of measuring the effectiveness of political participation by shifting his focus away from measuring of political outcomes. Instead, he argues that political equality as effective freedom should be measured by the *quality* of effective participation, not by its outcomes (Bohman 1997, 334). One such measure is the distribution of burdens of participating in deliberative processes: in an unjust situation powerful groups might be able to keep some issues from the deliberative agenda simply by threats and intimidation, while politically impoverished groups might have to pay a heavy price for even getting their issue noticed in the public sphere (Bohman 1997, 338–9). Another indicator Bohman proposes is the ability to initiate deliberation: if a group is unable to get their concerns on the deliberative agenda and suffers as a consequence, they probably suffer from political poverty. Continued participation and cooperation with political structures also indicates that a group feels that their concerns are listened to, even if they disagree with the outcomes. If some groups withdraw their participation in the democratic process, it probably is due to a capability failure, as ‘Persistently disadvantaged groups have no reason to recognize the legitimacy of the regime with which they disagree but cannot afford to ignore.’ (Bohman 1997, 333) In other words, if a group remains politically passive under conditions of formal equality, this should be seen as an indicator of political poverty, not a sign of a willingness to remain passive.

3.3 Equality of Effective Social Freedom

Bonvin and Laruffa (2018) have taken note of the way capability approach seems to be able to give an account of such deficits in ideal accounts of democracy that are incapable of accounting for real-life inequalities in political participation. Their emphasis is on how Sen's approach accounts for what they refer to as 'conversion factors,' or the ability of citizens '[to convert] formal freedoms (inputs) into capabilities or real freedoms (outputs)' (Bonvin and Laruffa 2018, 220). The capability approach allows for a way to understand how political poverty is not a result of individual failures:

Rather, as it is the case for any lack of capabilities, political poverty emerges from the interaction between individual and contextual or collective conversion factors. Along this line of reasoning, many sociological studies have emphasized how material barriers related to economic poverty translate into obstacles that restrict the capability for voice of those concerned and their ability to defend their views in the course of public debates.

(Bonvin and Laruffa 2018, 226)

Bonvin and Laruffa approach political poverty as a result of restrictions of two capabilities, the 'capability for voice' and 'capability for aspiration,' which are a result of social interaction, not individual choice. This is a step towards the sense of political poverty I wish to encapsulate in this dissertation. Of especial interest to me is the idea of inequality of the capacity to aspire as described by Arjun Appadurai (2004): Appadurai observes that the capability to orient oneself towards the future and engage with it can be a cultural capacity harmed by social misrecognition. This extension of the capability approach shows the power of the concept in providing measures for specifically political impoverishment.

However, the capability approach comes with its own shortcomings. Bohman's willingness to use the term political poverty, which underlines the concreteness of the phenomena and analytically differentiates it from the processes of political exclusion and inclusion as drawing of borders between 'us' and 'them'. I take Bohman's articulation of the concept in terms of equality of effective freedom to be a fruitful starting point for my own work. However, there is

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

something inherently suspicious in the very search for objective measures of political freedom. This has something to do with the very model of social criticism these theories engage in, and its shortcomings when talking about what goes on inside the heads of those who find themselves marginalised. What I am interested in are the social conditions for experiencing oneself as a capable political agent, something which the deliberative accounts of democracy, which treat politics from a third-person perspective, are surprisingly silent about.

3.4 What Is Missed by the Capability Approach?

The capability approach has its clear merits when compared to most other approaches to conceptualising social inequality and injustice. The insistence on freedom as effective social functioning is clearly a more pragmatic position than the idealism, proceduralism, and resourcism that characterise Rawlsian and Habermasian approaches to political philosophy. However, the capabilities account still gives a somewhat one-sided picture of political freedom, characterising it in terms of measurable possibilities and capabilities for action. Such an account of freedom limits its scope to the examination of external circumstances and their relevance to ideal accounts of democratic participation, deliberative or otherwise.

As Bohman (1997, 334) reminds us, while capability equality as agency freedom can be clearly measured through favourable outcomes, it belongs to the very nature of politics that the outcome is always at risk. This is why he formulates indicators of freedom which focus on the specific features of deliberative participation: initiating deliberation, participating in it, and being able to have one's concerns heard, are all qualities of deliberation itself and not its outcome. However, it is this element of risk which makes political engagement as much about having the courage to appear in public and disclose oneself to others, as about having the prerequisite cognitive and communicative capabilities for effective participation. This element of courage, the motivation to appear in public and to make oneself heard, is alone an important part of experiencing oneself as a capable political agent, as having a sense of meaningful political

3.4 What Is Missed by the Capability Approach?

agency, and points towards other experiential features of political agency. Bohman's account of effective social freedom does not discuss this subjective aspect of experiencing oneself as an authorised political agent.

The focus on cognitive and communicative capabilities—which presumably can be objectively measured—reveals an important aspect of Bohman's account: it is aimed at finding measures and indicators of political poverty which could be considered universally valid in any deliberative democratic context. My approach acknowledges the power of the capability approach in providing such measures. However, leaving the matter at finding an objective measure of political equality leaves much unexplored. I will in the following chapters approach political poverty from the perspective of freedom as it is experienced in coexistence with others. I am interested in the subjective level of experiencing oneself as a person who has the voice and ability to engage in political matters, a person who is allowed to be political. The way one experiences oneself as a political person is not separable from inhabiting a certain type of social position, or having a certain type of personal history, or belonging to a social group which is defined in outsider's eyes by a certain stereotype. When it comes to personal or group engagement in political life, what may come naturally to a university educated person with a middle-class background can, for those lacking these resources, be outside the bounds of what is experienced as possible. As Miranda Fricker writes, when one internalises such a sense of what is and isn't possible as part of one's identity, what one really is, the external structural form of social power becomes a form of 'informal disenfranchisement', something that is not external to the subject, but is experienced as a part of the self (Fricker 2007, 16). Such a habitual inability to perceive oneself as a political agent and the world as a field for political engagement is best examined by methods which go beyond seeking objective indicators of political poverty.

Bohman explicitly criticises proponents of deliberative democracy for their arid proceduralism that erases real life differences in political capabilities from view to theoretically procure a seemingly level playing field. The idealism of theories of deliberative democracy has been a favourite target of critical theorists of

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

many stripes since the 1990s and deliberative theorists have risen to the occasion to provide more nuanced and realistic depictions of possible just deliberative democratic systems (e.g. Dryzek 2010; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012; Young 2000). However, the capability account of political equality itself aims towards an objective measure of political poverty as an injustice, as relational as it might be. The matter of subjective motivation to participate reveals the limits of the capability approach. Instead, it puts forward a set of questions that are best answered by a tradition of philosophy that remains wary of objectivist moral and ethical reasoning while also refusing the uncritical return to subjective experience and psychological explanations as any ground for serious moral and political philosophy. The motivation to engage in politics is a phenomenon best approached by a phenomenological approach that as, noted by Sébastien Aeschbach (2017, 11), is neither normative nor causal; neither explores the normative status of political poverty as an injustice, nor wishes to explore the sociological or psychological causal mechanisms behind political poverty.

The account of political poverty as capability inequality shows that there is more to political equality than equality of opportunity and just democratic procedures, as important parts of the equation those are. Equality of effective freedom provides a conceptual tool to evaluate the justness of democratic participation in a much more substantial manner. However, the capability approach still remains within a paradigm of theories of justice and democracy which attempt to measure inequality of freedom as an objective phenomenon among others. Such an approach foregoes the subjective, experiential component of having and using political freedom. Approaching the question from first-person and second-person points of view reveals facets of the phenomenon which are unaccounted for by the objectivist model of social criticism. The attempt to find operationalisable indicators for measuring freedom neglects a crucial aspect of having political agency, that of experiencing freedom in lived coexistence with others. Freedom in this sense cannot be subjected to exact measure, as objective indicators have a hard time disclosing

3.4 What Is Missed by the Capability Approach?

the loss of a freedom that is experienced as engaging, liberating, enjoyable, but also as demanding and painful—but still *meaningful*. Revealing these facets of political freedom requires a different methodology.

While the capabilities approach is correct in turning its attention from equality of opportunity to equality of effective freedom, i.e. the capability to participate in public life of a community and its political deliberations, the approach is insufficient for exploring political poverty as loss of experiential freedom. What also needs to be a target of investigation are the intersubjective experiential grounds of political agency, the forms of embodied intentionality required for the emergence of a sense of meaningful agency in experience. Political agency means more than just possessing certain cognitive forms of know-how on how to participate in public deliberation. Political agency is also about being able to experience oneself as a capable political agent. A sense of oneself as a capable political actor, combined with a sense of being part a group effort towards a shared goal which is experienced as meaningful (an ideological project, abolishing a burning injustice, a wrong to be righted, or even the tribal project of protecting ‘us’ from ‘them’) present a shared horizon of future possibilities that may be grasped in public engagement, mobilisation, and action. In such engagement the world itself is experienced differently, with a new affective hue or ‘texture’ of publicness.

The ‘sofa problem’ appears to present a different question than the one answered by the approaches to political inequality explored above. Just as it is not enough to talk about exclusion instead of poverty, it is not enough to conceptualise political poverty as the lack of capabilities required for equality of effective social freedom. Political poverty is also suffered as inability to experience ‘getting off the sofa’ as a meaningful possibility, despite one’s own frustration with how society is organised. Often such frustration is due to suffering from economic and social marginalisation that one feels powerless to do anything about. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom means not being able to perceive any credible alternatives which would offer hope of making a meaningful difference. Such poverty is *suffered* as frustration,

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

powerlessness, and often even shame; it manifests as silences in public discourse, as blind spots and lacunae in experience, as social worlds in which their inhabitants lack a common idiom to put their experiences in their own words instead of having their lives explained for them by experts from the outside (see Skeggs 2004 on the role of expert knowledge in producing and upholding experiences of social inferiority).

I do not believe that it is enough to measure political freedom; nor that freedom, in the last instance, can be subjected to indicators and measures. Political freedom is fundamentally ambiguous and not co-terminous with the universal norms of autonomy and justice. Finding objective indicators that allow the operationalisation of a conception of political poverty is not the whole truth of the matter, as important as it is. I instead move toward a method that Simon Charlesworth calls a 'hermeneutic of experience' that aims to make intelligible obstacles, limitations and constraints to political agency that remain outside cultural representation (Charlesworth 2000, 4). This is a job for more than just sociology or critical theories of democracy: what is needed is a phenomenological examination of the experiential enabling conditions of freedom.

As an example of trying to find links between objective measures and subjective experiences of poverty, Lois McNay explores ways that political agency can be destroyed by experiencing oppression and domination as well as by material poverty. This does not mean talking only about a measurable lack of social recognition, or cognitive and communicative capabilities which allow persons to make use of opportunities and resources offered to them. The effects of unjust power relationships on social reality run much deeper than and do not stop at the level of influencing public deliberation in illegitimate ways. McNay (2014, 184) writes that 'domination is not a purely external relation, but, at its most effective, an internal one of symbolic violence.' Instead of focusing only on the external, objective features of poverty, McNay evokes its subjective side, that which impinges on the sense of having any social agency in the first place. As she writes: 'Economic deprivation is not just brute material lack but may be lived

3.4 What Is Missed by the Capability Approach?

as a lack of second-order agency, as feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness that often leave subordinated individuals unable to control their lives or do anything other than endure their oppression.’ (McNay 2014, 184) It is these feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, often combined with frustration and shame, that contribute to political poverty in the same way as lacking the cognitive civic capabilities conferred by education.

We are not ontologically separate from the social situations we find ourselves in, but always imbricated and interlaced with them on a pre-personal anonymous level of bodily being that comes before any objectifying reflection on our circumstances. The well-meaning universalism of thinking on equality in terms of opportunities or capabilities bypasses the existential situation that the politically impoverished find themselves in. Even the focus on capabilities, as it has been examined in this chapter, misses this facet of their predicament. Speaking of political poverty in terms of the loss of experiential freedom is a way to describe a way of experiencing the public world as devoid of possibility for meaningful political engagement. Moreover, public engagement may appear as something which causes shame and suffering. This stands in contrast of accounts of democratic activism that describe it as a self-evident source of joy and pleasure. Such possibilities for enjoying pleasures of activism have social conditions that must be addressed.

Political poverty is not just about a lack of certain capabilities, a matter that could be addressed with calls for increased civic education and other means of providing for the cognitive and communicative capabilities required for effective participation in deliberative democracy. By starting from the experiences of politically impoverished social groups we can begin to piece together a picture of social worlds marked by the diminishing of the experience of freedom due to suffering from frustration, powerlessness, hopelessness, and public silence. Lack of the capabilities required for production of shared political meanings is simply one facet of a larger picture in which entire social worlds can appear dispossessed of the conditions required for experiencing effective political engagement as a meaningful possibility. In the next chapter I begin to

3. Political Poverty as Inequality of Effective Freedom

put together a conception of political freedom which could be used in a diagnosis of such situations in which freedom has lost its meaning.

4. How Freedom Becomes Meaningful

4.1 Experiential Freedom as Meaningful Engagement

In this chapter I develop an experientialist account of political freedom. I focus on how political engagement comes to be experienced as a meaningful possibility, how politics begins to present a meaningful and believable field of possibilities for engagement. I approach the problem by discussing how the experience of freedom as the sense of having political agency can be approached in the terms of faith as a sense of practical meaningfulness in experience. This includes both faith in oneself as a political agent, and faith as finding meaning in political engagement. Faith in this sense forms a part of the affective atmosphere of human social experience; loss of faith is experienced as the diminishing and fracturing of that experience. In the next chapter I discuss how political poverty in this experientialist sense can be made intelligible through a heuristic concept of political poverty as loss of faith.

In this chapters I develop an account of freedom which begins from not from freedom of will and the capabilities required for effective action, but from the acquisition of meaningfulness in experience through sedimentation. I ground my approach through a reading of the political theory of Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological and political writings. Discussing the important similarities and differences between those two accounts allows me to tease out an account of the constitution of the experience of political freedom.

I investigate the birth of individual political motivation in the process of finding meaning in becoming engaged with politics. This is an aspect of political agency

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

that has not been sufficiently addressed by political theorists. The ability to experience the social world as a public thing, that is to say, as a meaningful field for political action and engagement, is a key component of freedom as political agency. Such meaningfulness is primarily experienced on a pre-reflective level of embodied operative intentionality, and it is on this pre-personal, anonymous level of intersubjectivity that human body-subjects come to have faith in themselves as political agents and correspondingly faith in the capability of politics to bring about meaningful change to the better. This faith is the cornerstone of the ability to experience the public realm as a field for possible action.

In this chapter I discuss political freedom as the experience of meaningful political engagement. It bears mentioning that it is certainly possible to remain active in one's private life without becoming politically engaged, even if proposing the reverse somehow appears to me to be a less self-evident proposition. I remain non-committal as to what exactly constitutes political action or engagement, the use of one's freedom. Instead of claiming that politics happen in certain kinds of places and institutions instead of others, I argue that political action remains ambiguous in both in the forms it takes and the places or spheres it takes place. We cannot know beforehand what constitutes political engagement and action; likewise, political engagement has to be understood as a broader phenomenon than in the kind of heroic account given of it by Arendt.

The account of freedom given by Arendt focuses on the heroic quality of action as a new beginning, a miracle, a break with the past and the emergence of a new meaning into the world. The word *natality* is to be taken in its most literal sense, since Arendt directly ties this capacity of action to the quality of every new human birth: 'the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.' (Arendt 1998, 9) Action has a narrative quality: the birth of a new human being means the beginning of a new story, a story which ultimately ends in their death. Any true actions they take during their life can, by definition, only happen in a dedicated public sphere, since only

4.1 *Experiential Freedom as Meaningful Engagement*

in the public sphere can actions be observed and joined in by others. In this way, elements of their story can become sedimented into the world through their actions, and carry on living even after the protagonist has left the stage. Only the public sphere as the in-between, the web of relationships we knit over the material world, can carry action and its consequences, the narratives it forms. According to Arendt, the stories we tell of action are the stuff that the public sphere is made of, and such deeds can only be brought about by a courageous actor which experiences freedom in heroic action with others.

However, as discussed above in Chapter 2.5, Arendt's account of freedom remains somewhat blind to the role that the sedimentation of our lived bodies has in the emergence of the motivation to participate in politics. As discussed in Chapter 2.4, I follow existentialist phenomenology in understanding experience as constituted through an open dialectic between a lived body and its environment, the results of which become sedimented into the lived body itself. This approach to the embodied and dialectical quality of being leads me to examine how having political agency becomes a meaningful part of one's experience. Below I approach this birth of meaning through Merleau-Ponty's concept *intentional arc*.

Action always has the character of improvisation: even when we engage in a cognitive deliberation before acting or speaking, this deliberation is not what we do when we act and speak. When engaged in action, the body-subject always somewhat loses itself in the task; they improvise on the sedimented significations which have been incorporated in interaction with others. Through improvisation, the body-subject makes meaning its own by expressing it, by allowing one's own style to show through. This is why Merleau-Ponty dedicates so much attention to painting in his work. Just as a skilful work of art reveals its author on a level of significance which cannot be intellectually apprehended, lived bodies reveal us the lived significance of lives *because* our bodies are an expressive medium which never stops signifying to others like us. We interact in the world on perceptual faith and this faith allows us our degrees of freedom in our dialectic with the world.

4. How Freedom Becomes Meaningful

All forms of sociality as intersubjectivity are always lived through by an embodied actor. Our affective attitudes, our forms of bodily comportment towards the world and others, as well as our cognitive schema, are largely the product of our continuous embodied encounter with the social world that imprints on us the perceptual and intentional machinery that allows our being its thrust towards the world. We do not perceive the world a set of given perceptual datum that we then constitute into objects of perception. Our perception is already *of* a social world and our previous encounters with it have sedimented into us a significance that casts over our perception not just the sense of there being external physical objects that maintain their existence outside us without us, but also a sense of a world of possibilities to action and expression.

Following Merleau-Ponty, one can claim that freedom as political agency and engagement is always ambiguous, that is to say, it is impossible to precisely say when we are being political and when we are not. In a time of strikes, going to work might become as much a political act as not working; there are times when public deliberation loses its political character and becomes empty speech. Who is to say if a football hooligan who finds a political meaning in his violent activities is not engaging in politics, whether his politics veer to the far right or to the far left according to the leanings of his group? Such a person might be far less politically impoverished than a middle-class person who cannot see any avenues for having an influence on the world around him, to bring himself to shake the feeling that politics is not for him, that it does not present a meaningful possibility, and thus he lacks faith in politics, and consequently, the motivation to get involved in public matters.

The role of context is paramount: it makes no sense to talk about experiencing freedom without there being in experience a realm in which freedom can unfold. We are only able to become politically impoverished in this experientialist sense in a system that guarantees democratic rights to its citizens and promises a formal inclusion into public deliberation. This creates expectations about our right share of power and liberty, which we rightly expect to be fulfilled or we

4.1 *Experiential Freedom as Meaningful Engagement*

lose faith in the workings of the system itself. When they are not, we become frustrated or even suffer from negative emotions such as a feeling of powerlessness and shame. Because of this I do not give a sociological account of causality in social marginalisation but attempt to make intelligible the facet of experience which I call *experiential freedom*. This is not to say I refuse the importance of research on marginalisation and poverty, far from it. I simply explore the matter solely through a phenomenological questioning of how political poverty can be approached as a diminishing or fracturing of social experience, of a loss of meaningfulness of political engagement. In this sense I follow Dejours et al. who, as I discussed in Chapter 2.2, advocates experientialist accounts of injustice over objective ones. The examination of particular experiences of injustice can reveal kinds of injustices which objectivist accounts are unable to make intelligible due to their universalistic approach.

To speak of political freedom is only meaningful if the society around us is at least nominally democratic, i.e. at least claims to present every citizen with the equal right to public engagement. To return to the Preface to Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror*, such liberty cannot remain a dead letter, a purely formal right. 'It is the essence of liberty to exist only in the practice of liberty, in the inevitably imperfect movement which joins us to others, to the things of the world, to our jobs, mixed with the hazards of our situation.' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, xxiv) It is only meaningful to speak of freedom in this experiential sense when this right translates to concrete relations between men, that in my experience the gates of politics do not remain closed to me. If I do not experience political engagement as a meaningful possibility because the world does not allow me the possibility to experience it as such, I remain informally disenfranchised, unable to act upon my purely formal right to become a political agent.

If I live in a totalitarian or otherwise hierarchical society, I might be perfectly content to let things remain as they are; to try to change them would be to engage in a literally heroic enterprise, to risk my life and limb in pursuit of a different future. Such heroic actions are sometimes taken; they are also rare and

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

are held as heroic for that very reason – they are a break in the political everyday, stuff of legends. In a functioning democracy such heroic action should not be required of anyone, as the rights of everyone are guaranteed in the letter of the law *and* in the everyday practices of a community. The frustration that political poverty brings is the frustration of not being able to use my democratic rights despite being told I am formally included, and formally provided with the opportunity to make myself heard in public. I might also experience the concrete repercussions of not having my voice heard and my interests looked after, increasing my frustration.

An important truth about the amount of liberty citizens enjoy under any given political regime is to be found by examining the ways that the regime allows for human beings and their interpersonal relationships to flourish. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

Whatever one's philosophical or even theological position, a society is not the temple of value-idols that figure on the front of its monuments or in its constitutional scrolls; the value of a society is the value it places upon man's relation to man. It is not just a question of knowing what the liberals have in mind but what in reality is done by the liberal state within and beyond its frontiers. Where it is clear that the purity of principles is not put into practice, it merits condemnation rather than absolution.

(Merleau-Ponty 1969, xiv)

This is also why I develop below a conception of political agency which keeps its distance to the Arendtian picture of action as a new beginning, as *natality*. I instead move towards Merleau-Ponty and his account of liberty as something we experience when we project ourselves towards the social world, 'throw ourselves' into a situation, a process which is always shot through by ambiguity: we do not know beforehand what we are doing before we do it, no more than we know who we really are, what we are *really* capable of when put to the test. We simply sense that there is a possibility that we are able and willing to engage with. Liberty in this sense is not a question of the purity of principles, of formal

guarantees of rights, or even a formal inclusion into a deliberative process, but something we experience in our human relationships. Experience of political freedom is a sense of being allowed to become engaged, a sense of trust in others and the world, a sense that there is a possible future to be reached towards, together. It is not a question of success, a result of having a radical impact on things. It is the feeling that one is authorised to act and speak, somewhat secure in the knowledge that the world will carry us even if we put ourselves in danger, and that there is something that it is worth putting oneself in danger for. It means having *faith* in the world and ourselves.

4.2 Faith as a Sense of Practical Meaningfulness

I begin with an example, an observation on the way residents of a Finnish underprivileged neighbourhood experience their inability to have a political effect on society:

During her years of fieldwork Eeva became more and more bothered by the observation that among the residents of the area the primary feeling associated with belonging to a society was frustration. Getting to know the residents made quickly clear that people were not – of course – dumb or lazy, far from it. But many seemed to lack an understanding of what could be done about frustrating things, and the faith in the capacity of one's own actions to have an effect on things.¹

The residents are lacking both the understanding of what could be done, and the faith in their own *capacity to make a difference*. This off-hand remark about a 'lack of faith' reveals an interesting theoretical question that takes me back to the sofa problem I discussed above. The residents have not chosen to remain

¹ "Vuosien kenttätöiden aikana Eevaa alkoi yhä enemmän vaivata havainto siitä, että alueen asukkaiden päällimmäisin yhteiskuntaan kuulumiseen liittyvä tunne tuntui olevan turhautuminen. Asukkaisiin tutustuminen teki nopeasti selväksi sen, että ihmiset eivät – tietenkään – olleet tyhmiä tai toimettomia, kaukana siitä. Mutta monilta tuntui puuttuvan käsitys siitä, mitä turhauttaville asioille voisi tehdä, ja usko siihen, että omalla tekemisellä voi olla vaikutusta." (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 14)

All translations from Finnish to English are mine.

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

politically inactive, yet they remain so, in a certain way against their own will. They are frustrated by their own experienced lack of ability and possibilities to make a difference.

The above observation about the loss of faith in one's capacity to act and change things leads me to begin my own discussion on political agency with a discussion on the role that faith plays in the experience of freedom. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom is described above as a question of losing faith due to reasons mostly outside one's own conscious control. As we will discuss further in the next chapter, this loss of faith has led the persons encountered by Luhtakallio and Mustranta to renounce public engagement as a possibility. When combined with economic hardship and other problems, this loss of a public role plays a role in the diminishing of their social experience, locking them in private lives often marked by frustration and suffering. It appears that faith, then, is not a subjective, private phenomenon. Instead, this loss of faith is both a subjective and an objective matter, a diminishing and fracturing of the social experience of those suffering from political poverty. This is well described by Hannah Arendt in the *Human Condition* (1998) as the fading away of the web of human relationships as something which 'illuminates' the world. In the next chapter I discuss further how in such cases one's social experience diminishes and becomes fractured as political engagement recedes from experience *as a meaningful possibility*.

How then could we approach faith as a political feature of experience? A route to examining faith in this sense emerges through looking at Arendt's treatment of classical religious accounts of the good as it should emerge in and guide public life. In her essay 'Freedom and Politics' Arendt explores political freedom as something which can only be experienced in 'intercourse with others, not in intercourse with our selves' (Arendt 2018, 220). Arendt knowingly picks her examples from the context of Christianity: she observes that accounts of freedom which focus on the freedom of will appear to delineate a moral politics which ultimately can be shown to be based on the works of Christian writers of the late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The focus on individual free will

4.2 Faith as a Sense of Practical Meaningfulness

inevitably appears to turn towards a discussion of moral goodness, which Arendt rejects as a meaningful possibility in public life. Action and speech are always undertaken in public and against uncertainty about their outcome; as such, their virtue is not the goodness of private men. The virtue proper to politics is *courage*, manifest in the willingness to emerge out in public life, something which always leaves us vulnerable (Arendt 1998, 186). Arendt follows Machiavelli, whose *virtú* is not goodness, but a quality that only belongs to public figures who act in the context of an entire community, and observes that ‘Goodness, therefore, as a consistent way of life, is not only impossible within the confines of the public realm, it is even destructive of it.’ (Arendt 1998, 77) The public actor must be able to set aside considerations of private morality and instead be ready to perform actions that benefit the whole community, even if they would not be the actions of a virtuous person who acts out of consideration for moral goodness.²

While Arendt is critical of Christian religious authorities, such as Saint Augustine and Saint Paul, for rejecting the political life of the Greek polis and turning their attention towards a religious concern with goodness, this is not due to a lack of a suitable example. To Arendt, there is a legitimate political religious character *par excellence* who can teach us much about properly political action: Jesus of Nazareth. The actions of Jesus bear testimony to a freedom that does not result from a freedom of will to choose, and consequently his actions do not exhibit a moral goodness, but a consideration of the needs of the community as a whole. As Arendt describes it, in the figure of Jesus we encounter ‘a quite extraordinary understanding of freedom and of the power inherent in human freedom; but the human capacity that corresponds to this power and, in the words of the Gospel, is capable of moving mountains, is not will but faith.’ (Arendt 2018, 239) When one acts with others, one does not have a free choice between clear-cut moral alternatives and guaranteed outcomes. In the absence of such options, one must draw on the human capacity of faith, not

² I note here that Arendt’s approving appraisal of Machiavelli is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s similar thoughts in the essay ‘Notes on Machiavelli’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 211–23).

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

will. According to Arendt action proper is the human ability to begin something new, and thus most properly characterised as a miracle, and performing miracles is most definitely ‘within the range of human faculties’—when looked at from this point of view, all human affairs are held together by miracles (Arendt 2018, 239).

Arendt also refers to Jesus as an example in the *Human Condition*: Jesus pioneered the political act of *forgiveness*. Forgiveness makes action possible by allowing men to release themselves from its always unpredictable consequences and to uphold the community. (Arendt 1998, 238–40) Similarly, it is the activity of *promising* to others and having faith that others keep their word which allows the political realm to come to being and hold together. Since man is unable to rely on himself alone, he can only muster the courage to act by having faith in others to uphold the shared world. This allows men to emerge from their private lives to engage each other in public and to experience the joy of public action. As Arendt writes,

Man's inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all. (Arendt 1998, 244)

This concept of faith as an interpersonal relationship which helps to keep the public realm together, then, appears to me a fruitful tool for approaching the experiential aspect of freedom as a political matter. Experiential freedom is not only about the absence of outer impediments to freedom as political agency. Nor is it about liberty as the freedom of will to choose as one wishes. It appears that experience of freedom is to be found only within action, political engagement itself. Approaching the matter of political agency as a result of faith, a relationship to the world which is, by definition, hard to put to words, appears to be one way of working through the implications of such a thesis.

4.2 Faith as a Sense of Practical Meaningfulness

According to Arendt (2018, 225), freedom can only be encountered in action itself, not in an operation of will which leads to acting. This is because action becomes freedom only when it is allowed to unfold in a public world shared with others. This means that action always has an element of spontaneity and improvisation. Such an unthinking virtuosity of acting with others does not belong to philosophical accounts of freedom which concern themselves with 'willing as intercourse with one's self' (Arendt 2018, 232). This can be read as saying that we can only truly act when we are able to engage with the world on an intersubjective level which comes before our personal cognitive operations, such as conscious reflection on means and ends. Taking Arendt's position on faith seriously means saying that political action is possible because one has faith in the possibility and meaningfulness of action on a pre-reflective level of intentionality. One can only act insofar as one is able overcome hesitation about the uncertainty of the outcome of one's actions, and have faith that the action will make a meaningful mark on the world, even if it was ultimately unsuccessful. I can act because on the level of operative pre-reflective intentionality I *believe* action to be meaningful and because I already possess in my body the incorporated significances upon which my lived body can constantly improvise by expressing itself in action.

In this respect Arendt's political theory has a lot in common with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) Merleau-Ponty attempts to show how our entire ability to engage in reflection is always dependent on a pre-reflective embodied relationship to the world which gives the world for reflection as its subject matter. We always begin from a position of *perceptual faith* (*la foi perceptive*): because we take the reality of the shared world as a given can we even come to question it in sceptical reflection. In order to act in, and reflect on the world at all, we must already be *of* the world, to have a relationship of perceptual faith with it. It is because we are as much a part of the world as other persons and objects external to us that things of the world appear to us as meaningful and significant; it is because others, too, can experience the world as we do, that makes the world appear real, and by

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

extension, our own existence appear real to ourselves, as well.³ As Merleau-Ponty describes it, our experience of this 'brute being' is the 'umbilical cord' which connects us to reality and subtends our attitude towards it (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 157).

In his essay 'Faith and Good Faith' Merleau-Ponty also sees a political aspect to even religious faith, approaching it in terms of an unreserved commitment which remains in movement, at moments sincere faith in God, at others a necessarily unquestioning obedience of the Church—a position reminiscent of a loyal Communist vis-à-vis the Party. In this sense all political engagement demands a measure of faith which is already present in every perception:

Faith—in the sense of an unreserved commitment which is never completely justified—enters the picture as soon as we leave the realm of pure geometrical ideas and have to deal with the existing world. Each of our perceptions is an act of faith in that affirms more than we strictly know, since objects are inexhaustible and our information limited. (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 179)

Merleau-Ponty draws from a conception of faith to remonstrate against a heroic notion of agency, that of an agent who, by acting alone, illuminates a religious or historical truth:

Or rather, is not faith, stripped of its illusions, itself that very movement which unites us with others, our present with our past, and by means of which we make everything have meaning, bringing the world's confused talk to an end with a precise word? This is just what the Christian saints and the heroes of past revolutions have always done—although they tried to believe that their fight had already been won in heaven or in History. This resource is not available to the men of today. (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 186–7)

Merleau-Ponty's work on intentionality and experience can have a political relevance and appear surprisingly consonant with Arendt's thinking on faith.

³ In *The Life of Mind* Arendt (1978, 46) cites Merleau-Ponty's thinking in these passages approvingly and appears to be largely in agreement with them.

4.2 Faith as a Sense of Practical Meaningfulness

Arendt (1998, 208) states that ‘The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all’; it is the fact of coexistence which makes the world appear as meaningful, a shared *reality* instead of a private illusion. There would be no possibility of politics without the human capacity to surpass antagonism by having faith in the possibility of a properly political coexistence between human beings. This capacity allows the public realm to provide a shared reality which also allows us to experience our own lives as meaningful and real. It is only by being able to take this reality on faith, that we provide the possibility of coming to being of properly political power which grows from this co-existence, as opposed to individual strength or violent force.

It is our sharing of the same world on the level of pre-personal embodied anonymity which decentres us from ourselves just enough to make politics both a possibility and a *necessity*. As discussed above in Chapters 2.3 and 2.4, we are intersubjective beings to our core; we can never coincide completely with ourselves; our entire sense of self is always a product of social contact. It is impossible to consider a sense of self without such contact; even the fantasy of Robinson Crusoe required the presence (not to mention the colonialist subjection) of Friday to make him properly human, to provide for the social constitution of a sense of self which allows the world to open as meaningful, as real. Faith, as I describe it, is a primordial, pre-reflective, and practical sense of meaningfulness in experience which subtends all experience of social relationships and is thus inherently connected to properly political freedom. As I will show below in Chapter 5, in experiential freedom there is an element of intersubjective trust, an aspect of being able to hope for a possibility of change, a feeling of being able to access a public sphere, and a sense of being able to express oneself in action.

I read Arendt and Merleau-Ponty as insisting on the intersubjective character of freedom. Freedom can only flow from a meaningful encounter in intersubjectivity which underwrites the ability to courageously project oneself in the world and to engage in intercourse with it, enshrined in the human capacity of faith. Experience of freedom in this sense is not a given, but always

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

a product of sedimentation, of incorporation of meaning and lived significances into the habitual lived body.

However, this process is not necessarily a positive one which would always allow body-subjects to increase their power to interrogate their social world. Sedimentation can work in the opposite direction, resulting in silences and darkness, closing down the political realm and coming in the way of world-illuminating action and speech. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom means the loss of the experiential bases of faith in oneself and to the possibilities of action in a public realm shared with a plurality of others. For example, groups of citizens can become functionally invisible to each other, as some groups become marginalised and are turned into stigmatised others who can be either ignored or vilified at will. As their faith in a shared public realm becomes fractured, the experiential conditions of *isonomia*, of being equal in public among other equals, disappear, and a tendency to withdraw from public engagement to suffer in private takes their place. I call this 'loss of faith,' which, for its part, is the subjective side of political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom, the internal counterpart to the diminishing and fracturing of the intersubjective political field that is external to the subject. After giving an account of experiential freedom which focuses on this aspect of experiencing political engagement as meaningful, I will in Chapter 5 focus on how this sense of freedom can be lost.

4.3 The Building of the Intentional Arc

How does faith come about? This sense of practical meaningfulness can be approached in a manner that helps me make intelligible how political poverty means losing it, and with it, the loss of experiential freedom. I tie the above discussion on faith to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception and embodied experience. Political faith in the sense I discussed above, as a faith in one's possibilities to effect meaningful political change, a practical, meaningful relationship to the public world, is not simply an attitude one chooses to take,

but also a product of habituation which, to an important degree, forms one's experience of the world. As Pierre Bourdieu states:

The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which, as Merleau-Ponty showed, is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up with it; he inhabits it like a garment [*un habit*] or a familiar habitat. (Bourdieu 2000, 142-3)

Bourdieu calls this form of practical understanding *illusio*, in the sense of finding a social practice meaningful by virtue of being engaged in it, comprehending it unthinkingly as a player comprehends the rules of a game he is engaged in playing (Bourdieu 2000, 135). The game is experienced as meaningful, the situation on the playing field presents possibilities which are intrinsically meaningful, something to be acted upon; the good player unthinkingly acts accordingly. This practical comprehension describes the character of having faith, something which can also be gleaned from Merleau-Ponty's negative example of having no faith in oneself, suffering from an inferiority complex which one cannot get rid of. It is not likely that one could overcome such a complacency in one's inferiority in a single act of freedom, instead, 'this past, if not a destiny, has at least a specific weight', 'it is not a sum of events over there, far away from me, but rather the atmosphere of my present'. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 467) This atmospheric quality also characterises the experience of freedom: it is the background against which political possibilities appear as *meaningful possibilities* and the world as a possible field for exercising agency. I approach this quality of experience in Merleau-Ponty's terms as its intentional arc.

Merleau-Ponty explores perception through pathological cases in which a trauma or an injury has somehow modified the perceptual schema of those suffering them. 'Schneider' is a patient whose case intrigued Merleau-Ponty. After becoming injured to the back of head by a shrapnel in war, Schneider's entire ability to relate to his surroundings underwent a change. Whereas a

4. How Freedom Becomes Meaningful

'normal' person constantly engages in a pre-reflective communication with their surroundings and spontaneously discovers new meanings and a temporal horizon in what they perceive and interact with, Schneider is able to do so only through a conscious deliberation, leaving him with representations which no longer hold any lived significance to him. As Martina Reuter writes:

Schneider's inability to project a situation for his actions makes visible what Merleau-Ponty calls the intentional arc. This intentional arc is inseparably motion, vision and comprehension; it is prior to the separation of different abilities. As an unitary ability, the intentional arc situates human subjects in relation to their space, past, future, human setting, physical, ideological and moral situation. (Reuter 1999, 74)

The diminishing of the intentional arc of experience means that 'Schneider's own bodily being has ceased to be an active transcendence' (Langer 1989, 52). While he is able to function in familiar situations after a cognitive process of learning to come to terms with them, he is not able to throw himself into new ones. He only comes to terms with them with great effort:

Hence, despite the fact that he possesses thoughts and words, he cannot use these freely to arrive at religious or political opinions; nor can he speak extemporaneously. He is totally caught up in the present, and cannot consider his past as a whole nor envisage his future as anything more than a 'shrunken' extension of the present. Thus it is the entire 'intentional arc' which has gone limp in Schneider. (Langer 1989, 46)

In Schneider's case his condition is especially evident in the field of sexuality. While he can discuss candid sexual matters, he no longer seeks sexual acts of his own volition. Formerly attractive bodies of the opposite sex no longer hold any special significance or appeal to him. He has lost the part of the 'affective milieu' of experience which would allow other persons present themselves as sexually significant, as something to desire and project one's own body towards (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 156-159). This mirrors his inability to project himself

towards the world and apprehend its lived significance. Schneider finds extending his social circles and establishing new friendships difficult. Like the android character Data in the science fiction series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, he does not fall into relationships spontaneously but instead ‘makes’ friends by a conscious abstract decision (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 160). He is incapable of the unthinking transcendence which characterises the everyday lives of people around him.

The example of Schneider’s sexuality was chosen by Merleau-Ponty because it powerfully illustrates the way our bodies apprehend significance in the world in a primordial dialectical relation to it, by throwing themselves against the objects of the world and interrogating them while remaining open to their solicitations. This form of inhabiting the world as an affective milieu and engaging in communion or dialectic with it cannot be reduced to physiological reflexes or intellectual representations. However, while the example of sexuality powerfully illustrates the fundamental disaffection with which Schneider lives his life, Merleau-Ponty does remind us that sexuality is only one current in a lived life, and leading an effective political life might even benefit from its absence (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 161–2). Conversely, the absence of political significance in one’s experience need not mean leading a lesser life in other respects. To refer back to what I called the ‘sofa problem’, it is perfectly possible that I could live a life that is happy in other respects without becoming engaged in politics if such engagement is not a relevant possibility in the social situation I find myself in. However, the kinds of frustration described by Luhtakallio and Mustranta is a sign that this is often not the case. While an entirely private life can be fulfilling to a degree, it must also be observed that as citizens of a democratic regime we have certain expectations which we expect to have fulfilled, expectations such as the right to participate as equals in the political process through voting, and the ability to have our voice heard in public. Having these expectations disappointed can be experienced as frustrating, and having one’s voice completely ignored can be experienced as a form of suffering. More importantly, not having one’s accorded share of political power often goes hand in hand with

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

suffering social marginalisation and economic impoverishment, another source of suffering.

The intentional arc, as described by Merleau-Ponty, then, forms the affective background of experience, against which things of the world present themselves as meaningful objects of action in certain ways. Coole (2007b, 166–7) argues that the body is always intertwined with the world through its intentional relations. This is what is experienced as motivation: the body stylises the world by casting an intentional arc around itself which makes the objects of perception appear as meaningful. Through the body's projecting of the intentional arc around itself, things of the world can solicit us to act upon them or appear to rebuff our advances. For example, when I have acquired the skill of driving a car, the cabin of any vehicle presents a space in which I can almost unthinkingly project my body to successfully operate it. Another example would be acquiring a reasonable facility in a public speaking: after giving presentations and receiving feedback from them, I slowly learn to carry my body and use my voice in ways which make me a more accomplished speaker. After a while I build a set of skills which become a part of the intentional arc of my lived experience. A podium no longer presents me with the repugnant sensation of anxiety, fear, the associated sweating, the ever-present possibility of failing miserably. Instead, it might even solicit me to use my skills and motivate me to do so. I come to have *faith* in myself as a speaker as audiences respond mostly positively to my overtures towards them. In this sense intentional arc forms the atmosphere of my experience, the intentional background against which certain things appear as meaningful in certain ways while others do not. As a part of the quality of my experience of things, it is as much a real part of them to me as their objective physical features.

Experiential freedom as I attempt to describe it here is a way of discussing the presence of specifically political significance in one's experience. The word 'faith' describes well the kind of pre-reflective and usually unnoticed attitude of taking the possibility of acting for granted, a feature of practical belief which subtends our lives as social beings and agents. It is also a positive term which

allows us to understand the empowering quality of such experiences, and ties to the theme of interpersonal trust I discuss below in chapter 5.3. Having faith in ourselves as political agents and in the capability of political engagement to change things gives our social experience a positive hue which can bleed into other aspects of life. Conversely, losing this faith diminishes and fractures our social experience. In the next chapter I describe ways that losing faith can lead to an experience of society as something distant and something one does not belong to. Losing faith even lead to a disappearance of meaningful experience of temporality, as a meaningful sense of future possibilities recedes from view and is replaced with a dull sense of being only able to expect more of the same. It appears to me that such diminishing of social experience can have an effect on the entire intentional arc of a person's experience.

The intentional arc of experience, then, comes into being through interaction with others and the world. It is a product of sedimentation of intersubjectivity into the anonymous embodied level of our pre-reflective intentionality. In Chapter 5 I describe at least four politically relevant aspects of the intentional arc as it forms experiential freedom: a sense of interpersonal trust, the expressivity of the body as it develops through sedimentation, a sense of having access to a public realm, and a sense of future temporality in experience, which could also be called hope. For now, I turn towards the way political freedom is always experienced in relationship to a public realm or a political field.

4.4 The Intercorporeal Context of Freedom

The key phenomenological idea I follow is the dialectical nature of the experience of freedom. As I discussed in chapters 2.3 and 2.4, freedom is experienced in a dialectical relationship of give-and-take between a body-subject and their social environment, an open horizon in which the constitution of meaning and significance in experience takes place. Such a freedom is an experience which engages the body's perceptual and motor intentionality. These serve an active, expressive role in creating their lived environment, projecting significance, space and time around the lived body in experience as

4. How Freedom Becomes Meaningful

much as they are passive in encountering and experiencing them. This expressivity of the lived body is also basis of political agency, and the way the body-subject encounters their world from childhood onwards has a massive impact on how they perceive their own possibilities for political engagement. We encounter the world as something which is already constituted by others and full of social meanings. This encounter constitutes us as body-subjects as meaning is sedimented into our lived bodies into habitual schemas of perception and action. The social world becomes sedimented into the lived body and constitutes our own selves; in this sense our experience of self-hood is intersubjective as we remain, in a sense, anonymous to ourselves unless we are able to present ourselves to others.

Experiential freedom is a style of perceiving and acting which makes it possible to experience political engagement as a meaningful possibility in one's own life, to have faith in oneself as a political agent and in the world as a field for possible political engagement. The intercorporeal field both defines my opportunities for freedom while also providing the realm in which freedom can be experienced and also exercised. I encounter the world as an already complicit participant in it, already caught up in projects of others and more or less capable of initiating projects of my own through the expressivity inherent to my lived body. As Coole writes:

Even if I can never achieve full self-knowledge, I discover-invent myself by exploring the world with others. A style evolves that becomes sedimented through practical responses that mark me as a singular temporality, which explicates itself over time. If my identity and role are already ascribed by the structures of world I enter, then my freedom resides in my capacity for improvisation, my singularity depends upon my capacity to reconfigure the world as an expressive advent, and my reflexivity is incurred along the fold of my incarnate existence. (Coole 2007b, 245)

This picture of singular beings as reflective embodied singularities is rooted on Merleau-Ponty's later writings, in which he conceives of the entire human world

as a perceptual field made of a single element, which he terms *flesh* (*la chair*). In the last section of *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) called ‘The Intertwining—The Chiasm’, Merleau-Ponty attempts to show how individual body-subjects rise to reflective consciousness out of the ‘texture’ of the flesh. The body is both a seeing thing and an object of the gaze of others, flesh reflecting on itself, a fold in the texture of the world. The anonymity of the body results from its own inability to completely know itself, while its perceptual relationship to the world unveils the ambiguity of its own borders. The reversibility of perception exposes that we are not a union of spirit and matter, but a more general mode of being as flesh; it senses little difference between attempting to touch my own hand and shaking the hand of the other (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 141–2). We can never catch ourselves ‘in the act,’ as a completely self-aware presence. We are always to a degree outside ourselves, already entangled with a field, an embodied opening towards the world which we operate towards in an attitude of perceptual faith.

In the last chapter of her *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* Diana Coole (2007b, 225 ff.) takes Merleau-Ponty’s thinking on the flesh and casts it into an explicitly political mould. The political field presents us with a fleshy intercorporeal world, criss-crossed and supported by invisible relationships of power which do their work on the singular body-subjects. Experience becomes the dialectical activity of beings immanent to the flesh of the world. We perceive the world while acting in it, all the while reflecting on ourselves and our world and the possible opportunities therein. Even if we tend to conceive of our experience as sequential states of a private consciousness, this does not mean that this is necessarily the case. Subjectivity is always lived together in a world, even if this doesn’t mean that we participate in the *same* intentional subjectivity. Coole reads Merleau-Ponty as instituting a new political ontology of a social world in which body-subjects emerge as singularities out of a shared intercorporeal lifeworld which can be articulated into a political field:

If the political field will be a genuinely intersubjective force field, then it emerges as an intercorporeal tissue wherein subjectivities,

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

like other visible forms, are nurtured or destroyed. This, in short, is a theory of “thick” intersubjectivity that is irreducible to individuals yet productive of degrees of reflexivity, singularity, and agency.

(Coole 2007b, 249)

Coole’s presentation of the flesh of the political as a corporeal, thick intersubjectivity has also its ethical consequences which result from the reconfiguration of the notion of political agency. In line with the somewhat Spinozist ontological monism inherent in the concept, the notion of flesh means rejecting individual subjects as autonomous, clearly delineated agents. Instead, there emerges a picture of agentic capacities which range from the anonymous agency of singular bodies to transpersonal movements, which all do their work inside, and on, the fleshy materiality of the political field (Coole 2005). This results in a political philosophy which prioritises embodied experience and its sedimentation into bodies, and is interested in adding to the capacities of those bodies to engage with the world outside them and stylise it in their image.

I have argued above that political freedom is experienced as meaningful practical engagement with an intersubjective public realm. To describe such engagement in terms of a corporeal intertwining, I make use of Diana Coole’s development of the political aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s thought and especially her reworking of the metaphor of the field. Coole’s reading of Merleau-Ponty begins from his model of the perceptual field as composed on the most basic level of the figure-ground dyad of *Gestalt* psychology. Perception cannot be reduced to the reception of quanta of sensory data. Instead we perceive a figure against a background, a *Gestalt* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 4). The lived body brings to this dyad a third term, with its capacity for expression and creation of meaning. As she writes:

It is this lived intentionality that gives the body’s formative capacities their direction and meaning (*sens*). When embodied subjects are situated in sociopolitical lifeworlds, the arcs they project include “our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation” (PhP 136). Intentional relations will become the

4.4 *The Intercorporeal Context of Freedom*

invisible threads that crisscross the visual (or sociopolitical) field, where they are simultaneously prepersonal (corporeal), personal (agentic), and transpersonal (structural). (Coole 2007b, 168)

The flesh as a perceptual field is the site of the intertwining of the lived body and the world, encountered in experience through both perceptual and motor intentionality. Coole's (2007b, 233) proposed metaphor of the political realm as a *force field* is instructive here, as the shared perceptual field is upheld by relationships of communication and power which make some things and persons appear as attractive while others become repulsive and shunned. Out of this field arise singular formations of agency and reflexive self-awareness. The flesh is embodied anonymous generality, 'midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139) Such an ontological picture of the intercorporeal world conceptualises body-subjects as reflective folds in the flesh, the materiality of the world.

Our agentic capacities flow from this primary intertwining with a broader social field to which we participate. The things of the field present both challenges and possibilities to our perceiving lived bodies. Our bodies are permeated by meaning and power on a somatic level. The body is not just the passive site of discursive inscription, but also an agent in its own right. Bodies apprehend and express significations on a level of pre-reflective operative intentionality that is not reducible to discursive or cognitive acts. Bodies are active participants in all such dialectical exchanges, giving them 'an entire corporeal subtext of lived meanings' (Coole 2007b, 175). This way of thinking about bodies also helps me to think of political agency in terms which go beyond questions of representation and deliberation, and the associated cognitive operations which are often considered to be the stuff of politics.

As discussed above in Chapter 2.4, as corporeal beings, our capacity for political freedom is marked by an ambiguity which eludes objectivation. As Diana Coole observes, while our intentional relationship to the world is fundamentally intersubjective, it is experienced by us as 'individuated body-subjects'. Coole

4. How Freedom Becomes Meaningful

(2007b, 245) proposes that we could understand such body-subjects as agentic singularities, folds in the social field that are capable of self-reflexivity, but only to a degree. Since we are always implicated in the world we live in on the anonymous level of the body, we can never achieve a complete picture of ourselves by our own powers. If this is correct, the possibility for appearance in a public world with others an indispensable part of a full human existence: without it our experience of the world becomes diminished. This could also be described in Arendtian terms as the necessity of coexistence for an experience of freedom, a freedom which also discloses our real self to ourselves in action: that self which we can only encounter in action and who we did not even know existed beforehand.

This has an important consequence regarding political agency. Coole argues that individual freedom is not an all-or-nothing affair: we are never fully determined by social structures or discursive formations, just as we are not absolute consciousnesses which can will and act with full autonomy. Our bodies are conditioned by their surroundings, but remain always capable of improvisation, of doing things differently while using the resources already at hand to it. At the same time our social situation limits the opportunities we can engage with. Understanding that our freedom is only meaningful when understood as a form of communing with our intersubjective and intercorporeal context makes it necessary to approach political freedom as something that cannot be measured from an impartial third-person perspective. An objectivist definition of political freedom makes freedom the subject matter of objective reflection that operates from a 'sideways on' perspective on a social phenomenon, as described by Dejours et al. (2018, 136–7). Such objectivist social critique is able to articulate a conception of freedom in terms of measurable opportunities and capabilities, but is unable to describe the lived experience of political freedom as having the feeling of being able to think and act politically, to work towards changing things for the better.

Much of my own argumentation flows from considering the role of the body and corporeality in critical political theory. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, 'it is not

4.4 *The Intercorporeal Context of Freedom*

the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject.' (de Beauvoir 1956, 65) The body is the locus of both the social inscription of power and the lived freedom of the subject; the latter is conditioned by the former without becoming reduced in it. The active work of performance within and on our bodies always takes place within certain social environments and is lived in different kinds of social positions. While individual subjects are never the kind of passive victims of structural operations of power which a facile reading of Foucault might paint them as, they are embodied ones. Coole is at pains to emphasise how

power relations can also readily proliferate on this somatic level, where dynamics of exclusion or competence are communicated via body language, gestures, and performances, which usually escape analysis yet which weave their effects in potent ways of which participants are rarely explicitly aware. Recognition itself initially occurs through perceiving bodies' different styles.

(Coole 2007b, 175)

I read Coole as saying that all cognitive and reflective political operations take place in a more primordial context of corporeality, which forms the pre-reflective affective context of all public deliberative and communicative acts. Deliberative political engagement is never only a case of an epistemic process. Discussing the political theories of Habermas and Arendt in the context of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh, Martín Plot (2012, 238) observes that something which is remains unnoticed by both is the fact that political communication is always a carnal relation. Even when deliberative communication happens at a distance (for example, through social media or televisual communication), it has its affective, somatic aspect: how we see others and how we are seen by them. Conversely, even when we meet face to face, our perception of the other is mediated by the embodied context of communication and our chiasmatic intertwining of our lived bodies and our world:

Communication is always at-a-distance. Vision is always tele-vision.
There is always a chiasm, first in the body itself, between the body as

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

seer and the body as visible, and this chiasm operates in the same fashion in all carnal beings and in the intercorporeality of the world. The chiasm is at the same time separation and union in both face-to-face interaction and mediated communication. (Plot 2012, 242)

Plot provides a clue to understanding how both the illusion of disembodied distance brought about by digital means of communication and the illusion of immediacy and authenticity carried by face to face meetings run the danger of effacing from view the way our freedom is always mediated by the intersubjective and intercorporeal context of politics: the public realm. According to Plot (2012, 254), democratic politics is not about mediating between different social interests or seeking consensus between different views, but learning what it is to speak and act with others: ‘To speak and act in democratic politics is rather, to become aware—or, even better, to participate in the coming to being—of interests and meanings by giving them an actual, intersubjective existence in the flesh of society.’ By considering the intercorporeal context of all political participation, we begin to notice how an account of experiential freedom must break out of objectivist schemas of analysis.

I have used Coole’s analysis to paint a picture of a pre-cognitive corporeal intertwining with the political field that sets limits to our experiential freedom while also enabling it to come to being. Freedom is experienced as a form of perceptual and motor operative intentionality, a pre-reflective practical relationship to this field, something encountered in meaningful engagement within it. It is always conditioned by acts of power while remaining always able to come to terms and challenge them. In this sense the deliberative democratic focus on the inclusivity and the epistemic quality of deliberation falls short of being able to comprehend the intersubjective level of pre-reflective experience, from which both faith in the meaningfulness of political engagement and trust in political institutions and others springs from.

This picture does not seek to destroy the individual as an agent. It reminds us of the way our consciousness is not identical with itself, and is in important

4.4 The Intercorporeal Context of Freedom

respects subtended by the intercorporeal anonymity we partake in as embodied beings. We are things that see and are seen, hear and are heard, touch and are touched in turn. This reversibility extends to our entire perceptual and motor relationship with the world and others in it. However, a facet of this reversibility is that we can never be both things at once. We cannot touch our own hand and feel both touches at once. We remain in the movement between the sensations, never able to stop the dialectic between the two. We are never completely aware of the expressivity our own bodies exhibit, and its connections with similarly embodied others who share the same perceptual field with us. While the my-ness of my historically separate intentional consciousness cannot be denied, it is always predicated on an anonymous embodied matrix, the carnal universe which subtends my perception of it and enters into my perception as its invisible institutive conditions. Sara Heinämaa warns against the conclusion that this would mean the destruction of individuality:

Thus, intercorporeality does not mean that separate bodies or bodily functions blend or merge to form one unified super-body, as is sometimes suggested. What it means is an immediate corporeal correspondence between individual bodily subjects or ‘minded bodies’, grounded on the kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and sensory capacities of the bodies in question. On the basis of this basic correspondence, human and animal bodies can spontaneously operate in concert, that is, in coherence and harmony.

(Heinämaa 2014, 72)

Our bodies are meaningful things in the social world we share with other bodies. At the same time they are meaning-generating originary beings, acting and perceiving in their own styles. We are connected to other bodies and the social worlds we share with them on a corporeal level which is lived before propositional thought or representations. As Heinämaa writes: ‘The connection is direct in the sense that it is not mediated by any thought-processes or inferences, such as introjection, projection, simulation, analogical inference, conceptual subsumption or theoretical or practical reasoning.’ (Heinämaa 2014, 71) Our relationship to the world and the others we encounter in it is not a

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

question of representation in cognition or the dialectic of inner consciousness facing an outer world containing others. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

We must conceive of a primordial *We* [*On*] that has its own authenticity and furthermore never ceases but continues to uphold the greatest passions of our adult life and to be experienced anew in each of our perceptions. For as we have seen, communication at this level is no problem and becomes doubtful only if I forget the perceptual field in order to reduce myself to what reflection will make of me. (Merleau-Ponty 1964b, 175)

The open, unceasing, and always productive dialectic between the lived body and the fleshy, intercorporeal context of the public realm and the others encountered within it is at the root of many specifically political features of experience. Acquiring a sense of a general trust in others and public institutions, the bodily sense of being able to express oneself under the gaze of others, a sense of being able to access the social world, and even being able to *hope* for meaningful social change for the better are all immensely political aspects of everyday experience. Likewise, their fracturing and diminishing is experienced as political poverty.

I have discussed the flesh of the political and lived body's intertwining with it to make it clear how insufficient a third-person, objectivist approach to political freedom as a phenomenon is. In order to understand the social roots of faith as a practical relationship with the world which allows for the experience of motivation to become politically engaged, we should also consider the entire intersubjective context in which political agency is exercised and experienced either as a meaningful possibility. Having a certain type of body with its own sedimented expressive style results in a certain style of experiencing the world. Some social situations result in styles of experience and expression which are not conducive to democratic engagement. One's experience of the social world can be diminished and fractured by damaging experiences and operations of oppressive and dominating power. Such factors are important to consider in order to understand why political freedom should always be considered from

the first-person perspective of the lived body and the second-person perspective of the intersubjective and intercorporeal context of social experience.

It is important to consider that my emphasis on bodies also brings with it the question of bodily health as an important condition of political freedom. In the next section I discuss the way Hannah Arendt takes the public appearance of bodies in their plurality as constitutive of the public realm. However, some bodies are more privileged in public situations than others. Disabled bodies, for example, are often stigmatised in public situations, and often have a hard time even reaching deliberative arenas due to the physical restrictions that too often remain unaddressed, as observed by Stacy Clifford (2012). Economic poverty and unemployment, too, become sedimented in both lived bodies and entire social worlds. They often leave their mark on the bodies of those suffering them, making it easy to stigmatise those suffering from them. Poverty shows itself both as outer signs, such as clothes, a less confident style of carrying oneself, or the even the unhealthier texture of one's skin, marking some out as 'lesser' from their social others. Poverty has also been shown to be a major cause of ill health, something which can be compounded by the lack of quality health care for those not able to pay for it. This is still the situation even in many of the wealthiest industrialised nations. While falling seriously ill is a part of the universal human condition which will befall on us all at some time, it is clear that economic circumstances play a large role in dividing wealthy, healthy bodies from poor, ill ones, a situation which is in current rhetoric often presented as a result of personal 'lifestyle choices'. This results in seeing structural inequalities in health as a case of the economically disadvantaged lacking personal responsibility, something they can be further stigmatised for.

All of these experiences have consequences for the ability to experience freedom as a meaningful possibility. For the purposes of this dissertation I must emphasise that I am not latently advocating for certain types of privileged bodies to appear in public at the expense of others. I instead hold that equality of experiential freedom demands the provision for the largest possible equality in the ability to appear in public for all kinds of bodies. This is consonant with

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

a republican view advocated by De Wispelaere and Casassas (2014), who hold that the right to appear in public and to contribute in politics belongs to all kinds of bodies, not just healthy ones.

4.5 Towards an Experientalist Account of Political Poverty

Faith, as I have described it in this chapter, describes an aspect of the intentional arc, something which is at the background of our entire social experience on a pre-reflective level of perceptual and motor intentionality. According to Merleau-Ponty, perceptual faith is at the root of our relationship to the world, and it forms the background of our natural and theoretical attitudes. While Merleau-Ponty (1968, 35–40) offers the notion as a solution to fundamental questions of epistemology, I make use of its practical aspects. Perceptual faith is the fundamental relationship to the world which subtends our reflection on the sources of our beliefs about the world. However, it also informs our experience of it as a meaningful field for action and engagement.

I have used the notion of faith here to describe a pre-personal, embodied experience of significance and meaningfulness. As I will discuss below, faith in this sense forms a part of the affective background of experience, something which animates experience, making specifically political agency appear as a meaningful possibility. In a certain sense it *is* the experience of political freedom as political agency, experienced in the perceptual and motor intentionality of the lived body. The concept of faith acts here as an antidote to the contemporary tendency towards building accounts of democracy which focus almost solely on the epistemic aspects of communication in the public sphere and democratic deliberation: the recent discussion on epistemic injustice is a good example (see e.g. Anderson 2006; Medina 2013; Fricker 2013). We should also pay heed to the way our subjective experience of freedom is also an intersubjective experience, with direct connection to democratic practice.

It is exactly our nature as opaque, embodied beings quite unfamiliar even to ourselves which makes politics not just possible, but necessary. Arendt observes that if we could perceive ourselves and others transparently, we wouldn't need

4.5 Towards an Experientalist Account of Political Poverty

speech, but could just perfectly communicate through signs and codes whatever information we deemed necessary (Arendt 1998, 179). As Loidolt observes, we need action and speech to appear not just to others, but to ourselves:

What Arendt points to here is a certain moment of alterity in the appearance of the who that is as constitutive for the political mode as visibility is: If everyone could be made *fully* transparent, interaction in the political sense would not be necessary anymore.

(Loidolt 2018, 184)

Interaction with others reveals us to ourselves; we depend on others to appear as real to ourselves. Political poverty also means being deprived of this chance to become human beings to ourselves.

Political freedom, then, has an experiential condition in the human capacity of faith, that is, in the practical sense of meaningfulness of political engagement and the experienced reality of the shared political realm in which it may unfold. It appears to me that in cases of political poverty the experience of the social world has become diminished and fractured. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, politically impoverished persons and groups can often be aware of living in a separate world apart from broader society. Their world is not a realm in which respect and recognition are accorded to persons equally and where political engagement seems like a real possibility. Instead, the society where political deliberation and official decision-making happens, intersects with theirs usually only when something is demanded of them, be it political participation in their own subjection in form of voting between alternatives that offer little meaningful positive change to them, or social participation in their own control in form of subjecting themselves to the disciplining gaze of public institutions. Public engagement appears to take the form of complicity in one's own oppression. The world where political engagement is entered into freely and out of one's own motives appears as distant: there is no coming into coexistence with other citizens. This means also that the public realm retreats from experience: there is no shared in-between which would allow the political world to emerge. In a self-enforcing circle the lack of faith in the power of one's

4. *How Freedom Becomes Meaningful*

own action and speech to change things leads to the closing down and fading away of the political realm exactly in the kinds of places where it would be most needed to bring about change.

In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre (2004) wants us to pay attention to the ways the 'practico-inert' social field itself can constrain us in virtue of us simply inhabiting it, turning us into 'serialised' bodies which are made to passively perform in concert against their interests *through* our active use of our perceived freedoms. Arendt's description of such situations as a modern social pathology, what she calls 'world alienation' (Arendt 1998, 248), resonates strongly with the kind of phenomenon I aim to make intelligible in the next chapter. However, the analyses of both Sartre and Arendt remain too general and pessimistic, and a more fine-grained approach is needed. Faith comes into being while body-subjects become intertwined with their social situations, the place they inhabit, the social context they interact with. As Simon Charlesworth writes on the importance of place:

The relation of person/world is situated in the dynamic of body/space, and is thus socially located to the extent of becoming the site of a necessary particularity. These are the consequences of an appreciation of the lived body as the site of a generative capacity of practical understanding which enmires the person, knowingly and unknowingly, in an objective being. Place, then, as a social site related to other positions and social localities and known as a locality in which experience, memory and feeling are constituted, is critical to understanding being-in-the-world. (Charlesworth 2000, 19)

Our affective inherence in the world presents a problem for political theory: if speech and action disclose the world to humans by knitting over it a dimension of relationships and making meaning where before there was none, there is at the same time a parallel process at work: sedimentation of meanings into lived bodies. Persons can become habituated to circumstances which might actively foreclose possibilities for reactivation and reconsideration of sedimented meanings, diminishing experience of freedom.

4.5 Towards an Experientalist Account of Political Poverty

I have in this chapter described a freedom and political agency which affirms the primacy of lived experience. I have made use of the tradition of phenomenology to give an account of political freedom as it is encountered in experience. Political poverty threatens these aspects of experience of freedom by diminishing the public affective milieu of perception, understood here as a primordial, pre-reflective intentional relationship to the world, which is operative and practical, affective and felt, and comes before our deliberative reflection. This is a way to follow the experientalist model of social criticism, as opposed to the more traditional and widely accepted objectivist model of social criticism as it is encountered in the works of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, and by extension contemporary critical theory and theories of deliberative democracy. I develop my heuristic phenomenological diagnosis as an alternative and a supplement to the approach chosen by those who approach political poverty through tools given by the capability approach, inspired by the work of Amartya Sen. The phenomenological approach provides a set of tools which allow me to approach political poverty as it is disclosed in experience. Suffering political poverty as loss of experiential freedom means that one's relationship to the public world is not of experienced possibilities, but one of *aphonia*, silencing, inexpressivity, constraining circumstances, and frustration. Having argued for a more comprehensive account of political agency, I now move onward to investigate political poverty as loss of experiential freedom.

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

5.1 Four Aspects of Experiential Freedom

In this chapter I develop a heuristic conception of political poverty that aims to capture the intelligibility of the phenomenon of political poverty.

I will give two diagnostic theses. First is a theoretical one. Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom, the phenomenon I attempt to make intelligible in this dissertation, is not adequately captured by any prior theoretical conception, of political poverty or otherwise. I have above explained some theoretical reasons why this is so, and why my own approach draws from a variety of philosophical and sociological sources to be better able to make the phenomenon visible and to put it into words.

The second is a thesis concerning the world we live in. If I am correct, the phenomenon of political poverty poses a threat to democracy as we today understand it. It appears to me that many groups in society live their lives suffering from a kind of experiential damage, a diminished and fractured experience of the social world. I will below discuss examples and phenomenological portraits which attempt to make such experiences intelligible. Political poverty results in situations in which some groups in society experience themselves as unable to become active citizens while being told that they are formally included and able to do so. The presence of such experiences undermines democracy itself.

In the above chapter I gave an experiential account of political freedom that underlines its ambiguous character. I used the metaphor of a shared perceptual field to describe the way that freedom is only meaningful when considered in

context of a situation that makes engagement *meaningful*. This is also why I focused on the human capacity of *faith*, instead of the human capacity of will, as that which allows freedom to do its work. I conceptualised faith in terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of the intentional arc of experience. This was to underline the atmospheric quality of faith: when we are successfully engaged, faith forms the intentional arc through which the situation presents itself: we are able to become thrown into the social field with others, open to others and possibilities present in the field that are still yet to unfold. This is so even if we take the cognitive step of making the conscious decision to become engaged, using our free will, so to speak. The freedom is only experienced as a meaningful possibility because we are already to a degree intertwined with a social field.

In this chapter I develop an account of the loss of experiential political freedom due to the diminishing and fracturing of a person's experience of the world. **Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom can be talked about in various ways.** It can be understood as being dispossessed of political agency, experiencing being excluded from using a form of power that one *should* have as an equal in a democracy. It can mean being unable to perceive the world in a certain way, as a field of possibilities for making a difference. It can be understood as the presence of certain affects in experience: for example, the frustration of having no possibilities to have an effect on one's social situation, or the associated feeling of powerlessness. Often political poverty appears to be connected to experiences of **shame** which result from social stigmatisation and stereotypes, **of being made to feel less valuable than others**. Political poverty can also mean undergoing *passivity*: not necessarily in the meaning of becoming completely inactive, a helpless victim, but in the sense of being unable to find ways of becoming politically engaged in a meaningful sense. All such situations point towards a phenomenon that is not exclusively subjective or objective, inside the agent or outside in the world; instead, the phenomenon seems to be an *intersubjective* one, residing in the in-between, the interface between persons, their social others, and the world.

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom, then, means a diminishing or fracturing of experience, something that persons and groups *suffer* in various ways that I aim to encapsulate below in an exploration of four different aspects of experience which have a specifically political relevance. I identify at least four aspects of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom: loss of trust, loss of expressivity, loss of access to a public realm, and loss of future temporality. Since I am engaged in a heuristic enterprise, I leave the door open for the emergence of a fifth, or even a sixth aspect upon further research and reflection. One such aspect could be ecology: we live under the shadow of a looming climate catastrophe, and there could be something to be said about the role that nature plays in setting the frame within which political freedom finds itself. My heuristic conception will remain open to changes suggested by further reflection and research.

I approach political poverty from a viewpoint that takes examining the dialectical relationship between the perceiving lived body and its environment as the methodological starting point of all reflection on human agency. In successful political engagement our freedom and situation produce a successful give and take, a dialectic. This dialectic results in experience of freedom as always in relationship to a concrete situation, a field of possible projects to which freedom, to use Merleau-Ponty's phrase, can 'gear' itself into (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 467). Instead of asking for the objective measure of capabilities political equality requires, I want to understand what it means to lose the experience of oneself as a credible political actor who can engage in a fruitful dialectic with their social world, to lose an experience of the social world as a political thing, a field of possible public action.

In the above chapter I described the experience of freedom in terms of faith, a practical sense of meaningfulness in experience. When we are engaged, our situation solicits us to act, and this solicitation is answered on faith, that is, we experience action as possible and throw ourselves into the situation; we become able to act. This faith flows from our primordial intertwining with our social world and the lives of the other persons that we share it with, both present and

dead. Such faith can disappear from experience. I return to the description Luhtakallio and Mustranta gave of the residents of the *lähiö*:

During her years of fieldwork Eeva became more and more bothered by the observation that among the residents of the area the primary feeling associated with belonging to a society was frustration. **Getting to know the residents made quickly clear that people were not – of course not – stupid or inactive, far from it.** But many seemed to lack an understanding of what could be done about frustrating things, and the faith in the capacity of one's own actions to change things.¹

The key word here is *frustration* due to lack of understanding and *faith*. Despite not being stupid and inactive, the residents remain unable to challenge their political exclusion due to lacking both the understanding how to change things, and the confidence or faith in their ability to enact that change. Addressing the former, the lack of cognitive and other capabilities, the lack of understanding, could be seen to be the starting point of the capability approach as it was discussed in Chapter 3. However, the focus on skills and capabilities, on doing politics as a cognitive process which involves both will and representation (Wacquant 2005, 3) does not address the second feature of the frustration suffered by Luhtakallio and Mustranta's subjects: the lack of faith in one's own capacity to bring about meaningful change.

As I discussed above, such faith forms a part of the pre-reflective intentionality of our experience. Lack of faith might only be a feature of subjective experience, but it is not an *accidental* feature of it. Such loss of being able to experience oneself as a political agent and the world as a field of meaningful action is a form of informal disenfranchisement and should be approached as such, a form of political poverty which has its roots in one's intertwining with their social world.

¹ "Vuosien kenttätöiden aikana Eevaa alkoi yhä enemmän vaivata havainto siitä, että alueen asukkaiden päälimmäisin yhteiskuntaan kuulumiseen liittyvä tunne tuntui olevan turhautuminen. Asukkaisiin tutustuminen teki nopeasti selväksi sen, että ihmiset eivät – tietenkään – olleet tyhmiä tai toimeettomia, kaukana siitä. Mutta monilta tuntui puuttuvan käsitys siitä, mitä turhauttaville asioille voisi tehdä, ja usko siihen, että omalla tekemisellä voi olla vaikutusta." (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 14)

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

Such a diagnostic goes beyond the objectivist model of critique and examines the intersubjective conditions of experiencing the world as a political field. It is this perceptual relationship to the world *qua* political that forms the enabling condition of the emergence of the public political realm itself. The fracturing of this relationship results in social worlds heavy with the pressing feeling of frustration, silence, apathy and even despair. What is missing is the way out provided by a vibrant civil culture, the shared public realm which allows the airing out of grievances by holding those in power to account in public.

I identify four aspects of the loss of experiential freedom which seem to fracture both the faith of persons in themselves as a political agent, as well in as their intersubjective capability to uphold a shared public realm. I've named these four aspects *loss of trust*, *loss of access to the public world*, *loss of expressivity*, and *loss of future temporality*. These appear to me to tie together key shared features of experiences of political poverty. This is not to say that politically marginalised persons would put their experiences in these terms, or that we could objectively measure these features of experience that, in any case, often reveal themselves only by their absence. The task is a negative one, to make intelligible the absence of certain aspects of pre-reflective intentionality from experience. These ways of relating to the world and others that could be described as experiencing the world under its public aspect and oneself as a capable and authorised public actor or a political agent.

One could argue for identifying more or fewer aspects the damage done to one's experienced relationship with the world. I have chosen these four because they seem to encapsulate well some key political aspects of experience, forming enabling conditions of our capacity to relate with the social world as a political matter. (On such 'enabling conditions', see Loidolt 2018, 113.) All of these aspects are features of subjective experience, yet rooted in intersubjectivity: they are the incorporated product of our lived relationship with others and the world which forms the embodied pre-reflective and pre-personal root of our experience. They are connected to our experience of the political, that is, they illuminate the world in ways that allow us to connect with society, to experience

action in public a meaningful possibility, and allow us to have hope that things can be changed for the better.

As discussed above in Chapter 4, human perception is not a process of mere passive observation of an outer physical world. Perception is rooted on a pre-personal embodied dialectical relationship with the world. Our lived bodies are a repository of habits, of ways of comportment and acting and shared schemas of perception which are a product of our living in certain shared social situations with others. The sedimentation of significations in lived bodies and social institutions both enables and constrains, makes visible and hides away. The texture of the visible world is always held up by the invisible threading of the intersubjective institutions of meaning and power. These are present in our experience as its intentional arc, the atmospheric background of our perception, against which the visible figure of the world as political may or may not appear.

Our experience is always shot through with the same ambiguity which characterises our conscious actions as both free and conditioned, as results of sedimentation of past actions taken by ourselves and others, and as the authentic use of our own individual capacity to agency. We do not necessarily perceive the same objective social reality. Inhabiting different social situations leads us acquiring different embodied affective background horizons of shared meanings and future opportunities. These experiences sediment themselves in individual lived bodies as forms of comportment and perception that are then taken as natural features of individuals, their social institution erased from view. The insidiousness of political poverty is exactly in the way that it constrains the capacity to perceive political engagement as a meaningful possibility while hiding its own tracks, so to speak. If the background horizon of meaningful opportunities for efficient political action is perceived as almost empty or even non-existent, it becomes hard to justify expending already scarce resources like time and effort on attempting to mobilise even a token resistance against domination.

There is a negative side to the account of faith as a product of sedimentation of meaning and significance into embodied being. There are situations in which

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

the social world itself offers little supports for faith, and might even actively damage it. Experiences of poverty, unemployment, silencing discrimination, violence, stigmatisation—as Iris Marion Young (2011) would put it, *oppression* and *domination*—all work to take away the body-subject’s experiential grounds for spontaneous expressivity and projection outside themselves. The works of Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre describe the ways oppression is inscribed into lived bodies to keep them from expressing themselves fully, making them complicit in their own oppression on a pre-reflective level of embodiment. Lived bodies can become constrained by their surroundings in ways which condition our freedom in *almost* absolute ways.

Sedimentation may threaten the very interiority of the subject itself. Experiencing domination and oppression, be it economic marginalisation and the attendant class stigmatisation, racism, or sexism can lead one’s whole interiority to be experienced mainly in relation to that domination, leading to the internalisation as one’s self-image the hostile stereotype that is used by others to deny one’s own freedom. Whereas Merleau-Ponty (2012, 467) refers to an ‘ordinary’ deep-seated inferiority complex as an example of such sedimentation as the ‘weight of being’, Franz Fanon describes the experience of the colonised black subject:

A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white. All those white men in a group, guns in their hands, cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good. (Fanon 1986, 139)

As is painfully well-known known by those on the receiving end of symbolic domination and violence, negative stereotypes can become deeply lodged in the individual, threatening their entire sense of self. The process of internalisation and incorporation of negative social signification about one’s own self and own social group is also a process of sedimentation, one aspect of political poverty considered as a loss of experiential freedom.

To politically well-connected people the public world appears as a field of possibilities and political projects, of causes to become involved in, of opinions

5.1 Four Aspects of Experiential Freedom

to be expressed, of struggles to win. This is an embodied way of relating to the world that takes joy in communication and organisation and which appears to outsiders as keen motivation to engage. To a politically impoverished person the public world may appear as hostile, unwelcoming, a separate world from the private one they live in. They might feel unauthorised to even formulate and express political opinions, and public expression of their grievances can be a source of intense anxiety and shame. Instead of experiencing the world as a field full of horizons of possibility for change, future can appear as devoid of hope, of the continuation of more of the same. These affective modes of relating to the world are rarely considered by democratic theorists, but they are experienced intensely by those suffering them and contribute to their withdrawal from the political realm.

It is important to restate that my own diagnosis is done in the context of a certain social and political constellation. This is the modern regime of liberal democracy, that is, a political system in which everyone is considered to be formally equal in front of the law, with formally equal opportunities for political engagement. Such formal equality is usually stated in liberal democracies as the principle of 'one person, one vote': even if voting in free elections does not nearly exhaust the field of possible forms of democratic political agency, it is a strong symbol of the way the democratic system enshrines in each and every adult citizen an equal share of the state's sovereignty. In such a system we could define democracy as the political organisation of coexistence between equals. The legal separation of powers and laws protecting liberal rights, such as the right to political organisation, right to free speech, right to present oneself as a candidate for public election etc. are legal safeguards which make democracy possible as a political relationship of freedom between men possible. They are not democracy itself.

I engage in a heuristic diagnosis which attends to the ways political poverty is experienced as the fracturing of the affective background of experience. This is an account of political impoverishment as it becomes incorporated into the body as perceptual and bodily habits, an account of not being able to experience

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

the world as a field of possibilities in a manner that would allow one to project oneself into the world and see and treat it as a public thing, to become politically engaged. This is a question which, as seen above, necessitated a treatment of political agency as such; I ended up recommending a view which focuses on the human being at the level of pre-personal, pre-reflective bodily intentionality, a level of double anonymity on which operative perceptual and motor intentionality are the means with which the lived body becomes intertwined with the world, allowing us to experience the world as a meaningful field for possible action.

5.2 Complicity and Sociological Concerns

One feature of political poverty appears to be what I call ‘complicity’. I have described how an individual body-subject’s experience of freedom is always a result of freedom ‘gearing into’ a social situation, a pre-reflective intertwining with the social field. This allows a fruitful dialectic to emerge: the body-subject acts in response to the field’s solicitation, and is rewarded with a response, which in turn becomes sedimented into the body-subject, allowing the emergence of an experience of meaningful engagement. Experiential freedom is the result of this successful dialectical relationship between a subject and their lived social environment.

A consequence of positive social experiences is that they can form a kind of dialectical feedback loop in which the attempts of the body-subject at interaction with the world are rewarded with positive results and become sedimented into the lived body as habits of acting and perceiving which open up as new kinds of possibility one can project towards. Conversely, negative experiences can close down horizons from experience, diminishing and fracturing the lived body’s ability to relate to the world as a public matter. Losing faith describes well the loss of a way of relating to the world as a public matter. When entire social worlds are dispossessed of the experiential conditions by which people acquire faith in the reality of a shared public realm and can allow it to manifest itself, a social world can become increasingly characterised by

silence instead of speaking out, by apathy instead of engagement. I attempt to integrate the objectivist concern with impartial critical standards of justice and equality with a concern for the diminishing or fracturing of the social experience of those who are been left unheard and unseen, who experience the public realm only from the outside. My phenomenological approach to what Sophie Loidolt (2018, 113) calls the enabling conditions of the emergence of the political realm, provides a toolkit for achieving this.

Whereas experiential freedom is the emergence of a successful dialectical relationship between a body-subject and their social world, loss of experiential freedom appears as the extinguishing, or falling asleep of this dialectic. **Complicity could be said to be the dark side of the ambiguity inherent in freedom.** I draw conceptual inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu, who observes that there is a relationship of ‘ontological complicity’ between an agent and their social environment (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 20). Political poverty is hard to make intelligible precisely because it is hard to point towards definite instances of it. A feature of political poverty appears to be the impossibility of drawing a clear distinction between the sufferer’s own loss of faith in the meaningfulness of political engagement (For example, ‘No-one would listen, anyway’) and how the social field would actually respond to political overtures (‘There really is no-one who would listen’). **Judging by such experiences, there are no clear perpetrators and no clear victims; instead, one becomes complicit in one’s own political impoverishment by allowing it to happen while knowing that engagement would be futile.**

The liberal democratic system we live under gives rise to normative expectations about how democracy should function. We expect to be equal in the eyes of the law; we expect to be able to exert democratic control over how we are governed through participating in elections and political deliberations. We expect to be treated as fellow human beings, as fellow citizens, as equals. When these expectations are not met, we respond in a variety of ways: some by becoming angry, some by becoming frustrated and passive. If such experiences are regular enough or happen in already sensitive periods of our lives – for example, during

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

childhood and adolescence – they might do untold damage to our faith in the ability of the system to work for *us* in the same way as it appears to work for others. On the other hand the system also expects things from us, in turn: we are expected to exert active control over our lives and to contribute to society to the best of our ability, if not by any other means, then at least by economic activity, by working and consuming. The failure to meet such expectations, even if due to no fault of one's own, is a cause for shame.

When a person experiences freedom, they feel they are able to respond to such expectations and are positively responded to in turn: they are able to live up to the image of political agency that is given to us. Experiencing stoppages in trying to live up to that image of agency, experiencing oneself as impotent and incapable, can shut down the possibility of further fruitful interaction. Some are more resilient to such setbacks than others, but most all of us have a limit after which we find further struggling meaningless or too painful. Giving up becomes easier, even if it is a cause for negative affects like shame and frustration, and the damage that they do to one's sense of self.

When we are unable to find action meaningful, we might even begin to believe that we really are incapable, that it is us who is to blame for our impoverishment. This is a relationship of complicity precisely because it is impossible to definitively establish if the fault 'really' is in the person or in the world, to establish if the belief that no-one will listen is justified or that it is exactly so. I attempt to make such experiences intelligible in the context in which they take place, in relationship to the world as it is encountered in experience. This is an account of political poverty that takes no position whether such experiences result from natural or cultural reasons, i.e. whether such experiences are somehow objectively legitimate and true.

Complicity, then, is a situation in which it is impossible to differentiate between internal subjectivity and external power relationships precisely because embodied experience of oneself as a political agent is always an ambiguous intertwining of both. As politically impoverished persons endure their position with quiet dignity instead of protesting it, they ironically only end up furthering

their own informal disenfranchisement. This institution of social relations of domination in the very embodied schema of perception and action of the dominated goes well beyond an understanding of political domination and oppression as the application of power on passive or resistant subjects. The insidiousness of complicity is exactly the way that it works through everyday shared beliefs and practices. This reminds of the way Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as leading those subjected to it to both silently reject the 'official' world and language of politics while remaining dispossessed of the means of presenting one's own alternative to it (Bourdieu 1991, 51-2).

It is such latent forms of domination and disenfranchisement that lead many of those suffering from them to not develop the expressive capacities and social relationships that effective political engagement requires. Bourdieu (1991, 95-6) illustrates the dilemma with the problem faced by working-class urban young males. One may submit to the middle-class symbolic authority of the schoolmaster, which means rejecting one's own identity as a working-class male and assuming a more middle-class *habitus*, a process that is then rewarded with concrete material and symbolic benefits that are offset by the experienced rejection by one's peers. However, rejecting school and broader societal expectations in favour of a culture of 'tough guy' cynical fatalism and delinquency means that in order to stay true to one's own 'tribe', one also has to reject further education and job prospects, leading to further social marginalisation.

A similar Catch-22 of inclusion itself haunts those suffering from political poverty. To let oneself be included into the political process can mean delegating one's own voice to a process that often acts against one's own interests, but to excuse oneself from participation is to altogether refuse responsibility for one's own situation. As Bourdieu writes, 'citizens, all the more brutally the more economically [sic] and culturally deprived they are, face the alternative of having to abdicate their rights by abstaining from voting or being dispossessed by the fact that they delegate their power' (Bourdieu 1991, 171). In such a situation the call should not be for increased inclusion, but for a diagnosis

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

of the ways political poverty is the result of such untenable situations that ultimately result in informal disenfranchisement, a seemingly voluntary abstention which is experienced as a loss of the freedom to do otherwise.

I attempt to diagnose such situations by illustrating them with examples that function as phenomenological portraits, as descriptions which illuminate a certain facet of the phenomenon I am trying to make intelligible. Through them I discuss the theme of complicity and the various guises it takes in relation to our experience of the political. Just as political freedom is ambiguous and only experienced in relation to an existing situation, an intersubjective field, so is political poverty as loss of experiential freedom. One way to approach such loss of experiential freedom is to describe the politically relevant aspects of different types of experiences and make them intelligible as cases of political poverty. Such portraits can be case studies drawn from sociological research, and I make use of studies on poverty and social exclusion by Pierre Bourdieu et al. (1999), Simon Charlesworth (2000), Eeva Luhtakallio and Maria Mustranta (2017), and Mike Savage et al. (2015). I also make use of prior phenomenological literature which touches on some aspects of the kinds of experiences I am attempting to make intelligible. I also provide thought experiments which provide us with pictures of fractured and diminished experiences of society.

This does not mean that I subscribe to any causal claims about the phenomena in question, or even wish to affirm in unambiguously objective terms the reality of the phenomena I am trying to describe. I have chosen these examples from an admittedly small selection of literature because they provide testimonies of the way social reality can become diminished for some persons and groups in society. Most importantly, they provide good stories which help me illuminate a reality that would otherwise remain invisible and unintelligible. **This is how the world appears to me as a philosopher; if I am right, we live in a society which in which many suffer, for no fault of their own, a form of experiential damage which diminishes their social experience fractures their ability to relate to the public realm of politics.**

5.2 Complicity and Sociological Concerns

I remain wary of grand sociological theories and frameworks, such as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the *habitus*. Bourdieu's work on the relationship of beliefs and the body has given me many ideas regarding the role that power relationships play in conditioning intertwining of individual body-subjects and their social environment. However, there is a noted tendency in such theories to present social structures as determining subjectivity. For example, take the famous articulation of the principle of *habitus* formation in *The Logic of Practice*:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (Bourdieu 1990, 53)

Bourdieu's conception of the *habitus* is a good example of how a sociological thesis regarding subjectivity can quickly become politically determining: subjective interiority almost becomes a function of the collective orchestration of the many social fields that the subject encounters and is conditioned by. The theory of *habitus*, inadvertently or not, also places a large political role on the sociologist-cum-spokesperson in articulating the functioning of dominating social structures in a politically efficacious way. (For a radical democratic critique of Bourdieu and other critical social theorists, see Rancière 2004).

No theory of politics can do without acknowledging the ambiguity of freedom and the potential inherent in our everyday relationships. Political theory must leave room for the emergence of experiences of freedom even among the dominated and politically impoverished. I will return to an example of engendering such experiences in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

However, I still make use of sociological and ethnographical examples in the course of this chapter to at least link my own insights with empirical research.

I believe it is enough for me as a student of philosophy and political theory to design a heuristic conception of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom, which would allow us to see and speak about such a phenomenon, which, if it does describe the social experience of some persons and groups, most definitely threatens democracy. It will take a trained sociologist to affirm if the matter is unambiguously so, and to what degree; still, the choice of examples from the field of sociology I provide here does at least make assenting to such a conclusion a somewhat plausible proposition.

Experiences of political poverty are not equally distributed, but appear to often follow other forms of social and economic inequality and domination. However, political impoverishment may as well affect persons who are relatively well-off in most other respects. The diminishing of the public world which preceded its complete disappearance under the totalitarian takeover in the 1930s and 1940s as described by Hannah Arendt (2004) is one extreme example of how public-mindedness is always dependent on the existence of a public world which allows it to flourish, and *vice versa*. The slow and, in retrospect, seemingly inevitable slide from the faltering democracy of the Weimar Republic to the darkness of the totalitarian Nazi state is a concrete example of political impoverishment of an entire nominally democratic society. However, things could have gone otherwise—the possibility to renew and reinvigorate the public sphere was there.

I am in this dissertation talking about a smaller-scale phenomenon, the way that **the formal presence of certain opportunities in a society is not enough to make them concrete meaningful possibilities.** Such impoverishment can best be understood by exploring how the lived relationship between a person and their social world can become impoverished, resulting in a loss of a facet or facets of experience, without which the world does not present itself as a public thing.

5.3 Loss of Trust

I begin by discussing loss of trust. I identify two aspects of loss of trust in a specifically political sense. **First is the loss of trust in public institutions.** This obviously includes political institutions, but is not limited to them: one can also lose trust in public institutions that are supposed to provide social support and education. **The second aspect is the loss of trust in a sense of belonging to a society and being able to rely on it.** In this sense I am describing a broader loss of trust in the social fabric one is ostensibly a part of. Such loss of the sense of belonging appears to play a large part in political impoverishment and the resulting loss of faith. Mistrust of public institutions, as well as the mistrust of one's social peers, appear to characterise the affective disposition of many who find themselves living in politically impoverished social worlds.

The loss of trust in institutions can be a result of experiences of domination and oppression by and within everyday interactions with social institutions. To provide a portrait of the problem, I use a case study: the book *Demokratia suomalaisessa lähiössä* (2017) by Eeva Luhtakallio and Maria Mustranta which, alongside other things, tells the story of a project of helping residents of an underprivileged neighbourhood get a sense of what political agency is like. In the beginning, Luhtakallio and Mustranta observe how many of the persons they encounter in the underprivileged Helsinki neighbourhood have attitude of systematic distrust against public officials, an attitude which is often inherited. This makes it difficult to even broach the subject of political engagement with them. Luhtakallio and Mustranta observe how experiences of humiliation have left many of the residents intensely suspicious of anything which sounds 'official', including public engagement:

[When talking with the locals], society and public authorities strongly appear to be the same thing. Society is not a community you belong to and are active in, but something you find yourself being the target of and at the mercy of. Something above you, which treats you humiliatingly and who you face with resistance and defiance.

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

Public decision-making appears to many as something very distant that doesn't concern them.

“People have given up after being stubbed out by each and every public official.”²

Their first attempt to include the locals in their workshop only managed to reproduce the social power inequality at play in the broader situation. They especially noted how their first top-down approach led to the situation taking on the didactic feeling of a school room, a place which most of the residents did not have positive memories about:

Despite our hopes and attempts to the contrary, we had ended up creating a situation in which the participants felt that they faced expectations that resembled being in school. However, memories about school are not the same for everyone. Here they appeared to become a seamless part of that humiliating inheritance of being branded stupid and incapable which many carried with them as their main experience of the whole of society.³

The same feeling of hostility and mistrust appeared to colour the perception of the residents when it came to society as a whole (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 56–7). This may present itself as anger and helplessness, as described by Luhtakallio and Mustranta:

Sometimes we were shocked by the tangles of serious problems we encountered. Sometimes we were shocked more by how helpless

² ”Yhteiskunta ja viranomaiset piirtyvät puheissa vahvasti samana asiana. Yhteiskunta ei ole yhteisö, johon kuulutaan ja jossa aktiivisesti toimitaan, vaan jotain, minkä kohteena ja armoilla ollaan. Jotain yläpuolella olevaa, joka kohtelee nöyryyttävästi ja johon suhtaudutaan vastarinnalla ja uhmakkuudella. Yhteiskunnallinen päätöksenteko tuntuu monista hyvin kaukaiselta ja itseä koskemattomalta asialta.

”Ihmiset on luovuttaneet, kun ne on stubattu joka ainoan viranomaisen taholta.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 27)

³ ”Olimme siis kaikista päinvastaisista toiveistamme ja yrityksistämme huolimatta päätyneet luomaan asetelman, jossa osallistujat kokivat, että heihin kohdistui koulumaisia odotuksia. Koulumuistot eivät kuitenkaan ole kaikille samanlaisia. Täällä ne tuntuivat liittyvän saumattomaksi osaksi sitä nöyryyttävää tyhmäksi ja kyvyttömäksi leimaamisen perintöä, jota moni kantoi mukanaan päällimmäisenä kokemuksenaan koko yhteiskunnasta.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 55)

many felt with the situations they faced. Many felt like they had been humiliated again and again by the whole of society since their childhood. There were different reactions to this experience of humiliation. Some became angry and hostile, speaking in an obscene tone and acting in an aggressive manner which was sometimes distressing to watch. Some ended up taking the position of the victim, becoming paralyzed and unable to resolve even the smallest issues, to take a single independent step of their own.⁴

For the residents of the neighbourhood, failing at school was often the beginning of series of negative experiences of public institutions. The sense of mistrust characterises the social experience of the residents, resulting in a general feeling of inferiority and incapability.

Such situations exemplify the aspect of complicity at play in political poverty. The residents of the example suffer from their mistrust. Their other problems are often the result of political decisions taken by others. At the same time the common opinion in the neighbourhood holds that all politicians are the same and not to be trusted, and that voting is a fool's errand. By remaining mistrustful of official situations, politicians, and public institutions they remain unable to effectively address their problems and only deepen their own political impoverishment. (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 56) Luhtakallio and Mustsaari observe that there was a pervasive feeling among the residents that they did not belong to society and thus did not feel *entitled to participate* (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 56). However, as Luhtakallio and Mustranta observe, politics plays a major role in upholding this feeling of not belonging, which defines the political mindset of the inhabitants and contributes to their informal disenfranchisement (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 57).

⁴ "Välillä vaikeat ongelmavyhdyt järkyttivät, välillä järkytti enemmän se, miten avuttomia ihmiset olivat tilanteidensa kanssa. Moni koki tullessa ikään kuin koko yhteiskunnan nöyryyttämäksi uudestaan ja uudestaan, lapsesta asti. Tähän nöyryytyksen kokemukseen oli erilaisia reaktioita: yhdestä tuli raivokas kiukkupussi, jonka puheet olivat räävittömiä ja aggressiivisuus välillä ahdistavaa katseltavaa, toinen uhriutui ja lamaantui kyvyttömäksi ratkaisemaan enää pienimpiäkään asioita, ottamaan enää yhtään itsenäistä askelta." (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 55–56)

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

Being unable to trust public institutions, the residents of the example remain at their mercy. At the same time it seems callous to lay the fault solely at the feet of the residents. For them, society is not something one belongs to; politics does not present them with an open field of political possibilities to be grasped, but something one looks at from the outside in with distrust. The unfortunate result is that the residents become complicit in their own domination precisely by withdrawing their trust, and along with it, their political participation. It is hard to point towards any single agent or structure who would be at fault. The situation is ambiguous, one of complicity between persons who mistrust society and a society which appears to offer little reasons for extending trust to its institutions. Remedying it would require the (re-)building of trust and agentic capacities from the ground up, a task which Luhtakallio and Mustranta undertake by the medium of community theatre. I will return to the outcome of their project in the epilogue to this dissertation.

A certain amount of distrust appears to be an integral part of what makes democracy work: as Mark E. Warren observes, democracy appears to be most successful when it remains distrustful and suspicious of those in power and attempts to hold them to account (Warren 1999a, 320). At the same time functioning democracy relies on a high level of trust in interpersonal relationships. This kind of trust could be called *generalised trust*:

Generalized trust is a key dimension of the political capacities of civil society, which in turn reflect the capacities of individuals and groups to act for common ends as well as to represent their interests to the state. Conversely, high levels of distrust within society erode these capacities, the absence of which is one condition for detached, unresponsive, and corrupt governments as Putnam's (1993) work on Italy suggested (cf. Gambetta 1988). (Warren 1999b, 12)

Effective democratic agency, then, appears to demand a relatively high level of trust in everyday interpersonal relationships. However, Warren (1999a, 312) also notes that politics are inherently inimical to trust: it is exactly when grounds for trust become undone that we enter politics:

When social relations become political, social points of reference are contested, threatened, or challenged. Relations can become socially groundless: groundless not in any metaphysical sense, but rather in the existential sense that social relations lose their taken-for-granted status, the qualities that provided for secure social locations (Warren 1996b). Where there is politics, then, the conditions of trust are weak: the convergence of interests between truster and trusted cannot be taken for granted. (Warren 1999a, 312)

According to Warren, this tension between trust and politics flows from the very nature of politics: politics is a future-oriented activity which brings with it both the possibility of reopening unjust social arrangements and the risk of coercion and domination. As such, trusting opens new horizons of possibility while bringing risks: 'In this sense, then, the judgment to trust is a judgment oriented toward future possibilities. But because the risks include uncertainties that fall beyond the capacities of individuals to assess, let alone control, trust leaves individuals vulnerable to the trusted and thus exposes them to new, perhaps exploitive, relations of power.' (Warren 1999a, 313). Making the judgement to trust opens one to the potentially unwanted consequences of politics; at the same time it makes a future-oriented activity possible.

Trust, however, is not equally shared, but is contingent on a number of social factors. In his review or studies on political trust Orlando Patterson (1999) observes that economic well-being and security roughly correlate with high levels of trust in others and society. Conversely, economic uncertainty and anxiety contribute to distrust, as do experiences of persecution due to one's minority status (Patterson 1999, 190-1). It would seem that living in a precarious situation contributes to a general distrust in politics and political institutions.

Loss of trust can also be approached as a loss of a sense of belonging, which in extreme cases can take the guise of a fear of one's social peers. Simon Charlesworth observes how people in Rotherham are wary of each other and prone to aggression; he reads this to be a direct result of living in a social world

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

in which sources of shared respect and civic feeling have disappeared (See for example Charlesworth 2000, 79 ff.). As he writes:

That is, for many, there is much isolation and little sense of anything approximating to a shared sociality that grounds experience in the common references of a common life. They may see the same old faces on the streets and out on the town but they do not know them, and, moreover, it is best kept that way, because in such space one never knows what kind of threat contact might be interpreted as. In a world of where people feel stigmatized, it is as though ‘face’ and ‘respect’ can only be maintained through non-contact and the maintenance of a heavily managed ‘front’. Any approach risks provoking hostility. (Charlesworth 2000, 58–9)

In such situations there are little grounds for a sense of shared community of trust which meaningful political engagement requires. A certain amount of distrust of both institutions and other citizens appears to be inherent to democratic politics. However, in the examples I discuss there appears a deeper fracturing of trust which works on the level of pre-reflective intentionality: the social world appears as hostile, a source of disappointments and humiliation which one must remain wary of and approach with cynicism. As Luhtakallio and Mustranta observe:

When you discuss politics, participation, and influencing with the local residents, the conversations convey a sense of disappointment and distrust. Society should be the guarantor of help in face of life's ordeals, but this promise has been repeatedly broken. No-one has noticed their distress, or it has not been responded to. The comments also echo with the bitterness brought about by false promises:

“Everyone can make something out of themselves.” “If given the chance.” “But they always pull the rug from under your feet.”⁵

⁵ ”Kun alueen asukkaiden kanssa puhuu politiikasta, osallistumisesta ja vaikuttamisesta, keskusteluista välittyy pettymys ja epäluottamus. Yhteiskunnan pitäisi olla takuu avusta silloin, kun elämä koettelee, mutta tämä lupaus on toistuvasti rikottu. Kukaan ei ole huomannut hätää, tai siihen ei ole vastattu. Kommenteissa kaikuu myös falskien lupauksen herättämä katkeruus:

Such comments signal a situation in which the experience of society appears to have lost a fundamental, background sense of trust which could be called *atmospheric* (Schmitz 2014). Anthony Steinbock catches something of this kind of trust when he describes trust a way of seeing (Steinbock 2014, 203). Such trust is a type of experience which is ‘interpersonally formative and that without which sociality would be impossible.’ (Steinbock 2014, 208) The coming to being of the social world is predicated on such experiences of trust:

In being bound to another in this act of trust, we become precisely vulnerable. In so doing, we prepare the field of social existence. I mentioned above that trust is revelatory of interpersonal relations and of the moral sphere, opening up a social space. One can see this perhaps even more clearly in the opposite example of someone who is constantly suspicious of others, who tries not to be susceptible to betrayal, who is always distrustful, or seeks negative possibilities in others as a way of forestalling vulnerability. Rather than being expansive, this movement contracts, and in general retracts from the social sphere. One tends to isolate him- or herself and sequester him- or herself from the company of others. **Trust therefore is a basic condition for the constitution of a social world.**

(Steinbock 2014, 210–1, emphasis mine)

Steinbock highlights the role that experience of trust has in the emergence of a social world, and how experiences of distrust lead to its narrowing and contraction. I argue that trust forms a part of the intentional arc of my experience and enables me to project myself in the world; I am secure in the trust that my actions are not responded to with hostility or derision. Such trust is a result of sedimentation of positive experiences: my attempts to interact with others the world around me have been answered positively and I have gained a sense of security both in myself and the world which is further strengthened by every positive interaction. It is this affective background of experience which has become broken in Luhtakallio and Mustranta’s interviewees: the repeated

”Kaikista on johonkin.” ”Jos annetaan mahdollisuus.” ”Mutta kun aina vedetään matto jalkojen alta.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 26–7)

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

humiliations and other negative experiences have fractured their ability see the world as an affective milieu characterised by trust.

The loss or fracturing of trust in one's experience is, in many ways, analogous to the loss of what Anthony Giddens (1992, Chapter 2) describes as a sense of *ontological security*. According to Giddens, when a child is allowed to grow up in a secure and nurturing environment, a sense of ontological security develops, and forms the basis for a stable sense of self-identity. Giddens (1992, 37–8) proposes that the primary role ontological security plays in the life of an individual is the management of existential anxiety or dread, which he poses, after Kierkegaard, as an inevitable part of the human condition. The development of coping mechanisms through routines and public rituals associated with social life allow us to overcome this anxiety and to function in public life: they bring about a sense of faith in the coherence and continuity of everyday life.

Giddens (1992, 40 ff.) argues that much of how we conduct our daily lives is not open to constant conscious reflection, but is based on the unconscious basic trust, the security of faith 'as if' things will continue as they are. Our habitual behaviour is a product of practical logics embedded in the routines of everyday life. While this means that a certain social inertia makes social conventions quite resistant to challenges and reflective change, it also allows the very sense of continuity over time in our lives, extending to our personal sense of identity. Ontological security means that the individual has developed a practical, even unconscious sense of continuous self-identity or 'biographical continuity', a practical consciousness of a specific way of functioning in the world which excludes others and thus provides a sense of stability, and a sense of self-integrity, or a sense of being in control of things of the outer world, and one's own life. Sources of such security are many, from religious faith or a membership in a community, to the simple affirmation brought by a stable social environment with its routines and everyday rituals, and they make it possible to approach the world from a standpoint of trust.

The conception of ontological security illuminates one important aspect of the experience of freedom: the background affective background of trust in one's peers and social institutions which forms the bedrock of being able to project oneself towards the social world. The loss of trust in others of the social world and its public institutions is mirrored in loss of trust in one's own ability to effectively function inside that world in concert with similarly situated others. The loss of this trust is a severe a diminishing and fracturing of the affective background of one's experience of the social world. As Giddens (1992, 41) also observes, this trust also makes possible to engage in creative involvement with others, an aspect of the expressivity I discuss next.

5.4 Loss of Expressivity

In James Bohman's usage, political poverty means the lack of capabilities to social functioning as opposed to poverty as lack of resources. The capabilities Bohman speaks of are to be understood, as seen above in Chapter 3, as cognitive and communicative functionings: the capabilities required to effectively participate in democratic deliberation. Such capabilities should then be provided by, for example, public education (Bohman 1997, 344–5). However, such a communicative conception of political agency is necessarily too narrow to address the kinds of curtailing of expressive capabilities that are also associated with political poverty. While Bohman's account reveals an important aspect of having a sense of political freedom, I argue that instead of capabilities *simpliciter*, we should be talking about the broader relationship of the lived body to its social environment, and how this relationship either makes possible, or curtails, speech and thinking, as well as certain styles of bodily comportment and action, through which we appear to others in public.

To reduce confusion, I have decided to refer to the curtailing of the expressive capabilities of a body-subject with the term 'loss of expressivity'. I want to outline a broader conception of embodied expressivity that does not reduce itself to some form of communicative action. In the above chapter I discussed the way that bodily expressivity does not limit itself to creative expression, but

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

is a feature of human experience: our thinking, perception and motor being are intertwined in experience. Expressivity is present in all experience: the body creates space around itself in a dialectical relationship with its surroundings, and the bodily attitude and comportment a person takes (or is habituated to take) towards the world also has an effect on the affective content of perception. At the same time expressivity is also a matter of language: there is a linguistic aspect to human experience, and a learned facility with certain styles of language makes it possible to perceive certain phenomena instead of others. All of these features of bodily expressivity have political implications, as the diminishing of the body-subject's expressive capacities also diminishes their social experience.

The capability approach goes a long way towards understanding how often what comes in the way of public engagement is the lack of faith in one's ability to express oneself in public, or in Arendt's terms, to act and speak. We like to think that shyness, the tendency to keep silent in public situations, is something some persons are born with while others are innately good at speaking their mind. To a degree, we know this to be true in everyday experience: our temperaments vary, and some persons are more suited for confidently taking positions in public than others. This apparent self-evidence of possessing speech hides away the social constitution of such confidence: as we saw above when I discussed trust, such ability to project oneself into the world is also a product of sedimentation of positive social experiences into a general positive sense of ability in experience. For example, on a pre-reflective level I know myself to be capable, and thus I can appear under the gaze of others to act and speak. The public world opens to me as a field of possibilities, into which I can project my freedom to do so in defence of different causes. Conversely, should my confidence become broken by negative experiences, I would be reticent to act; the world would not entice me to act but instead would appear as hostile and unwelcoming. I would not experience myself free to act and speak; instead, I would feel constrained in doing so, and be ashamed of my inability to appear under the gaze of others.

As we saw in the above section on trust, domination can also be experienced at an early age and within ostensibly egalitarian educational institutions. The resulting lack of academic qualifications and the associated precarious social situation can be doubled by the feeling of being incapable of expressing oneself in public. Such experiences directly curtail the ability to develop one's expressive capacities, as does the material reality faced by the marginalised which often offers little support for creative pursuits. This may result in the unwillingness to even attempt to express anything that goes outside the boundaries of one's given existence. Such damaging of the generative competences to use language can go to such extreme lengths that it is almost impossible to understand from an educated outsider perspective (Charlesworth 2000, 287).

Simon Charlesworth observes how his working-class interviewees often appear to suffer from a damaged relation to their own expressive capacities: 'It is as though these people are perceptually damaged, and what looks like a natural absence of capacity in fact emerges from a taught inability and the damage that comes from being made to be intimidated by the expressive medium itself...' (Charlesworth 2000, 283) Charlesworth argues that such perceptual damage is the embodied result of a string of experiences of being 'put to one's place' by different social institutions from an early age. His example is an extreme one, but one which mirrors the social experiences of the persons interviewed by Bourdieu et al. (1999, e.g. 421-6) and the residents observed by Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 55-6). The sedimentation of negative social experience in one's lived body has implications to the ability to express oneself effectively.

The fundamental connection between experience and being able to act and speak flows from the way our lived bodies engage in an active dialectical relationship with their environment. Our environment entices us to act upon it and responds in turn. It could be that my environment supports my attempts to interrogate it and interact with it in a way which invites more action and broadens my sense of possibilities for acting; I build confidence in my capabilities and feel able to express myself more freely as I overcome challenges.

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

However, this dialectic can also lead to a negative outcome: if the outer world answers my interaction with indifference or even hostility or violence, my sense of myself as an agent contracts; I become more guarded, and may even despair of voicing my thoughts.

Political theory often focuses on the condition of sufficient social recognition as a form of justice which allows political agency to happen (see e.g. Honneth 1996; Deranty 2009). For example, Bohman argues that sufficient social recognition is one *sine qua non* condition of effective social freedom (Bohman 1997, 324). However, Nikolas Kompridis (2008) notes that not all obstacles to effective political agency are external in this way. It is not enough to point at objective features of injustice, we must also pay attention to the way being robbed of the capacity to articulate one's suffering can also be a form of injustice, as it is only through expression that suffering becomes intelligible even to those suffering it. As he writes, 'all the recognition in the world can neither guarantee nor serve as a substitution for our own voice.' (Kompridis 2008, 303)

Negative social experiences of loneliness, shame, and frustration can become incorporated into the body as a disposition to withdraw from political engagement. When attempts at establishing a dialectic go unanswered, the route to public political engagement can appear to become blocked. In such situations social environment itself comes in the way of individuals developing the requisite capacities for self-expression that political engagement and participation requires. As people lose faith in the possibility that anyone would listen, and even their belief in their right to voice their suffering, entire social worlds can become marked by silence. **This is another way of approaching situations of complicity as discussed above: it is impossible to establish whether it is actually true that no-one would listen. The loss of expressivity in one's experience means that the intentional arc of experience has already become damaged.**

Doing politics means using language. Language, however, is not an equally distributed good. Whereas we all might consider ourselves as conversant in our native tongue, language also serves to differentiate people. Action and speech

disclose who we are in relation to others, and in this sense they are never innocent of power relationships. A fear of public situations is familiar to those who are not comfortable with official language, the high and technical register of speaking that is often felt as required from those appearing in public. Bourdieu notes that all linguistic interaction contains this latent level of power, and it can reduce everyone to the place they occupy in the social field, whether they are conscious of it or not:

This linguistic 'sense of place' governs the degree of constraint which a given field will bring to bear on the production of discourse, imposing silence or a hypercontrolled language on some people while allowing others the liberties of a language that is securely established. This means that competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is *socially acceptable*. The sense of the value of one's own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies in the social space. (Bourdieu 1991, 81)

The ability to speak with relative confidence in public situations is one kind of product of a bodily intertwining with the world, the result of which is the capability to think and speak openly. Such a relationship can also be fractured by negative experiences, especially in conditions of persistent social inequality. Such fracturing does not have to be understood as permanent or determining. It is not that one needs an academic diploma to express their grievances. However, one can lose the faith in oneself and one's ability to speak and act in public, a faith that is often reliant on social recognition of one's capability to express oneself as an equal.

The capability to articulate oneself and put one's feelings in words forms the basis of effective political agency. Politically effective use of language, however, is not just a linguistic capability which could be provided as one would provide a resource. Expressivity in comportment and speech is a result of sedimentation of significations into the habitual body, the intertwining of individuals with

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

their social environment. The capability to express oneself effectively in the public realm, to engage with relative confidence in action and speech, is a result not only of cognitive achievement and learning, but also the acquisition of contingent habits by the body-subject, habits which confer real social power on those able to acquire them.

Merleau-Ponty describes the capability of originary or authentic speech to directly communicate a new thought, to use language to deliver, for example, a heretofore unarticulated sense of a situation or a place (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 2012, 200, 323, 409, 411), an existential sense of meaning which cannot be reduced to the illocutionary or perlocutionary pragmatic aspects of linguistic expression. As Langer puts it, ‘The consideration of authentic speech thus alerts us to the existential significance which underlies the conceptual significance of language.’ (Langer 1989, 59). Such originary speech, as opposed to secondary speech, speech *about* speech itself, always delivers something of the sense what it is like to have a certain experience. This is a matter of immense political relevance: **political poverty also happens when one becomes incapable of articulating one’s own social experience to differently situated others.**

As both Arendt (1998, 179) and Merleau-Ponty (2012, 408) are at pains to emphasise, authentic expression, acting and speaking to others, is always about something more than the communication of pre-formed thoughts. In action and speech we appear under the gaze of others in our distinctiveness, presenting oneself not only to others, but also to oneself.

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and the sound of the voice. This disclosure of “who” in contradistinction to “what” somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (Arendt 1998, 179)

In appearing under the gaze of others and expressing ourselves to them, we make ourselves known, and in the process also come to know ourselves. This is one fundamental aspect of the ambiguity which characterises political freedom: we do not know what we are doing, or even who we are, before throwing ourselves into a situation in which we act with others and at the same time present ourselves to others. There is a spontaneity to acting and speaking which can be traced back to the way action is reliant on the human capacity of faith in oneself and the world.

Expression always means transcending oneself and what one may have previously believed and thought possible (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 408). It is only in action and speech that I can become what I could be, which can be much more than what I believed was possible. It is through public speech and expression, by committing ourselves to engagement in a shared social realm, that we transform ourselves into something we previously didn't think possible. We become quite literally something more than ourselves, or to be more precise, our selves are given a chance to finally appear in the eyes of others as well as our own.

There is a role played by implicit cultural expectations of what good political speech is like. Having to face such situations can itself be a force which causes people to silence themselves in fear of being judged inadequate in the eyes of those in power. As Iris Marion Young writes:

Actual situations of discussion often do not open themselves equally to all ways of making claims and giving reasons. Many people feel intimidated by the implicit requirements of public speaking; in some situations of discussion and debate, such as classrooms, courtrooms, and city council chambers, many people feel like they must apologize for halting and circuitous speech. (Young 2000, 38–9)

Such norms of articulation might be culturally and historically contingent, but in public situations they are unknowingly accepted by all and have the force of customary law. It is possible that ostensibly egalitarian public institutions can be experienced as a form of domination and discipline from above. Such

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

experiences often leave those suffering them with a lack of faith in one's own ability to express oneself properly in public. The experienced weight of such internalised inability can present itself in surprising situations. Charlesworth describes how the mere appearance of a tape recorder on the table makes his normally articulate and intelligent working-class interviewees fall silent; the machine makes the interview situation feel 'official', and they are not the kinds of persons who are allowed to express themselves in such situations (Charlesworth 2000, 135). Persons in such situations can feel as if they have had the words with which to protest their condition taken out of their mouth.

The cultural specificity of ways of speaking and comporting oneself, and social power relations latent in public conversational norms are an important factor in the silencing of politically impoverished groups. However, we should also pay attention to how negative social experiences can also become sedimented into the habitual body as the limiting and curtailing of the body-subject's capacity to express itself. This is another form of complicity: the body itself betrays the conditions of its upbringing and its intertwining with a certain social world. The world one inhabits forms the context of all attempts at conveying meaning. Our speech, too, is an embodied form of expression that always carries with it a sense of place and its social history, 'a context of incarnate subjectivity'. (Charlesworth 2000, 23) For example, the *parvenu*, the *novus homo* always stands out in influential circles from those who are privileged by birth. Expressivity and intertwining with a social field are thus intricately connected.

Instead of thinking political poverty in terms of capabilities as skills or abilities which allow one to function effectively in society, we should be thinking about expression from a phenomenological perspective as an aspect of all experience, a part of thinking, perceiving, and the motor intentionality of the lived body. As seen above when I discussed the example of Schneider in Chapter 4.3, our experience of the world is in a sense a result of the spontaneous expressivity of the lived body. When the intentional arc of the lived body becomes fractured, one's entire experience of the world becomes diminished. Expressivity means more than just being able to speak, or to dance, or to play an instrument;

expressivity means being able to project oneself towards the world, its others, and an uncertain future, with a certain amount of faith in one's own capability to handle oneself in one's circumstances. The kinds of informally enforced silences, curtailing of expressive capacities and experiences of *aphonia* (see Kompridis 2008, 301) suffered by politically impoverished groups the world over are such burning injustices because their sufferers are left with a diminished and fractured experience of the world because they remain unable to voice their concerns, their suffering.

5.5 Loss of Access to the Public World

The above discussions on trust and expression lead me to talk about the experiential aspects of the public realm itself. One key aspect of experiential freedom is the sense of having access the public realm, of being a legitimate political agent. We have already seen above that the loss of trust in social institutions and wider society can result in a tendency to withhold one's political participation. can easily disappear from experience.

When a well-heeled London City banker passes a homeless rough sleeper on his way to the office, there is a short intersection between two social worlds which, despite their intense physical proximity, remain completely separate from each other. There is something similar in the familiar phenomenon in which young urban professionals find much more in common with similar groups in other large cities across Europe than with the working-class persons of their own countries. The similarities in both lifestyle and political outlook are not coincidental. From the point of view of an educated middle-class person living in central Helsinki, those living in the relatively impoverished suburbs could as well be living in another country, and vice versa. This experience of a shared social world does not neatly coincide with the inhabiting of a certain place, and in the conditions of a globalising world, this seems more important to grasp than ever. Political poverty can create experienced pockets of non-belonging, within which access to the public realm can appear as an impossibility. These pockets can exist unnoticed by everyone else around them.

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

In Chapter 2.5 I developed a conception of the public realm as an intersubjective world, a field which is constituted by sedimentation of human interaction into webs of human relationship. I will in this subsection contend that one aspect of political poverty is the damaging of the human embodied capability to experience oneself able to access a shared civil realm, or a public world, in the sense of an experienced meaningful public field of action.

I begin with this quote from the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

If there were no cycles of behaviour, no open situations that call for a certain completion and that can act as a foundation, either for a decision that confirms them or for one that transforms them, then freedom would never take place. [...] If freedom is to have a *field to work with*, if it must be able to assert itself as freedom, then something must separate freedom from its ends, freedom must have a *field*; that is, it must have some privileged possibilities or realities that must tend to be preserved in being. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 462)

In order to come to being, freedom must have a field to work with. Conversely, if the field closes down, if nothing invites me to act, experience of freedom becomes diminished and fractured. Freedom gears into an already existing situation which is experienced as meaningful, as giving our being directedness and motivation (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 467). I must experience myself as able to access a public world to experience political engagement as meaningful; political freedom means being able to engage in a fruitful dialectical relationship with the social world. Merleau-Ponty calls this *conditioned freedom*:

What then is freedom? To be born is to be simultaneously born of the world and to be born into the world. The world is always already constituted, but also never completely constituted. In the first relation we are solicited, in the second we are open to an infinity of possibilities. Yet this analysis remains abstract, for we exist in both ways *simultaneously*. Thus, there is never determinism and never an absolute choice; I am never mere thing and never a bare consciousness. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 480)

There is then always a double movement to freedom. I must feel solicited by the world if I am to feel motivated to act upon it; the exterior world acts on my lived body and I feel engaged when I respond in kind. My perception of the world is of the same expressive movement which unites my body with my surroundings. Such an account of freedom as it is experienced in a concrete practical engagement with the world is especially pertinent when discussing political agency. In the preface to *Humanism and Terror* (1969) Merleau-Ponty discusses political liberty as not a question of freedom of the will or abstract theories of rights, but as the concrete terms of engaging in practical movement: 'It is the essence of liberty to exist only in the practice of liberty, in the inevitably imperfect movement which joins us to others, to the things of the world, to our jobs, mixed with the hazards of our situation.' (Merleau-Ponty 1969, xxiv) We are only free when we can ourselves become a part of a concrete situation and turn our attention and efforts towards our fellow others. We cannot know from advance how our engagement fares; it is always an ambiguous process of committing ourselves to the world and allowing ourselves to sense a bond with it in turn. We must have faith in the world to encounter it, to engage with it, and to experience such engagement as meaningful, as motivating us.

Taken concretely, freedom is always an encounter between the exterior and the interior – even that pre-human and pre-historical freedom by which we began – and it weakens, without ever becoming zero, to the extent that the *tolerance* of the bodily and institutional givens of our life diminishes. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 481)

Freedom never 'becomes zero' – that would be to lose all connection to the world, for example, by dying. It is not possible to imagine the complete absence of the social component of our lives which would make it impossible to relate to others in a meaningful way. Our sense of self is always constituted against a world already made meaningful by the presence of others. However, a real-life close example could be the predominantly Japanese phenomenon *hikikomori* or '[social] withdrawal', in which adolescent persons withdraw from society to the confines of their home or their own room. In the worst cases, they even become

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

unable to connect with their immediate family (see Saitō 2013). A person suffering *hikikomori* has not necessarily become depressed or apathetic, however, they are unable to go out and relate to the social world around them; they have not become desensitised to their situation but experience it as a cause of anxiety (Saitō 2013, 77–8, 54).

The case of *hikikomori* is, admittedly, an extreme example and appears quite specific to the Japanese case, even if a similar phenomenon has been observed in Western countries as well (Saitō 2013, 74–6). However, there are some interesting features to the phenomenon which might serve as an analogue to the loss of access to the public world I aim to make intelligible in this section. The social withdrawal is not a conscious, subjective decision; instead it appears to be a result of certain social factors. There is something in the social reality of those suffering from social withdrawal, which makes them slip away into a situation in which they are unable to understand themselves as a part of the same society that everyone else appears to belong to in a way which seems quite natural and effortless. While one should be wary of analogies, there is something similar to losing a sense of being able to access the specifically public realm of political engagement.

Our relationship to the institutional givens of our life can become diminished or even disappear from experience. One way to approach political poverty as loss of access to the public realm is to understand it as becoming alienated from the public world of civic engagement. This can happen in two ways.

The first is losing a sense of being able to access the public world. As seen above when I discussed loss of trust, marginalised persons may feel like they do not belong to society but are at its mercy; suffering but unable to protest their suffering in public. What has been lost is an experience of being authorised and capable to *access* the public world. Alongside the many other problems Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 56) observed, one of the most pressing was the pervasive feeling among the residents that they did not belong to a society, and thus did not feel *entitled to participate*. This can be interpreted as an example of loss of faith in oneself as a political agent. Instead, the residents have

internalised a self-understanding of themselves as not belonging to society, and so, politics is something that is done by others and not by them.

The other way an experience of losing access can take place is due to the public world itself disappearing from experience. What is often called ‘alienation’ can be approached as the disappearance from experience of the intersubjective conditions for experiencing the public world as meaningful. As I explained in Chapter 2.5, public world, then, should be understood in the world which exists as the in-between or the *inter homines esse*, the intersubjective public dimension of our lives which makes public appearance possible and which is a product of sedimentation of meanings into a shared world which allows us to feel at home. The existence of the public world is always contingent on us engaging with it as citizens and it might disappear. An extreme example is the totalitarian state in which public life is made impossible by violent repression. When any criticism of the state apparatus is outlawed and everyone around you might be a police informant, action and speech in concert become impossible: they find no intersubjective reality in which new shared meanings could unfold and take root.

However, such a loss of reality can also take place in much more mundane circumstances. The residents observed by Luhtakallio and Mustranta have lost faith in their ability to change things; instead, society appears distant, a place that cannot be accessed from where one is now. Of course, the residents live in a social world with its institutions, both official and informal; however, it appears that the world is decidedly lacking a *public* aspect, a space of action and speech that could be used to take control of the political destiny of one’s life. Public institutions are often mistrusted, since they are experienced as indifferent to the problems faced by the residents. It is not society as such but specifically *civic* society or a public realm that the residents appear to feel like they have no access to.

Sociologists have used the term ‘social capital’ to describe the sum of relationships and connections an individual has (see Putnam 2000; Savage et al. 2015; on the shortcomings of the concept as a tool for analysis of political

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

trust and apathy, see Kim 2005). Social capital is a resource one can draw on to make things happen politically; conversely, lacking social capital can make one a complete political outsider, as described by Luhtakallio and Mustranta:

While the networked activist is browsing through the contact information of ten different council members on their cell phone to push their agenda forward, there is elsewhere a group that does not protest or participate in associations, nor set up trendy street festivals. Their city looks completely different – it is not a playground of imagination where everyone can bring their own contribution, nor are the decision makers reachable by phone or a Facebook message, but could just as well reside in another reality. They see their possibilities to influence society, or even to belong to it, as non-existent.⁶

Luhtakallio and Mustranta describe how the lack of social capital can have an experiential effect, as the intersubjective basis for feeling like being able to access the political world disappears. This a state of affairs which has a perceptual effect: their city looks different, not a field of possibilities for action, but a reality which is closed to them. Earlier in the text they discuss the singular example of ‘Cisse’, a man in his 40s who, despite his good humour and intelligence, had ended up almost completely excluded from civil society. His family background offered little support for pursuing education and he soon found himself outside the structures of civil society:

Cisse had never voted. That society in which you vote and wherein lie institutions and services and decision-making was definitely not the one where Cisse had lived more or less his whole life. He made

⁶ ”Mutta samaan aikaan kun verkostoitunut aktivisti selaa kymmenen kunnanvaltuutetun yhteystietoja kännykästään viedäkseen asiaansa eteenpäin, on toisaalla joukko, joka ei osoita mieltään tai osallistu juuri yhdistystoimintaan sen enempää kuin järjestä trendikkäitä katufestareitakaan. Heidän kaupunkinsa on aivan eri näköinen – se ei ole mielikuvituksen temmellyskenttä, johon jokainen voi tuoda oman panoksensa, eikä sitä koskeva päätöksenteko ole puhelinnumeron tai Facebook-viestin päässä vaan pikemminkin aivan toisessa todellisuudessa. He näkevät mahdollisuutensa vaikuttaa yhteiskuntaan, jopa ylipäättään kuulumisensa siihen, olemattomina.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 118)

short visits to that second society when he ended up in a hospital, for example, but that was the extent of their relationship.⁷

The examples by Luhtakallio and Mustranta show how an experienced divide has grown between the everyday world of the marginalised residents of the neighbourhood, and society, that world in which public engagement and democratic participation are experienced as meaningful possibilities. The experience that the residents have of their reality has become diminished and fractured: there is an experienced divide between society and them. The two worlds intersect from time to time, but there is rarely any meaningful communication. For example, when a well-meaning community organiser comes to meet the locals at their volunteer-run community café to get them to vote, she condescendingly insists that they should look after their own interests by voting. She doesn't even take notice when the residents react with a measured quiet disbelief. The organiser simply lacks the understanding about the kind of world the residents live in, one in which the constant stream of everyday problems and deprivations one is faced with makes it hard to see how voting would help. 'Even the observer became angry at the insistence of the community organiser – as if voting was the kind of duty one simply must perform without caring about feeling like you're getting nothing in return.'⁸

Such examples signal the existence of an experiential divide between those for whom accessing the public realm with its civic habits and practices is a self-evident experiential fact, and those who can only perceive such a world from afar and outside it, if at all. As I discussed in the above chapter, the perception of the figure of the visible world is always constituted against the affective background horizon which allows the configuration of the visible to emerge. As embodied temporal beings we never really coincide with ourselves in complete

⁷ "Cisse ei ollut koskaan äänestänyt. Se yhteiskunta, jossa äänestetään ja jossa sijaitsevat instituutiot ja palvelut ja päätöksenteko, on aivan eri kuin se, missä Cisse oli elänyt pitkälti koko ikänsä. Hän teki lyhyitä vierailuja tuohon toiseen yhteiskuntaan esimerkiksi joutuessaan sairaalaan, mutta sen tiiviimpää sidettä hänellä ei siihen ollut." (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 59)

⁸ "Tarkkailijaakin suututti puuhanaisen patistelu – aivan kuin äänestäminen olisi sellainen velvollisuus, joka pitää van suorittaa välittämättä siitä, ettei koe saavansa mitään vastineeksi." (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 57)

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

presence. Instead we partake in, and are in part constituted by, the anonymous 'We' of the intersubjective relationships of our social lives which become sedimented into our bodies through the conscious and unconscious learning processes. These become incorporated into our habitual body as the habits and forms of life we take as familiar. Our way of experiencing the world, what in a certain sense exists for us as social beings, is one of these habits, a product of ceaseless social learning and its sedimentation into our bodies.

What we might call civility or civic culture is, in an important sense, a product of sedimentation of meaning, on which is founded a way of perceiving others and the world. Charlesworth describes how, for the working-class residents of Rotherham, being cast out of the horizon of secure employment, usually approached as a statistic, or a matter of subjective outlook as opposed to objective material reality, can have a disastrous impact on the intersubjectively constituted horizon of our experience:

Such conditions of scarcity amidst affluence, of severe vulnerability amidst images of security, of dislocation without movement, have led to the creation of a class in which many have come to appear 'odd', abject, because they have been unable to participate in spaces in which they could learn, mimetically, body-to-body, the manners and styles of deportment of the accomplished adult, attuned to the respectable world of a civilized realm in which there exists, practically and dispositionally, a civic culture oriented to public civility. (Charlesworth 2000, 159)

Production of a civic culture of public civility that citizens can access *as citizens*, that is to say, as equals, is not simply a discursive or a communicative affair. It is a product of embodied *mimesis*, of learning body-to-body how to appear as in the public under the mode of public civility. This is sedimentation at work: we learn a public or civil form of being in and seeing the world when actions of others who co-exist with us, or even became before us become sedimented into our bodies. As discussed in Chapters 2.4. and 4.4., as embodied beings we are always a product of intertwining with our lived environments. As we inhabit

certain social worlds, these worlds also inhabit us as ways of comportment, speech, and perception. Social worlds can become marked by a persistent silence and the rotting away of that 'civic culture oriented to public civility', leading to the disappearance of the way of inhabiting the world which allows the public sphere to emerge in perception.

When one lacks the possibility of learning how to be in civil society, the very public realm itself begins to appear as a distant place one does not inhabit, a separate world from one's own. Experiencing the public world as a possible field for action is a sedimented result of a process in which one learns to see the world as a *res publica*, a public thing. Political poverty means that this sense of access, of knowing how to relate to a public world, becomes fractured or disappears completely:

What is being taken away here is the very possibility of on-going, practical belief in the network of relations through which one took up, through the silent communication of bodies in comportment, the ability-to-be that disclosed the world as inherently meaningful. Life for the economically marginal and unemployed is a condition in which absorption in a public domain all but ceases and possibilities recede. (Charlesworth 2000, 209)

Our being in the life forms a life is a unitary structure, and such decay acts as the taking away of the Gestalt background of publicness or civility that forms the basis for political engagement. We can understand the perceptual field as a form and product of intersubjectivity which is based on our fundamental intercorporeal nature. (Zahavi 2001, 166) describes the simultaneous appearance of the self, others, and the world, three interrelated phenomena which cannot exist separately. What I want to emphasise is the way he discusses the coming together of the world as 'only brought to articulation in the relation between subjects', continuing:

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

As Merleau-Ponty would write: the subject must be seen as a worldly incarnate existence, and the world must be seen as a common field of experience, if intersubjectivity is at all to be possible.

(Zahavi 2001, 166)

When I say that one way in which political poverty manifests itself in experience is the 'loss of access to the public world', what I mean is that this seemingly organic form of basic intersubjectivity, the primordial relationship between self, others, and the world, becomes fractured. This relationship is revealed to be contingent on a number of conditions which enable it to come to being, and which are dependent on the curious way our bodies are beings that are both 'inner and outer'. Our embodied selves and the intersubjective social world they inhabit emerge in the same movement from the pre-personal sediment lodged within our habitual lived bodies (Heinämaa 2015).

It appears to me that the development of a certain civic sensibility in experience comes about only through participating in social institutions. Conversely, experiences of being excluded, being dominated and humiliated can fracture the experience of the world as a public thing one has a stake in. Employment is one such institution which is rarely considered seriously political theorists. For Charlesworth's interviewees, the disappearance of stable industrial employment has also meant the disappearance of the basis for obtaining a sense of civic decency, a way of life in which one could appear as respectable in public life, participating in the working-class associations and sports teams of the factories and the mines, and through them, in the public and political life of the community (Charlesworth 2000, 158). The way unemployment and precarious employment circumscribe one's ability to interact and learn in a broader social reality is also noted by the social psychologist Marie Jahoda (1982, 25–6), who describes how unemployment causes an impoverishment of social experience of the kind that home life cannot substitute for:

In employment, even a shy and withdrawn person cannot help but enlarge his knowledge of the social world as he observes the similarities or differences, compared with his own, of the habits,

5.5 Loss of Access to the Public World

opinions and life experience of others around him. He may not like the social contacts that employment forces, but they are an inescapable source for enlarging his social horizon. During unemployment such impoverishment of social experience follows necessarily from the change in the structure of daily life.

(Jahoda 1982, 25)

Marie Jahoda observes that high levels of unemployment have historically not resulted in political uprisings, but an increase in political apathy. Losing one's employment means not just a loss of monetary compensation, it also means losing the cultural meanings and temporal rhythms it imposes on everyday experience. The increase in leisure time among the unemployed is illusory: leisure time is only experienced as such when it is opposed to time spent in work. **While some lucky few manage to manage their own lives effectively, for the majority the destruction of this time structure means enduring a sense of purposelessness which also extends to communal engagement (Jahoda 1982, 23–25, 27).** Merleau-Ponty, for his part, observes that the great uprisings of workers have always happened at a delay, only after conditions have already improved. This has made it possible to detach from the immediacy of surviving everyday life, allowing a fellow-feeling between workers to emerge and a public political project with others appear as a meaningful aspect of reality (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 471).

As discussed in the above chapter, I conceptualise experiential freedom as engagement with the intersubjective public world, a political field, draws from the similarities between Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and his account of authentic or originary expression, and Hannah Arendt's account of action as *natality*. The experience of freedom reorganises a body-subject's perceptual field, their public milieu, in a new configuration, a phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty describes through the fitting example of the arrival of a newborn baby into the household. Suddenly the entire world appears in a different light: 'There was henceforth a new "milieu" and the world received a new layer of signification.' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 429) The appearance of the public milieu

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

or world in the perceptual field is a new layer of signification in experience, a new world.

It is this sense of access of the political or the public sphere which becomes occluded when one's experience of the social world becomes diminished and fractured. When the sense of having access the public realm disappears, the public realm disappears from experience as a field one can project themselves towards and into. The intentional arc of publicness disappears from experience and with it the sense of access to the public realm.

Poverty relates to political poverty not just as the lack of measurable resources, but as the loss of the intersubjective enabling conditions of upholding a civic public realm in the first place. Arendt's conception of the public realm describes it as a space of appearance which is always present 'only potentially, not necessarily and not forever' (Arendt 1998, 199). The public realm comes to existence when we are allowed to live our social lives in a certain way, taking a certain political relationship to the first in-between of the social world of appearances and articulating it into the second in-between of *inter homines esse*, free appearance of ourselves to others in plurality. The loss of a sense of access to the public realm, the shared space of appearance, is a form of political poverty because it is the public realm which confers *reality* to our lives and allows our political freedom a directedness, something towards which to project itself. As Arendt writes:

This space does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them—like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world—do not live in it. No man, moreover, can live in it all the time. To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; “for what appears to all, this we call Being,” and whatever lacks this

5.6 Loss of Future Temporality

appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality. (Arendt 1998, 199)

Being able to access a shared public world means being able to participate in the coming to being of political power which confers visibility and reality to our daily concerns. To be deprived of the experience of this power is to be consigned to live with a diminished experience of society. As Arendt describes it, this form of power is human potential, that which ‘springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse’ (Arendt 1998, 200). It preserves the public realm which makes shared reality of human affairs possible, as well as the narratives we tell of human affairs; without it, ‘the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word.’ (Arendt 1998, 204)

Our bodies are expressive beings which never stop improvising on that which from a certain perspective might seem as constraining and given. Our social worlds always contain within themselves the possibility of breaking out of their isolation and the shared learning of living together in a public manner. Unfortunately, these learning processes can also curtail our vision and lodge into our bodies habits which shut out ways of seeing and ways of being. The intersubjective perceptual field becomes lessened as it loses meaning, fracturing one’s ability to engage with the others and the social world we share. The world loses its public character, or inversely, there is a sense of a loss of access to the public world.

5.6 Loss of Future Temporality

One important aspect of political poverty as experiential damage is the loss of the future temporal aspect of experience. This sense of future temporality is itself an aspect of our embodied pre-personal perceptual relationship to others and the world, and flows from practical engagement. It is hard to describe a phenomenon like the experience of future temporality in terms of objective possibilities and capabilities. A constant in the literature I have discussed so far appears to be what in the lack of a better term could be called a loss of hope.

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

When an agent loses the ability to even imagine a relevant horizon of possibility for future action, one loses any hope of political change, and with it the motivation to even attempt to engage with politics.

Pierre Bourdieu (2000, 206) contrasts the abstract, objective conception of continuous and uninterrupted time as it is understood by physicists and scholars, with 'human time' which is always a result of engagement in social practices. Only practical engagement in the world confers to individual experience a sense of time, and with it, a sense of reality. Human time is not a dimension of our physical reality, a line extending from past to future. Instead, time forms an aspect of our perceptual and motor intentionality which arises from our active embodied engagement with the social world, and is thus conditioned by the social situation one is faced with. Merleau-Ponty characterises time as a part of our perceptual field, 'a network of intentionalities'. To use Merleau-Ponty's idiom from the *Visible and Invisible* (1968), time is as much a part of the invisible threading of the texture our visible perceptual field as our intentional relationships with own bodies and those of others, as well as the inanimate objects outside ourselves. Our sense of time, then, both subtends and is born out of our relationship to things of the world.

If a perceived sense of temporality is born out of our engagement with the things of the world, how do the things of the world in turn effect and change our perception of temporality? For Merleau-Ponty time forms one aspect of the perceptual field. Just as we perceive a house in its wholeness despite only having looked at it from a series of perspectives, we perceive of time as having both the aspects of its past and its future: our perception is a synthesis of these horizons. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 70–2) Merleau-Ponty characterises this perspectival and intentionality of our perception of time as much a part of our perceptual field as our perception of space and things, and flows only as much as we are able to occupy it through practical engagement:

Time understood broadly, that is, the order of coexistences as much as the order of successions, is a milieu to which one can only gain access and that one can only understand by occupying a situation

5.6 Loss of Future Temporality

within it, and by grasping it as a whole through the horizons of this situation. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 347)

Our perceptual field is, in part, constituted by intentional relationships of 'retention', or perceiving the presence of their past in the things of the present, as it is a relationship of 'protention', or perceiving things of the world already under their future aspect. As Merleau-Ponty (2012, 440) puts it, 'Time is not a line, but rather a network of intentionalities.' The experience of time is not universal in its givenness, but is always conditioned by sedimentation, the history of our conditions, or its social situation. One of the most insidious effects of political poverty is the fracturing of the future aspect of the perceptual field, a cutting off of the present from possible futures, the ability to experience the world with the intentional arc of its future aspect present.

This also reminds us that politics is not only about *natality*, the bringing of something new into the world, the creation of a disjunction through an event. Political engagement is also about temporal continuities, about being able to become a part of a collective narrative which forms a possibility of moving ahead, passing from the past towards a better possible future. The heroic, disjunctive, and even somewhat disembodied character of Arendt's political theory is thrown into a different light when compared to this sense of human time as an aspect of experiential freedom, itself having an embodied aspect that must not be left unexamined. The kind of faith in oneself and the world that action springs from flows from constant engagement with everyday social life, its mundane routines and its concern with bodily reproduction and well-being. Participation and engagement in this social field is just as much a guarantee of the reality of experience as its articulation in public engagement.

For example, as Maria Jahoda observes, in modern societies for the majority of persons their 'tie to reality' is provided by the social institution of employment, something that still holds almost 40 years later (Jahoda 1981, 189). Employment and being allowed to participate in productive activity is for the many their main source of a sense of a practical engagement with the world. Conversely, being stuck in a precarious situation of unemployment or too little work and having

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

to focus on economic survival leaves little room for imagining the alternative futures in which a new political imagination could find room to grow. As Charlesworth (2000, 169–70) glumly notes, even the relative affluence afforded by poorly paying employment can secure a sense of freedom in an existence that is more cognitive than, and at a distance from, the focus on survival and securing of corporeal needs faced by the economically dispossessed. Persons living in precarious situations can experience the political world as a source of anxiety and threats to one's sense of self. As I noted in Chapter 2.5, political freedom has its material requirements. Suffering poverty and precariousness due to unemployment has its consequences for experiencing oneself as a credible political agent.

Bourdieu, too, observes that employment, with the regular rhythms it brings to life, is in contemporary democratic societies the main source of practical involvement in the world. Its absence can lead to the disappearance of human time from lived experience:

If time seems to be annihilated, this is because employment is the support, if not the source, of most interest, expectations, demands, hopes and investments in the present, and also in the future or the past that it implies, in short one of the major foundations of *illusio* in the sense of involvement in the game of life, in the present, the primordial investment which – as traditional wisdom has always taught, in identifying detachment from time with detachment from the world – creates time and indeed *is* time itself.

(Bourdieu 2000, 222)

Employment, of course, is only one aspect of social and civic life, but an important one, as it is the source of an experience of frequent activity which helps put the world into a clear time frame and also gives economic security and even the hope of being allowed to plan for a future with others. This is not to say that there isn't something wrong with a system which places such an onus on being employed as the condition of being a good citizen while stigmatising the unemployed and placing them under institutional relations of domination

and oppression through different systems of regimented unemployment. I am merely saying that as it appears to me, being employed does provide for the large majority of persons their context of regular daily interaction with the world and others outside the home, the source of a sense of a somewhat stable future, and by extension, hope.

An important aspect of the loss of experiential freedom appears to be the loss of hope. Political theory has understated the importance of experiencing hope, or future temporality which contains within it the possibility of change for better, to developing political subjectivity. When an agent loses the ability to even imagine a relevant horizon of possibility for future change, one loses any hope of political change, and with it the motivation to even attempt to engage with politics. The experience of a relevant future horizon of political change can be replaced by a resignation to the continuation of more of the same, with little to no hope for any sort of change. This also leads to loss of a grasp of the present moment.

Daniel Ratcliffe (2013) rejects the view of hope as a simple intentional state ('I hope that p') or a subjective feeling, and instead shows how hope forms an embodied affective background condition of experiencing the world as a meaningful field of action. Experiencing hope in this sense means being able to perceive the world in a certain way, and hopelessness means the loss of this ability. Such loss is often felt as an intense sense of absence and the loss of trust in the world (Ratcliffe 2013, 607). We could with good reason consider hope the political emotion *par excellence*. The loss of hope from experience must then be considered a serious form of experiential damage, a real obstacle to be able to perceive the world as a meaningful field of political action.

One aspect of experiencing political poverty, then, is losing a sense of human time as the presence of a future horizon in experience, and with it, a sense of hope, or a credible future possibility of being able to change things for the better. When one loses hope, one loses the ability to see the world as a field of possibilities one can act and have a meaningful effect on. Social phenomena may begin to simply occur as if by the whims of a higher power. The loss of the future

5. Loss of Experiential Freedom

temporal aspect of perception also means losing hope of influencing things and changing them for the better. **Hope is human time, the sense of engaging with a human world as a field of projects that reach towards the hope of a better future, no matter how realistic or not. Political poverty means the fracturing of this experience of future temporality.**

The human experience of time is intimately connected to being able to engage in a range of social practices which offer the promise of possibilities for things being otherwise. It is this sense of temporality that is also the basis of 'political time', or a shared future horizon towards which a political project can open up, motivating collective organisation and action. Political time is not an objectively measurable continuity, but a structure of experience which gives reality a practical significance which could be understood as being able to perceive of the world against the future background horizon of possibility for changing things to the better. A sense of a past and a future is conferred to experience by practical engagement with others in the social world.

Political motivation springs from having hope, from being able to perceive the world against a credible future horizon of possibility. If one is unable to perceive the world against the affective background of hope, of against a future horizon of possibility, the alternative can be apathy and quietly seething *ressentiment* (see Aeschbach 2017). Social precariousness can lead one to adopt a relationship to the world that quietly accepts the meaninglessness of any talk of future: the world is here and now, and future appears to offer only more of the same. This leads to the loss of the sense of agency as things 'become occurrent', completely outside one's control.

It is this umbilical cord between body-subject and world that is disturbed by the destruction of the humdrum setting of our lives as personal time is arrested and one form of present comes to proclaim itself over and against the movement of time, displacing the subject's sense of the temporal location of practice, robbing new presents of their authenticity. It is as though life goes on, under this dread, as a grinning mockery of itself, and this alien subjectivity comes to

5.6 Loss of Future Temporality

inhabit the person, virus-like, destroying the programmes of the habit-body until enjoyment of the thickness of being is foreclosed upon, indefinitely – or until, perhaps, there comes a point when ontological security is founded, established, again.

(Charlesworth 2000, 77)

Experience of time, then, can be approached as also function of ontological security which I called above a certain experience of trust.

To understand how a future can be lost is to understand that in an important way, human time is a result of activity. Time is something that body-subjects project outside them as a dimension of the intentional arc of their experience. When body-subjects are denied the possibility of engaging meaningfully with the world around them, this has an effect on their experience of time. Losing a sense of credible future possibilities can also lead to the loss of a grasp of the present moment. The fracturing of the ability to project a future temporal dimension to one's experience contributes to a breakdown in the ability to project oneself freely into the world.

The sense of a fracturing of the experience of a future is also somewhat manifest, for example, in the way that many interviewees of Charlesworth describe their lives as a cycle of 'not going anywhere'. Something of this can be gleaned from this interview:

The world has become occurrent to them, something they experience 'from the outside', that is, from a position of non-involvement. Possibilities no longer solicit them. They experience a radical discontinuity, an unsettledness emanating from the grounds of the body's projection into the future which creates a sense of the loss of meaning of their lives and yet which makes the meaninglessness of the world in which they live more explicit. It is a sense detectable in the words of one unemployed person:

X: A've [I've] bin rait [right] depressed miself [myself] this week. An' fuckin' boored [bored] aht'a [out of] mi [my] mind. Ah just an't got a fuckin' thing to du [do]. It is strange, it just meks mi s' [so] upset. It's

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

like beein' fuckin' ill, I feel sick an' I an't [haven't] bin [been] rait [right] fo' weeks. A'm just wastin' all mi life an' the'r in't a fuckin' thing Ah' can du. That's why Ah stay in bed su [so] late. Ah dun't wanna get up to feel su fed-up. [Pause] It meks mi feel strange inside . . .[pause] (Charlesworth 2000, 79)

What is important to note in this example is that Charlesworth's interviewee describes himself as depressed, an unusually strong self-ascription when compared to the rest of his interviewees. However, it would seem strange to describe all politically marginalised persons as depressed. We should note that one can be active in one's everyday personal life while remaining disconnected from the rhythms of public life. I believe that Daniel Ratcliffe's distinction between depression and demoralisation is apt here.

The demoralised person does not lack the capacity for motivation, or indeed for hope, but she does experience her future as a realm that is devoid of possibilities for action. [...] So demoralisation can be described as a loss of radical hope, but it is not a loss of the capacity for hope in the same way that depression is. The person with severe depression cannot conceive of any state of affairs offering the possibility of hope, whereas the demoralised person retains a sense of what it would be to have a hopeful orientation towards the future. She just doesn't have one. (Ratcliffe 2013, 611)

The loss of hope for the future and the concomitant loss of faith in oneself as a political agent is a certain form of such demoralisation, and is intimately connected to the fracturing of the future temporality of one's lived experience. Such loss of faith can, it should be noted, be very compatible with the (even oppressive) presence of past in one's perception. Ratcliffe (2013, 612) notes that it is through the enduring presence of the capacity to hope that 'demoralisation is compatible with imaginatively reliving past hopes'. The connection between political apathy and reactionary populist politics could be seen through this capability to relive past glories, combined with the loss of an experience of future. This can become another source of frustration which can lead one to adopt a reactionary politics; as Sebastien Aeschbach (2017, 57) notes, the

inability to forget the past, and the compulsion to relive it, together form an essential ingredient of the affect of *ressentiment*.

If I become demoralised, I feel like my life is not going anywhere, that I am dragged down by my surroundings with no escape in view. This fracturing of the future temporal dimension of one's experience, contributes to a breakdown in the ability to project oneself freely into the world. One of the symptoms of the disappearance of human time from experience is the experience of living from day to day with little ability to see a way out or things being different as they are. Experience of freedom is also an experience of being able to open towards a future of possibility, a future which holds the promise of change that can be grasped, that can hold within it a political project one can become engaged in. When experience becomes devoid of such possibility, the entire perceptual and motor structure of the lived body becomes disturbed. The diminishing of the future temporal aspect of the intentional arc can be the result of the loss of all aforementioned aspects of political poverty; in a sense, our experience of human time as future temporality is trusting, engaging in expression, a sense of belonging which is self-evident until it is gone.

Political poverty as loss of experiential freedom means the going to sleep of the dialectic which founds our experience of the political. The diminishing of possibilities for positive change, the loss of a politically relevant future horizon from experience is perhaps the best illustration of a loss of faith. Unlike accounts of political equality which emphasise the provision of opportunities and capabilities for the use of one's freedom of the will, I emphasise the experiential aspect of freedom as a meaningful future temporality: the way that the lived body plays an active part in projecting a future for itself in a dialectical interaction with the intersubjective field it encounters. This is an encounter that can also go badly; the result is the diminishing of the experience of the world.

Having *hope* is an important aspect of the experience of political freedom, a fact readily acknowledged by any community organiser or leader, whose job it is to engender that hope. In cases of political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom, the experience of a relevant future horizon of political change is often

5. *Loss of Experiential Freedom*

replaced by a resignation to the continuation of more of the same, with little to no hope for any sort of change. The closing down of an open future horizon in experience and its replacing with a closed recurrence of present problems and suffered injustices also means the diminishing and fracturing of the ability to project oneself towards political engagement.

In the previous chapter I turned to phenomenology in order to give an account of political freedom as a relationship between an agent and a social field, and of faith as a relationship of practical meaningfulness which forms a part of the intentional arc of experience. In this chapter I have developed a heuristic account of political poverty which attempts to include within itself various aspects of social experience which have political relevance. These aspects, a sense of trust, a sense of expressivity, a sense of access to the public world, and the sense of future temporality, can all become diminished and even lost from experience to various degrees. This is due to the diminishing and fracturing of the intentional arc of experience, experienced as a loss of faith in oneself as a capable and credible political agent, as well as a loss of faith in politics as an avenue for pursuing meaningful social change. Previous accounts of political poverty and exclusion have not been able to identify the phenomenon I describe here. If I am correct, I have identified an important aspect of political agency which has not been fully identified by previous democratic theorists. I hope that this account allows us to recognise the importance of treating the experience of political freedom that individuals and collectives have as something that is not subjective, or separate from the broader social context of their lives. It is instead always to a degree a factor of the intertwining of the self, others, and the world, resulting in the ambiguous and context-dependent character of liberty.

I hope that the thinking tools provided in this chapter can help political theorists and activists alike to identify cases of political poverty as loss of experiential freedom, and to come up with strategies for combating the phenomenon. Next, in the concluding chapter, I present one such strategy.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Epilogue

A dissertation on critical theory must, of course, present a critical diagnosis which identifies a problem. If this negative task was all that needed to be completed, I could stop now. However there is a legitimate question that should be answered: ‘What is to be done?’ Whereas an ethnographer can remain content with describing a social phenomenon, a philosopher cannot rest content with the kind of pessimism which characterises, for example, Simon Charlesworth’s study. It is not enough to give a critical account of an injustice, to make such a phenomenon intelligible. One should also attempt to make intelligible the already present emancipatory potential immanent to even the direst social situations.

My aim has been to identify and make visible a phenomenon which, if I am correct, is a real problem in our democracies, and which has not been addressed by most political theorists. This does not mean that no-one has tried to somehow remedy the situation. Instead of making grand normative statements, I end this dissertation with an example of engendering freedom, the story of a grass-roots initiative which attempted to give a sense of political agency to persons who had lost their faith in their own capacity to change things and in ability of the system to ever work for them.

I have above quoted liberally from Luhtakallio and Mustranta’s book *Demokratia suomalaisessa lähiössä* (2017), which is, as noted, a short book, part investigative journalism, part polemic treatise on political exclusion in contemporary Finland. The book is also the story of a democracy workshop

6. Conclusion

which tried to do things otherwise. In the preface to the book Eeva Luhtakallio describes how she had spent years in an underprivileged neighbourhood in Helsinki, doing sociological research on inequality in political participation. Luhtakallio had become disillusioned with official and third-sector ‘inclusivity initiatives’ which, while usually well-meaning, often only appeared to affirm the residents’ subaltern position as clients, as passive and incapable subjects to power, instead of putting power in the hands of the residents themselves. Finally the residents themselves gave her the idea: since she constantly talked about political participation, why not hold a workshop and show everyone what participation really meant?

The workshop activity was meant to give the participants experiences of political participation and to strengthen their knowledge about different means of influence and the skills to use them. At the same time, we thought that we could ourselves learn from the participants many things about the bases of political participation that are hard to capture with traditional research interviews or journalistic interviews.¹

Luhtakallio enlisted the help of the journalist Maria Mustranta, who had done a piece on the residents of the neighbourhood, and after receiving a grant, they set out to work with a small group including a community theatre pedagogue. The group focused their efforts on a community space for families dubbed ‘Kahvila Kultakutri’, Finnish for ‘Café Goldilocks’. The community space was an important place for the parents in the neighbourhood, many of them single custodians who had few other places for meeting people. The café was run by a non-profit and had become an established spot in the neighbourhood. The café goers themselves were a group characterised by a combination of factors which often reduce social inclusion: they were predominantly women, often single mothers, with low incomes and low educational background, and often from an

¹ ”Työpajatoiminnan tarkoituksena oli tuottaa osallistujille kokemuksia poliittisesta osallistumisesta sekä vahvistaa eri vaikuttamiskeinojen tuntemusta ja taitoja käyttää niitä. Samalla ajattelimme, että voisimme itse oppia paljon sellaista, jota on vaikea tavoittaa esimerkiksi perinteisillä tutkimushaastatteluilla tai journalistisilla haastatteluilla.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 8)

immigrant background. Many suffered from chronic illness and the absence of support networks of their own.

These factors have the tendency to reinforce another. Experiences from different spheres of life of not getting one's own voice heard, of one's situation remaining invisible and one's circumstances remaining unrecognised pile up into a lasting experience of deprivation and becoming excluded. Such experiences appeared repeatedly in the conversations and reactions of the goers to Goldilocks.²

Consequently, the participants in the workshop had little resources to spare for thinking about politics, something noted by organisers of prior events. Many were so overwhelmed by the problems in their own lives that they had little interest in political issues, others were afraid of appearing less knowledgeable than others. Many had issues with trust in general and especially with trusting the kind of well-educated and well-spoken persons as the organisers, a result of becoming repeatedly disappointed by city officials and social institutions. (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 47) These were the kind of people who rarely appear in public with their own faces and voices; instead, in the public eye they are usually cast in the role of passive targets of social measures, never in the role of active citizens in their own right.

The organisers began slowly by organising events every other week, first trying to get to know the residents and to gain their trust. However, they couldn't help pushing a bit too hard. An early effort at organising a public protest on themes chosen by the participants was politely ignored by almost everyone at the café – the participants had never taken part in an organised public protest and were bewildered by the whole idea of being able to do so. After the protest the mood at the café began to sour. Many resented the very idea of having to constantly

² ”Näillä tekijöillä on lisäksi taipumus vahvistaa toisiaan. Kokemukset eri elämäalueilla siitä, että oma ääni ei kuulu, tilanne ei näy eivätkä huolet ja olosuhteet tule tunnistetuiksi, kasautuvat vähitellen pysyväksi kokemukseksi osattomuudesta ja syrjäytetyksi tulemisesta. Tällaiset kokemukset vilahtelivat toistuvasti kultakutrilaisten puheissa ja reaktioissa.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 46)

6. Conclusion

spend time thinking about 'this kind of stuff', about general and abstract political issues, instead of just spending time with others. There was a clash of worlds: the workshop organisers were veterans of public protests and public speaking; the café goers had never felt competent at engaging in political action. Luhtakallio and Mustranta describe how they unwittingly had become guilty of the kind of top-down sermonising that they themselves resented. Instead of an atmosphere of equality and inclusivity which sprang from the needs and experiences of the participants, they had made everyone feel as if they were in school. This made the residents recall their memories of education, a time which for most of them was the beginning of a string of humiliations at the hands of public institutions, being made feel stupid and worthless. (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 55) One time a community activist came to lecture the café goers on the importance of voting; even the organisers felt the absurdness of telling the participants, who had received so little from society, to suddenly start caring about their duty towards it. As if they should just ignore that they were getting nothing in return! (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 56–7)

However, the mood in the workshop began to improve as the organisers themselves started to realise the mistakes they made in their approach. They received a lucky break when they organised a knitting workshop for making socks to recent Syrian refugees, an activity that was felt to be practical and meaningful, a way of doing something concrete to help. The participants were then the subjects of a program at the local radio station and had the chance of presenting the daily life of the café to outsiders. A turning point in the process was a Halloween party: what was meant to be a politically charged evening of composing protest songs was turned into a simple get-together of families gathering over food. At first this annoyed the organisers, who had wanted something politically relevant and had their plans rejected by the participants. However, the evening revealed to them what in hindsight was seemingly obvious: the pressing need to take into account the perspective of the participants themselves and recognise their needs and wishes as legitimate.

Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 72–4) describe the immense importance simple act of ‘entertaining’, or treating people to things like snacks, food, and even a night out to go see a play, as one of the most important lessons of the whole workshop. The organisers began to take the participants for outings, first into a political art workshop, then to see a political play. For people who are not used to even the small luxury of being able to take a taxi, being taken for a night out at the theatre was an immensely welcome experience. Many found the play exciting, something which led the organisers to focus on working with the medium of community theatre.

The reaction of the participants to being treated as guests who are treated to things is an instructive example of the kind of material conditions of freedom that often are left unnoticed by political theorists. People who hail from the middle classes are used to the small luxuries of everyday life: a free glass of wine at a show, a lunch on someone else’s account, all the while friendly mingling with friends and strangers. As Luhtakallio and Mustranta observe, for people from lower economic classes, such treats are few and far between. Often considering such small luxuries in the context of political participation is a subject of heavy-handed moralising: people should be interested in fulfilling their citizenly duties, not getting stuff for free, and this goes especially for those who are not economically successful enough to provide these luxuries for themselves. The provision of these small treats (within the bounds of resources and reason) made participants feel welcome and relaxed the atmosphere considerably. It helped everyone become predisposed to the idea of political engagement as something they are *allowed*, not expected and ultimately forced to do.

Finally, the organisers decided to do take the workshop to its conclusion. Inspired by the success of their trip to the theatre, and Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, they decided on organising a political play which would be based on the experiences of the participants. The organisers took the group out for a weekend at a drama camp where the group started hashing out ideas and characters for their play. The role of organisers was to facilitate the participants

6. Conclusion

in putting their thoughts to words, and to finally turn the stories and reflections of the members of the group into a coherent script for the play. The group continued to gather at evenings and weekends at the café to finish their project. Some of the most important support was material: providing childcare and dinner made possible short periods of freedom from chores, making it possible for everyone to engage with current issues and their own experiences from their own viewpoint. The end result was a successful play full of carnevalistic humour and sharp plot twists, and with a happy and hopeful ending. Despite the fact that many of the participants were of Finnish ethnicity, the play ended up telling the stories of a Somali single mother Naima, and Iraqi refugee Ahmed. Naima is harassed by her xenophobic neighbours, but ultimately becomes a successful Somali community organiser. Ahmed, for their part, comes to terms with being transgendered, and after enduring various hardships finally organises a successful protest in front of the Parliament and continues their life as a spokesperson for immigrant and trans rights. Along the way the play handled various issues from racism to poverty, and finished with a depiction of a perfect world of equality and caring as the participants themselves envisioned it. The problems the play tackled were familiar to all, and the proposed solutions were political: coming together and organizing a movement. The play was presented at a local school and was a success; for many, it was the first public performance of their lives.

After the workshop, life at the café continued mostly as usual. No grand political outcomes were reached, no-one's life was completely turned around. Some continued to hold on to their new hobby as amateur thespians, most did not. The project was not a failure; the participants did feel that their experience was exciting and empowering. The social issues at hand simply were too large to be solved by a single workshop. Luhtakallio and Mustranta end their account with a long reflection on the character of democratic participation in a world of sharpening class differences and increasing ignoring of those left behind. These are structural issues which must be attended to collectively; at the same time the participation of everyone does matter. As they write:

Democracy is not just a system for organizing elections. It is a form of society based on the radical idea of human equality, and that human beings can make decisions together about their common affairs. There is no democracy without justice and equality. Democracy is broken if making decisions about common affairs is primarily characterised by a deep inequality of the possibilities of influencing them.³

In the beginning of their book Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 16) provide a tentative list of rules that they followed during their project, a list based on a prior one given by Leonardo da Costa Custódio (2016, 229–35). The list is meant to provide a short, simple, and demanding set of ethical guidelines for researchers, journalists, activists, community organisers, and everyone else who wishes to participate in direct action towards undoing political exclusion and inequality. The list below is written as a combination of both:

- Familiarise yourself with the context
- Focus on individual needs and motivations
- Combine raising political awareness with providing the possibility for doing things otherwise
- Consider how change could open spaces for new ‘counter-publics’ to emerge
- Learn to value different kinds and different increments of change
- Be ready to learn and to challenge your own prejudices and preconceptions on ‘how to do things right’
- Engage in actual dialogue

This list also works well with Luhtakallio and Mustranta’s shorter list of three catchwords *seeing*, *recognising*, and *respecting*⁴ which sum up their proposed method. According to them, *seeing* stands for both identifying problems and

³ ”Demokratia ei ole pelkkä vaalijärjestelmä. Se on yhteiskuntamuoto, joka perustuu radikaalille ajatukselle ihmisten tasavertaisuudesta ja siitä, että he pystyvät päättämään yhteisistä asioistaan yhdessä. Demokratiaa ei ole ilman oikeudenmukaisuutta ja tasa-arvoa, ja se on rikki, jos yhteisistä asioista päättämistä leimaa ensisijaisesti jyrkkä eriarvoisuus mahdollisuuksissa vaikuttaa asioihin.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 119)

⁴ The Finnish verb ‘arvostaa’ can, in addition to ‘to respect’, be translated as ‘to value’, ‘to hold in high esteem’, and ‘to appreciate’. I chose ‘to respect’ as the translation which in my opinion best catches the political intentions of the writers.

6. Conclusion

being able to set them in their context, *recognising* stands for understanding both one's own presumptions and being able to set oneself in the position of the other. *Respect*, then, stands for treating all forms of political participation and engagement equally and respecting the ability of others to act as citizens, despite their background, resources, and other, secondary qualities. (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 13)

Luhtakallio and Mustranta's project presents a case of committed people actually practicing the work of engendering motivation to become politically engaged. Their example provides some practical solutions to the problem I've tried to put into theoretical form through a commentary on the philosophical works of Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and many others. Their story provides a good example of how an approach to participatory democracy should begin from the experience of the marginalised themselves. The key shift in their story takes place when Luhtakallio and Mustranta realise that they are not engaging with the participants as equals. The moment forced them to rethink their approach and led them to engage the participants on their own terms. After admitting that they have just as much or even more to learn about democratic engagement as the participants, the attitude of Luhtakallio and Mustranta also changed. Their own gaze stopped being that of a third-person outside expert making objective observations of an impoverished social reality, and became the first- and second-person look of someone plunging into a shared project with their differently situated, yet just as capable equals. After this moment the experience of the participants began to change as well: they began to see themselves as authorised political agents, the kind of persons who are 'allowed to be political'. They began to have faith in their capacity to participate in a project that is explicitly political.

Just as Luhtakallio and Mustranta did, I want to underline the importance of the fairly mundane act of providing food and other kinds of practical assistance, such as childcare. In Chapter 2.5 I noted that the provision of the material conditions for exercising freedom is an important part of the experience of freedom. We should not focus on the act of giving food as a case of provision of

resources as an abstract act of redistribution. Instead, the example turns our gaze towards the way that showing hospitality and genuine concern for the material well-being of the participants had an effect on their experience of themselves as political agents: suddenly, they felt as they were being treated as honoured guests, as equals among equals. The provision of food and assistance is a good example of the way that finding the motivation to become politically engaged can be dependent on the surprisingly mundane things that political theorists tend to take for granted while focusing on more objective systemic and procedural issues.

Iris Marion Young describes the act of providing food and drink as a good example of the mode of communication she calls ‘greeting’, or public acknowledgement (Young 2000, 57–62). Alongside friendly greetings and other forms of acknowledgement, it makes people feel welcome and included, making room for friendly social interaction. Most importantly, it is a show of appreciation and recognition, even deference, towards people who are not used to being treated as welcome guests, as equals. For those struggling with economic and social hardships, being able to come to a ready table also provides an important respite from everyday responsibilities. For people who spend most of their limited time and energy providing for their family, it can provide a rare moment of taking some cognitive distance from their daily worries and making room for relaxing, thinking and engaging in actual conversation, something which academics like me tend to take for granted. As described by a coordinator of the project,

“Being in a place where food is ready at the table really helps to free the thinking of these parents. They do not have to ponder about what to serve for dinner today, how much laundry they have to do, and who has to be taken to which after-school activity.”⁵

⁵ ”Kun ollaan paikassa, jossa ruoka on valmiina, se vapauttaa näiden vanhempien ajattelua ihan kauheasti. Heidän ei tarvitse pohtia, mitä syötäisiin tänään, paljonko pitää pestä pyykkiä ja kuka viedään mihinkin harrastukseen.” (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017, 102)

6. Conclusion

The project highlights the importance of attending to personal motivation, as making political engagement something that is felt as a meaningful way to have influence on problems present in one's own life. The project might have achieved only limited results and did not fulfil all the expectations of the organisers or the participants, but it was experienced as valuable and empowering by those included. This in itself goes to prove that we should learn to value different kinds and increments of change. Instead of judging from beforehand the correct form and subject matter of democratic participation and measuring political engagement by how closely it hews to theoretically predetermined standards, we must learn to appreciate the uncertainty and ambiguousness which is the mark of all true political engagement. The real influence of projects like Café Goldilocks cannot be determined beforehand or exactly measured after the fact. Maybe the café-goers returned to their lives as usual. Maybe one or two of them found the confidence to become more engaged in politics. Maybe some of the café-goers raise their children to value community-mindedness and they become influential activists. We cannot know from beforehand what kinds of outcomes political engagement leads to. What was valuable in the example was the way that the participants at least for a moment experienced themselves as persons who are authorised to appear and express themselves in public, as persons who are allowed to imagine a different kind of future together.

Political theory can sometimes be indifferent to the individual needs and experienced realities of people who do not hold a lofty theoretical image of what political participation should be like. We remain blind to the many kinds of benefits engagement can provide for everyone, as long as they are ignored due to latent academic and theoretical prejudice. Most of all, the kind of objective viewpoint that us academics are taught to take can even lead us to condescend upon the very people that theory should be helping, furthering their marginalization. As Leonardo da Costa Custódio puts it,

We easily forget that other people also have knowledge and that what they know matters even if it is not a result from years of higher

education. We also risk forgetting that other people also struggle and juggle between socioeconomic constraints and individual imperatives. Behind our institutional walls and frequently incomprehensible jargon it is also easy to forget that we— the “experts”—also contribute to the ways the main public sphere restricts the pluralization of counterpublics and voices.

(Custódio 2017, 199)

Luhtakallio and Mustranta are eager to confirm that we live in a complicated world, and not all the effects of top-down participatory democracy initiatives are negative. However, it appears that many of them end up, unwittingly or not, only giving people the illusion participation without any real possibility to exercise political power. As Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017, 124–5) observe, such measures can become a form of compulsory activity, a way of excluding persons from political power by including them in enacting it, by forcing them to control themselves in predetermined way. Such measures are apt to only affirm the image that politically marginalised persons have of themselves as ‘not political people’, further entrenching their political impoverishment.

As discussed above, Nick Crossley has described citizenship not just as a formal legal status, but also as an intersubjectively constituted and lived *role* that must appear as meaningful to be relevant (Crossley 1996, 151) . Engendering freedom, then, must be a project of engendering an experience of meaningfulness in participation in places where citizenship appears as something other people do, a role one is not allowed to inhabit. If we hold democracy to be valuable in itself, and wish to engender it in politically impoverished places, such a project must also be a grassroots affair. The ideal of democracy as *isonomia*, living as an equal among equals, requires providing people with ways of breaking through the role of the passive target of measures conducted by others, and helping them to seize the role of the citizen for themselves. I have provided this story as an example of how one group of people managed exactly that.

6.2 Concluding Remarks

My aim in this dissertation has been to develop a heuristic diagnosis of a phenomenon, political poverty as the loss of experiential freedom, which has not been recognised by prior political theorists. Such political poverty cannot be described by an objectivist account of social criticism. This is to say that this form of political poverty cannot be described in terms of inequality of resources or inequality of political capabilities. Instead, it must be approached through an experientialist model of criticism and the tools of phenomenology. Approaching political poverty as it is experienced reveals a phenomenon that can be made intelligible as a diminishing and fracturing of social experience.

Freedom becomes meaningful only when considered as engaging with a social field which contains sources of positive identity which provide for a sense of belonging to a society, makes it possible to trust others and public institutions, and provides possibilities for expressing oneself authentically on one's own terms. In such a society individuals and groups can learn the civic habits which make the emergence of a political realm possible. Meanings become sedimented in lived bodies and social institutions which knit together a web of human relationships which one can have faith in, a realm which supports freedom and makes it possible for citizens to emerge in public in their plurality and distinctiveness, learning about others at the same time as they learn about themselves.

In the above chapters I have attempted to describe the ways in which political poverty can be approached as a loss of experiential freedom. My diagnosis relies on a heuristic conceptual apparatus which is meant to uncover a field of social experience which by its very nature tends to remain unarticulated and invisible. This set of thinking tools is meant to make such experiences visible and intelligible, and to help begin talking about them in ways which are meaningful to us all.

In order to get a grasp on how this fracturing and diminishing of experience, the loss of meaningfulness in social experience, can come to being, it has been

necessary for me to draw on a number of philosophical and theoretical sources. I began from the tradition of critical theory and James Bohman's (1997) account of political poverty as inequality of effective freedom. This dissertation is explicitly an attempt at the kind of emancipatory constructive criticism as described by Herbert Marcuse (2009). Bohman provided me with the terminology of political poverty, and a valuable account of the phenomenon as approached through the tools of critical theory, theories of deliberative democracy, and the capability approach to freedom. I have contrasted my own diagnosis to Bohman's account, and more broadly, an objectivist model of social critique. Instead, I chose to follow an experientialist model of social critique as described by Christophe Dejours, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Emmanuel Renault, and Nicholas H. Smith (2018). However, I found their account somewhat limited for my own purposes, and for this reason embarked on a search for alternative methodological and philosophical sources, which I found in the tradition of existential phenomenology and especially in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the political theory of Hannah Arendt.

I have aimed to show how political freedom not only a question of the effective use of one's cognitive skills, communicative capabilities, nor the faculty of will. My examination of the primordial, pre-reflective operative intentionality of our lived bodies has shown that the experience of political freedom is also reliant on faith, or a sense of pre-reflective practical meaningfulness in experience. I have discussed how in experience of freedom perception and motricity of the lived body are fundamentally interrelated: there is an active and embodied moment in the seemingly passive and cognitive process of perception, just as there is also a certain passivity, an openness to the world, present in all bodily action. This dialectic takes place against the temporal originary horizons of past and the future. Subjectivity is found in this unceasing movement which makes it possible for us to project ourselves outside ourselves and also reveals the ambiguity of the borders of our selves. We are always intertwined with a social field inhabited by others, and in constant dialectical relationship with our

6. Conclusion

surroundings. The relationship between the lived body and the world is at the core of all human agency; political agency is not different.

All human agency has its perceptual and motor aspects. In order for political engagement to appear as a meaningful possibility, one must be able to perceive the world around them and the issues in their own lives as a political matter, and to feel able to project oneself towards others and the world by expressing oneself. I have, after Merleau-Ponty, approached this sense of motivation and meaningfulness in experience as a part of the intentional arc of experience, a product of sedimentation of meanings and significances into the lived body. The intentional arc can also be diminished through negative social experiences. However, the loss of such meaningfulness is hard to detect as such. It is hard to make any objective indicators of the non-presence of meaning in experience. How would one measure the closing down of shared horizons of meaning, the disappearance of the experienced possibility of a better future?

It appears to me that in contemporary democracies there exist persons and groups who are made complicit in their political exclusion by stripping them of their experience of political freedom. In addition to inequality in capabilities and the failures in public functioning explored by the capability approach, political poverty is also an experiential matter. However, it is somewhat paradoxically experienced as the *diminishing and fracturing* of experience, the inability to experience political engagement as a meaningful possibility in one's own life and oneself as a credible and authorised political agent.

As I said above, I make no causal claims, sociological or otherwise. This is a philosophical diagnosis of a phenomenon which I have approached through political theory, phenomenology, and a hermeneutical interpretation of examples of experiences I have gathered from studies into poverty and political exclusion. If my diagnosis is a correct one, political poverty presents a threat to democracy, one that appears to me to be growing as social inequality increases. Such a phenomenon, if sufficiently widespread, would also provide a fertile ground for growing anti-democratic movements and allow them to gain a foothold among the disaffected.

I have wanted to avoid painting political poverty as a form of apathy and those suffering from it as helpless victims of their circumstances. This would be a distortion of reality, and only a small step away from painting politically passive persons as the victims of some structural determinism. Such an objectivist denial of agency is perversely not far away from its opposite, blaming politically impoverished persons for being willingly lazy and thus deserving of being marginalized. Instead I want to emphasise the agency of persons who remain active in their daily lives *despite* being economically and socially marginalised. People in economically and socially precarious situations display amazing ingenuity in keeping their lives together and surviving from day to day, even while that survival is rarely recognised as an accomplishment in itself. To downplay the inherent agency possessed by persons and collectives who have lost faith in politics is to latently re-establish the age-old divide between active and passive citizens. Even the most well-meaning attempts to help people become politically involved are doomed to fail if they treat the people they want to help as apathetic targets of inclusion measures, not as equals and partners in coexistence and practices of freedom but as ‘clients’ who have to be lectured to and condescended upon. It appears to me that a way towards engendering freedom is to make the effort to really see the conditions that keep some from experiencing the recognition that belongs to everyone, and to respect the capacity of every person to act as a capable citizen in their own way.

This dissertation has many limitations and omissions. Perhaps the most important of these is that I do not discuss the effect that social media and other virtual political spaces have on the way we experience ourselves as political agents. While I remain convinced that appearing to others in bodily presence is always an aspect of experiencing freedom, this presence is becoming constantly reinterpreted and reimagined as we become more and more intertwined with the digital universe. As I discussed in Chapter 4.4, Martin Plot (2012, 242) argues that all political acts are mediated by their intercorporeal context, the flesh of the political. The felt immediacy of the face to face meeting is just as tele-visual as the seeming distance and detachment experienced when

6. Conclusion

communicating through social media. This does not mean that the quality of the technologies used for communication do not matter. I fear that the spread of new digital forms of communication is not at all benign to democracy. It appears to me that the antipolitical affects of hate and *ressentiment* are amplified by the seemingly disembodied context of the virtual world and constantly find new ways of threatening and destroying the lived bonds that allow us to approach each other as equals. As I write this in April 2020, the entire world is in the middle of the Coronavirus epidemic that has forced many of us to withdraw from public places, confining us inside our homes where we can engage with each other only through technologies such as teleconferencing and text messages. These have proven to be poor substitutes to meeting our friends and comrades in the flesh. I fear that we are all going through a real diminishing of our social experience that can have large repercussions on democracy in the future.

Now, at the end of this dissertation, I find myself sharing Hannah Arendt's suspicion at treating political freedom as a matter of justice. As Arendt writes, 'it is precisely one of the outstanding characteristics of modern society that considerations of justice will tend to outweigh all others.' (Arendt 2018, 204) However, freedom is not a matter of equality as justice, something that could be assessed objectively according to universal principles. When political poverty is approached from an objectivist viewpoint, the phenomenon becomes conceptualised as either a violation of the principle of equality of opportunity or resource equality, or the violation of the principle of equality of effective freedom, that is, the fair distribution of social recognition and capabilities in addition to resources. This objectivist approach, which places universal norms of justice above particular experiences and contextual factors, misses the way freedom is lived and experienced as feeling able to participate in society as an equal and to work with others towards changing things for the better. While considerations of justice are important, it is also important to plunge into the world and examine the way that objective consideration of justice can occlude important phenomena from view. If injustice is to be fought, it needs to be

fought through as broad democratic participation as possible, through giving people experiences of freedom in coexistence. **Political freedom cannot be measured and doled out in equal portions according to a just measure.** It can only be experienced by being allowed to interrogate the world and interact with others in *isonomia*, as equals among equals. As Arendt writes,

We first become aware of freedom and its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in intercourse with ourselves. People can only be free in relation to one another, and so only in the realm of politics and action can they experience freedom positively, which is more than not being forced. (Arendt 2018, 220)

Freedom experienced in political engagement has to be a learning experience for everyone involved. Political poverty as the loss of meaningfulness of political engagement in experience, as feeling unable to participate as an equal in civil public life, is a fractured and diminished experience of the social world. Such situations cannot be remedied solely by measures towards political inclusion which are directed from above; instead, such condescending measures are apt to backfire and only further the political exclusion of the marginalised. Only by understanding the embodied and sedimented nature of political agency can we also attempt to find solutions to such situations which flow from a real attempt to see and recognise forms of life marked by deprivation and to respect those living them.

I end this dissertation on a hopeful note. Pessimism over the prospects of democracy is never warranted. The possibility of fruitful democratic engagement is always present wherever people come together and decide to coexist as equals among equals, no matter how difficult it seems at first. We must always be at the ready to open towards a common horizon based on trust and hope. We must always have faith: faith in ourselves, faith in others, and faith in the capacity of democracy to change the world for better.

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