

**AGENCY AND SOCIALITY**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

**2023**

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PHILOSOPHY**

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**Word count: 66,387**

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## Abstract

**Abstract:** This thesis is, above all, about sociality. Sociality refers to the condition or quality of being social. Sociality refers to the many ways in which we live together. It is about living under the same roof, sharing a bedroom, or being together in a stadium, cheering with other fans for your team. This thesis is about life in society, but especially about the relation between agency and sociality. It is about playing football, going to cafés, and meeting online. I will analyze different fragments of sociality. The social world is rich. There are so many different ways of acting with others, being with others, and connecting with others. This thesis is composed of four chapters. The first is about, perhaps, the strongest forms of cooperation. It tackles sociality at a highly collective level. The second is about a very light form of sociality. It deals with just being near others without even engaging in joint activities. The third chapter is about how none of the main theories in social ontology can explain all types of collective action. It is only in the fourth chapter that I attempt to provide a more positive and ambitious theory regarding sociality. That last chapter is about how we need to take the environment seriously in order to understand agency and, therefore, sociality.

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## **Dedication**

*For Hadis Farokhi Kakesh. Her constant support and inspiration were vital. Words cannot grasp her importance to me.*

## Acknowledgments

There are many to whom I am immensely indebted in writing this thesis.

My parents, Alberto Lopes Costa and Lúcia Maria Figueira Faria, who always supported my choice to study philosophy. My brother, Gabriel Faria Costa, who was the first to encourage me to stay in England.

Family is always important, but so are the teachers and professors who molded me. I would like to thank my school teacher, Fátima Amorim, who presented philosophy to me. To this day, she remains my first intellectual godmother.

I would like to thank my colleagues Itauan Costa Ventura, Jean Carlos Duarte Pinto Coelho and, with special emphasis, Wagner da Silva Nascimento. The endless philosophical discussions we had are still one of my most cherished memories.

After I decided to study social ontology, I was lost since no one in Brazil could supervise me in this area. However, an invaluable meeting with Natalie Gold changed everything as it set the path that I eventually took. In addition, it was Gold's work with Sugden and Bacharach that got me interested to work in this area.

But of all teachers and professors, by far the most important figure was my supervisor, for both my master's and PhD, Thomas Smith. His patience in reading my lengthy chapters, his open attitude to my style of writing, and his constant encouragement to get my work published were precious in developing this piece of work. I wish to sincerely thank him for being so compassionate and generous with me in all these years.

It might seem a bit odd, but besides people, I would like to acknowledge the importance of a very important factor. This factor is the availability of open-access materials. Back in Brazil, I had no way to access most papers, and certain key books simply did not exist in any library in my country. Legal access to some of the most reputable journals requires an obscenely high price, especially when we take into consideration the value in the currency of countries like Brazil. I cannot stress enough how valuable it was for me that the *Journal of Social Ontology* was open access. All academic papers should be open-access. This is a necessity, especially for third-world countries, such as Brazil.

## Introduction

This thesis is, above all, about sociality. Sociality refers to the condition or quality of being social. Sociality refers to the many ways in which we live together. It is about living under the same roof, sharing a bedroom, or being together in a stadium, cheering with other fans for your team. This thesis is about life in society, but especially about the relation between agency and sociality. It is about playing football, going to cafés, and meeting online. I will analyze different fragments of sociality. The social world is rich. There are so many different ways of acting with others, being with others, and connecting with others.

This thesis is composed of four chapters. The first is about, perhaps, the strongest forms of cooperation. It tackles sociality at a highly collective level. The second is about a very light form of sociality. It deals with just being near others without even engaging in joint activities. The third chapter is about how none of the main theories in social ontology can explain all types of collective action. It is only in the fourth chapter that I attempt to provide a more positive and ambitious theory regarding sociality. That last chapter is about how we need to take the environment seriously in order to understand agency and, therefore, sociality.

The first chapter is titled “Feeling Joint Ownership of Agency: The normative aspect of agency transformation”. This chapter was published in the *Journal of Social Ontology*. I have made no major alterations to the paper. This chapter is about my own take on what can be considered the strongest form of cooperation. It is about the theory of team reasoning. More specifically, it is about a problem with the theory of team reasoning. Team reasoning is when an agent thinks in terms of what “we” should do instead of what “I” should do. This means that a person who performs team reasoning will choose what is best for the group and will derive her own agency from the group agency. Team reasoning is a theory from game theory, which is a branch of economics. Game theoretical agents are purely rational agents and individual reasoners. This means that they always try to get what is best for them, i.e. they maximize utility. The problem with classic game theory is that, sometimes, this individual reasoning seems to actually not maximize utility. That is the case in the Prisoner’s Dilemma. If we use classic game theory, then the best choice for each agent is to play *defect*. However, the outcome where both choose *defect* is

the second worse outcome for each agent. There are other dilemmas, like the Stag Hunt, but what matters is that classic game theory faces some serious problems. The theory of team reasoning is able to solve some of these dilemmas, such as the Prisoner's Dilemma. The problem is that team reasoning can only solve these dilemmas if the agents not only perform team reasoning, but also know that others will also perform team reasoning. This is a problem because, if we concede the possibility of knowing that other agents are performing team reasoning, then we might not need team reasoning at all. The challenge is to explain how team reasoning can solve those dilemmas without that possibility. Here is where comes my addition to the theory of team reasoning.

I argue that when an agent shifts from the "*I*" to the "*we*" perspective, this triggers a change in the normative attitude regarding other members of the "*we*". In order to explain that change, I make use of the concept of affordance. A glass of water, for example, affords "holding it" for people who have hands. Affordance is related to the actions provided by the environment. This concept of affordance is important because it invites us to pay attention to the situation of the agent, and not solely to the action. A lot of the work done in philosophy of joint action focus on intention, which is a mental state that applies to actions being performed or that will be performed. I argue that we make sense of our agency according to not only our intentions and specific actions performed, but according to our situation. And by situation, I mean the many affordances presented to an agent, which I refer to as a "mosaic of affordances". The process of making sense of one's agency according to one's mosaic of affordances leads to a notion of ownership of agency. Let me explain with an example.

Consider the classic trolley dilemma. A person can pull a lever, saving the lives of five people and condemning one. Or the person can decide not to pull the lever, letting the trolley hit the five people but keeping safe that other person. What we have here is a situation of a person next to that lever. The environment affords her "pulling the lever". My argument is that, even if she chooses not to pull the lever, she will conceive her agency as "the one who has control over the lever". She feels ownership of her agency. What I mean by this is, basically, that she perceives the situation as "up to her" to pull or not pull the lever. Notice that my concern is not with the causal chain of events. My concern is with the structure of agency. If a person is in a car, behind the wheel, she is the "driver", regardless of what she does with the car. She will feel she owns the agency of "driving the car". Now, if we are in a rowing boat, we are all "drivers" of the boat. When a person perceives

at the collective level, she will contrast her agency with the group's mosaic of affordances. And she will also contrast other members' agencies with that same mosaic of affordances. This triggers the feeling of joint ownership of the agency. She will perceive the situation as "up to us", and not "up to me". She will feel entitled to demand others to cooperate, and that others are likewise entitled to demand the same from her. This warrants the belief that others will cooperate. This means that when an agent shifts from the "I" to the "we" perspective (i.e. when the agent conceives her own agency as part of a group agency), there is also a change in the normative attitude.

In that first chapter, I present a picture of what I consider to be the strongest form of cooperation. It involves collective reasoning, a notion of plural subject, and a normative relation between the members regarding the cooperation. In that chapter, I already call that a case of *strict cooperation*, which is a term I return to in the third chapter.

In the second chapter, titled "On Gregariousness", I turn upside down the take on the social world. Instead of keeping exploring strong forms of cooperation, or further developing those irreducibly collective attitudes, I talk about one of the lightest forms of sociality. I talk about gregariousness. This chapter was published in *Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup> I have made only very minor alterations. Consider going to a café alone. There will be others in the café, but you will be there by yourself, enjoying a cup of coffee, reading a book or simply looking at life going on in the street. There is a positive social aspect to that situation, yet, it has been overlooked by the literature in social ontology. Being in a café is neither a completely individual action nor a joint action. It is something in between. It is an individual action performed in a social environment. The aim of that chapter is not so much to provide a thorough theory of gregariousness, but to show that there is a very important element of the social world that we, in social ontology, have not been paying attention to. Most theories focus on the rationality of interaction or on the normativity. These are important elements, but they are not enough to explain gregariousness. Gregariousness is precisely the sociality we missed during lockdowns. It is about being in a café with others, exercising in a gym, or studying in a library.

Gregariousness is not about joint action, yet, it is still social. In that chapter, I do not talk about affordances, but I talk about the situation in which the agents find themselves. I suggest four main

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<sup>1</sup> It won the essay prize of that year, 2021.

aspects of gregariousness: proximity, openness, asymmetry, and privacy. Proximity means that people need to be actually proximate to others. I do not go into detail about what constitutes being proximate. The main thing here is that proximity is not a mental state. It is a feature of the environment. On the other hand, openness refers to features of the agents. Openness means that agents need to have an affable attitude toward others. They do not have to be willing to engage in joint activities, but need at least to tolerate others. This means gregariousness is not compatible with purely aggressive attitudes. Asymmetry means that agents need not have the same attitude. One agent can be really keen on engaging in joint activities, while another merely tolerates the presence of others. This is important because many theories of joint action require symmetry of attitudes. Lastly, gregariousness requires privacy. Exercising by yourself in the gym, studying by yourself in a library, and being in a café by yourself, all these activities involve an element of sociality (i.e. gregariousness) that requires the preservation of privacy. It feels comfortable being in a café by yourself precisely because you have that privacy.

I finish that chapter by considering that the concept that gets closer to explaining gregariousness is the concept of “sense of us”. Instead of moving on to an analysis of the phenomenology of being together and other forms of sociality, I once again shift the angle to tackle sociality. The third chapter is titled “Loose Collaboration and Strict Cooperation: Many forms and layers of joint agency”. In that chapter, I present two cases of joint action. One is the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. Twitch is a platform for streaming videos, usually people playing games. If the reader is unfamiliar with Pokémon, it is a very simple game made in the 1990s. It is a single-player game where the player has a character that progresses in the game. In that experiment, viewers were not only watching the game being played. They were the players, and by they, I mean all the viewers at the same time. All of them controlling the same character. Sometimes, there were thousands of players at the same time. Pokémon is a simple game with few commands. People could add inputs in the chat, which would eventually be performed in the game. Besides all the madness, they managed to finish the game. That is a type of joint activity that involves a very fluid membership and barely any communication. It does not seem to involve collective reasoning, feeling of joint ownership of agency, or normative attitudes regarding the cooperation. I consider it a case of *loose collaboration*. I apply a series of theories in order to show that only some are able to explain that case of joint action. As I argue, team reasoning, joint commitment and even my own theory of joint ownership of agency fail to explain it. Theories that do not require

normativity and collective reasoning are better suited to explain loose collaboration. Then, I present a case of *strict cooperation*, namely, a football match. The theories that can explain loose collaboration struggle to explain strict cooperation. My point is that no single theory can explain all types of joint action. In chapter 2, I already present a type of sociality (namely, gregariousness) that no current theory in social ontology can explain. In addition, in the final part of chapter 3, I argue that many cases involve more than one layer of joint action, which can be of different kinds. For example, the Underground Railroad (a decentralized network to help people escape slavery) has one layer that is a strict cooperation and another layer that is loose collaboration. The same happens with the Animal Liberation Front. Within each cell, we have strict cooperation. Between cells, we have loose collaboration.

In all these three chapters, I am concerned with the situation in order to analyze agency and sociality. In chapter 4, titled “Place and Agency”, I take that seriously and develop a novel theory of place. In chapter 1, I use the notion of affordance in order to solve a problem in the theory of team reasoning. In chapter 4, I expand on this. I argue that we operate using a notion of place. I define place as a node of affordances. For instance, the kitchen is a node for cooking-related affordances. I argue that the concept of place eases the cognitive load on the agents. We are creatures with limited cognitive power. Instead of pondering about where to store a tool, we already have a place for storing tools. In that chapter, I argue that nodes of affordances are related to normativity. They are related to a negative pressure, of the type “do not do X in Y”. For example, do not sleep in the kitchen. I present mostly pragmatic reasons for this. There is, however, a positive pressure, such as the pressure to study when at a library.

In order to explain that positive pressure on agency, I engage with the literature on the philosophy of geography and narrative self. Philosophers of geography have long been interested in the notion of place. They conceive place as related to subjectivity, and by this, they usually mean a person’s identity and feelings. I think it is important to take seriously the relation between a person and the places she inhabits. In order to reach that, I use a notion from theories of narrative self. My goal is not to defend a certain theory of narrative self. Rather, I borrow the idea that a person becomes herself partially due to what she did and what happened to her. Affordance helps here, since affordance cannot be grasped solely as objective or subjective. Affordance is a feature of the compound agent-environment. Since I argue that human agency has to be understood using

the notion of affordance and node of affordances, and a person's identity is connected to her agency, then I am connecting a person's identity to the places she inhabits. My concern is not with "personal identity", understood as what makes a person a unit through time. That would be a PhD thesis on its own. My concern is more modest. When I talk about a person's identity, I am talking about how a person perceives herself as an agent. I had already done that in chapter 1. In that chapter, I talked about the rowing boat and presented the notion of ownership of agency, which is about perceiving oneself as, for example, "a rower", or "the driver", and so on. Notice how it was already about how an agent perceives herself as an agent. It is in chapter 4 that I explore in more detail the relation between the environment and how an agent perceives herself. Places have a coherence, which is related to the activity that characterizes it (which is directly related to what are the affordances that compose the node). The situation of being in a rowing boat with others in the middle of a lake is related to the coherence of rowing together. Given that most places are shared, much more often than not, this coherence is social. Take a street. Not only does a street affords a car to drive at high speed, but there is also a convention or a commitment to treat the street as such. In my theory, a street is a place for cars to drive. But then Carnival comes, and crowds flock on the streets. We have a clash between what a street is supposed to be (i.e. a place for cars to drive) and the actual use and affordances of the place. I argue that this reveals two layers of normativity regarding places. One is about what places should be – this one is connected to us shaping the environment. The other is about how to act according to what the place currently is – this one is connected to how the environment shapes us. During the Carnival, with the flocks of people in the streets, the street ceases to be a place for driving cars. I finish that chapter by applying my theory of places to the Internet. The future of sociality is virtual. In short, I focus on a more political aspect, and I argue that the mode of sociality characteristic of Twitter is now infecting places for political decision-making.

There is an underlying notion in my theory of places and my argumentation in all chapters. It is the notion that agency is fluid. Humans are "agent-chameleons". In a way, this notion pervades my entire thesis, all the chapters. The embryo of that idea is already in the notion of agency transformation that I discuss in chapter 1, which, in that chapter, is about shifting from the "*I*" to the "*we*" perspective. With chapter 4, agency transformation becomes much broader. We do not simply move from "*I*" to "*we*". We are constantly shifting our point of view, the hierarchy of payoffs that guide our agency and the norms that rule our choices. It is true that when I am in a

football stadium, cheering for my team with thousands of fellow supporters, I am not just “*me*”; I am the crowd. But this is not just a shift from the individual to the collective. In the football stadium, I am a supporter. In that situation, I am barely moved by needs or desires to, say, study philosophy. This is quite the opposite when I am at the library, in which case I can barely pay attention to football (unless it is during a World Cup). As we move through the city, we slightly change our modes of agency. And this fits very well with my take on sociality. My take is that there is a very rich diversity of socialities. If we focus on only one aspect, we lose sight of that diversity. Normativity is important to establish harmony in society, but we cannot explain the need and the pleasure of being by yourself in a café by focusing solely on normativity – this means a limitation for theories based on joint commitments or feeling joint ownership of agency. Individual rationality can explain a wide range of joint actions, but it fails to explain the strongest forms of cooperation – this means a limitation for theories based on shared plans or individual rationality such as in classical game theory. The same goes for all main concepts in the field of social ontology. Theories based on the notion of collective reasoning fail to explain loose collaboration. And all of these theories struggle to explain gregariousness. So, maybe we do not need a single overarching theory of sociality. Human agency is fluid, rich, and creative. Maybe agency and sociality are like games. We are, at the same time, designers and players. My overall aim in this PhD thesis is not to provide an overall theory of agency and sociality. Rather, my aim is to contemplate the rich diversity and liveliness of acting and living together with others.

# Chapter 1 – Feeling Joint Ownership of Agency: The normative aspect of agency transformation

**Abstract:** Team reasoning is the idea that we can think as a “we” and this can solve some coordination dilemmas, such as Hi-Lo. However, team reasoning can only solve the dilemmas it is intended to solve if the conditions for team reasoning warrant the belief that others will also perform team reasoning and these conditions cannot render team reasoning otiose. In this paper, I will supplement the theory of team reasoning by explaining how agency transformation also involves a change in the normative attitude. To do this, I will use the theory of affordances, which is the idea that the environment provides ways to interact with it. I will argue that when a person perceives as a group member, she associates herself and the other members with the group’s mosaic of affordances. This triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. It is the feeling that it is up to us to deal with the situation, so we feel entitled to demand each other to cooperate. It warrants the belief that others are team-reasoners without rendering team reasoning otiose. This means that the agency transformation (from *I* to *we*) involves a change in the normative attitude.

## 1. Introduction

Team reasoning is the idea that we can think as a “we” and this can solve some coordination dilemmas, such as Hi-Lo (Bacharach, 2006).<sup>2</sup> There is a problem with the theory of team reasoning, however, which is that team reasoning can only solve the dilemmas it was meant to solve if each member believes the others are also team-reasoners. The challenge is to explain how that can be possible without resorting to conditions that would render team reasoning otiose. For example, communication could explain how one team-reasoner believes the other will also perform team-reasoning. But communication could also enable individual-reasoners to solve the dilemma.

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter was published as a paper in the *Journal of Social Ontology* (Costa, 2021). Only minor alterations were made to the paper.

By using James Gibson's theory of affordances (Gibson, 1986), I will be able to supplement Michael Bacharach's theory of team reasoning (Bacharach, 2006), by explaining how agency transformation will involve a change in the normative attitude of the members. Affordance is the idea that the environment provides ways to interact with it. A knife might afford "cutting", but that does not mean there is a demand to use it to cut something. We live in a social world, filled with social norms, which can explain why certain actions are demanded or prohibited. If the person holding the knife is in a restaurant kitchen and dressed as a cook, you will not perceive him as a potential threat, the same way a pedestrian does not fear the cars on the road. Víctor Fernández Castro and Manuel Heras-Escribano (2020) provided a theory that when we perceive another person, we perceive a rule-follower. One could use their theory to explain team reasoning. However, as I will argue, it would render team reasoning otiose. If there is a normative background, then individual reasoning is sufficient to solve the dilemmas.

I will argue that when there are, say, two people sharing an environment, there are two ways for a person to perceive the situation, which leads to two different attitudes. One is to perceive as an individual person, who is dealing with the other person and with the environment. The other is to perceive as a group member, where the group is dealing with the environment. This is important, because, as I will argue, we associate a person with her mosaic of affordances. A mosaic of affordances is all of the affordances related to a person. The detection of a new affordance might not be a simple addition, it can impact the other affordances. So, for example, if you are near a train track, you do not feel associated with the train's movement. However, if you detect a lever that can change the derailed train's course, and save the lives of five at the expense of the life of one person, this can make you feel associated with the train's movement, regardless of whether you pull the lever or not. This means that this feeling is different from what is known as the sense of agency, which is the sense that I am intentionally doing something. I will call it *feeling ownership of the agency*.

If a person shares an environment with another person, she might perceive as an independent, individual agent interacting with the environment. In this case, she will form an individual mosaic of affordances. She will associate herself with her mosaic of affordances, which triggers a feeling of individual ownership of the agency. She feels that what she does is only up to her. She does not associate her mosaic of affordances with the other person. She does not feel the other person is

entitled to have a say in what she does or that she has a say in what the other does. However, if she perceives as a group member, she will perceive the possible interactions between the group and the environment. She will associate herself and the other person with the group's mosaic of affordances. This triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. It is the feeling that dealing with the situation is up to them. What this means is that she will feel they are both accountable for the group's performance, so each answers to the other. She will feel entitled to demand the other person works as a team too, or to rebuke him if he does not, and also that he is also entitled to demand the same of her. Even if she cannot talk to the other person, she still feels he owes her to act as a team, as she feels they owe one another to work as a team. For example, if we are both in a rowing boat and I perceive the environment as a group member, it means that I will detect what the group can do. I will associate both of us to the group's mosaic of affordances. This will trigger me to feel joint ownership of the agency. I will feel that dealing with the environment is up to us. That is, it is up to us to row and get out of the lake. I will feel entitled to demand you to row too or to rebuke you if I discover that you are not rowing, regardless of whether we can talk or not. Therefore, the agency transformation (i.e. from perceiving as an independent individual to perceiving as a group member) will involve a transformation in the normative attitude of the members. This normative layer enables team reasoning to solve the dilemmas without rendering it otiose.

I should point out that team reasoning cannot be applied to all forms of joint agency. This is because not all cases of joint agency will involve collective reasoning, and not all cases will involve a normative aspect. My focus on this paper is only on joint actions that involve both these aspects. I call this form of joint agency *strict cooperation*.

## **2. Game Theory**

Team reasoning, as formulated by Bacharach (2006), is an attempt to solve coordination dilemmas in game theory. First, I will explain what some of these dilemmas are, then how team reasoning can solve them. I will also explain Bacharach's variable frame theory, which is the idea that a person frames her agency either as an individual agency or as part of a group agency. Agency transformation is the process of ceasing to frame as an individual and starting to frame as a group

member. Then, I will explain why a team reasoner needs to believe that the others are also team reasoners in order to solve the dilemmas and that the conditions for a person to frame as a team and to believe that others are also team reasoners cannot render team reasoning otiose. These will be the challenges for the theory of team reasoning, which I will attempt to solve.

### 2.1. Orthodox game theory

First, I will explain game theory and two dilemmas that orthodox game theory cannot solve, the Hi-Lo and the Prisoner's dilemma. The Hi-Lo is a situation where two people have to choose between *High* or *Low* and they cannot communicate with each other. If both choose *High*, both will get the best payoff. If both choose *Low*, both will get the second-best payoff. If they choose different options, both will get the worst payoff. The matrix of this game is illustrated in Figure 1:

		Me	
		<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
You	<i>High</i>	4, 4	0, 0
	<i>Low</i>	0, 0	1, 1

Figure 1: Hi-Lo

According to game theory, the players are rational, in that they can think about what the other is likely to choose, and that each wants to maximize their own individual utility, that is, each wants to get the best payoff they can. The combination *High-High* is clearly the best option for a rational player. However, according to orthodox game theory, the rationality of the players is radically individualistic. Each player thinks in terms of “What should *I* do?” and applies best-reply thinking. This means that choosing *High* is only good when you think that I will choose *High* too. If you think I will choose *Low*, then the best option for you would be *Low* too. Since we cannot communicate with each other, we have equal reasons to think the other will play *High* or *Low*. In other words, choosing *High* is not more rational than choosing *Low*.

Orthodox game theory can only solve this dilemma if there were prior interactions or if there is the chance of future interactions, i.e. if the game is repeated. If you have played the game many times in the past, and people usually chose *High*, then one could say that this choice has a salience

or that there is a convention to play *High* (see Schelling, 1963; and Lewis, 1969). However, people could have chosen *Low* instead, and the choice *Low* should not be the rational choice. Future interactions can also solve the dilemma (see Axelrod, 1984). If you think there will be future interactions, it becomes rational to play *High*. However, if it is a one-shot game, then the orthodox game theory cannot solve it.

Future interactions can also solve another famous dilemma in game theory, the Prisoner's dilemma (Figure 2). There is a big difference between this dilemma and the Hi-Lo. In the Prisoner's dilemma, the players have a dominant strategy, i.e. there is one choice that always maximizes their utility function. The players have to choose between *Coop* or *Defect*. The worst scenario is when the other chooses *Defect* and you choose *Coop*. The second-worst scenario is when both choose *Defect*. The third-worst scenario is when both choose *Coop*. And the best scenario is when you choose *Defect* and the other chooses *Coop*. No matter what the other person chooses, *Defect* is always the best reply. This means that both are going to choose *Defect*, that is, the outcome will be *Defect-Defect*, which is worse for both than *Coop-Coop*. If the players think they will have more rounds of this game, but they do not know when it will be the last round, then it becomes rational to play *Coop*.<sup>3</sup> However, if it is a one-shot game, then, according to orthodox game theory, it will always be rational to choose *Defect*.

		Me	
		<i>Coop</i>	<i>Defect</i>
You	<i>Coop</i>	-4, -4	0, -10
	<i>Defect</i>	-10, 0	-8, -8

Figure 2: Prisoner's Dilemma

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<sup>3</sup> The players cannot know when it will be the last round. This is because, on the last round, it is rational to play *Defect*, as it maximizes individual utility. If both players know when the last round will be, both will play *Defect* in the last round, which means that the last opportunity to maximize individual utility by playing *Defect* is in the last-but-one round. The cascade effect will make it rational to play *Defect* since the first round.

## 2.2. Team reasoning

In order to improve game theory and solve these dilemmas, Bacharach (1999, 2006) introduced the concept of team reasoning.<sup>4</sup> Orthodox game theory fails to solve these dilemmas because it assumes only individual reasoning, which applies best-reply thinking. In the Prisoner's dilemma, the best reply to whatever the other player chooses is *Defect*; thus generating *Defect-Defect*, which is a bad outcome for both players. In the Hi-Lo, the best reply is *High* if the other player chooses *High*, and *Low* if the other player chooses *Low*; which means that playing *High* is not more rational than playing *Low*. Bacharach argues that this is not the only possible type of reasoning. For him, a player can think as a team. "Roughly, somebody 'team-reasons' if she *works out the best feasible combination of actions for all the members of her team, then does her part in it*" (Bacharach, 2006, p. 121). The player who thinks as a team member will think "What should *we* do?" instead of "What should *I* do?" (Bacharach, 2006, p. 141). The "best feasible combination of actions for all members of the team" in the Hi-Lo is *High-High* and *Coop-Coop* in the Prisoner's dilemma. This means that, if a player performs team reasoning, then it is rational to choose *High* or *Coop*; thus solving the dilemmas.

## 2.3. Variable frame theory

For Bacharach, there are two ways to frame a situation: at the individual level or at the group level. This is his *variable frame theory* (Bacharach, 2006, pp. 14–23). An agent, at its most basic level, is an entity that can choose between alternatives and has preferences:

"A frame is the set of concepts or predicates an agent uses in thinking about the world. If I see the marks as a circle, a triangle and a cross, my frame includes three shape concepts; if as an omicron, a delta and a xi, three letter concepts. I can also see them as both. But not at the same time. One does not just see, but one sees as". (Bacharach, 2006, p. 10 – the marks and letters are possible ways to interpret Figure 3 below)

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Sugden (1993) also introduced the concept of team reasoning. The focus of this paper will be on Bacharach's account, though, because it involves a strong form of agency transformation.

O Δ X

Figure 3: Marks or letters

For Bacharach, whether a person sees a certain shape as a circle or as an omicron will depend on psychological factors. Bacharach refers to Gestalt and Post-Gestalt psychologists, according to whom, “entification in visual perception is involuntary” (Bacharach, 2006, p. 71). Properties such as “similarity”, “common fate”, or “contiguity”, will be essential in how a person will frame the situation, i.e. if she will entify the group as the agent. So, Bacharach refers to factors such as the use of the pronoun “we”, having a “common fate”, and many others; but he does not give an exhaustive list of factors (Bacharach, 2006, p. 76). He argues that a Hi-Lo game exhibits harmony, in that the players have a common interest, namely, *High-High*. They have a common fate, as either both get a good payoff, or both get a bad payoff. There is a “common interest which can only be achieved together”, and there is strong interdependence, as “they depend upon each other, that is, they perceive that they will do well only if the other does something that does not seem to be assured” (Bacharach, 2006, p. 84).

A person cannot rationally choose how to frame the interaction. This would imply a neutral position from which the agent can deliberate; but such deliberation would replicate the dilemma, which would generate infinite regress (see Pacherie 2011, pp. 186-187; see also Gold 2017, p. 224). If I think in terms of “*T*”, I will frame the question about how to frame as “How should *I* frame the question?”, which would lead to the answer “As ‘what should *I* do?’”. As Elisabeth Pacherie points out, Bacharach’s aim was probably not to say that a person cannot choose her frame, but that it cannot be a matter of rational choice (Pacherie 2011, p. 186).

#### **2.4. Agency transformation**

Team reasoning will involve both payoff transformation and agency transformation (Bacharach 2006, p. 90). There is payoff transformation, as the team has its own utility function, i.e. its own preference ranking. The discussion about how to model this utility function is something I will not deal with in this paper. What is important is that the team’s utility function incorporates the payoffs of all members. Payoff transformation, however, is not enough to solve

the dilemmas. If the players were altruists, then the payoff matrix of the Prisoner's dilemma would change and maybe it would be rational to choose *Coop*; but that would depend on how altruism transforms the payoffs. It could transform it into a Hi-Lo. Altruist players in a Hi-Lo are as lost as non-altruist players. This is because altruist players are still performing individual reasoning, which applies best-reply thinking.

What Bacharach means by agency transformation is not entirely clear, because sadly he passed away before completing his book. My proposal is to extend the notion of agency transformation to involve not only a change in the reasoning but also a change in the normative attitude. The change in the reasoning is that the person will think on a group level and the change in the normative attitude is that the person feels there is a demand to perform team reasoning, which means that the person will hold all group members accountable for the group's performance too. This normative aspect provides the necessary stability for team reasoning to work properly, as I will explain.

### **2.5. Team reasoning requires the belief that others are also team reasoners in order to solve the dilemmas**

Let me first explain what this change in the reasoning is. In team reasoning, the rationality of the agency of each member is derived from the rationality of the group action. The team-reasoner no longer applies best-reply thinking. He will identify the best outcome for the group and perform his part of it. Francesco Guala argues that this can be understood as solution thinking:

“At step one, I look at the problem and identify a focal point (the “obvious solution”). Step two replicates the procedure for the other player: she identifies the same focal point because she is just like me. Once the solution has been identified, I can derive my own actions and the actions of the other player by simple means-ends reasoning (step three). Using the same procedure (“she reasons in the same way”) finally I predict what she will do and what she believes that I will do”.  
(Guala, 2018, p. 364)

This means that team reasoning can only solve the Hi-Lo dilemma if both players think that the other will also perform team reasoning. If only one player performs team reasoning, he will not be able to apply solution thinking. For Bacharach, it is possible to frame as a team member

and, yet, not be assured whether the other player also frames as a team member. This would be a case of circumspect team reasoning (Bacharach, 2006, pp. 130–135).<sup>5</sup> If I am assured that the other person will not perform team reasoning, then it is a case of restricted team reasoning (Bacharach, 2006, pp. 127–129). The team is composed of the members of the group that perform team reasoning, but the group can include members who do not perform it. In a restricted team reasoning, for example, if I perform team reasoning, I will try to maximize the group’s utility, but I will have to apply best-reply thinking. Using Guala’s terms, the belief that both players are team-reasoners is the necessary input belief to get the output belief that I will choose *High* and you will choose *High* (Guala, 2018, p. 364). Without that input belief, a team reasoner cannot solve the Hi-Lo or the Prisoner’s dilemma.

## **2.6. The challenge: The conditions for team reasoning cannot render team reasoning otiose**

This gives rise to a problem for team reasoning, namely, how can a person form a belief that the other player is also going to perform team reasoning. As Abraham Roth argues, if “we have any conclusive evidence for believing that they are [team-reasoners], then we don’t need team reasoning” (Roth, 2014, p. 294). Roth’s worry is accentuated in the case of the Prisoner’s dilemma. If I believe that you are a team-reasoner, this might encourage me to play *Defect*, i.e. to double-cross you. Roth’s own solution is to say that team reasoning will have to be manifest and not based on evidence: “if the rationality of team reasoning is manifest, then this should be demonstration enough of a non-evidential yet defeasible entitlement or warrant to think that fellow participants are team reasoners” (Roth, 2014, p. 294).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For Sugden, for a person to perform team reasoning, there must be a *mutual assurance* that both players are team-reasoners (Sugden, 2015, p. 156 and 162). This is the main difference between his account and Bacharach’s account of team reasoning.

<sup>6</sup> Saying that team reasoning is manifest might seem a bit mysterious. One could understand this “manifestness” of team reasoning as something akin to a Neo-Anscombian account. According to Elizabeth Anscombe (1963), an intentional action is an action that I know I am doing without having to observe it (i.e. knowledge without observation). The Neo-Anscombian approach to joint agency is to consider that in a collective intentional action, we know what we are doing without having to observe (see Laurence, 2011). From the perspective of the team reasoner, he finds himself within the group’s frame, and he does not need to give an explanation of why he perceives

The challenge is not only that whatever conditions cause a person to perform team reasoning should also “entitle or warrant” her to think that fellow participants are team reasoners and it must prevent double-crossing. The challenge is also to explain how such conditions do not render team reasoning otiose (Roth, 2014, p. 291). For example, communication could explain such a “warrant” to think that the other will perform team reasoning, but if we can communicate, then we do not need team reasoning to solve the Hi-Lo. Besides, communication might not prevent double-crossing in the Prisoner’s dilemma.

### **3. Affordances**

In order to address this challenge, I will use Gibson’s (1986) notion of affordance to explain how the agency transformation involves a change in the normative attitude. Affordance is the idea that the environment provides ways to interact with it. Social affordances are about how people perceive each other, that is, about social cognition. Affordances themselves are not normative, they are just possibilities of action, i.e. there is not a demand. Therefore, I will have to explain how there can be a relation between affordances and normativity. First, I will explain how one could explain this relation, and thus explain team reasoning, by using Castro and Heras-Escribano’s (2020) normative approach to social cognition. Their idea is that when we perceive other people, we perceive rule-followers of social norms. The problem of applying their approach to explain team reasoning is that it would fail Roth’s challenge. This is because if there is a normative background, then even individual-reasoners can solve the Hi-Lo dilemma (though not the Prisoner’s dilemma), which means that we would not need the theory of team reasoning.

#### **3.1. Affordances and social affordances**

Gibson’s idea is that “the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). This means that when you see a glass of water, you do not first identify that it is a transparent solid object containing a transparent liquid, infer that it is a cup of glass containing water, and then infer that you can drink

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his agency as part of a group agency. The account I will offer in this paper is different, because instead of using the concept of intentional action, I will use the concept of affordance to understand agency transformation.

it. First and foremost, you perceive the affordances, in this case, that it is “drinkable”. When you see a lake, what you perceive is what it affords you. A lake affords “swimming-in-able”, but not “walk-on-able”. The affordances of the environment give shape to the ways to interact with it. As you explore the environment, you detect new affordances. Another important point is that what is afforded depends on the features of the organism and the features of the environment. If a person does not have the skill or the tools to swim, then a lake does not afford her “swimming-in-able”. A cave only affords “shelter” if you can fit in it.

Humans live in a social environment. Artifacts are designed having in mind the ways people can interact with them. A door with a knob, for example, affords a human who has capable hands a way to interact with it: use the knob to open the door.<sup>7</sup> The other key aspect of the notion of social affordance is that the presence of another person offers new possibilities of agency. As Gibson says, “behavior affords behavior” (Gibson, 1986, p. 135). Imagine you see a big rock. It seems heavy and it does not afford you a way to move it. Now, imagine there is someone else near you. The presence of another person affords a way to move the rock. When you perceive that there is another person present, you perceive the presence of another agent, who is also exploring and detecting the environment.

### **3.2. Normative approach to social cognition**

When you detect the presence of another person, this opens possibilities of interaction. If you are playing poker, you will try to read what is in the other player’s mind. This gives rise to a widely discussed problem, namely, how a person can have access to the other person’s mental states. There are many theories on this topic, and it would go beyond the scope of this paper to talk about them. From the many theories about social cognition, there is one that seems relevant to discuss here. It is Castro and Heras-Escribano’s (2020) normative approach to social cognition. One could use their approach to explain how team reasoning can be possible. However, as I will argue, it would fail Roth’s challenge.

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<sup>7</sup> We also organize an environment to shape what it can afford. For example, whatever a baby sees, even if it is not an object produced by humans, it is placed in the baby’s room in a very careful way (Costall, 1995, p. 472).

Castro and Heras-Escribano's argument is that we cannot make sense of human behavior without resorting to a normative background. From the moment we are born, we interact with a world of rules. The social environment is not only an environment where there is the presence of other people. It is also, and maybe most importantly, an environment filled with social norms, which are related to certain affordances. Suppose you are on the side-walk and you see a car in the street. You detect a driver, i.e. a person who must follow the traffic norms. So, you are not afraid of the car hitting you, because the social norms constrain this affordance. We make sense of each other's actions by framing them within a normative background (see Castro and Heras-Escribano, 2020, p. 83).

They argue that the social structure is a network of nodes and when we perceive another person, we perceive which node she occupies. Based on that, we form expectations about what the other person will do, or what her intentions are (Castro and Heras-Escribano, 2020, p. 89). And we hold her accountable for her actions based on the node she occupies in relation to the network (Castro and Heras-Escribano, 2020, p. 81). As they argue, "we easily make sense of others' behavior by looking at the social norms shared by a community rather than trying to infer what's going on in a particular person's mind" (Castro and Heras-Escribano, 2020, p. 89).<sup>8</sup>

### **3.3. The normative approach applied to team reasoning**

Castro and Heras-Escribing's (2020) approach can explain the relation between social affordances and social norms. As such, it seems like a promising way to explain team reasoning. Take the Prisoner's dilemma for example. According to their theory, we do not need to infer or simulate what each other is thinking. We know what node each one occupies, e.g. we are both low-rank members of the same gang. If there is a social norm that gang members should help one another, as they need to promote the gang's business, then that can be enough to explain team reasoning. I know that what is expected of me is to assist the gang, which means that I am expected to work as a team with the other gang member. In other words, there is a warrant to believe that

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<sup>8</sup> Although Castro and Heras-Escribano do not mention her, their notion of social structure as a network is consistent with Katherine Ritchie's (2020) account of social structures. For the same reason that their account could be applied to team reasoning, but it would fail Roth's challenge (which I will explain in Section 3.4), so it would fail if we applied Ritchie's account to team reasoning as well.

we are both going to perform team reasoning. In addition, we will be held accountable for our actions according to the node we occupy, which adds a layer of protection against double-crossing. There is a normative background demanding us both to work as a team. If I play *Defect*, I will have contravened the social norms.

This approach can also solve the Hi-Lo dilemma. If social norms related to the nodes we occupy in the social network demand us to work together, then there is a normative pressure for each of us to perform team reasoning. The normative background explains why I will frame as a group and it also explains why I will think you will also frame as a group. Therefore, we will be able to coordinate at *High-High*.

### **3.4. Normative background renders team reasoning otiose**

At first glance, it seems the normative approach to social cognition can explain team reasoning. Indeed, it does, but it would render team reasoning otiose. To recap, Roth's challenge is that the conditions for team reasoning should not enable individual reasoning to solve the dilemmas, otherwise team reasoning would not be necessary. As long as it is possible to solve the dilemmas without using team reasoning, then, using Ockham's Razor, we are better off by not using team reasoning at all. This does not mean that such an approach gives a bad account of human behavior. What it means is that it does not work as a definitive argument supporting team reasoning.

Such an approach would render team reasoning otiose because the presence of a normative background enables individual reasoning to solve the dilemmas. First, consider the Hi-Lo dilemma in a case where there is a social norm to work as a team. Because there is such a social norm, I will expect my partner not only to employ team reasoning but also to believe that I will employ team reasoning as well. I might perform individual reasoning and, using best-reply thinking, I can easily infer that he will choose *High*, which means that my best-reply is to choose *High* as well. Maybe neither of us is framing as a team, but both believe the other is and that the other thinks both are team-reasoners, which means that each of us, using individual reasoning and best-reply thinking, will end up choosing *High*. These previous cases do not render team reasoning completely otiose because, although each person is performing individual reasoning, each believes the other is performing team reasoning. So, they are making use of the idea of team reasoning. However, if there is a normative background, then they might not even use the idea of team reasoning at all. It

could very well be the case that the social norm is not to employ one type of thinking (e.g. team reasoning) but to choose one specific course of action. For instance, a person with a knife affords a series of possible interactions, one of them being aggression. However, if such a person is dressed as a cook and she is in a restaurant, then it will not afford aggression. This is because, according to Castro and Heras-Escribano's (2020) approach, there are social norms in place, which constrain that affordance. Returning to the Hi-Lo case, social norms can constrain the opportunity of choosing *Low*. This can be enough for an individual reasoner to choose *High*, as he expects the other to choose *High* as well. What I mean is that social norms might just give salience to an option, which is enough for individual reasoning to solve a Hi-Lo. The social norm could also be to play *Low*, which would lead to a sub-optimal solution for the Hi-Lo.

Regarding the Prisoner's dilemma, for an individual reasoner, even if there is a social norm to perform team reasoning or to choose *Coop*, for himself it is better to choose *Defect*. No amount of information or assurance about what the other will choose will change his best strategy. This means that the normative background can only solve the dilemma (in a one-shot case) if it changes the matrix. For instance, choosing *Defect* is a deviation from the norm, and we will be held accountable for such a choice. If there is an impact on future interactions, then it is not really a one-shot interaction, and individual reasoning can explain why it would be rational to choose *Coop*. If there is immediate punishment, then this punishment should be incorporated into the payoffs of the game matrix. If choosing *Defect* is always worse, because of such punishment, then it is no longer a Prisoner's dilemma.

### **3.5. Social identities would also render team reasoning otiose**

Normative background can give a lot of information, and all that extra information can enable individual reasoning to solve the Hi-Lo dilemma. For the same reason, using theories of shared value or social identities to explain team reasoning would not be a good strategy. Castro and Heras-Escribano's normative approach to social cognition is similar to Marcus Hedahl and Bryce Huebner's account of how shared values can explain cooperation (Hedahl and Huebner, 2018).

Hedahl and Huebner's idea is that shared values can generate demand and entitlement to demand. People have social identities and, if we share a social identity, then we can expect and demand each other to behave according to the values we share (Hedahl and Huebner 2018, p. 245). For example, if we are both fishers from the same village, then we share that social identity. To

share a social identity means to share a pack of values, such as praising fishing as noble labor and protecting the lake where we fish. If there is a factory nearby polluting the river and I know you are also a fisher, then I, as a fellow fisher, will expect you to uphold the same values and to act accordingly. If you do not, then I will hold you accountable based on that social identity. As you can notice, this is very similar to Castro and Heras-Escribano's idea that we form expectations about what people will do and we hold them accountable for their actions based on the normative background (Castro and Heras-Escribano, 2020, p. 81).

Hedahl and Huebner's account would also render team reasoning otiose. Sharing a social identity can make one choice salient, enabling individual reasoning to solve a Hi-Lo dilemma (or to solve it sub-optimally by making option *Low* salient). In fact, the fisherman might not even engage in best-reply thinking. He might just act unthinkingly in accordance with his social identity and values. Moreover, social identities can be good explanations of behavior that is not a joint action. A father shares a social identity with his child and he will demand his child to act in certain ways, such as not wearing certain clothes. This is the case even if the child does not live with his father and the child makes his own choices about what to wear. The child wearing clothes, arguably, is not a joint action between the father and the child. Theories of social identities are important to explain certain behaviors, but they would not be the most appropriate way to explain team reasoning.

### **3.6. Normativity and affordances**

None of the authors I have presented tried to apply their accounts to team reasoning. They are good accounts of social behavior and are potential candidates to explain team reasoning. However, as I have explained in the previous sections, they would render team reasoning otiose. We have to remember that team reasoning can explain how cooperation is rational even in a one-shot game of Hi-Lo or Prisoner's dilemma. If these other accounts cannot successfully explain team reasoning, then it means that certain kinds of cooperation are beyond their scope. What this means is that there is more to strict cooperation than these theories are able to explain.

The main argument I am making in this paper is that agency transformation (from individual-reasoner to team-reasoner) will also involve a normative transformation. I have argued that we can use the notion of affordance to analyze human behavior. What I will now argue is that this notion of affordance can help us to explain the normative aspect of the agency transformation.

I should highlight here that, according to Manuel Heras-Escribano and Manuel de Pinedo, it would be wrong to say that an affordance is normative, since affordance is just an opportunity of action, not a norm (Heras-Escribano and Pinedo, 2016, p. 581). As they argue, some affordances can be related to social norms (Heras-Escribano and Pinedo 2016, p. 587). But affordances, by themselves, are not normative (Heras-Escribano, 2019, p. 110).

Some people argue that affordances are normative, such as Anthony Chemero (2009). However, he argues that all affordances are normative (Chemero, 2009, p. 145). What Chemero means by “normative” is not the same as what I mean in this paper. What he means is that affordances are related to abilities. Roughly, his argument is that you can fail to perform some ability, so you can fail at taking advantage of a certain affordance. What I mean by normativity is not something related to abilities. Rather, it is about a demand to act in a way or constraints not to act in a certain way. Perceiving that something is “walk-on-able” does not mean there is a demand to walk on it. You might fail to walk on it, but this does not mean there is a normativity involved there. What I think is that some affordances are related to a feeling of a normative demand and constrain.<sup>9</sup>

If affordances themselves cannot be normative, and if the normative background is insufficient to explain team reasoning, this means that I have a double challenge here. I have to explain how the affordances of an interaction can involve a normative aspect, which supports team reasoning without rendering it otiose, and without referring to social norms.

#### **4. Feeling Joint Ownership of Agency**

My argument is that agency transformation can be understood as the person perceiving as a group member, the group interacting with the environment. First, I will explain that a person perceives many affordances, i.e. the many possibilities of interaction with the environment. This forms her mosaic of affordances. Then, I will explain that when a person perceives as a group member, the person perceives the many possibilities of interaction between the group and the

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<sup>9</sup> Heras-Escribano has explained at length the problems with Chemero’s account (see Heras-Escribano, 2019).

environment. This forms a collective mosaic of affordances. I will explain that we act and judge our performance according to not one specific affordance, but according to the mosaic of affordances. We make an association between a person and a performance. I will argue that a person feels an association with her performance according to her mosaic of affordances, which I will call feeling ownership of the action. My argument is that perceiving as a group member means that you will contrast your agency with the group's mosaic of affordances. This triggers the feeling of joint ownership of the agency, which is the feeling that we are accountable for one another concerning the group's performance. It is the feeling that it is up to us, as a group, to deal with the situation. This feeling adds a normative layer that enables team reasoning to solve the dilemmas, without rendering it otiose.

#### **4.1. Perceiving the environment and other people**

As the person detects the affordances of the environment, she perceives many ways to interact with it. This creates a mosaic of affordances, which is her profile of possible actions. This does not mean that she will act in one way or another, but as she detects new affordances, this can change her behavior, because it changes the perspective that she has of the actions she can take. For instance, if a person sees a source of food, this provides "satisfying-hunger-able". The food is on the other side of the river, which means that the person will get wet. She can also choose not to cross the river. So, the situation actually affords a composition of eating and getting wet, and a composition of not crossing and not eating. Getting wet might not be in the person's interest. If the person also detects a towel near the food, this will afford "getting-dry", so now it is a good choice to cross the river to get the food. Perceiving a new affordance can impact the mosaic of affordances.

A person can also perceive the presence of another person. This can also impact what is afforded to each one. Let us consider a case where there is only one person. She sees a big rock. This does not afford her "move-it-able", as the rock is too heavy. Now, let us introduce one more person sharing the environment. They can see each other, and because they share the environment in fairly equal positions, they are aware that both can perceive the environment and the big rock. Because there is one more person, who together can move the rock, the situation now affords "move-it-able". The presence of another person changed the affordances.

My suggestion is that, when there is another person in the environment, there are two possible ways they can perceive the situation. One is to perceive as an independent individual dealing with another independent individual and the environment. Each with their own individual mosaic of affordances. The other way is to perceive as a group member, the group dealing with the environment. The group has possible ways to interact with the environment, i.e. a collective mosaic of affordances. What I have just done is to translate Bacharach's variable frame theory into the language of affordances. It is the difference between perceiving yourself as an individual agent or as part of a group agent. Framing as a team, however, does not enable team reasoning to solve the dilemmas, not if the members do not believe that they are both team-reasoners. This means that just perceiving as a group member is not enough.

Before I proceed, I should point out that team reasoning is not something afforded. The environment affords possibilities of interaction. If a person perceives as an independent individual, she will think about what she should do, according to her individual mosaic of affordances. That is, she will frame as an individual and, thus, perform individual reasoning. If a person perceives as a group member, with its collective mosaic of affordances, she will perform team reasoning. Certain features of the environment induce a person to frame as a group member, but that is not the same as saying that the environment *affords* team reasoning. If that was the case, then it would be up to the person to decide whether or not to perform team reasoning, which would replicate the dilemma (see Section 2.3).

#### **4.2. Affordances and feeling ownership of the agency**

The existence of a specific affordance does not mean the person will take advantage of it. However, what a person does is based on the affordances. A new possibility of interacting with the environment will impact the other ways to interact with the environment. A lake affords "swimming-able", but it also affords "getting-wet". If there is a towel, this affords "getting-dry", which means that the option of "swimming" becomes more attractive. What a person does is based not on one specific affordance, but on the whole mosaic of affordances.

We usually associate a performance with an agent. When we see a car, we associate the movement of the car with the driver. If the car hits a pedestrian, we blame the driver. If the car managed to avoid a collision, we praise the driver. We make judgments of accountability based on this association between an agent and a performance. I have argued that what a person does

depends on the mosaic of affordances. This means that we hold a person accountable for her actions based on her mosaic of affordances. If the car hit the pedestrian, but it had no other choice, this would relieve the accountability of the driver. He is still the author of what happened, but his mosaic of affordances did not include a different course of action.

My suggestion is that this association between the agent and the performance can be understood as a feeling of ownership of the agency. When a person perceives the environment, she forms a mosaic of affordance. This triggers a feeling of being associated with what you perform based on the mosaic of affordances. If you are behind the wheel of a car, this triggers a feeling that the performance of the car movement belongs to you. By belonging I mean it is *your* agency. To an extent, you feel you own what happens to the car.

Consider the trolley dilemma. There is a train without brakes, and on the train track, there are five people who will be hit by the train. You are next to a lever, and if you pull it, it will redirect the train to another track, where there is only one person. Let us first consider a scenario where there is no lever. You would not feel connected to what happens to the train. My suggestion is that the presence of the lever adds an affordance that impacts the mosaic of affordances. You could decide not to pull the lever and not change the train's course. However, in this case, you would feel connected to what happens to the train. The presence of the lever, regardless of whether you end up pulling it or not, triggers in you a feeling of being associated with the train's movement. She feels it is up to her to pull or not to pull the lever. The composition of affordances triggers the person to feel ownership of certain performances.

### **4.3. Why “ownership” of agency?**

One could argue that I should not use the term “ownership” as applying to agency because agency is not something that can be owned, like a product can be owned.<sup>10</sup> If you own a ball, you can do all sorts of things with it, including selling it to me. The moment I buy your ball, it becomes mine and I can take it far away from you. One could argue that you cannot do that to agency. I can

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<sup>10</sup> It might sound strange to use the term “ownership” in relation to agency, however, many philosophers have said similar things. John Locke said that a person is the proprietor of her actions (see Locke 1988, §27 and §44). In Kant's philosophy, acts can be transferred through agreement. Arthur Ripstein, a Kantian, says that “through our agreement, I do not acquire an external thing, but your deed” (Ripstein, 2009, p. 69).

sell my labor to you, e.g. you can hire me to paint a house, but it is still me who has to undergo the experience of painting. You cannot take my agency away from me.<sup>11</sup> What you can do is to take the product of my agency away from me. This is true, but I am not arguing that agency should be understood as an object. Ownership of an agency is not the same as ownership of an object. I use the term “ownership” because it refers to the notion of belonging. My argument is that there is a feeling of association between a person and what she performs, an association of belonging.

When we say that “this house belongs to me”, what we mean is a relation of possession of a property. We also say that “I belong to my people”, but what this means is not that my community possesses me like a property. What we mean is a connection between me and my community. When I say that a person feels she owns the agency, what I mean is that she feels that agency belongs to her, where “belong” is not understood as a relation of property possession or of social identity. What I mean by “feeling ownership of the agency” is an association between a person and a performance, where she feels a certain performance is *up to her*.

#### **4.4. Feeling ownership of the agency**

Another reason I use the term “ownership of the agency” is because I need to distinguish this feeling from what is known as the *sense of agency* and the *sense of ownership*, which are also associations between an agent and a performance. Shaun Gallagher defines the sense of agency as “the sense that I am the one who is causing or generating an action” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). If I intentionally move my arm, I sense that I am the agent causing it. If someone applies an electric stimulation to my brain, which makes my arm move, I do not sense that I was the agent who caused it, but it was my body that moved. This is what Gallagher calls a sense of ownership, “the sense that I am the one who is undergoing an experience” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15). It is about ownership of the body, which means that a better label for it would be “sense of ownership of the body”.

Let us return to the trolley example. In the first scenario, there is no lever. You could not possibly feel a sense of agency. Neither would you feel a feeling of ownership of the agency. In the second scenario, there is a lever. If you pull the lever, then you will have a sense of agency. However, if you do not pull the lever, then, arguably, you will not have a sense of agency. You will not undergo the experience of pulling it. Nonetheless, because there is a lever, my argument

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<sup>11</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify this point.

is that it will make you feel ownership of the agency. It is the feeling that you had a part in it, that what happened was partially up to you, regardless of having taken some action or not.

The feeling of ownership of the agency is a bit broader than the sense of agency. The sense of agency applies only to the experience of acting. This means that there is a sense of agency of stopping the car, and there is a sense of agency of accelerating the car. These are different experiences, different actions with different intentions. The feeling of ownership of the agency is based on the mosaic of affordances. When you are behind the wheel, you feel you own the car's movement, whether by stopping it or by accelerating it.

#### **4.5. Perceiving as a group member leads to feeling joint ownership of the agency**

When a person perceives the other as an independent, isolated agent, she will perceive her own individual affordances and she might form a notion of what the other person perceives. In this case, she will have her own mosaic of affordances and the other person will have theirs. So, she associates her agency with her mosaic of affordances. This triggers a feeling of individual ownership of the agency. She does not associate herself with the other person's mosaic of affordance, which means that she does not feel she is entitled to have a say in what the other person does. Likewise, she does not associate the other person with her mosaic of affordances, which means that she does not feel the other is entitled to have a say on what she will do. Absent social norms or shared values, there is no room for her to feel entitled to demand anything from the other.

When a person perceives as a group member, she frames her agency as part of the interaction between the group and the environment; the group with its own collective mosaic of affordances. She perceives the possibilities of interaction as the group's possibilities; this is what I mean by a collective mosaic of affordances. So, she will associate her agency and the other person's agency with the group's mosaic of affordances. This triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. She feels that the possible interactions with the environment are up to *them*. She associates both of them with the group's performance. She will frame the actions of the other person as contributions to the group's performance. Because of this, she feels each is entitled to demand the other to behave accordingly. She feels that what the other person does is up to her, and vice-versa. This means that the agency transformation, i.e. perceiving myself as part of a group agent, triggers a feeling of normative unity.

#### 4.6. Feeling joint ownership of the agency does not render team reasoning otiose

My argument is that perceiving as a group member triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency, which enables team reasoning to solve the dilemmas. Let us consider a one-shot Prisoner's dilemma, without communication or social norms. Consider that the players perceive each other as independent individuals. Each person has their own possible choices, which is contrasted to their own individual mosaics of affordances. This means that each person answers only for her own agency. Technically, on a first level, the situation affords you "play *Coop*" or "play *Defect*", but what will end up happening depends on the other player as well. Behavior affords behavior. The absence of any way to form and enforce a pact means that the mosaic of affordances offers you a way to defend yourself from getting suckered (i.e. by playing *Defect*). You perceive a grim scenario, where conflict is inevitable. No matter what you choose, you do not feel entitled to rebuke the other person.

Now consider the same game, but that the players perceive each other as composing one group. Each person has their own choice, like before, but they perceive a different mosaic of affordances. Each one's agency will be contrasted with the collective mosaic of affordances. This triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. What this means is that each person perceives the situation as up to them to deal with. They both feel they answer to one another. Each feels entitled to demand each other to act as a group. This feeling of normative unity warrants the belief that other is also going to perform team reasoning. And this unlocks *Coop-Coop*.

The same will happen to the case of Hi-Lo. Perceiving as a group member enables coordination at *High-High*, because it triggers a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. This does not render team reasoning otiose. If a person perceives as a group member and associates herself with the collective mosaic of affordances, this will trigger the person to feel joint ownership of the agency. It will trigger this feeling because, as I have argued, we normally make an association between a person and her agency based on her composition of affordances. In this case, she will associate every member's agency with the collective mosaic of affordances. This means that even without a previous agreement or social norms, I feel entitled not only to expect the others to cooperate but also to demand them to cooperate and to rebuke them in case they do not. Because I feel there is a normative relation between us, this gives the necessary stability for a team-reasoner to solve a Hi-Lo or a Prisoner's dilemma.

Communication and agreements might assist a person to perceive as a group member, but these are not necessary conditions. Think of a rowing boat for four people in the middle of a storm. If there are four people on it, this is enough for a person to perceive as a group member. The rowing boat is like a car with four drivers behind four wheels. A person might perceive this as a case where it is up to the four rowers, as a group, to deal with the situation. In this case, each one's action will be contrasted with the collective mosaic of affordances, which triggers a feeling of joint ownership of rowing the boat. If one of them does not contribute to the rowing activity, the others will feel entitled to rebuke him, even if there was no previous agreement.

There can be many factors that promote perceiving as a group member and feeling joint ownership of the agency. Think of football fans. If you are supporting your team in a football stadium, there is this feeling of jointly owning the team's performance. It is not uncommon for players to say that the supporters "pushed the team", that it gave them that bit of extra strength to keep playing. Quiet supporters, in the stadium, can be criticized for not doing their part. A quiet crowd will not "push the team". There is a feeling that the supporters jointly own the team's performance. When the team wins, they share part of that experience. The point is not whether the supporters really had a causal connection with the team's performance, but that they feel that they are jointly accountable for the team's performance. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the possible factors that promote or undermine the feeling of joint ownership of the agency.<sup>12</sup>

Feeling joint ownership of the agency does not exclude restricted team reasoning. According to my argument, when a person undergoes agency transformation, this triggers feeling joint ownership of the agency. No extra information or conditions are necessary in order to trigger such a feeling. If you perceive as a group member, then you do not need extra information in order to form an expectation that others will cooperate. It is the other way around. You would need extra

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Tomasello did some experiments with toddlers which suggest that around the age of three they undergo a normative turn, and it is also the age when they can form a concept of "we" (Tomasello, 2019, pp. 202, 220 and 238). They start to understand entitlements and demands around that age (see also Schmidt et al., 2013; and Goulding and Friedman, 2018). The idea that a robust notion of "we" involves a normative attitude corroborates the account I am presenting in this paper.

information in order *not to* form such an expectation. And even if this happens, you are still going to feel entitled to rebuke them. Lack of trust leads to restricted team reasoning, but that does not mean the normative aspect is gone.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

There is a problem with the theory of team reasoning. Team reasoning can only solve the dilemmas it is intended to solve if the conditions for team reasoning warrant the belief that others will also perform team reasoning and these conditions cannot render team reasoning otiose. For example, if there are social norms or previous agreements, then individual-reasoners can solve the dilemma. In this paper, I have attempted to approach Bacharach's variable frame theory using the theory of affordances. Affordance is the idea that the environment provides ways to interact with it.

Simply put, my argument is that agency transformation (from *I* to *we*) will involve a change in the normative attitude, which is that they will feel joint ownership of the agency. My argument is that when a person perceives herself as an independent individual in comparison to the other person (i.e. she frames as an "*I*"), she will have her mosaic of affordances, which triggers in her a feeling of individual ownership of agency (as she will not consider her agency as part of a group agency). We hold a person accountable for her agency by contrasting what she did with her mosaic of affordances. The mosaic of affordances is all the affordances related to a person. When a person perceives as a group member, she perceives as a group interacting with the environment. This means that the group will have its own collective mosaic of affordances. By associating herself with the collective mosaic of affordances (which is what she perceives, as she perceives as a group member), this will trigger in her a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. It is the feeling that a certain situation is up to us to deal with, so we feel we are entitled to hold one another accountable

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<sup>13</sup> What I mean by feeling joint ownership of the agency is very similar to Margaret Gilbert's (2014) theory of joint commitment. The problem with applying Gilbert's theory to team reasoning is that, first, forming a joint commitment is a rational choice, and framing as a team cannot be a rational choice. Second, the existence of a joint commitment would render team reasoning otiose, as joint commitment requires common knowledge of each members' expression of readiness, no matter how tacit they can be (see Gilbert, 2014, p. 29; and Tollefsen, 2014, pp. 44–45).

for the group's performance. For example, if we are in a rowing boat with four people, we will associate the rowing activity with the four of us. We will feel that it is up to us to row, so we feel entitled to demand one another to row. This normative aspect warrants the belief that the other will perform team reasoning. It is possible to achieve this feeling without having prior or future interactions and without the existence of previous agreements or social norms. This means we are able to explain team reasoning without rendering it otiose.

## Chapter 2 – On Gregariousness

**Abstract:** There seems to be a difference between drinking coffee alone at home and drinking coffee in a café. Yet, drinking coffee in a café is not a joint action. It is an individual action done in a social environment. The café, with each person minding their own business next to others, is what I call a gregarious state of affairs. Gregariousness refers to the warmth of the social world. It is the difference between studying alone at home and studying in the library. This light form of sociality is precisely what we were deprived of during the coronavirus lockdowns. Gregariousness cannot be explained as interaction or coordination, and neither can it be grasped solely as a normative aspect of the environment. This is why gregariousness cannot be explained using the concepts of strategic equilibrium, shared planning agency, joint commitment, we-intention, or second-person standpoint. In this paper, I will also provide a prospective theory of gregariousness. The aim of this paper is not to provide a definitive theory of gregariousness, nor to demonstrate that other theories of joint action are incorrect, but rather to draw attention to this aspect of the social world that has been largely neglected. In chapter 1, I talked about the strongest form of cooperation. But sociality is not just strict forms of cooperation. There are much lighter forms of sociality.

### 1. Introduction

“There are times when I need to ride in the subway at rush hour or sit in a crowded movie house – that’s what I mean by a humanity bath. As cattle must have salt to lick, I sometimes crave physical contact” – Saul Bellow (2008, p. 4)

With the coronavirus pandemics and the lockdowns, people left the streets and confined themselves in their homes.<sup>14</sup> We had to be physically isolated from each other. We could no longer enjoy a cup of coffee in a café or study in a library. I did not think I would miss being in a library. I always thought of studying in the library as an individual action. However, with the lockdown, I

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<sup>14</sup> This chapter was published as a paper in *Philosophy* (Costa, 2022). It won the Royal Institute of Philosophy 2021 Essay Prize. Only minor alterations were made to the paper.

missed being near others. Humans are gregarious creatures, and this desire to be near others is a manifestation of our gregarious nature. It is the desire to share presence with others, to connect – but not necessarily a strong form of connection. It can be as simple as the desire to study in a place where others are also studying. The presence of other people sometimes is like a fireplace. Too near would be too hot. Too far would be too cold. Near, but with some distance, we get the warmth of sociality. Consider this example:

Saul is alone at home when he feels like drinking coffee. He goes to the kitchen to prepare his own coffee, but he changes his mind and decides to go to a café near his home. Saul does not call any friend to go with him, and neither does he intend to meet other people in the café. He is thinking of sitting alone in the café saloon, where most likely there will be other people, minding their own business.

There seems to be a difference between drinking coffee alone at home and drinking coffee in a café. And yet, drinking coffee in a café is not a joint action. It is an individual action but performed in a social environment. Most theories in the literature on social ontology focus on interactions and, as such, tend to focus on the rationality of cooperation or the normative aspects of the social world. Granted, Saul's drinking coffee in the café is not a joint action, so we should not expect a theory of joint action to explain that phenomenon. However, some authors in the area, such as Margaret Gilbert (2014, 2003), consider the concepts in their theories to be the fundamental block that composes the social world. Even though some authors, like Michael Bratman (2014), do not aim to explain the whole social world, they analyze social interaction without first considering the possibility of actions that are not completely individual (like drinking coffee alone at home) and neither completely joint (like sharing a cup of coffee with a partner). There is a gap in the literature. From the philosophy of action, which is focused mainly on individual agency, the literature jumped to analyzing joint action.<sup>15</sup> But there is something in between. My focus in this

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<sup>15</sup> Consider, for instance, what Frederick Stoutland said: “Philosophers of action have not paid much attention to social agency, that is, to actions performed not by individual persons but by social groups of various kinds” (Stoutland, 2008, p. 533). In that paper, Stoutland argues against individualist accounts in the literature in joint action. Notice how Stoutland jumps from individual to group action without considering the nuances in between, such as the café example I am presenting in this paper.

paper will be on these very light forms of sociality, such as going to a café, cinema, or library.

This jump in the literature, from individual to joint action, has led many authors to consider many social situations as “mere aggregations”.<sup>16</sup> Bratman (2014) used his theory of planned agency to explain shared agency, and focused on what he called “modest sociality” (Bratman, 2014, p. 8). Modest sociality is about a small group of people coordinating in an intentional way. Coordination that does not involve an intention to act together would be mere aggregation. It became a widespread consensus that modest sociality is the most basic form of sociality. A consensus that has been accepted without questioning. Even the current trend to analyze minimal forms of joint action fails to capture sociality outside of coordination. As such, the field has become blind to lighter forms of sociality. We have been overlooking the *gregarious* aspect of *aggregations*.

Providing a theory of gregariousness will only enrich the current theories on social ontology. There are currently no theories on this type of sociality. Gregariousness is about the warmth of the social world. When we face lockdowns and cannot go to the cinema, study in the library, nor drink coffee in a café, what we miss is not just a normative relation with others. Neither is this a desire to engage in strategic interactions. Not being alone should be considered the most basic level of sociality. As gregarious creatures, we desire to share our presence. I will present four

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<sup>16</sup> Many authors in the literature on joint action use the term “mere aggregation” meaning the simple sum of individual actions or attitudes, which would not amount to a joint action or a collective attitude. This notion is widespread. The following is just a short list of occurrences: Searle (1990, p. 402); Hammond (2016, p. 2711); Gilbert (2018, p. 224); Jankovic (2014, p. 498); Schmid (2016, p. 59); Jansen (2014, p. 92); Peter French (1979); Alonso (2017, p. 34); Caporael (1996, p. 268); Hakli, Miller and Tuomela (2010, p. 294).

Sara Rachel Chant contrasts “aggregate actions from a mere collection of actions” (Chant, 2017, p. 20). What Chant means by aggregate action is different from collective intentional action (as usually conceived in the main theories, such as by Bratman or Gilbert). However, her notion of aggregation is very different from the gregariousness that I am analyzing in this paper. I will discuss Chant’s theory in Section 3.1.

Philip Petit and Christian List (2011) use the term “aggregation”. However, their theory is about aggregating individual decisions into a collective deliberation. It is a different phenomenon from sitting in a café nearby other people, where there is no collective decision-making taking place.

characteristics of gregariousness. The first is proximity, which is a feature of the environment, not a mental state (Section 2.1). The second characteristic of gregariousness is openness (Section 2.2). Agents need to have an affable attitude toward each other. The third characteristic is asymmetry (Section 2.3). Agents need not have the same attitude, e.g. one can desire to form further joint actions whilst another agent desires to stay by themselves near others. It excludes only purely aggressive attitudes. This leads to the fourth characteristic, privacy (Section 2.4). I will also briefly explore the possibility of gregariousness in virtual environments (Section 2.5).

In Section 3, I will provide a negative thesis. I will start addressing how the literature overlooks the gregarious aspect in what they refer to as “mere aggregation”. The essence of my negative argument is that gregariousness cannot be understood as coordination. This means that the concept of strategic interaction cannot explain gregariousness (Section 3.1). Then, I will explain how the concepts of shared planning agency, joint commitment and second-person standpoint can only explain the normative aspects of the café, but not gregariousness (Section 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 respectively). Next, I will address the concept of institutional facts, which is based on the concept of we-intentions (Section 3.5). The concept of we-intention, however, has inspired the concept of sense of us, which could be weakened to provide an account of gregariousness (Section 3.6).

## 2. Positive Thesis

Gregariousness comes from the Latin word *grex*, which means flock or herd. Gregarious creatures tend to form *grex*. Humans are gregarious creatures. We tend to form groups and stay nearby others. David Hume once wrote that there is no bigger punishment than being completely alone (Hume, 1978, p. 363). The state of affairs of being near others is what I am calling gregarious. As such, gregariousness depends both on mental states (i.e. the attitudes of agents) and on the features of the external world (i.e. the environment). Since it requires more than just mental states, it is distinct from the concept of collective intention. As I will argue later, most accounts of collective intention rely solely on mental states. However, there is no *grex* if there is no proximity among the agents.<sup>17</sup> This proximity is not just physical. It requires the agents to recognize other

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<sup>17</sup> What I mean by the term *grex* is something much weaker than a *group*. Víctor Fernández

agents and also not to treat them as enemies. Hence, gregariousness also relies on mental states.

Gregariousness can be defined by four main characteristics: proximity, openness, asymmetry, and privacy. Let me explain each in more detail.

## 2.1 Proximity

The main difference between drinking coffee alone at home and drinking in a café is that, in the café, you are not alone. In order not to be alone, there has to be some proximity. By proximity, I mean actual proximity in the world. Proximity is not a mental state. It is a feature of the environment.

Proximity can be a vague concept. People who live in Berlin are nearer the Eiffel Tower than people living in Tokyo. Even though it is easier for a person in Berlin to access the Eiffel Tower, it is highly probable that many people in Berlin have never even visited Paris. To say that something is near does not reveal much unless there is a reference point.

The proximity required for gregariousness is the one that impacts the agents' perceptual present space. If two people are in front of each other at a table, they are present to each other. Each perceives the other. Each perceives that they are sharing the environment with the other. In a way, we are all sharing the same planet, but the impact a person in Japan has on a person in Mexico is insignificant. It is not captured by the agents. It does not affect their present space.

It is hard to pinpoint the limits of the present space of an agent. One possibility would be to consider the agent's body as the centre, and the further away other elements in the environment are, the slower would be their impact on the agent (i.e. the less they are available to the agent to interact or perceive).<sup>18</sup> We can divide this distance into levels. The first level would be the

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Castro and Elisabeth Pacherie (2021) have recently argued that the need to belong is what makes commitments credible and forceful. Inspired by Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) and Harriet Over (2016), they conceive the need to belong as the need to keep long-lasting relations with others. This motivates us to keep frequent interactions. What Castro and Pacherie are analyzing is stronger than gregariousness. The café, and the examples used by Saul Bellow, are not cases where there are long-lasting relations.

<sup>18</sup> Such an account could be similar to the concept of *oikeiosis* (see Engberg-Pedersen, 1990). *Oikeiosis* is the ancient stoic idea that people perceive ownership over their own bodies. This creates a fixed point of reference, from which the person perceives concentric circles of

peripersonal space, which is the space immediately next to the body. The people around the person are at immediate access. This does not mean they are more relevant. Imagine a fugitive is in a café, surrounded by other people. She sees in the distance a police officer coming towards the café. The police officer has far more impact on her than the people around her, who are largely ignoring her. However, the police officer is far, so it is not as immediate as the people in the café. The proximity required for gregariousness, in this account, would be when it reaches the threshold to be perceived as immediate.<sup>19</sup> On this account, gregariousness is a state of affairs relative to the person. For example, imagine a very large café. Larger than a football stadium. Imagine a person sitting at one edge of the café. The people sitting on the other edge are not perceived as immediate by her. Her environment affords her gregariousness because she is surrounded by other people, but not because of the people at the other edge of the café.

## 2.2. Openness

In order for proximity to generate gregariousness, the agents need an open, affable, friendly attitude.<sup>20</sup> If an agent cannot conceive the other as an agent, then it is impossible for that person to conceive that she shares a space with others. On top of that, the agents should not have a purely aggressive attitude. This would not generate gregariousness but conflict.

This openness refers to being affable towards the presence of other people. It ranges all the way from wanting to interact with others to just tolerating their presence. Gregariousness does not preclude the emergence of stronger forms of sociality. It is possible to be in a café, willing to

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relationship to her. The person then perceives what else she owns, which would be the family, the people you live with, your home. *Oikos* is ancient Greek for home. Then the person perceives her relationship to her city, which is another, bigger circle. And so on, until the person perceives the circle that encompasses all of humanity.

<sup>19</sup> Immediate proximity could be understood as “here”, which could be understood in terms of peripersonal space (see de Vignemont, 2021). Proximity required for gregariousness would be an extension of the “here”.

<sup>20</sup> One of the first occurrences of the term “sociality” in English is in David Hartley’s book *Observation on Man*, from the 18th century. Talking about the pleasures related to sympathy, Hartley defines sociality as “the Pleasure which we take in the mere Company and Conversation of others, particularly of our Friends and Acquaintance, and which is attended with mutual Affability, Complaisance, and Candour”. (Hartley, 1749, p. 472)

engage in conversations with others. Even if you do end up engaging in a conversation with someone in the café, there is still a gregarious state of affairs between you and the others who are not taking part in the conversation. Openness also refers to just appreciating the presence of other people. Consider, for example, sidewalk cafés, where an individual can enjoy his cup of coffee while watching people passing by.<sup>21</sup>

### **2.3. Asymmetry**

The gregarious attitude is asymmetrical. It does not require reciprocity. The decision to go to the café instead of drinking coffee at home is motivated by the desire not to be alone. I do not need other people to desire the same. They can have their own reasons to go to the café. If other people are aggressive to me, then, in that case, it would block the gregarious attitude. As long as they are at least neutral, it does not hinder my gregarious attitude.

Asymmetry is the main difference between the gregarious attitude and the concept of collective intention, which I will discuss at length later in this paper in Section 3.2. For example, shared intention, according to Bratman (2014), requires all members to have the same intention. Gregariousness, on the other hand, is compatible with many different attitudes, as long as they are not purely aggressive. Very little is required from the agents in order to reach gregariousness, which makes it not cognitively demanding, and a good candidate for a minimal form of sociality.

### **2.4. Privacy**

In the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper, Saul Bellow expresses his desire for a “humanity bath”, and the examples he used do not usually involve further joint actions. When you take the underground, most likely, you do not interact with other people, no further than “doing nothing together”. During the lockdown, I missed studying in the library. I missed being near others, studying in a place where other people are also studying. However, that specific desire was not to engage in conversations in the library. It was the desire to be in a social environment but to

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<sup>21</sup> Both these notions of openness have, in some measure, been discussed by the famous urbanist Jane Jacobs (2016) and the sociologist Lyn Lofland (2017). Jacobs talks about how cities, at least the good ones, provide a multitude of random encounters. She discusses how sidewalks provide a place for brief non-intimate encounters and how important they are (Jacobs, 2016, pp. 33–34). Regarding Lofland, I will discuss her account in more detail later in Section 3.6. About sidewalk cafés, I also recommend Jan Oosterman (1992).

preserve a large degree of privacy. In the café example, I might not desire to talk to anyone else. Yet, if there was nobody else in the café, then it would not satisfy my desire. The same goes for the cinema. When the cinema is completely empty, then it is much like watching a movie alone at home, but with a better screen. A better screen is not what makes cinema what it is.

In the literature in social ontology, the analogy of “glue” is commonly used (especially by Epstein, 2014). However, glue is not a good metaphor for gregariousness. Gregariousness is like gravity. It can pull to contact and be the initial force that turns into more stable forms of collective activity. But it can also be a force that makes people stay around, like satellites orbiting each other. Never in contact, but always close enough. Not isolated from each other, but in between others. Social, but not joint.

### **2.5. Gregariousness in virtual places**

So far, I have considered physical places, such as cafés and libraries. However, nowadays, we spend a good amount of time on the Internet, such as on Twitter, YouTube and Zoom. One could argue that these platforms might provide the warmth of sociality, the feeling of not being alone. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of “study with me”. These are students who live stream themselves studying for hours on YouTube, usually not showing their faces and not interacting with the viewers. Millions of people “watch” these videos. They let it play while they also study. It provides them with a background noise of an environment of study.<sup>22</sup>

These streamings can indeed provide some social warmth, but they are not gregarious state of affairs. This is because we are not sharing an environment. Consider the following example of a strange library. It is composed of a series of booths arranged in a circle, and in the middle of the circle, there is a desk. The surrounding booths are completely closed, except for a door to enter the booth and a two-way mirror on the front wall, which faces the desk in the centre. Two-way mirrors are transparent on one side but reflective on the other (they are very common in detective movies). The students in the surrounding booths cannot see each other, but they can see the student at the desk in the centre through the two-way mirror. The student at the desk cannot see anyone. This strange place looks more like a panopticon than a normal library. There is no shared environment. There is no proximity. Streamings of “study with me” are more similar to that strange library than

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me to develop more on this point.

to normal libraries. Also, it is worth noting that although there are plenty of “study with me” and “code with me” streamings, but there are no “drink coffee with me”, where the streamer drinks coffee without addressing the viewers and people at their homes also drink coffee without paying too much attention to the streaming. Usually, the streamings of “‘activity’ with me” are about motivating others to study, code or read.<sup>23</sup>

I am not saying that these streamings cannot provide feelings of togetherness, nor that it is impossible to have gregariousness through the Internet. Lucy Osler (2020) has analyzed at length communal experiences online. There are several online forums, and they can form a group identity and become a community. Real-life communities also extend online, such as a group of friends using Facebook. However, in order to provide gregariousness, we need to actually share an environment. This environment can be virtual. Online games, specifically the massively multiplayer online games with a persistent world, are the best example of virtual gregariousness. In these games, each player has an avatar, and the players do not need to interact. Nevertheless, they share an environment, and it is very common for players to play these games without engaging in joint activities (the so-called “solo players”).

Osler also talks about how online games can provide a sense of togetherness (Osler, 2020, pp. 583-584). However, she focuses on the interaction, such as accomplishing missions together. Massive multiplayer online games typically involve interactions, but it is also typical for players to play alone. Some of the “solo players” do not even like to talk to other players. It is interesting that these people desire to play a multiplayer game, though they do not want to “play together”. My point is that they have a desire for gregariousness. They want to play where others are playing, and maybe they enjoy seeing other avatars nearby, doing their own things. This experience is rather different from watching someone streaming themselves playing a single-player game and you playing as well at the same time (which would be akin to the “study with me” phenomena). I am

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<sup>23</sup> Maybe it is possible to conceive a group of socialities that do not involve joint action, of which gregariousness would be a sub-set. Another sub-set would be doing the same thing, but not together, as in the case of the “study with me”. In this latter case, it is about doing the same thing. That situation cannot be explained as shared planning because it would not satisfy all of Bratman’s conditions (such as common knowledge) and it does not involve joint commitments, but there is something social about it.

not saying such a situation would not involve any form of sociality, but only that they are different things. I do not have space to provide a more thorough analysis of virtual gregariousness, as it would require a more detailed analysis of what a virtual environment means and the distinction between a platform like YouTube and an online game with a persistent world. And it would also require a thorough analysis of gregariousness, whereas, in this paper, I am only providing a prospective account.

### 3. Negative Thesis

As I have been arguing in this paper, there is a gap between individual action in isolation and collective action. This gap will not be filled by analyzing minimal forms of joint action, for one main reason. They are bound to the notion of interaction and coordination. Bratman (2014) is one of the most influential authors in this area. He coined the term modest sociality to refer to simple forms of group coordination, e.g. pushing a piano upstairs. He considers these as “basic forms of sociality” (Bratman, 2014, p. 3). Anything less than that would be a “mere aggregation”. This view is widespread, but it should be questioned because it overlooks any form of sociality that fails to satisfy the criteria for joint action. Even accounts of minimal joint action face the same problem. Most accounts of minimal joint action start their analyses by identifying essential aspects of robust cases of joint action, like pushing a piano upstairs, and then weakening them to apply to simpler forms of joint action (Ludwig, 2020; Paternotte, 2020; Saint-Germier et al., 2021). However, no matter how much we weaken these aspects, they will always be bound to the interaction among the agents.<sup>24</sup>

The aim of the arguments in this section is not to refute these views but rather to show that these theories fail to fill the gap that I am concerned with in this paper. I will start by addressing the concept of strategic interaction. Then I will move on to address the concept of collective intention – and show how these concepts are inappropriate for explaining gregariousness.

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<sup>24</sup> Butterfill et al. (2020) starts his analysis by taking into consideration the weakest forms of joint action, but the final product is not so different, since it is still bound to interaction and coordination.

### 3.1. Not strategic equilibrium

Some authors have presented theories of joint action based on the concept of strategic equilibrium. Sara Rachel Chant (2017) argues that we can better explain joint action if we understand it as aggregate action. What Chant understands by aggregation is rather different from what I mean by gregariousness.

Chant presents two examples that would normally be considered joint action, but theories of collective intention would fail to explain them: *Lost in Paris* and *Spy-proof Factory* (Chant, 2017, p. 20). The *Lost in Paris* example is about two friends who lose each other in Paris, and each decides to go to the Eiffel Tower in the hope of finding the other. This is a classic example used by Schelling to explain salience in game theory literature (see Schelling, 1963, and Lewis, 1969). The *Spy-proof Factory* example is about a factory where each worker knows only about their own task in the assembly line, they have no connection to other workers, and they do not even know what they are producing. These examples are problematic for both Bratman's and Gilbert's theories, Chant argues, because they do not fulfil the common knowledge condition in these theories. While Chant is correct in this assessment, note, however, how the examples are cases of joint action stripped from any gregariousness. The *Lost in Paris* is an example of individual rational agents in a pure coordination dilemma. The *Spy-proof Factory* is an example of extreme alienation in the workplace. Surely, we could conceive it as a joint action. Yet, it would be the coldest form of joint action.

The *Spy-proof Factory* would be a purely rationalized form of coordinating in society. There is no sense of proximity and openness. The example of *Lost in Paris* is precisely an example of not sharing a space, and thus not being present to each other. Strategic equilibrium can provide an explanation of how isolated rational decision-makers can find a way to reach each other, which would then be a state of being together. However, it does not explain what the state of being together is.

### 3.2. Not shared intention

If we use the concept of shared planning agency to explain the sociality in the café, the only thing that is shared would be the policy not to bother others. Being near others without any desire

to do so is a common thing.<sup>25</sup> In these cases, Bratman’s notion of shared planning agency might be enough to explain the social interaction. What his theory cannot explain is the positive social aspect of the intention to drink coffee in a café and not alone at home.

Bratman argues that collective intentions can be reduced to individual intentions, so he prefers to call it shared intention. The idea, in short, is that we can explain shared intention by using the same elements used to explain individual intention. Intentions, in contrast to desires or goals, have four norms of rationality: means-end coherence, agglomeration, consistency with other intentions and beliefs, and stability (Bratman, 2014, p. 15). Intentions can explain how agents can perform complex tasks that extend over time. In a similar way, shared intentions are intentions that extend socially. Each member needs to include a reference to each other’s intentions and sub-plans regarding the joint activity.<sup>26</sup> This creates a web of intentions that allows members to coordinate. When two friends are walking together, it is not required for all of their intentions to be means-end coherent with one another, nor that they are consistent or agglomerate with one another. What matters are only the intentions regarding the joint activity – these should be coherent and consistent with one another in an intentional way.

Even though Bratman explicitly says that he has only provided sufficient conditions for shared intention (i.e. not necessary conditions; see Bratman, 2014, p. 36) and that he is focused on modest

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<sup>25</sup> This notion of forced socialization can be found on Martin Heidegger’s notion of “being-with” (*mitsein* in German). He thought that human existence is always among other people (Heidegger, 2010). We are always surrounded by others – it is not an option. However, this is a notion of “sharing presence” as a necessity. Heidegger’s work in *Being and Time* inspired Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophy. For Sartre (2003), there is also a mode of existence that is social, it is the being-for-others. However, what Sartre means by being-for-others is different from Heidegger’s being-with. Sartre talks about how a person feels shame when she becomes aware that someone else can see her. As Sartre argues, the presence of another person (or the *Other*, as Sartre calls it) objectifies us. This is a notion of sociality as an obligation, as something we have to do (as well represented in his story *No Exit*, Sartre, 1947). Later in life, Sartre changed some of his views, and he started to consider that social relations can have positive reciprocity, where each strengthens the freedom of the other (see *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 2006, and *Notebooks for an Ethics*, 1992). But even in that case, the focus is either on joint projects or on not repressing other people. In this sense, applying Sartre’s theory to the café would be rather similar to Darwall’s second-person or Gilbert’s mutual recognition of co-presence, which I will discuss in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

<sup>26</sup> The summary of Bratman’s theory can be found in Bratman, 2014, pp. 85–86.

sociality (i.e. small groups of adults with stable membership, without hierarchy imbalance), the only thing his theory can explain is the normative aspect of being near other people, but not the four characteristics of gregariousness. Let me explain this by using an example from Velleman (2015).

When you walk completely alone, that action is individual. It does not involve any kind of reference to anyone else. When you walk in a crowded street, you might not share an intention with other people, but you need to be aware of the presence of other people. You do not care about what others are doing, but you do not want to bump into others. Bumping into others is not just morally wrong. It is also inefficient. Consider car traffic. People want to get back home, so they do not want traffic congestion. Therefore, at the very least, there is coordination not to interfere with one another. If so, then there is a shared intention between the people in a crowded street, namely, the shared intention of doing nothing together (Velleman, 2015, p. 108).<sup>27</sup> It not only guarantees an efficient flux in the crowd but also protects each person from engaging in a shared intention with others. If I start walking next to you, it might give you the wrong impression that I want to walk with you, but I do not. The same could be said about the café, where each person might desire to enjoy their coffee without engaging in conversation with others.<sup>28</sup>

Here is how one could use the concept of shared planning agency to explain “doing nothing together”. Each person in a café has sufficient reasons to believe that everyone else there has the intention to mind their own business and not bother other people. They can only mind their own business in peace if everyone does not bother others. It is not much of a stretch to suppose that this is common knowledge among everyone in the café. In this case, there is a shared plan which provides the basis for each person to pursue their own private intentions. This shared plan of “not bothering others” will operate as a shared policy (Bratman, 2014, p. 136). According to Bratman,

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<sup>27</sup> Velleman’s argument that there is a shared intention to do nothing together fits Bratman’s account, specially Bratman’s account of shared policies (Bratman, 2014, p. 139). I should acknowledge, however, that Velleman has some criticisms of Bratman’s theory (see Velleman, 1997)

<sup>28</sup> What Velleman is talking about is very similar to Erving Goffman’s notion of civil inattention (Goffman, 1980, pp. 83-84). I will return to Goffman’s (1980) work later when I discuss Stephen Darwall’s (2011) account, in Section 3.4.

intentions need to be able to agglomerate (Bratman, 2014, p. 15). This means that a person cannot rationally uphold conflicting intentions. The moment we form an intention, it usually becomes a filter for other intentions. For example, when I form the intention to go on a diet, it does not specify what I should eat, but it rules out the intention to eat junk food. In the café, there is the shared intention “not to bother others”, which acts as a filter for other private intentions. Thus, I can drink my coffee as long as I am not bothering others.

Bratman has argued that joint action does not necessarily involve some normative element, like joint commitment (Bratman, 2014, pp. 118–120). Nonetheless, shared policies are pretty much social norms. If we use the concept of shared planning agency to explain “doing nothing with others”, all we can explain is the normative aspect of not bothering others. It overlooks gregariousness. The difference between walking absolutely alone and walking in a crowded street would be that, in the latter, there is a normative requirement not to bump into others or too near others. This would mean that when Saul Bellow said that he needed to be in a crowd, it would be a need for sharing a policy, which pretty much amounts to a need for feeling constrained by a norm. However, this is not what Bellow needs. He needs “a humanity bath”. Maybe he does not need to actually touch other people, but he needs to be near them. He needs to walk in the busy street. When I miss drinking coffee in a café, it is not the case that I miss being constrained by a norm. What I miss is being near others without engaging in further shared intentions with them. There is more to not being alone than just sharing a policy.

I am not arguing that a café without such a shared policy would be able to function as a café. Norms are important. My argument is that the concept of shared planning agency cannot grasp the positive aspects of gregariousness. There can be norms without gregariousness. I have presented earlier the example of everyone having to stay at home during the lockdowns. Even if there was no official law dictating people to stay at home, there could be a shared policy not to go out unless for essential things. When we stayed at home, we were being constrained by a norm. We were participating in a shared policy. Yet, there was little gregariousness. The concept of shared policy cannot grasp the difference between coordinating due to a norm and being near others “doing nothing”.

### 3.3. Not joint commitment

Gilbert (2014) explains joint action using the concept of joint commitment.<sup>29</sup> To create a joint commitment, all parties have to agree (even if just tacitly, without overt communication, see Gilbert, 2014, p. 29; and Tollefsen, 2015, pp. 44–45). This is because a joint commitment is nothing more than a decision. Any decision creates a commitment (a *commitment of the will*, in her words). When you agree to walk with your friend, you two form a decision (a *pool of wills*), which generates a commitment – in this case, a joint commitment. This means that even if you change your mind and form a divergent intention, you are still part of the joint commitment.

Inspired by Charles Taylor’s (1985) notion of *entre-nous*, Gilbert analyzes what could be the most basic form of joint commitment: mutual recognition of co-presence. Gilbert uses the example of a library (Gilbert, 2014, p. 329). Suppose I am reading a newspaper, and you are reading your book. Due to the lack of empty seats, we are sharing the same table. We are sitting across from one another. As you sit, you look at me and give a smile. I notice that you are looking at me, and I look at you, answering with a smile. Gilbert argues that this brief interaction establishes a joint commitment to recognize each other’s presence. That brief exchange of looks was enough to communicate to each other the message that “I see you, and I will respect your presence”.<sup>30</sup> If, after that brief interaction, I spread my newspaper over your face, you will rebuke me for not respecting your space. What entitles your rebuke is that we formed a joint commitment to respect each other’s presence. If that brief interaction had not happened, then I could claim that I did not see you, but from now on, I will respect your space. You can rebuke anyone who bothers you, but there is a difference between rebuking someone who does not perceive your presence (so it is accidental) and rebuking someone who has already perceived your presence (this amounts to a lack of respect).

For Gilbert, what binds the participants of a joint activity is the joint commitment – it is what makes an activity collective. She says that it is the atom of the social world (Gilbert, 2014, p. 18;

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<sup>29</sup> “Persons X and Y collectively intend to perform action A (for short, to do A) if and only if they are jointly committed to intend as a body to do A” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 83).

<sup>30</sup> Although Gilbert does not refer to Goffman’s work, her notion of mutual recognition is very similar to Goffman’s notion of civil inattention, which I will discuss in the next section (Section 3.4).

2003). In the café example, there is a joint commitment to do nothing together, but, as I have argued, there is more. The theory of joint commitment cannot explain the non-normative aspects of gregariousness. Moreover, it reduces “sharing presence” to a normative relation, thus overlooking the importance of affability and amenity involved in being in a social environment. Think of a cinema. Even though I cannot rebuke other people for leaving the cinema during the movie, I can demand other people to be quiet if they are too loud. After many months without being able to go to a cinema, I find myself missing the experience of watching movies in the cinema. Maybe what I miss is the big screen or the audio system. Or maybe what I miss is eavesdropping on other people’s chats after the movie. I miss hearing other people laughing when there is a joke or screaming when there is a jump scare. Maybe I miss the smell of popcorn and all the little noises that compose the social experience of watching a movie in the cinema. But most certainly, I do not miss being in a position to demand other people to stay quiet.<sup>31</sup> There is more to sharing a space than only norms.

Sharing space can involve conflict and might not be an amicable experience. However, that side of the social world has been analyzed at length by so many theories. Joint commitment is just one of them that can explain how we are able to stay civilized. The problem is that we have been overlooking the amiable side of the social world, and we need new concepts to explain it.

### **3.4. Not second-person standpoint**

Darwall’s notion of second-person relation is similar to Gilbert’s theory of joint commitment. The main difference in Gilbert’s theory is that she does not consider joint commitments as being moral (Gilbert, 2014, p. 310). We can be jointly committed to performing something wrong.

When I drink coffee alone at home, there is only me. When I drink coffee in a café, there are other people. I am drinking my coffee, but I am also present to you. We are in the presence of each

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<sup>31</sup> Watching a movie in the cinema could be understood as a case of joint attention (see Campbell, 2005). I might desire to jointly watch the movie. Discussing joint attention is beyond the scope of this paper. It suffices to say that being in a café is not a case of joint attention. Joint attention might require sharing presence, but sharing a presence is not the same as joint attention. I am tasting my coffee, and this is not a joint experience between me and the other people in the café who are not drinking coffee. Each person is attending at something different, but we are sharing the space.

other. Darwall argues that “presence is a second-personal notion” (Darwall, 2011, p. 15). A second-personal relation is a relation of mutual accountability. When I perceive that we are sharing presence, I perceive my own presence in the I-Thou perspective. I perceive myself as also being present to you. We are aware of each other’s presence, so we are accountable to one another. Darwall distinguishes “being with” from “being around”. “Being around” would be just being physically nearby each other. “Being with” is when we engage in second-person relations. As Darwall argues, presence “is a “forensic,” that is, a normative, moral space of second-personal interaction” (Darwall, 2011, p. 15).

Both Darwall’s notion of second-person standpoint and Gilbert’s notion of mutual recognition of co-presence are very similar to Goffman’s notion of civil inattention (Goffman, 1980). Goffman was an influential sociologist who provided a rich analysis of the micro-interactions we perform in society. For him, when we share an environment, we necessarily communicate (Goffman, 1980, p. 33). This can happen through verbal communication and it can happen with a mere exchange of looks. It also happens even without any interaction whatsoever. For example, the way we dress and behave sends a message about our attitude (Goffman, 1980, pp. 26–30). If I pick my nose in front of other people, I am sending a message that I do not care about their presence. The problem with Goffman’s view is that, just like the other accounts, it ends up being about the normative aspects of sharing an environment (see Goffman, 1980, pp. 22–24 and 243). Consider a sidewalk café. There is a pleasure in seeing others walking by. Certainly, if we stare at someone, this will cross a line. But we are not simply recognizing the presence of others. We appreciate it. We enjoy it. We cannot reduce this activity to simply civil inattention.<sup>32</sup>

In recent years, Darwall has been shifting his analysis to non-normative second-personal attitudes (Darwall 2017, 2021). He has already written about love and trust as second-personal attitudes of the heart (Darwall 2017). He argues that love is second-personal because it addresses someone and it invites an answer, although it is not normative (Darwall 2017, p. 47). Loving

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<sup>32</sup> Goffman also uses the term “mere aggregation” as opposed to a social group. He argues that situational properties (which are the rules that guide an individual when in public environments) “transform the gathering itself from a *mere aggregate* of persons present into something akin to a little social group, a social reality in its own right” (Goffman, 1980, p. 196 – my emphasis).

someone is an invitation, not a normative requirement, for that person to love you back (Darwall 2017, p. 47). This contrasts with recognizing each other's presence, which would be normative. Even though it is possible to exist non-normative second-personal attitudes, I do not think they can explain gregariousness. There are three potential problems. First, there would be the problem of identifying which kind of second-personal attitude would be going on in a café. Certainly, they would not be attitudes of love. Second, second-personal attitudes are always about addressing someone and being addressed. However, in a gregarious state of affairs, it is not clear who is being addressed. When I drink coffee in a café, my action of drinking my coffee is not addressed to anyone in there. The same goes for studying in a library – my actions are not addressing anyone. One could argue, based on Goffman's account, that we are always communicating with others, such as by the way we dress. But in that case, the only attitudes that could be considered as addressing others would be the ones related to normativity, such as civil inattention. In addition, even if we accept Goffman's idea that the way we dress is already communicating our attitude to others, this kind of communication is not I-Thou (one-to-one) but communication to everyone who could be in the shared environment. Third, even in the cases where my action is about someone else, such as sitting in a café and watching other people walking, it is asymmetrical in a radical sense. The person sitting in the sidewalk café enjoys looking at the pedestrians, and this does not invite a likewise attitude from the pedestrians. Most likely, the pedestrians will either ignore him or just exert civil inattention on their part.

### **3.5. Not institutional fact**

John Searle's theory, in short, is that joint actions involve we-intentions. Searle uses the example of two people playing violin in an orchestra to illustrate what collective intentionality is (Searle, 1995, p. 24). The example contrasts two violinists intentionally playing together (i.e. the orchestra) and two violinists who unintentionally find themselves playing in such a way that the final result is similar to the orchestra. Searle is contrasting collective intentionality with "mere aggregation". This is similar to the case of a crowded street used by Velleman. If we use Searle's theory, we will have to say each one's individual intention is not derived from a collective intention to walk together (i.e. no joint action), but there is the "background" to respect each other (i.e. "doing nothing to each other").

This "background" is the context upon which the intention takes place. Searle uses the

example of a café to explain his point. I ask for a cup of coffee, and the waiter brings it (Searle, 1995, p. 3). The café involves a series of collective intentions, named we-intentions in his account. Searle uses the term social facts “to refer to any fact involving collective intentionality” (Searle, 1995, p. 27). An orchestra playing a song is a social fact. Some social facts are *institutions*.<sup>33</sup> An institution is composed of rules of the form “X counts as Y in C” (Searle, 1995, p. 43).

These institutional facts compose the background of most social activities. It provides a set of expectations and readiness for certain behaviour, e.g. people do not normally approach others in a café. To this extent, the notion of institutional facts can explain some difference between drinking coffee alone at home and going to a café. However, this background of institutional facts is, essentially, a set of norms and guides for behaviour. Moreover, it requires reciprocal attitudes (as it requires we-intentions), and it does not require proximity, whereas gregariousness admits asymmetrical attitudes and it requires proximity.

When Saul Bellow says that he misses being in a crowd, he misses the “warmth” of the crowd. The violinist case used by Searle is a good example here. What Searle calls a “mere aggregation” might, in effect, be gregarious. A person can desire to practice the violin near others because she wants to feel the warmth of the *grex*. She wants to play the violin, but she does not want to be alone. If it so happens that there are other violinists nearby her, it could be even better for her, in case she has a very open, affable attitude.

The concepts of shared planning agency, joint commitment and institutional facts are hugely famous in the literature in social ontology. Yet, none of them gives the proper importance to the basic human desire not to be alone, the desire to feel somehow connected or near others. This is because these concepts were created to explain coordination in joint action. There is, however, one potentially interesting aspect to the concept of we-intention. Institutional facts rely on we-intentions. We-intentions are intentions of individuals, but they require a non-reductive notion of “us”. Having a we-intention might involve a *sense of us*, a concept that might be able to explain

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<sup>33</sup> There can be collective intentions without institutions (i.e., they do not need an “institutional” background nor do they give rise to institutions). For example, a pack of hyenas hunting a lion (Searle, 1995, p. 38). It is a social fact, since it is collective intention, but it is not an institutional fact.

gregariousness.

### 3.6. Not sense of us, but similar

The sociologist Lyn Lofland (2017) is, perhaps, the author that got closest to identifying gregariousness. Inspired by the works of Goffman (1980) and Jacobs (2016), Lofland provides an account of the *public realm*. Public realm is what she calls urban areas where strangers co-exist, such as a street downtown. Her notion of public realm overlaps with what I call a gregarious state of affairs, but, ultimately, they are different. For example, public realm is strictly about the co-presence of strangers (Lofland, 2017, p.14), whereas gregariousness can happen between the co-presence of friends (e.g. friends studying in a library but each at a different table). Public realm refers to all sorts of social activities that happen between strangers in a city, so she does talk about classic forms of joint action (although without engaging with the philosophical literature on the topic). Gregariousness, on the other hand, is precisely about the sociality that exists even when there are no joint actions. Nevertheless, her work can certainly inspire accounts of gregariousness.

What is interesting about Lofland's account is that she puts emphasis not only on the normativity required to preserve peace and privacy in public, but also on the pleasures of the public realm (Lofland, 2017, p. 77–78). Of the pleasures she identifies, two are most relevant: people-watching and public solitude. People-watching is about the pleasure of seeing others living their lives (Lofland, 2017, pp. 90–92). This can mean not only watching people walking, but also eavesdropping on a couple having an argument, for example. She also talks about the pleasure of public solitude, which is the pleasure of being alone but “surrounded by the hum of conversation” (Lofland, 2017, p. 89). In my account presented here, that kind of pleasure is related to privacy and openness, as I presented in Sections 2.1 and 2.2. When Lofland talks about that kind of pleasure, she mentions the term “sense of oneness”. It is the joy of being part of a crowd. She mentions an example of people who go to a specific café in Israel on the Memorial Day, when they ring the sirens to remember past tragedies (Lofland, 2017, p. 89–90). Being in that café when this happens brings a “sense of oneness with the other inhabitants” (Lofland, 2017, p. 89). Lofland's mistake was not perceiving that she quickly shifted from analyzing a gregarious state of affairs (e.g. being alone in a crowded restaurant) to analyzing a case of interaction (e.g. rising for a minute of silence in a specific place and time when everyone is supposed to do the same). In addition, Lofland also did not explore in more detail what this sense of oneness means. It is odd that she

puts the sense of oneness as part of the pleasure she classified as public solitude.

I believe this “sense of oneness” can be understood as the “sense of us”, as analyzed by Dan Zahavi (2015). Watching a movie in a cinema is, arguably, a shared experience. We are all watching the same screen. So, when someone says that they miss going to the cinema, they might mean that they miss having a we-experience of watching a movie. This is how Zahavi explains what a we-experience is:

“Emotional sharing requires a preservation of plurality and a certain self–other differentiation but if the difference between self and other is too salient, it will prevent any experience of togetherness. (...) You need to experience the others’ perspectives on you, you need to be aware of them as being aware of you and to see yourself through their eyes, so that you can come to experience yourself in the same manner as you experience them. When that happens, you can become aware of yourself as one of them or, rather and more accurately, you can become aware of yourself as one of us”. (Zahavi, 2015, pp. 94–95)

Maybe the definition above is too strong to explain the sociality in the cinema or the café (not the Israeli café that Lofland talks about, but the café example I presented at the beginning of the paper). It would require everyone to actively engage in being aware of one another, whereas, in a cinema, you do not know very well how many other people there are, who they are, or even if they are aware of you. If I am alone in the cinema, I normally eavesdrop on other people’s conversations about the movie. I do not want to talk to them, I do not want to take part in the conversation, so I try to be discrete. It is not that I am hiding my eavesdropping action. It is just that I do not want to cross the line of privacy. Returning to the café example, we might ask ourselves what experience is being shared. I am drinking my coffee. You are using the wi-fi. We are not sharing the experience of drinking coffee, and we are not sharing the experience of using your computer. What is shared is the space. We experience the presence of one another.

The “sense of us” involves empathy, and emotional sharing, which is not present (or at least not strong enough) in the café example, or in the library. I do not need to see myself through the eyes of the other person in the café. It might even be a stretch to say that “I can become aware of myself as one of us”. Imagine a group of friends who are meeting in the café. They are a group. I am also in the café, sharing the space, but I came alone and I am not part of that group. They are

aware of my presence. Still, maybe they would rather reserve the term “one of us” only for the group of friends.

If we focus on the normative relation between the people, there is a risk of understanding the sense of us as a second-person standpoint, as mutual recognition of co-presence. However, we can focus on the non-forensic aspect of sharing presence. Maybe it is possible to have a lighter definition of “sense of us” (of we-experience), one that could accommodate the cinema example. This weakened sense of us cannot be understood in terms of I-Thou, i.e. as a web of one-to-one relations, as I have argued before (see Section 3.4). Instead of using a metaphor of eyes (as in the passage above: “to see yourself through *their eyes*” – my emphasis), the metaphor could be about ears and hearing. Eyes encounter each other, as in face-to-face interactions of civil inattention, whereas hearing is something more diffuse. So, it is not so much about being aware of each other individual in the crowd (the *grex*, the flock), but just being aware that you are in a crowd. So, instead of a “sense of us”, we can talk about a “sense of gregariousness”. To experience a sense of gregariousness would involve a stronger sense of self-other differentiation, but not strong enough to “prevent any experience of togetherness”. In short, my argument here is that as long as we do not focus on the forensic aspect of the “sense of us”, nor constrain it as an I-Thou relation, it is possible to deflate that concept to provide a phenomenological account of gregariousness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, I provided a prospective positive thesis of gregariousness, identifying four aspects: (a) It is the desire not to be alone – this means proximity. (b) It is open – it does not have to be “doing nothing together”; it can be a willingness to engage in further joint activities or just the pleasure of being in a crowd. (c) It is asymmetrical – gregariousness requires affable attitudes, in that it is incompatible with a purely aggressive attitude. However, it does not require the same attitude, e.g. some might be willing to engage in joint actions whilst others just want to be near, and others might just tolerate the situation. (d) It maintains privacy. Proximity and asymmetry are the main reasons why the concept of collective intention cannot explain gregariousness. I also briefly explored the possibility of virtual gregariousness, and my argument was that it is only possible if there is a shared virtual environment. In the negative part of the paper, I have explained

how the concepts of strategic equilibrium, shared planning agency, joint commitment, second-person standpoint and we-intention fail to explain gregariousness. I explored how Zahavi's notion of "sense of us" could be weakened to accommodate gregariousness.

I have not explored the negative aspects of gregariousness. Gregariousness requires proximity, and this can be bad in case there is a risk (such as a deadly virus that spreads through the air). Also, gregarious state of affairs involve privacy. I argued that gregariousness does not preclude the emergence of stronger forms of sociality. However, there are some gregarious places that involve too much privacy, which makes it difficult for people to approach one another (e.g. a library). The sociality present in gregariousness might not be sufficient for a person not to feel lonely. It is all too common to hear people complaining that, in big cities, there are no meaningful interactions. Mark Twain, way back in 1867, said that New York "is a splendid desert—a domed and steepled solitude, where the stranger is lonely in the midst of a million of his race" (Twain and Meltzer, 2002, p. 82). Humans need more than just not being alone. We need to make meaningful connections, form intimacy and be part of well-established groups. However, the negative experience of the lockdowns supports the idea that the so-called "meaningless sociality" so common in big cities is actually quite important. Humans are complex and delicate creatures. We need a whole array of different forms of socialities, as well as being alone sometimes.

Before the pandemics, I do not remember looking forward to taking a bus. It was something I had to do, and I would always avoid sitting nearby other people. Even though I do not miss getting a bus every day, there is something I miss. The almost complete absence of sharing space with others reveals that sharing space is more than normative relations. There is a quality to it. It is this quality that makes me choose to drink coffee in a café and not at home.

Most theories in social ontology, especially on joint action, have focused on the rationality of coordinating or on normativity. They approach sociality in a rather cold way. They overlook the warmth of the social world. We share our presence with others not only because we have to. We also desire to. These theories focus on how humans have the cognitive tools to engage in social interactions, but they seem to forget the most basic: we do not want to be alone. This is true for many animals, not just humans. Like penguins and elephants, humans are gregarious creatures. It is at the foundational level of the social world. It is the ground upon which the social norms and conventions can build their castles.



## **Chapter 3 – Loose Collaboration and Strict Cooperation: Many forms and layers of joint agency**

**Abstract:** I will present two different kinds of joint agency, namely, loose collaboration and strict cooperation. To illustrate loose collaboration, I will present the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. It involves unreliable communication, high fluidity in membership, and no norms regarding the joint activity. To illustrate strict cooperation, I will present a football match. It involves collective reasoning, rigid stability in membership, and norms regarding following the rules of the game and cooperating as a team member. I will apply different theories in the field to both cases. Collectivist and normative theories provide good explanations for strict cooperation but struggle to explain loose collaboration. Non-normative and individualist theories perform the opposite way. The overall goal of this chapter is to defend a pluralistic view of joint agency. We should use different theories to explain the different kinds of joint agency. Moreover, some joint activities involve many layers. The Animal Liberation Front and the Underground Railroad are cases where there is one level that is constituted by strict cooperation and another wider level constituted by loose collaboration.

### **1. Introduction**

In chapter 1, I presented my own take on the concept of team reasoning. As such, my concept of joint ownership of agency refers to strong forms of cooperation. The very idea of agency transformation (from “I” to “we”) indicates at least two different forms of agency in shared environments. In chapter 2, I presented the idea of gregariousness, which refers to very light forms of sociality, without involving joint agency, and which current theories in our field have overlooked. Thus, what I have presented so far are two very distinct forms of sociality: one very strong and the other fairly light. But there is a multitude of different forms of sociality in between. In this current chapter, I will present two cases of joint agency, one which does not involve norms to cooperate or collective reasoning, and the other which does involve normativity and collective

reasoning. I name them, respectively, as *loose collaboration* and *strict cooperation*.<sup>34</sup> The main goal of this chapter is to defend a pluralist view of joint agency. Thus, some theories will be better suited to explain loose collaboration, while others will be better to explain strict cooperation. The underlying idea is that agency is plural, and so is sociality. This underlying idea will be explored in the final chapter of the thesis. This current chapter has a more modest aim, namely, to affirm that any single theory of joint agency will struggle to explain all cases of joint agency.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 2 is about loose collaboration. To illustrate what loose collaboration is, I will present the case of the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. In short, thousands of people, for many days, played a game through a streaming platform, Twitch. Using the chat box, people could write commands which would be inputs in the game. The game, Pokémon, is an old single-player game from the 1990s, where the character has to collect monsters, and defeat others, and there is an end, i.e. a finish line. The reader can imagine how chaotic that experiment was. Surprisingly, that collective mess managed to finish the game. The image that comes to mind is of the frontispiece of the first edition of Thomas Hobbes' book *Leviathan* (1651/2017), by Abraham Bosse, of many bodies composing one giant body. I consider it as a case of joint agency, but one where there was barely any communication, and, most importantly, no norms regarding the activity. Also, it does not seem to involve collective reasoning, at least not in the sense of team reasoning. After presenting the *Twitch* experiment, I will try to apply different theories to explain it. I will start with Margaret Gilbert's (2014) theory of joint commitment, and explain why it would fail to explain it. Then I move on to apply the concept of team reasoning and my concept of feeling joint ownership of agency, but both fail as well. Next, I consider theories of we-mode intentions, namely, John Searle's (1990, 1995) and Raimo Tuomela's (2007) theories. Both fare better in explaining the experiment, but Tuomela's concept of progroup I-mode fares even better. After that, I consider individualistic theories of joint agency. I briefly comment on Seumas Miller's (2001, 2007) theory of common end, but mostly I discuss Michael Bratman's (2014) theory of shared planning. Scott Shapiro's (2014) version of Bratman's theory, which he

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<sup>34</sup> In chapter 1, I had already signed posted that team reasoning and my notion of joint ownership of agency apply only to strict cooperation. The concepts of *loose collaboration* and *strict cooperation* will be fundamental when I discuss sociality in digital environments in chapter 4.

named massively shared plans, provides perhaps the best explanation of the *Twitch* experiment. That is not very much a surprise, given that Bratman developed his theory having in mind non-normative cases. However, that is precisely the limitation of his theory.

In Section 3, I will present the football match as an example of strict cooperation. I will apply the same theories once again, and in the same order. As the reader might expect, the theories that struggle to explain loose collaboration will provide a much better explanation of strict cooperation. The overall goal, as I have said, is to argue that the social world is very rich and messy. It is much easier to develop theories by thinking of very simple cases. All theories will be made having certain cases in mind. Bratman developed his theory, for example, by having modest sociality in mind (i.e. cases of small group interaction). The problem is when we take that narrow scope as representing the entirety of the social world. One could think, therefore, that an account such as Tuomela's account of modes of intention might be better suited to deal with the richness of the social world. My argument is that, of all theories, Tuomela's theory might be the most pluralistic one, but it still fails to provide a proper explanation of strict cooperation because it is attitude-based. Instead of having one theory to explain all sorts of joint agency, this chapter defends the idea that we can use different theories for different kinds of joint agency.

Besides the existence of different kinds of joint agency, many joint activities have different layers, and these layers can be of different kinds. I will explore this matter in Section 4. I believe that it is important to be aware that many joint activities involve different layers, which means that for one same joint activity, we might need to recur to more than one theory currently available in the field. For example, a football match has two layers. One is the level of the team, where teammates need to cooperate to win, and the other level is of the field, where everyone in both teams needs to follow the rules in order to play the game. I will also present decentralized cases of joint agency. To illustrate this, I will present the Animal Liberation Front, where each cell is constituted by strict cooperation, but the relation between the cells is of the loose form. In addition, I will present the Underground Railroad as another case where one level is of strict form, and the other is of the loose form. The Underground Railroad was a decentralized movement to help people escape from slavery in the United States. Since the overall connection in these movements is of the loose mode, I develop an extension of Bratman's theory to explain it. This is interesting for two reasons. First, it requires modifications that are different from Shapiro's modifications of

Bratman's theory since there is not a massively shared plan. Bratman (2022) has recently expanded on Shapiro's modification. The modifications I will present suggest a different path for expanding Bratman's theory of shared planning, expanding on his notion of social networks, which Bratman himself never explored further. Second, in the same way that I presented my own take on the theory of team reasoning in chapter 1, I will present my own take on a non-normative and individualistic theory in this chapter. This reinforces my overall pluralistic take on sociality.

One could question the choice of the labels, "loose collaboration" and "strict cooperation". I chose "loose" because the connection between the members is not strong. It lacks norms to cooperate and an irreducible notion of "we", i.e. of a collective agency in the strong sense of the term. I chose "strict" because of the normative aspect. The word "strict" refers to both rigid and tight relations. Strict cooperations involve a tightness in the sense of the irreducible collectiveness of the agency, and a rigidity in the sense of the norms to cooperate. "Collaboration" and "cooperation" are synonymous, so I could have used "loose joint agency" and "strict joint agency". I prefer "collaboration" and "cooperation" for stylistic reasons and to demarcate a bit more the distinction between these two different forms of joint agency.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. Loose Collaboration

I will start by analyzing a case of loose collaboration, that is, a joint action that does not involve a feeling of being entitled to demand and rebuke others, nor does it involve a strong form of collective reasoning, such as team reasoning. I will first present the case of *Twitch Plays Pokémon*, and then compare it with some theories in the field. The main argument in this section is that *Twitch Plays Pokémon* is a joint action because there is a shared goal and, after finishing the game, there is a feeling of "we did it".

Loose collaborations are joint actions that do not involve collective reasoning (as in team reasoning) or strong normativity (as in joint commitment or feeling joint ownership of the agency).

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<sup>35</sup> There is no unanimous definition of cooperation, but for me, it seems to refer to stronger forms of joint agency. Bratman, for example, reserves the term "cooperation" for shared agency that does not involve deception or coercion (Bratman, 2014, p. 38). Since there is no unanimity, the choice of these terms is mainly stylistic.

In order to better show this, I will start by contrasting the theories of joint commitment and team reasoning to the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. Then, I will gradually move on to less rigid accounts. I say that they are less rigid because they do not require stronger forms of collective reasoning or normativity.

### **2.1. Describing the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment**

An unknown person set up a social experiment on Twitch, called *Twitch Plays Pokémon* (see Mallory, 2018). It was done in 2014. Twitch is an online video streaming platform, focused on live-streaming, usually people playing games. Next to the video, there is a chat box, where viewers can interact between themselves and the streamer. In the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment, there was no streamer. The Pokémon game would be played by the viewers. Let me briefly explain what the Pokémon game is.

The Pokémon franchise of games is highly successful. The first game of the franchise dates back to 1996. There was also an animation, which made the game even more famous. In the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment, the game was the classic old one. The platform Twitch was already heavily focused on games, so it was safe to expect most people who used that platform to be familiar with that classic Pokémon game. On top of the familiarity, the game is somewhat simple. It was designed to be played on handheld consoles (Nintendo's Gameboys), so there were only very few buttons for input. Basically, there were four buttons for movement (i.e. up, down, left and right), a pause button, and two other buttons, A and B. Besides movement, any action in the game had to be done by pressing either A or B, and the game consisted of turns. This meant that at any given specific moment, the interaction between the player and the game was rather simple. For instance, the player could choose between attacking or not attacking. If he chose to attack, he could choose which attack to perform. As you can see, each step in the game was broken down into very simple actions. Moreover, the game was 2D, i.e. two dimensional, and had a top-down perspective, i.e. a bird's eye perspective. This meant that moving the character in the game was also simple. The last important aspect to take notice of is that the progression in the game was linear. This means that the game was, in its essence, like a corridor. If the Twitch experiment had used a more modern game, with three dimensions, a variety of buttons and not turn-based, coordination in the experiment would most likely be much more complicated.

The *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment consisted in letting the viewers play the game. There were two versions to “govern” the viewer’s inputs: anarchy and democracy. In the anarchy mode, every single command written in the chat box would be performed. Since at certain points there were hundreds, or even thousands, of viewers, the commands would form a long queue. So, the time lag between you writing the command in the chat box and the character actually performing the action could be quite large, sometimes several minutes. Because of this time lag, it was hard to predict what your command would do in the game. The resulting gameplay was a chaotic mess. Most of the time the character would get stuck for several minutes on a corner. Fairly simple tasks would take very long.

The time lag was not the only reason for the chaotic mess. There were many viewers who did not care about completing the game. Many would write commands with the intention of messing things up. For example, when the character should simply walk up through a hall, many viewers would write the command to move down. The command “press B” was usually for going back a step. For instance, if you pressed A during a combat, you would be given a list of possible attacks. Pressing B would return to the stage of deciding to attack or flee. Thus, many times during a combat, “press B” would make no sense, but some viewers would write that command. I will call this type of player a *chaotic player*, in opposition to the players committed to doing what is rational in order to progress in the game, which I will call *true players*. There were also many people who mainly just watched the streaming, rarely writing a command in the chat box. For many, they would give up trying to provide a rational input, since the queue of inputs was just too long already. They would write commands in order to take part in the activity. These are players that are neither committed to chaos, nor are they committed to providing the best inputs in order to progress in the game. They are neither chaotic players nor are they true players. I will call them *neutral players*.

There was another mode of “governance” called democracy. In this one, the command that was most written during a span of thirty seconds would be performed in the game. This would transform the long queue of inputs into a system of votes for what the character would do in the game. In this system, it was easier to progress, but not completely smooth though. Players could invoke an “election” to decide whether to change the “governance” mode, which could only happen once every several hours. The democratic mode was not necessarily better. Not only would the character move only twice per minute, which was boring, but it would also take away some

element of fun provided by the madness. It was more beautiful, and impressive, when progress was made in the midst of all the anarchic mess. Regardless of the "governance" mode, most progress was made when there were few people taking part in the streaming. There would be fewer chaotic players, it would be easier to neutralize the chaos provided by such players, and the input provided by neutral players would not be so random. A handful of people being able to coordinate is ordinary. *Twitch Plays Pokémon* was an impressive social experiment precisely when there was some progression even when there were hundreds of players and the fun anarchic mess. Somehow, the players managed to finish the game.<sup>36</sup>

This was a very odd kind of joint action. All the inputs would be performed in the game, and that meant controlling the character in the game. The character was a puppet controlled by thousands of hands. Most people who took part in the experiment did so for only a couple of hours. Some would be chaotic at some times, but true players at another. People could communicate between themselves through the chat box. But the chat box was already flooded with commands. There was barely any possible communication, though it would not be true that there was no communication at all. It was an unstable form of communication. Another important point is that even if at certain times there was not a single person playing the experiment, the streaming would still be there, available to anyone. Anyone with a Twitch account could take part in the experiment. There was no other filter.<sup>37</sup>

## **2.2. Why I consider *Twitch Plays Pokémon* as a case of joint agency**

The character in the game forcefully unifies the sum of the inputs. This means that whatever happened in the game was due to the inputs of all kinds of players. The character progressed in the

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<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, I am focusing on the experiment done in 2014. Since the experiment attracted so much attention, there are still similar experiments being performed. As a matter of fact, the reader can access and try at: <https://www.twitch.tv/twitchplayspokemon> (Accessed on 10 December 2022). The current version is a bit different, and it attracts a small number of viewers and players, so that is why I focused on the experiment done in 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Other examples of loose collaboration can be found in virtual forums, such as Reddit and 4Chan. In chapter 4, I will develop further loose collaboration through the Internet. Regarding non-virtual forms of loose collaboration, later in this chapter, in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, when I talk about layers of joint agency, I use the Animal Liberation Front and the Underground Railroad as having one layer that is loose collaboration.

game, so maybe we could talk about the narrative of the character in the game. For instance, we would say that “the character got stuck walking in a loop in a corner”. The experiment was fun because the character would do nonsensical things. I am not saying that the character was an agent, but that it emulated an agent. It gave a body to social activity. Whatever happened to the character is because of what the viewers decided to write in the chat box. And even though it was an anarchic mess, they managed to finish the game. Who finished the game? That crowd, with fluid membership, unstable communication, and different player kinds. The different player kinds (i.e. chaotic, neutral and true player) refer to different attitudes. All of the players enjoyed the social interaction, but for different reasons and with different emphases. The chaotic players focused not on finishing the game, but on the mess. The true players focused on finishing the game, but that does not mean they did not enjoy the mess. The mess was the obstacle to overcome. The chaotic and the true players are shadows of each other. There is no chaos if no one else is trying to progress in the game. And it is fun to progress in the game with all the chaos. The neutral players simply enjoyed the progress through the mess, or simply being part of that event.

As many philosophers have already pointed out (such as Nguyen, 2019; and Suits 2005), games require the player to pursue the goal stipulated by the game, but the reason why someone plays the game can be something else. For instance, in order to play football, you have to try to score goals, but you might play because you enjoy dribbling more than you enjoy winning or actually scoring a goal. The same would apply to the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. People played not in order to finish the game. They played to have a certain experience, to take part in this event, to promote chaos, or to try to coordinate in that mess. But no matter what the players were looking for, trying to progress in the game was necessary in order to have such experiences. One could argue that chaotic players did not try to progress at all; much the opposite. This is correct, but the action of chaotic players should be understood as part of a joint activity. The action of the chaotic players only makes sense (i.e. it is only *chaos*) if there are others trying to progress.

I am considering the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment as a case of joint activity. I admit that this is largely based on intuition. It *seems* that the experiment is a case of joint activity. My position is that, in order for someone not to consider that experiment as a case of joint activity, that person would have to show how it is inconsistent with their theory of joint agency and show why that experiment seems like a case of joint agency. In chapter 2, I presented the notion of gregariousness,

which refers to simply being in a shared environment without engaging in further interactions with others. An example would be exercising by yourself in a gym. When we think solely about the activity of exercising in the gym, that activity is not a joint activity. My claim, in that chapter, is that there is something social about it that goes beyond normativity, it cannot be captured by the concept of collective intention, and it is not a joint agency. The *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment involves an interaction. Imagine a LAN house, with many computers. Each person is playing Pokémon alone, in single-player mode. That is a gregarious state of affairs, like the gym. Now imagine that everyone at the LAN house is taking part in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. Their actions are now interacting. If at the gym there are many machines and each is used by one person at a time, in *Twitch Plays Pokémon* there is only one machine and it is shared by many people at the same time.

The actions of each person in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment are connected to each other through the mechanisms of the game. However we define “sharedness”, there is more sharedness in that experiment than in a person by herself exercising in a gym that is also used by others. In chapter 2, I discussed mostly gregariousness in physical environments. Physical proximity forces people to be in a state where they share the environment. The proximity forces a connection, but it is a connection between their presence. In *Twitch Plays Pokémon*, the mechanisms of the game force a connection between the actions of people. It is not that the actions of each interfere with the other. The game provides a goal. It provides a sense of progression. Like mountains and hills concentrate water on the valleys, forming a river and shaping it, so does the game concentrate the actions of each on one character, aggregating their actions and providing a joint shape to it.

As contrasted with gregariousness, in *Twitch Plays Pokémon* the actions of people are connected and they form a rather odd type of joint agency. As I will argue, this case can be explained by some theories in the field, but not by others. Later I will provide a much stronger case of cooperation, a football match. The theories that can explain the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* struggle to explain the football match. And the theories that explain the football match struggle to explain the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. My goal is to argue that, in between the light form

of sociality present in gregariousness and the strong form of cooperation present in team reasoning, there is a whole ocean of different types of sociality.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.3. Joint commitment and loose collaboration

For Gilbert (2014), all actions involve a commitment. Before coming up with the term "joint commitment", Gilbert used to use the term "pool of wills" (see Gilbert 1989, pp. 197–198 and 200). I think the term "pool of wills" describes very well what Gilbert means by joint commitment, which is basically a commitment of the will formed by many people. Individual actions involve personal commitments, while collective actions involve joint commitments. When a person decides to do something, she forms a commitment of the will (Gilbert 2014, p. 420). That explains why intentions are stable, i.e. why they tend to last through time, as opposed to desires, which can be fleeting. We can force a person to change her mind about what she decided, but we cannot do it for her. We can only threaten or attract her to alter her decision. Gilbert's idea is that the same goes for joint agency. Only the people who formed the joint commitment can alter it. This means every single member of the joint commitment has to agree to change it. It is possible for a person to cease following what they jointly decided. In this case, she will have a divergent intention. However, others will be entitled to rebuke her. Notice that only those who are part of the joint

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<sup>38</sup> Olivier Roy and Anne Schwenkenbecher (2021) have also used the term "loose" referring to "loose groups". In their account, loose groups are groups where there is no strong communication channel and no "codified organizational structure" (Roy and Schwenkenbecher, 2021, p. 4524). The *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment seems to be such a case. Their account, however, goes in a different direction than mine. They argue that the common knowledge condition is too strong and can be substituted by what they call "pooled knowledge". Common knowledge would require all members to know everything relevant to the joint action. In pooled knowledge, no member knows everything, but each member knows something relevant and there is some other member, or way, that links all these separate pieces of information and provides guidance in the joint activity. In contrast, I use the term "loose" referring to loose collaboration, which is not defined as lacking a codified organizational structure nor as a lack of communication. I use the category of loose collaboration to refer to all sorts of collective action that lack the aspects of strict cooperation, which I consider to be: collective reasoning and a normative relation between the members and their agency. In chapter 1, I already provided a case where there is such normativity even in the absence of a "codified organizational structure" (i.e. the rowing boat case).

commitment are entitled to rebuke her. Gilbert's point is that, as long as joint commitment exists, it will exert normative pressure on the agent (Gilbert 2014, pp. 102–103).

The *Twitch* experiment does not seem to involve any kind of joint commitment. Anyone could join the experiment. And there was no tacit agreement about how to behave. The chaotic players are not under normative pressure not to be chaotic. True players could complain that chaotic players are making it harder to progress. But are they entitled to make such a complaint? The chaotic player could easily dismiss such a complaint. The chaotic player could say he is playing the game his own way. He might even perceive it as spicing things up. In this case, he would perceive his agency as part of what makes the event fun. However, that player does not always have to be chaotic. He can, at any time, become a true player. In addition, anyone can join and leave at any time, and this is not because they jointly agreed on that. It is because of the mechanics of the experiment. There does not seem to be any ground to expect others to cooperate in progressing in the game or to feel entitled to demand others to do it.

One could argue that the *Twitch* experiment is a joint commitment, not to progress in the game, but to play the game. One could argue that, within the scope of the game, there is room for people to behave chaotically, neutrally or as true players. Moreover, one could argue that it is common knowledge that anyone can join or leave the experiment, and thus the joint commitment. The idea is that the game being played is the experiment itself, and not the Pokémon game. Taking part in the experiment would mean tacitly agreeing to take part in that joint commitment. If that was the case, then the content of the joint commitment would be to jointly perform the experiment, tolerating fluidity in the membership. The problem, in this case, would be in identifying what would be not to perform the experiment. If chaotic players are not performing in a divergent way, then who would be? It could not be someone who is not performing the experiment, because, in that case, she would not be part of the joint commitment. Maybe it could be someone who takes down the streaming. In that case, it is clear that this person would be harming the ones participating in the experiment. It is not clear, however, how that person was part of that joint commitment. This means that the only way to have a divergent behavior would be to perform something in the experiment that blocks the experiment. This was not possible, given the mechanics of the experiment. Players could only use the chat box, and it was not possible to take down the streaming

by using the chat box. Therefore, a joint commitment to be part of the experiment, which tolerates fluidity in membership, would be meaningless.

#### **2.4. Team reasoning and loose collaboration**

Team reasoning is the idea that people can think as a team and derive their own agency from that (Bacharach, 2006). In order to progress and finish the Pokémon game, people would have to coordinate. However, they can barely communicate with each other. This seems similar to the conditions I have presented in chapter 1. In that chapter, I presented the example of people in a rowing boat who cannot talk to each other. My argument was that certain features of the environment could make them perceive as a group, which could trigger a feeling of joint ownership of the agency. It is the feeling that it is up to us to row the boat.

There are some strong differences between the *Twitch* experiment and the rowing boat. The most noticeable one is that the rowing boat does not have fluidity in membership. People in the *Twitch* experiment could leave at any time. That is a strong diminisher to triggering agency transformation (agency transformation is when a person shifts from perceiving as an individual to perceiving as a group).

Another important difference is that the rowing boat does not admit nonsense as the *Twitch* experiment does. The mess in the experiment was fun. Progression through that mess was impressive. This means that having chaotic players was part of the constitution of the experiment, and, so, that it was expected to have chaotic players. In the rowing boat, a chaotic member would be just frustrating. The chaotic player in the *Twitch* experiment did not risk destroying the experiment. A chaotic rower risks ruining not only the capacity to direct the movement of the boat, but also a perception of group agency. What is important to notice is that the *Twitch* experiment, in its constitution, did not require normative pressure to act in this or that way.

One could argue that only the true players in the *Twitch* experiment would perform team reasoning, but this would also run into problems. Team reasoning involves, basically, four steps. First, it requires identifying as a team member. Then, it involves identifying what is best for the team. Given that, the person can identify what she should do. The final step is to actually perform what she should do. In the *Twitch* experiment, people know what the “team” should do. They should progress in the game. Since everyone was familiar with the game, it was clear to everyone

what the “team” should do, i.e. what the character should do in the game. What was not clear was how to identify what one should do given the anarchic mess. For chaotic and neutral players, any input would promote what they wanted, namely, to create more mess or to just take part in the game. The problem was for the true players. My argument is that the true players would derive their personal agency from knowing what one would do if it was a single-player game. Not only true players, but chaotic players could also derive a notion of what would be the most chaotic input precisely because they also know what one would do if it was a single-player game. In other words, what seems to be happening here is not a case of team reasoning, but a case of a shared goal or of a shared plan.

I have said before that completing the game involved a feeling of “we did it”. One should not confuse a sense of us with team reasoning. Team reasoning involves a sense of us, but not all cases of sense of us will involve team reasoning. If team reasoning applies to the *Twitch* experiment, it would only apply to the true players. But in the experiment, there was a high fluidity in membership, which strongly diminished agency transformation. In the experiment, people could transition from a chaotic style of playing the game to a true style of playing. None of these things was against the experiment. When the game finally finishes, the feeling that “I was part of it” involves all kinds of players.

## **2.5. We-mode intentions and loose collaboration**

According to Searle (1995, 1990), joint actions are constituted by intentions in the we-mode. Searle uses the concept of we-intention to distinguish joint agency from mere aggregation (Searle, 1990, p. 402). Two friends walking together as they walk from their workplace to a restaurant is a joint agency. Two strangers who just happened to walk nearby each other is not a joint agency. The main difference is that, in the former, there is a collective intention to walk in close proximity from point A to point B, whereas, in the latter, each stranger has their own individual private intention to walk from point A to point B. The stress test would be to ask them why they are walking. One of the friends would answer, "because I am walking with my friend". One of the strangers would answer "I just want to get to point B". The main difference between Searle's we-intention and Gilbert's (2014) joint commitment is that Searle does not require normativity. For him, intentions are always the intentions of individuals (Searle, 1995, pp. 25–26). This would mean that, if there is such a thing as a commitment of will, it would always only apply individually.

Searle's notion of we-intention is irreducible because it is not an I-intention with a reference to someone else, as the strangers walking alone in the street have I-intentions with reference to others in the street (e.g. so as not to bump into them), but they are not walking together.

Since Searle does not require normativity, it seems far easier to apply to the *Twitch* experiment. The idea here is that the *Twitch* experiment is a joint action because there is a collective intention. If the *Twitch* experiment is a joint action because there is a collective intention, then what would that intention be? It could be the intention of true players in progressing in the game. The true players might have a we-intention to progress in the game. We-mode intentions, unlike joint commitment, put no normative restrictions on divergent behavior. On top of that, we could say that there is an overarching we-intention to take part in the experiment. We (true players) intend to progress in the game. We (all participants) intend to have an interesting experience. This could explain the difference between the feeling of "I was part of it (the social experiment)" and "we did it (progress in the game)".

Besides Searle, Tuomela (2007) is another famous author who worked on the idea of we-mode intentions. For Tuomela, there are basically three types of intention: plain I-mode, progroup I-mode and we-mode intentions.<sup>39</sup> The plain I-mode would be an attitude that does not involve group identification, collective commitment or collective reasoning. A person with a plain I-mode intention would be somewhat similar to a classic game theoretical agent, i.e. she would be trying to get what is best for her (which could be altruism, but as I have explained in chapter 1, altruism is different from collective reasoning). In contrast, a person with a we-mode intention would be someone who identifies with the group, performs collective reasoning, and is collectively committed. Tuomela's we-mode attitude is very similar to the strong form of cooperation I discussed in chapter 1 (i.e. collective reasoning coupled with normativity). The progroup I-mode is in between the plain I-mode and the we-mode. In progroup I-mode, the person is motivated to perform her part in a group activity, or to collaborate for a collective goal, but there is no collective commitment. This means that, in the progroup I-mode, the person has private commitments.

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<sup>39</sup> There are some variations based on these three, such as pure private I-mode (see Tuomela, 2007, p. 53). But, for the purposes of this chapter, these variations are not important.

Progroup I-mode attitude might be one of the best ways to explain the attitude of true players in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. There is a collective activity to be performed, namely, progress in the game. It is common knowledge what progress is in the game. People need not be moved by solely a collective attitude. As I have said many times, people could and would change their attitudes throughout the experiment. A chaotic player at a certain point would be a true player at another.

Therefore, Searle's concept of we-intention could be applied to the *Twitch* experiment. Alternatively, Tuomela's account of progroup I-mode seems to be very applicable to the attitudes of the players during the game, especially the attitude of true players.

## **2.6. Shared plans and loose collaboration**

I have said before that the true players shared a common goal, namely, to progress in the game. This means that an account of joint agency based on shared goals could fit the *Twitch Plays Pokémon*. Miller (2007; 2001) defends the thesis that joint action is simply coordination by sharing an end. Thus, we would not need irreducible collective attitudes. Team reasoning, joint ownership of agency, joint commitment, and we-intentions are irreducible. For example, we-intentions are intentions of a different kind, and not a simple sum of individual intentions, even though, for Searle, we-intentions are held by individual minds. For Miller, we can explain joint agency without recurring to irreducible collective attitudes.

It is possible to conceive that true players had no regard for a collective end. Maybe they simply wanted the character in the game to progress. A "millerian" agent would be able to play the role of a true player in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. Miller could argue that the true players have the shared goal of progressing in the game, the chaotic players have the shared goal of hindering the progression, and everyone has an overarching shared goal to take part in the experiment and have fun.

Bratman (2014) also defends the thesis that joint agency can be explained without irreducible collective attitudes. While Miller explains joint agency based on the concept of common ends, Bratman explains it on the concept of shared planning. He builds his theory of shared agency based on his theory of intention as plans. For Bratman, intentions cannot be just desires, beliefs and goals. Desires are fleeting, whereas intentions are stable, that is, intentions have inertia and they tend to

persist through time and redeliberation (Bratman, 2014, pp. 18, 21–23). People can have contradicting goals, such as having the goal of being employed in two different jobs. It is impossible to have these jobs at the same time, but a person can have contradicting goals, in the sense that she is preparing herself for either of these goals. Intentions, on the other hand, cannot be contradicting. The intention, in that case, would be to get a job, or maybe to get a job in one of the two different companies. Intention organizes agency through time. It is through intentions that we are able to exercise complex forms of agency, such as activities that last for long periods of time. Since intentions organize a person’s action through time, it also organizes action socially – that is the essence of Bratman’s theory. If we are able to explain joint agency without recurring to a new element, and an irreducible collective attitude would be one, then, using Ockham’s Razor, it is better to do so (Bratman, 2014, pp. 36–37).

Bratman sets the scope of his theory. It only applies to modest sociality. Modest sociality refers to cases of joint action involving a small number of healthy adults, with an absence of asymmetric authority and stable membership (Bratman 2014, p. 7). In order for Bratman to argue that we do not need irreducible collective concepts to explain joint agency, all it would take him is to show at least one case where we can explain joint agency without such irreducible concepts. Thus, Bratman does not provide a list of necessary conditions for joint agency, but only of sufficient conditions. He provides the following list (Bratman 2014, p. 85–86):

- (i) intentions on the part of each in favor of the joint activity,
- (ii) intentions on the part of each in favor of the joint activity by way of the intentions of each in (i) and by way of relevant mutual responsiveness in sub-intention and action,
- (iii) intentions on the part of each in favor of the joint activity by way of meshing sub-plans of the intentions of each in (i),
- (iv) beliefs of each that, if the intentions of each in (i) persist, the participants will perform the joint activity by way of those intentions and relevant mutual responsiveness in sub-intention and action,
- (v) beliefs of each that the intentions of each in (i) are persistence interdependent,
- (vi) the intentions of each in (i) are persistence interdependent,
- (vii) common knowledge of (i)–(vii).

- (viii) the connection between the shared intention (as in (i)–(vii)) and the joint action involves public mutual responsiveness in sub-intention and action that tracks the end intended by each of the joint activity by way of the intentions of each (in (i)) in favor of that joint activity.

Bratman is happy with dropping some of these conditions. For instance, dropping the mutual responsiveness (condition viii) would not harm his main argument. Some think that Bratman's conditions are too demanding. Pacherie, for instance, argues that it might be too cognitively demanding (Pacherie, 2011, p. 185). In order to form a shared intention, each member would have to make sense of not only each other's intention, but also of the sub-plans. It would involve a large chain of inferences, and also probably communication between the participants. One could answer Pacherie's objection by simply affirming that in very small cases of joint agency (i.e. very modest sociality), people have such a cognitive capability. The problem, in this case, would be that there is some limitation to Bratman's theory. Bratman's own answer to Pacherie's objections is somewhat unsatisfactory. Bratman argues that the conditions are just ontological and not actual processes in people's reasoning (Bratman, 2014, p. 104).

The best answer to Pacherie's argumentation would be to follow Shapiro's take on Bratman's account. Shapiro (2014) uses Bratman's theory of shared planning to explain massively shared agency. Massively shared agency does not seem to be a situation where people know each other, so this could hinder the meshing of the sub-plans, and also hinder common knowledge. Shapiro relaxes Bratman's account. Instead of relying on a notion of common knowledge that involves each person referring to each other's mental attitudes, all we would need would be a shared plan. A shared plan can be common knowledge between a massive group of people. People can deposit their trust that the plan will organize their agency. This follows from Bratman's account because Bratman requires that intentions relevant to the joint agency should be "out in the open" (Bratman, 2015, pp. 57–58). This seems to be exactly what happens in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment.

In the *Twitch* experiment, everyone is familiar with the game. This means that everyone knows what the character should do in order to progress in the game. This is enough to provide the backbone of an overarching shared plan. Bratman argues that shared plans provide a background for bargaining about the shared activity (see Bratman, 2014, pp. 90–91). This fits very well the

description of the *Twitch* experiment. People could shift from being a true player to being a chaotic player precisely because of that background. As I have said before, a chaotic input is only chaotic given that there is a progression. It could be argued that there was an overarching shared plan, namely, a plan to progress but also to tweak progress in order for that progress to be fun. In addition, Bratman's theory does not require normativity, and this fits well with loose collaboration.<sup>40</sup>

Although Bratman does claim that he is only focused on modest sociality and that he only wants to provide *sufficient* conditions, between the lines we can see that Bratman is more ambitious than that. Bratman says at one point in his book in 2014 that he provides a theoretical toolbox to analyze agency and sociality (Bratman, 2014, p. 105). This would mean that his theory of shared planning might not be enough to explain all forms of sociality, but that it has the “tools” to provide theories on these other forms. Recently, Bratman (2022) expanded on the idea of overarching shared plans, basically expanding Shapiro's take on his theory. Little by little, Bratman does seem to want to explain the entirety of the social world. In this sense, what I am presenting in the next section would be a problem for the reach of his theory, because it establishes a limit for a theory

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<sup>40</sup> It would be worth pointing out a similar account, namely, Christopher Kutz's (2000) account of overlapping participatory intentions. Kutz is concerned with collective action happening in larger and diffuse contexts. These are contexts where it is hard to communicate or achieve common knowledge about each other's intentions. This happens both when there are too many people involved, but also when the members of a small group cannot communicate. One example would be two painters who agree to paint a house on alternate days. I believe the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment fits very well the kind of collective action Kutz has in mind. Kutz considers that we do not need to have common knowledge of our intentions and beliefs in order to act together (Kutz, 2000, p. 18). We do not even need to believe that everyone else is collaborating (Kutz, 2000, p. 19). All we need are participatory intentions, which he defines as “an intention to do my part of a collective act, where my part is defined as the task I ought to perform if we are to be successful in realizing a shared goal” (Kutz, 2000, p. 10). This seems to provide a good explanation of what is happening in the *Twitch Plays Pokémon*. There are divergences between Bratman and Kutz. For instance, Bratman argues that, as long as there is a prior moment of interaction that establishes the joint action, then there is shared intention (Bratman, 2014, pp. 81–82). Regarding the purposes of this chapter, what matters is that Kutz's account is somewhat similar to Shapiro's (2014) take on Bratman's account, and it will suffer from the very same limitations.

that dismisses collective reasoning and normativity as intrinsic to some forms of sociality. That is, certain forms of sociality require “tools” that Bratman’s theory might not be able to provide.

### **2.7. Loose collaboration: Taking stock**

I presented one case of loose collaboration, namely, the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment. I presented that experiment as a case of joint agency because there was coordination and it was an activity that people would say “we did it”. However, it does not involve normativity, at least not as joint commitment or joint ownership of the agency. Then, I contrasted the *Twitch* experiment with many theories in the field, so as to show which ones are compatible, and how they could be compatible. In the next part of the chapter, I will talk about strong forms of joint agency, which I call *strict cooperation*.

## **3. Strict Cooperation**

I will start by presenting one case of strict cooperation: a football match. As I will argue, a football match involves collective reasoning and normativity. Hence, theories of team reasoning or joint commitment can provide good explanations for that kind of sociality. My goal is to show that the social world is rich in diversity. There are many different forms of sociality. Towards the end, I will argue that we would do better to apply different theories to different kinds of sociality instead of applying the few ones that are somewhat able to encompass both loose collaboration and strict cooperation.

### **3.1. Playing football: Normativity and collective reasoning**

I believe everyone is familiar with football. Thus, I will not provide a description like I did of the *Twitch* experiment. I will start by already identifying characteristic elements of sociality in playing football. The first is that playing football involves a normative aspect.

In the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment, anyone could join at any time and leave at any time. There was no pressure to stay and no feeling that people were entitled to demand anything from anyone. In a football match, things are different. When you play a football match, your teammates will rebuke you for hogging the ball. There is normative pressure to behave properly. There is also a normative pressure to follow the rules of the game. As such, there are at least two layers of

normativity. One is at the level of the team. If you hog the ball, your teammates will rebuke you. If a person from the other team rebukes you for hogging the ball, this would be empty, or even nonsensical. Only your teammates can demand you to play well. The other layer is at the level of the match. The game of football is constituted by a conjunct of rules. Failure to follow these rules risks destroying the activity. Thus, if a player holds the ball with his hands, and he is not a goalkeeper, then anyone from either team can rebuke that player.

On top of the normativity, there is also a strong cohesion between the agency of each player in a team. Each player is accountable for the team's performance – this refers to the normativity at the level of the team. However, this also refers to the performance being collective in a strong sense of collective. The team wins, not the individual players. No matter how good was the performance of an individual player, the performance of the team matters more. Not only it matters more, but the performance of an individual is also judged as *part* of the team's performance. This means that when an individual player thinks about what to do, the “do” here refers to a part of what the team does. We can hardly dissociate a player's agency from the team's agency. Granted, this form of group identification and collective reasoning happens at the level of the team, not at the level of the football match, or at least not in the same strength.

The way I presented the football match above already reveals how I understand that phenomenon in the light of theories like the theory of team reasoning, joint commitment and, of course, joint ownership of the agency. I will first contrast the football match with those theories, and then move on to less strict theories, in the same order as I did in the previous part.

### **3.2. Joint commitment and strict cooperation**

Gilbert's theory of joint commitment (2014) can explain the normativity in the football case. A game of football involves communication. By accepting taking part in a football match, wearing the shirt of the team and getting on the field, the person is accepting a commitment to play football and to play for her team. It is possible to say that there are two joint commitments. One is to play football. The other is to play for one's team. The player will be playing as a team, i.e. “emulating a single body” (Gilbert, 2014, pp. 116–117).

I have said before that the football match involves not only normativity, but also a rather strong form of collective agency. This could be understood as team reasoning and a feeling of joint

ownership of the agency, as I will argue in the next sub-section. In this case of the football match, “emulating a single body” could be interpreted as performing collective reasoning and feeling joint ownership of the agency.

There is one important aspect of joint commitment that makes it especially interesting when analyzing the sociality of a football match. I have said that not following the rules of football would destroy the activity. The concept of joint commitment can explain the stability necessary to games. Divergent behavior risks destroying the game because the game’s existence depends on the players following the rules. If a player does not follow a rule, games usually have rules for punishment. This punishment is within the frame of the game. For example, in football, all players, save the goalkeeper, cannot use their hands to touch the ball. In order to enforce those rules, the penalty for touching the ball with the hands is a yellow or red card and a free kick for the other team. If the individual player does not care about the game at all, then this is not much of a punishment to him. However, given the collective nature of the activity, it is a punishment for the team. Other teammates will strongly rebuke that player, and they will keep rebuking him even after he gets expelled from the match. This makes sense in terms of joint commitment. There is a joint commitment to follow the rules of the game and to act as a team. Everyone in the match will be entitled to rebuke him for using his hands. Regarding the members of the opposing team, as soon as he is expelled, they can cease their rebuking. Regarding the members of the same team, he did not only diverge from the rules of the game, but he also badly affected the team.

In chapter 1, I have presented my own take on the theory of team reasoning. In that chapter, I argued that team reasoning and the feeling of normativity between the members do not require communication. In that sense, I diverged from Gilbert’s theory. The rowing boat case from chapter 1 could be considered a case of strict cooperation with no communication. Gilbert’s theory would struggle to explain that case. In chapter 2, I argued that Gilbert’s theory cannot explain gregariousness, and in this current chapter, I argued that her theory cannot explain loose collaboration. This means that Gilbert’s theory would only be able to explain a section of strict cooperation. While this might be perceived as a strong limitation to her theory, I would argue that many of the most important forms of sociality are of that kind.

### 3.3. Team reasoning and strict cooperation

Michael Bacharach himself referred to football when he explained his theory of team reasoning (Bacharach, 2006, p. 124). No wonder why the concept is named *team* reasoning. If there is any case of sociality that team reasoning can explain, a football match would be the one. Bacharach did not argue that normativity was essential to team reasoning, but my own take on his theory, as I argued in chapter 1, is that agency transformation involves a normative transformation. My argument was that when people perceive as a group, this triggers them to contrast their agency with the group's mosaic of affordances. This means, basically, that the person will perceive the situation as something "up to them" to deal with it. In the case of a football match, an individual player will perceive the match as a situation where it is "up to the team" to face the opposite team. This means that if one player acts inconsequentially, holds the ball with their hands, and gets expelled, this is a problem for the whole team. It is a problem for us, and I am part of us. So, I will feel entitled to rebuke the other player since I feel that we jointly own the agency.<sup>41</sup>

The fact that a football match has strong stability in membership helps with feeling joint ownership of the agency. The *Twitch* experiment did not have such stability. A high fluidity in membership is a big obstacle to feeling joint ownership of the agency. It does not necessarily block a sense of us. There can still be group identification. However, I would not say that a case where there is group identification, but there is no feeling of joint ownership, would be a case of restricted or circumspect team reasoning. Restricted team reasoning is when the team reasoner thinks another member will not perform team reasoning. Circumspect is when the team reasoner is not sure about the other member. My argument is that restricted team reasoning co-exists with an entitlement to demand the other to start behaving as a team member. If I am performing restricted team reasoning is because I am thinking the other person is behaving in an inadequate way. And this is because, as long as I perceive as a team reasoner, I will perceive the situation as "up to us".

Team reasoning applies very well to the level of the team. Players of opposite teams do not perform the same team reasoning. Thus, it could be argued that team reasoning does not apply to the level of the match. To this objection, I would argue that, at the level of the match, there is still

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<sup>41</sup> In chapter 1, I explained in more detail what joint ownership of agency means and the choice for the term "ownership".

joint ownership of the agency. On one level, there is the performance of the team. On the other level, there is the activity of playing a football match. It is “up to us” to play football. This means following the rules and applying the penalties when a member does not follow the rules. On one level, I derive my agency from the agency of the team. On the other level, the agency of the team derives from the collective agency of playing a game together. Granted, this level of agency does not require too much collective reasoning. All it requires is to follow the rules. If members of the other team do not follow the rules and they do not accept the penalties, they are ruining the whole activity. They are not simply ruining the activity for their team, but for everyone.

### **3.4. We-mode intentions and strict cooperation**

Searle’s account of we-intention can partially explain the football match. Searle’s notion of constitutive rules, i.e. collective intentions to treat X as Y in Z, can explain the reality of a football game. Thus, we could say that there is a collective intention between everyone to play a football match. Then, we could say that there is a collective intention between teammates to play as a team. The problem with Searle’s account is that it does not grasp the normativity of a football match. It can explain the normativity of the game only insofar as the person has the collective intention to play the game. For example, only the goalkeeper can use his hands to hold the ball. If any other player uses the hand, there is a punishment. Using hands to hold a ball is only wrong in the context of the football game. Without the intention to play football, using hands to hold a ball is not wrong.

The problem is that normativity would rely completely on a collective intention. And this might not grasp all the sides of the normative aspect of playing a football match. Football has rules, and these rules constitute the game. Not following them means not playing football. Imagine a reckless player who decides to hold the ball with his hands. He does that many times, so he gets expelled. Not only he provided the opposite team free kicks, but also his team now lacks one player. Not following the norms was ruining the match, but the football game has regulations to ensure its stability, the main one being expelling a player. By expelling him, as long as he stays away from the football field during the match, he is no longer a threat to the match. However, expelling him damages the performance of his team. The rebuking from his teammates is far stronger and more demanding than from players of the opposite team. His ceasing to have the collective intention to play according to the rules does not seem to relieve him from the demand to play for the team, and to play well.

Tuomela's (2007) account might fare better. For Tuomela, the we-mode, as opposed to the group I-mode, involves collective commitments. In this sense, we can consider that Tuomela's account embraces the characteristic normativity present in some forms of sociality. However, for Tuomela, the collective commitment is grounded on the attitudes of the members. This means that if people cease to uphold a commitment, it will cease to exist. Tuomela's account is attitude-dependent. So, Tuomela says that "it can be useful to view a group as an agent capable of acting as a unit" (Tuomela, 2007, p. 4). He uses the metaphor of being "in the same boat" or "standing and falling together" (Tuomela, 2007, pp. 4, 50, 64). Thus, Tuomela would agree that the team wins or loses, and not the players individually.<sup>42</sup> This follows from Tuomela's Collective Condition, which is, basically, that a group goal is only satisfied for a member of the group if and only if it is satisfied for all other members of the group (Tuomela, 2007, pp. 4 and 48).<sup>43</sup> However, Tuomela rejects that the group is an agent "over and above group members" (Tuomela, 2007, p. 4, see also p. 145). Thus, a collective commitment would necessarily be based on the attitudes of individuals.

This is different from Gilbert's (2014) theory of joint commitment, which is not attitude-dependent. Joint commitments are attitude-dependent only at the moment of creating the joint commitment. Gilbert's concept of joint commitment can explain teammates being entitled to rebuke a player that was being reckless, even if that reckless player stopped having the intention to play football with the team. The question arises about how Tuomela could explain that phenomenon. For Tuomela, such pressure would only exist because there are still some underlying group dynamics. As long as the reckless player cares about what these other people will think of him, this creates a normative pressure for conformity. These feelings about your place in the community usually lead to conformity, and this would provide grounds to expect others to believe and behave accordingly (see Tuomela, 2007, pp. 65 and 68). Interestingly, Castro and Pacherie

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<sup>42</sup> "Every group member is accountable not only to himself for his participatory action but also to the other members" (Tuomela, 2007, p. 5).

<sup>43</sup> Tuomela's definition of the Collective Condition: "(CC) It is true on "quasi-conceptual" grounds and hence necessarily that a goal content p is satisfied in the case of a member (qua a member) of an egalitarian collective g if and only if it is satisfied for every other member of g (qua a member of g)" (Tuomela, 2007, p. 48).

(2021) have recently argued that the motivating force behind joint commitments could be the desire or need for long-term relationships (such as friendship).

I agree that the desire to be accepted by the group, the desire to be liked, and the need for long-term relationships are major forces of sociality. What I want to raise is the possibility of strict cooperation that does not rely on those desires and needs. I believe the rowing boat example I presented in chapter 1 is such a case. Perceiving as a “we” does not require a desire to belong to a group. In the football case, it is not necessary that every player has a desire to be accepted by that community. A player could just desire to have fun playing football with strangers, and he might not even personally like them. Most of the time, football matches are a tool to promote social cohesion. But, sometimes, in some teams, certain players might have no desire for such social cohesion. My point is that the teammates can strongly rebuke the reckless player who got expelled regardless of whether or not that player has a desire for conformity. Their rebuking does not need to be of the form of “we do not accept you anymore in our team/group”. The rebuking can be “you are of the team and you damaged the team’s performance”. In that latter case, the teammates recognize the collective agency as not relying on the attitude of the reckless player. Gilbert’s theory of joint commitment can explain that situation because joint commitment admits divergent behavior. My theory of joint ownership of agency can also explain that situation because the perception that something is “up to us” does not necessarily rely on the other person perceiving likewise.

I should point out that it is not impossible to develop an extension of Tuomela’s theory so as to accommodate that kind of normativity discussed above. Given Tuomela’s pluralist spirit, of all the leading theories in the field, his theory might be the most amenable to extensions.

### **3.5. Shared plans and strict cooperation**

Bratman’s account of shared intention was focused on modest sociality, and he argues that normative elements, at least in modest sociality, are supplementary. Arguing against the theory of joint commitment, Bratman argues that a shared intention only exists while the members uphold the relevant individual intentions (Bratman, 2014, p. 117). Thus, if two people get together and decide to clean the house, but both give up doing it, then there is no shared intention to clean the house, regardless of whether or not they have already communicated it to each other. The essence of his argument relies on the idea that agency is only explained in individualist terms. According

to Gilbert's theory, if joint agency was like that, it would be very unstable, as it would cease to exist as long as one member forms a divergent intention (hence why she proposes the disjunction criterion, see Gilbert, 2014, pp. 102–106). Bratman is happy to bite the bullet.

I believe it is hard to treat the normativity of a football match as something supplementary. Bratman never says how many people are too many for modest sociality. Maybe a group of eleven is not too many. Maybe a group of twenty-two is not too many either. In that case, a football match would be a case of modest sociality. It has stable membership. Everyone is adult and healthy. There is no asymmetry in authority. There are few members. And in addition to satisfying the criteria for modest sociality, it seems to satisfy all of the sufficient conditions Bratman presents for joint agency. It satisfies common knowledge, and even mutual responsiveness. This would be enough to affirm that the football match is a case of joint agency. It could be argued that there is an overarching shared intention to follow the rules of the game, and a shared intention to play in a team. Shared plans are not able to explain the rebuking phenomenon. We would have to recur to some other concept. It could be said that the reckless player harmed the others, or that he broke a promise to play football. In either case, the reckless player would be doing something immoral. The problem is that anyone who is a member of the moral community is entitled to rebuke a person for doing something immoral. However, only the participants of a joint agency are entitled to rebuke a divergent behavior.

Bratman could argue that his theory is modest and only affirm that the football match is a case of joint agency, as it satisfies the sufficient criteria. The problem with that explanation is that it leaves the normativity of the football match without an explanation. And in order to explain that normativity, we might have to use concepts that are irreducible to the individualistic elements present in Bratman's theory of planned agency. Joint commitment can explain the normativity, but it is an irreducibly collective concept. Feeling joint ownership of agency explains both the normativity and the team reasoning present in a football match, but it involves an irreducible notion of "we". It seems that we need an irreducible concept in order to explain strict cooperation. In other words, the collective reasoning and the normativity in strict cooperation are intrinsic to that form of sociality.

## 4. Layers of Joint Agency

I presented the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment to illustrate loose collaboration and the football match to illustrate strict cooperation. Strict cooperation involves collective reasoning and normativity. Loose collaboration is a broader category, since it encompasses all joint agency that is weaker than strict cooperation. In both examples I presented, there was more than one way to engage in the joint activity. In the *Twitch* experiment, a person could participate as a true, neutral or chaotic player. However, in the football match, not only are there different ways to participate in the joint activity (e.g. as a goalkeeper or as a referee), but also there are two levels to the joint activity. This indicates that a joint activity can be constituted by members with different attitudes and it can have different layers.

In the previous sections, I already explored how different theories can explain the two layers in a football match. This last section is dedicated to exploring a bit further how joint activities can have different layers.

### 4.1. Both layers as strict cooperation

A football match has, at least, two layers. There is one layer that encompasses everyone in both teams, the field-level. They are all playing football and, as such, they need to follow the rules and behave appropriately. Then, there is another layer, which encompasses only the members of the team, the team-level. They are teammates and, as such, they need to try to win. This is a case where both layers are in strict cooperation. The team-level involves a more active collective reasoning, a stronger feeling that each one's agency is the team's agency, and a more vivid demand to cooperate. For example, many times during a match, teammates will have very brief altercations, like “why did you shoot to the goal? You should have passed to me!” – that sentence is enough to indicate the three aspects I have just pointed out. At the field-level, there might not be much of a collective reasoning, but there is a feeling of an overall collective agency that belongs to everyone in the field, and there are many instances of demand to follow the rules of the game.

### 4.2. One layer as loose collaboration, the other as strict cooperation

Some joint activities, however, have layers of different types, i.e. one that is a loose collaboration and another that is a strict cooperation. Take the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) as an example. They are a radically decentralized movement to defend animal rights through direct

action. Groups of people can form cells at their will, wherever they are, and call themselves part of ALF, as long as they follow ALF's ideology and type of action. Communication between groups is not required, but it is fostered. Since some of the direct actions they take are illegal, this radical decentralization and lack of communication protect their anonymity and reduce the damage if they get infiltrated. Being part of ALF and doing something as part of ALF feels like you are doing something together with others, even if you never meet people from other cells.

ALF has two layers, one that encompasses all the cells, and the other that is only a single cell. As a member of a cell, you might never meet people from other cells, there are no reliable means of communication, and you do not even know how many other cells are out there. Even if you do meet people from other cells, that would not mean you would feel entitled to demand them to take part in some specific action. Part of the decentralization is that the cells are completely autonomous. Their autonomy comes from within, not from outside. As a member of ALF, you could criticize other cells for not being active, but this does not mean that neither you nor they feel you are entitled to demand them to be more active. What you could do is not consider them as members of ALF. There is also another, more common, kind of weak interaction, which is when one group does something, and this information spreads and reaches other cells. All members of ALF will feel excited and encouraged when they know that some cell was successful in doing some direct action. Even if you are not part of the cell who did it, you still feel part of it, as part of the broader movement, the ALF. The relation between cells is a loose collaboration. Let us call it the inter-cell level.

The relation within a cell, however, is not a loose collaboration. The members know each other since cells tend to have a small number of people. If your cell decides to break into a laboratory where they do tests with animals and rescue these animals, there will be a strict cooperation between the people involved. Let us call it the intra-cell level.

So, ALF's structure is a loose collaboration between cells, and strict cooperation within a cell. It is a similar structure to the Underground Railroad (UR). It was a network of people who helped black people to escape slavery in the United States of America, in the nineteenth century. It had to be largely decentralized to avoid getting the whole network compromised in case they got infiltrated. The Underground Railroad is closer to an organization than to a movement, whereas ALF is closer to being classified as a movement. The many different people operating in the

Underground Railroad network would only know a very few other members, which were the links, the wheels, that would carry the fugitive to either the northern states, Canada, or Mexico, where slavery had already been abolished. For example, a member would only transport the fugitive from point *A* to point *B*, so he only knows the other members at these two points. The relation between two links in the network involved a stronger form of jointness, especially regarding the normative demand to do one's part. Thus, the direct-links would be strict cooperation, and the indirect-links would be loose collaboration.

There are many distinctions between ALF and the Underground Railroad, even though both have two layers, the largest one being a loose collaboration. In ALF, the inter-cell level can be explained using a theory of shared goal, like Miller's theory (2007). The shared goal is to defend animal rights and pressure society to take animal rights seriously, but each cell's activities are loosely related. For example, each cell does what seems fit, like sabotaging a certain laboratory (e.g. getting the dogs used in experiments to some heaven farm). However, rarely, if ever, would the cells collaborate on one single activity, e.g. different cells participating in a decentralized way to perform a single sabotaging in a laboratory.

The Underground Railroad members did share a common ideology, namely, the end of slavery. However, the overall agency of the many links in the "railroad" amounts to one single outcome: getting a person to liberty. In this sense, the rationality of the direct-links relied on the overall decentralized rationality of the indirect-links. The "railroad" was like a chain, so if one part of the chain breaks, the enterprise of getting this one person to freedom might be in danger. In this sense, we could say that there is an overall plan. Since the indirect-link level did not involve collective reasoning or normativity, it is fair to suppose that Bratman's theory of shared agency might be able to explain that joint agency.

### **4.3. Loose collaboration as social network**

Both the inter-cell level of ALF and the indirect-link of UR lack communication between members, have unstable membership and are composed of a large number of people. That is, they are not cases of modest sociality. This does not mean that Bratman's theory would not be able to explain it, but only that it is outside its comfort zone.

The ALF and the Underground Railroad do not satisfy conditions (v) and (vi), the persistence interdependence of the intentions. Members of one ALF cell will not give up because other cells gave up. Similarly, a member of the Underground Railroad will not give up because another member gave up his intention to take the fugitive from point *B* – mostly because they would not be aware of this and also because they would try to fix that break in the chain. Also, since there is almost no communication or knowledge of who and where are the other members, it could be problematic to say that they satisfy the common knowledge condition (vii).

In Bratman's sense of the concept of shared intention, there is no overarching shared intention between the groups in ALF nor is there an overarching shared intention between all the members of the Underground Railroad. What there could be, using Bratman's theory, is a social network. Bratman never developed this concept in detail, but the basic idea is that shared intentions can overlap, maintaining a certain core aspect. Paraphrasing Bratman (Bratman 2014, p. 98–99), two members of the Underground Railroad, John and Kate, can be engaged in the shared activity of getting the fugitive from point *A* to point *B*, and this activity would involve a shared intention as defined before. At point *B*, John leaves, and Kate stays with the fugitive, until another member arrives, Hector. Kate and Hector take the fugitive from point *B* to point *C*, and this activity involves a shared intention. And then Hector will meet someone else to get the fugitive to point *D*. There is a connection between all these shared intentions, although there is no overarching shared intention, because, e.g., John and Hector do not know each other and do not share an intention. What there is, according to Bratman, is an overlap between these two intentions, i.e. a *social network*. Bratman never fully develop this concept of social network, so he does not give an account of what constitutes this network. For example, we could not say that, because Kate is part of a shared intention with John and with another shared intention with Hector, there is a shared intention between John and Hector. Kate is part of many other intentions that do not overlap in meaningful ways (e.g. Kate has a shared intention to have dinner with her daughter every night, and this has no relation with the UR).

In recent work, Bratman (2022) has extended his theory to social rules and social institutions. What he offers, briefly, is largely in the spirit of Shapiro's (2014) account of massively shared plans. That is an extension of Bratman's notion of shared policies. Shared policies are simply shared intentions to uphold a certain policy (see Bratman, 2014, pp. 136–141). This could explain

social rules and hierarchy. For instance, the shared intention can be to follow what one person says the group should do. This notion of shared policies, however, cannot explain the decentralized agency of ALF or UR. There is a shared ideology, namely, to defend animal rights and, for the other, to abolish slavery. These ideologies provide some direction and put certain constraints on the groups' agencies, but in a rather minor way. ALF and UR are not social institutions like the city council or the Futbol Club Barcelona. Neither are they constituted by rules of behavior for society, such as not littering. Granted, members of ALF will follow the rules of veganism, but being vegan does not mean being part of ALF, nor does being against slavery makes one part of the UR. The UR performs specific actions. They cooperate in order to get someone to freedom.

Instead of weakening the concept of shared intention in order to have a minimal shared plan that can be more easily shared (which is Shapiro's strategy), we could consider another way of weakening that concept. One possibility would be to consider shared overarching intention as a weaker and more flexible form of shared intention. John and Hector might not share an intention, but in the content of the shared intentions each has with Kate, there is a reference to the overarching shared intention, which is to get that person into freedom. This would mean that John and Mary need to share an intention that, in addition to having meshing sub-plans, it needs to mesh with the overarching intention. The shared intention between John and Mary of moving the fugitive from point *A* to *B* is itself a means to an end, which is to get him free, and this is the overarching intention of all the members of the network.

Bratman's take on joint agency is to put the jointness in the content of the intention. Thus, my suggestion is to include a reference to the overarching shared intention in the content. This is not so different from, in a modest shared intention, members not being fully aware of each other's sub-plans. The direct-links in UR would be modest shared intentions, which would themselves be like sub-plans in the overarching shared intention of indirect-links to get this one person into freedom. So, the UR would be a chain of John, Kate and Hector. John and Kate share an intention, but that shared intention has a reference to the overarching shared intention. John is aware that the success of the overall action (i.e. to get this person into freedom) relies on the overarching shared action, which includes people and actions that he is not aware of and that he cannot be mutually responsive to. However, John is aware that whoever else is part of the overarching shared intention is responsive to getting that person into freedom. What this means is that the rationality of each

modest shared intention (i.e. direct-link level) relies on the rationality of the overarching shared intention. There is, thus, a belief that if everyone is successful in performing their parts, the overall agency will be successful. If there is a problem, for instance, between Kate and Hector, then it is up to Kate, who is currently taking care of the fugitive, to find another way. She might get back to John since it was her other direct-link. In a larger chain, Kate would only be directly linked to Hector and John, so she would seek help only with these two.

There are two important differences between my suggestion of an overarching shared plan and Bratman's modest shared plan (which can be found earlier in this chapter, or in Bratman, 2014, p. 85–86). One is about common knowledge (condition vii) and the other is about the intentions of each being persistence interdependent (conditions v and vi). Regarding common knowledge, I have said before that the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment provided a plan that is “out in the open”. Everyone was familiar with the game and knew what it took to progress and finish the game. In Shapiro's words, there is a plan that is accessible to everyone (Shapiro, 2014, p. 282). In ALF and UR, this is not the case. ALF cells might not know what other cells are doing. Direct-links in UR might have no idea what other links are. Thus, overarching shared intentions would have to drop the common knowledge condition. Regarding persistence interdependence between the intentions, this also cannot be satisfied in the UR. That condition is that a person only has the shared intention to *J* as long as the others also have likewise intention and meshing sub-plans. This means that if the other person ceases to have the intention to *J*, then they are no longer sharing an intention to *J*. In UR, this is not the case. John is not aware of the connection between Mary and Hector, or between Hector and other people further down the chain. John will not cease to have the shared intention he has with Mary, nor cease to have the overarching shared intention to get the fugitive into freedom, because there is some defectiveness somewhere down the chain. This cannot be the case because, first, John is not aware of what goes on down the chain, so his intentions cannot rely on specificities of what is beyond his direct links. Second, John's intentions rely on a belief in the responsiveness of participants in the chain. This means that John relies on Mary finding out an alternative in case her link with Hector gets busted.

Such overarching shared intention would be a possible definition of social networks in Bratman's theory, and it might provide a good explanation for decentralized loose collaboration, like in ALF or UR.

#### 4.4. On the possibility of different mixes of layers

Joint activities can have more than two layers, and there can be all sorts of mixtures. At first sight, one might think that if the wider level involves norms to cooperate, this will affect the inner levels, making them strict cooperations. In the ALF and UR cases, the wider level was a loose collaboration and the inner levels were strict cooperations. Only inner levels involved entitlement in demanding cooperation and collective reasoning.

While there exist norms to cooperate to *J*, there are also norms that demand a certain behavior without amounting to a cooperation. For example, a group of people can have a norm to dress in a certain way – not as a fashion trend, but as a normative rule. In this case, the norm involves a demand to conform, but it is not a demand to perform a collective agency, at least not in the sense of, for example, a group pushing a piano upstairs. The rules in a football match constitute that joint agency, namely, to play football. The rule of dressing in a certain way does not necessarily constitute a joint agency. It can refer simply to one way to perform individual agency. These are usually called social norms. Social norms can have their origin on a strict cooperation. The people of Ancient Athens would gather in the Pnyx to have the assembly and decide matters for the city. The assembly is a case of strict cooperation. It involves communication, common knowledge, and it is itself constituted by norms. From the assembly, the city can establish new norms. They could establish, for example, a norm that big lyres could only be pushed across the Agora during the afternoon, so as not to bother the market of fruits, which is more intense during the morning period. Pushing a big lyre can be considered a case of loose collaboration. It is fairly similar to pushing a piano, which Bratman presents as a case of modest sociality. A small group of people can form a commitment to push the lyre, but it is conceivable that random people might join in to assist in pushing the lyre, and these people are under no normative obligation to keep assisting. If, however, this is done during the morning, other citizens will not only complain but feel entitled to demand them to stop, since the assembly has so decided. In this case, there is a strict cooperation at the wider level and a loose collaboration at the inner level.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented one case of loose collaboration and one case of strict cooperation. Instead of presenting a theory of what is loose collaboration and what is strict cooperation, I applied different theories in the field to explain these two different cases. My goal was not to provide a novel theory of joint action. My goal was to promote a pluralist view of the social world. Gilbert argues that joint commitments are necessary to any joint agency, which rules out the joint agency that does not involve a normative demand to cooperate. Thus, it rules out Bratman's theory. Bratman, in its turn, argues that his theory presents sufficient conditions for joint agency and that norms to cooperate would be supplementary and not intrinsic to joint agency. Such a view leaves little room for analyzing cases of joint agency where the normativity seems rather intrinsic (i.e. if we try to explain the normativity in those cases as supplementary, we run into problems, as I have argued earlier in the chapter).

There are other theories that apply to most cases of sociality. Searle's theory of we-intention is easier to apply to both loose and strict cases, but Tuomela's theory seems even more suitable. Tuomela's theory runs into potential problems when applied to certain cases of strict cooperation, but it could be possible to tweak his theory even further in order to accommodate such cases. My take, however, is pluralistic in a more radical sense. Instead of searching for the holy grail, the one theory that can explain the entirety of the social world, we can apply current theories to their own scope. Thus, when it comes to cases of joint agency that do not involve norms to cooperate or collective reasoning, we do well by explaining it using Bratman's theory. And when it comes to stronger cases of cooperation, we do better by using a theory like joint commitment or team reasoning. It is important to be clear about the scope of our theories. In order to analyze the social world, philosophers usually start by delimiting a scope, which is implied in the choice of examples to analyze and in the angle through which they analyze the examples. The danger lies in taking that scope as depicting the entirety of the social world.

My pluralistic take on joint agency relies on an underlying notion of human agency as rather fluid. The underlying idea is that people can alter the structure of their agency according to different situations. This is aligned with the idea of agency transformation, which I explored in chapter 1. People are able to think and act as a "we", but that does not mean that they will always think and act as a "we". At many points in my argumentation, I have talked about features of the

environment in order to explain sociality. In chapter 1, I argued that features of the environment make people perform team reasoning and feel joint ownership of the agency. In chapter 2, I argued that gregariousness also depends on features of the environment (e.g. proximity). In this chapter, especially when I talked about the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment, I talked about the features of that virtual environment. I talked about being on a boat with others in the middle of a lake, I talked about being in a café, and I talked about being in an online experiment. All of my analysis, so far, indicates the importance of environments. In the next chapter, I will provide a novel account of place, defined as a node of affordances. I will explain how human agency relies on the notion of place, and how important it is to take the relation between agency and environment seriously in order to analyze sociality. We shape the environments we inhabit, but the environments also partially shape our agency.

## Chapter 4 – Place and Agency

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I will present a novel theory of place. I define place as nodes of affordances constituted together with people’s identities. My theory of places is based on the concept of affordance, and I will argue the relation between affordance and normativity. My theory also draws from the philosophy of geography, where the emphasis is on the relation between the identity of a person and the places she inhabits. I use the notion of narrative self in order to explain how nodes of affordance are connected to how a person thinks of herself as an agent. With this notion of place, I am able to provide a novel account of shared places. My argument is that we shape the places we inhabit, but the places also shape us. Thus, shared places shape sociality. Finally, I apply my theory of places to the Internet. I present a worry about shifting political decision-making from environments of strong cooperation and normativity to environments of secluded sociality and lack of accountability.

### 1. Introduction

“That people could come into the world in a place they could not at first even name and had never known before; and that out of a nameless and unknown place they could grow and move around in it until its name they knew and called with love, and call it home, and put roots there and love others there; so that whenever they left this place, they would sing homesick songs about it and write poems of yearning for it...” – William Goyen (2002, p. 40)

The aim of this chapter is to provide a definition of place. Place is about the relation between agency and space. Space can be a confusing term. There is the physical space measured in meters and miles.<sup>44</sup> We can measure the sizes of the rooms that compose a house in meters. However, how many of us keep in mind the exact measurements of our own kitchen when we cook a meal? As the philosopher of geography, Yi-Fu Tuan says, “few people know from direct experience that

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<sup>44</sup> That is the Euclidean, or Newtonian, space. Philosophical discussions of Euclidean space are, for example, what is a hole (See Norton, 2019).

France is bigger than Italy, that settlements in the American Middle West are arranged in nested hexagons, or even that the size of their own piece of real estate is 1.07 acres” (Tuan, 1979, p. 388). Some geographers, including Tuan, prefer to use the term “place” when referring to the relation between people and the space they inhabit.

In the philosophy of geography, there has been some work on the “sense of place” (Agnew, 1987; Malpas, 2004; Massey, 1994). Sense of place refers to the subjective experience of people in relation to the space they inhabit. Authors working on the philosophy of geography are very much influenced by continental philosophy. Some authors, such as Tuan (1979) and Jeff Malpas (2004), are very transparent about this. Both argued that theories should not aim at being crystal clear nor follow a straight logic. Authors in this area prefer a dialectical approach that admits paradoxes and contradictions. In contrast, the analytic tradition praises clarity and coherence, so, naturally, there are too many bridges between the philosophy of geography and social ontology.<sup>45</sup> By social ontology, I mean the current field with Michael Bratman (2014), Margaret Gilbert (2014) and John Searle (1990) as leading figures.<sup>46</sup>

Someone could argue that these non-Euclidean aspects of agents inhabiting a space have already been widely discussed in the analytic tradition, namely, through the theory of affordances.<sup>47</sup> James Gibson, the author who coined the term affordance, used the term *environment* rather than *space* to refer to the relation between agent and space (Gibson, 1966). Thus, it could be argued that the concept of place from the philosophy of geography could be

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<sup>45</sup> Malpas (2004) did try to create a bridge between works in the analytic tradition and works in the continental tradition and philosophy of geography. However, Malpas leans heavily towards the continental tradition. What that means is that Malpas did not aim at providing a clear definition of place (Malpas, 2004, pp. 38–39), unlike my aim in this chapter. I would like to add that this is not, in and of itself, a problem for Malpas. Malpas, Tuan, and the majority of authors in philosophy of geography follow a method of doing philosophy that is different from the analytical method predominant in the current field of social ontology.

<sup>46</sup> There are some philosophers working in social ontology who bridge the gap between the analytic and continental division, and, as one would expect, they mostly work on phenomenology (such as Zahavi, 2015; and Dreyfus, 2007, 2011). However, they do not work on the concept of place, nor do they engage with the literature on philosophy of geography.

<sup>47</sup> Technically speaking, the theory of affordances is from psychology, and not analytic philosophy. But it has been embraced and largely used in analytic philosophy.

captured by the concept of affordance. I agree with that only up to a point, since it might miss the relation between place and identity, which is what philosophers of geography are interested in. My theory of place is mostly based on the concept of affordance, but I will use the idea of narrative self in order to connect the discussion about affordance and agency with the discussions about identity and place present in the philosophy of geography.

In order to provide a novel account of place, I will draw from both the philosophy of geography and the theory of affordances. Throughout the chapter, I will be in dialogue with theories from social ontology. I believe the field of social ontology has much to gain by taking the concept of place seriously, and the field of philosophy of geography also has much to gain with a clearer definition of place. Thus, in my account, place has two main aspects: it is about how we organize our agency in our daily lives, and it is about how we form our identities.

Let us take, for example, the Appalachian Trail. The online Cambridge dictionary defines the term *trail* as “a path through a countryside, mountain, or forest area, often made or used for a particular purpose”. The Appalachian Trail was first conceived by Benton MacKaye in 1921, who thought of the trail as a way to connect the many farms, wild areas and towns in the region (see Nelson, 2019). MacKaye did not have hiking as the original intention. However, the idea got traction precisely because of the possibility of hiking. As time went by, more and more people hiked the Appalachian Trail. Hiking the Appalachian Trail is not easy, and, just like any big quest, it usually marks a period in a person’s life. Naturally, books and movies were created based on real-life stories, which feeds back into the importance of the trail. Nowadays, the Appalachian Trail has become more than just a trail. It is still a place for hiking, but now people do it planning to have an iconic moment in their lives. And the more people have iconic moments on the Appalachian Trail, the more it reinforces the significance of the trail.

The Appalachian Trail was shaped and re-shaped through the actions of many people. And that trail has shaped many lives. We shape the environment, but the environment also shapes us. There is one dimension of the Appalachian Trail related to daily practices and affordances. MacKaye proposed the trail precisely to facilitate the connection between the many settlements in the area. By creating a path in the woods, they also provided a place that affords leisure and hiking. And there is another dimension of the Appalachian Trail, namely, the importance of the trail for the identity of so many people. I will argue that these two dimensions are connected. The latter

follows from the former.

I will define place in terms of function and identity. The notion of agency I will work with is based on James Gibson's (1986) notion of affordance and also, to a lesser degree, on Bratman's (1999) theory of planning agency. Affordance is a crucial concept because it provides a notion of agency that does not dissociate the agent from the environment.<sup>48</sup> I will propose that the concept of place is essential for agents to operate complex actions. The world is rich in information, and the concept of place enables agents to organize their agency in such a world. I will define place as a *node of affordances*. However, the process of organizing the world in places is a process of perceiving the purposes of places. It is a process of inputting coherence into the world. In order to provide a definition of place, we need to explain the relation between places and subjectivity – which is precisely what is explored in the concept of “sense of us” from the philosophy of geography. The difference between my approach and most theories on the sense of place is that I borrow ideas from theories of narrative self. Some authors (MacIntyre, 1984; Taylor, 1989; Ricoeur, 1992) argue that the self is made through the process of acting and reacting to happenings in life and reflecting on these actions. If the self is constantly made through our actions and interpretations of our actions, and agency is understood through the lens of affordance, then we cannot dissociate the agent's identity from the environment. Thus, it only makes sense to talk about a person's identity in relation to the places she inhabited.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, talking about a place will require talking about the people that inhabited it. The history of a kid's childhood cannot be dissociated from the history of her home. And that house is partially defined by all the things that the kid did or happened to her in that house. In this way, it is possible to even talk about the identity of a place, as long as we bear in mind that we are always talking about the relation between that place and the people who live there. The process of making ourselves is, concomitantly, a process of carving the identity of the places. And since our agency and identities are partially shaped by the places we inhabit, I will argue that it is mainly through places that we shape each other's

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<sup>48</sup> This is in contrast with many accounts of agency and joint agency based on intention. These accounts are usually based solely on mental states. See, for example, the theories of Bratman (2014), Searle (1990), Gilbert (2014), and Tuomela (2007).

<sup>49</sup> Charles Taylor said that “A self can never be described without reference to those surround it” (Taylor, 1989, p. 35). As a parallel, my argument in this chapter is that a self can never be described without a reference to the places he inhabits.

identities and practices, i.e. place can explain the idea in the literature of narrative self that we are co-authors of each other's narratives.

This chapter is comprised of five main sections. Section 2 is about the concept of node of affordances. Section 3 is about the relation between place and identity. Section 4 is about shared places. These three sections together constitute the main body of the chapter. It is through these three sections that I am able to present my original theory about place, and its relation to sociality. In the last two sections, in which I expand a bit more on this discussion. In Section 5, I briefly discuss two other possible ways to conceive place, namely, through communication and through joint perception. In the final part of this chapter, Section 6, I apply my theory of place to analyze sociality on the Internet. More specifically, I analyze Twitter as a platform for politics.

I will start by talking about nodes of affordances (Section 2). I will explain the theory of affordances and what I mean by function (Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). I will also explain three ways in which nodes of affordances are formed (Section 2.1.3). Then, I will explain the relation between affordances and normativity (Section 2.1.4). However, in order to better explain this (i.e. how nodes of affordance exert positive pressure on agents), I have to explain the relation between place and identity, which is the focus of Section 3. I will start by bringing some ideas from the philosophy of geography. Then, I will use some ideas from theories of narrative self to explain the connection between action, place and how an agent perceives itself as an agent (Section 3.1). Next, I will use games as an analogy to illustrate how place shapes agency (Section 3.2). After that, I will explore a bit more the notion of a place being meaningful and the possibility of talking about the identity of a place (Section 3.3). In Section 4, I talk about shared places. I will talk about what it means to share a node of affordance (Section 4.1). Then, I will talk about cafes and alleyways (Section 4.2). It is through shared places that I will explain how the coherence of agency is related to the coherence of places (Section 4.3). I will talk about the conflicting uses of a place (Section 4.4). Then, I will talk about two levels of normativity, one being about what the place should be and the other being what one should do according to what the place is (Section 4.5), and I will talk about how both these normativities can emerge without prior interactions (Section 4.6). Finally, I will talk about the coherence of sociality (Sections 4.7 and 4.8).

The sub-sections above constitute the main body of this chapter. After that, I deal with two possible alternative theories of place (Section 5). First, I talk about a theory of place based on

communication and joint commitment (Section 5.1), and then I talk about a theory of place based on the notion of joint perception (Section 5.2). The final section of the chapter is an application of my theory. In Section 6, I use my theory of places to analyze sociality through the Internet. I will assess Elon Musk's claim that Twitter is the digital town square and the bedrock of democracy. First, I start by analyzing what the Ancient Agora and the Pnyx were, and I contrast them with contemporary abandoned town squares (Section 6.1). In Section 6.2, I present the notions of *open place* and *strictly public place*. Open places are related to gregariousness and loose collaboration. Strictly public places are related to strict cooperation. In Section 6.3, I argue that in order to understand what a virtual platform like Twitter is, we have to take into account the history of the use of similar virtual environments. I present a brief history of the Internet, focusing on digital forums, and how they were, and still are, places for secluded forms of sociality. In Section 6.4, I argue that Twitter is not an appropriate place for doing politics, and how the sociality characteristically of Twitter is now spreading to parliaments.

I would like to point out that although I start by analyzing place in relation to individual agency, by no means am I supposing or arguing that individual agency necessarily precedes collective agency and sociality. The beginning of my argumentation about nodes of affordances indeed focuses mostly on cases of individual agency, but that is only for simplifying the beginning of the explanation. The complete explanation of the relation between agency and place, which spans until Section 4.8, will use cases of collective agency and sociality. My discussions in this chapter do not make a commitment about the precedence of the "I" over the "we", nor the other way around.

## **2. Definition of Place: Node of affordances**

I will define place as the following:

Place is a node of affordances constituted together with people's identities.

This definition points to the two main aspects of place. As I will argue, the latter aspect follows from the former. Thus, the definition could be reduced to place being a node of affordances. I prefer not to do so because I believe it is important to highlight the relation between place and identity.

Some places have names. Others do not. Restaurants have names, but no one names their kitchen. This does not mean that the kitchen is not a place. The Appalachian Trail has a rich history, but so it has the bedrooms of everyone's homes. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote in his book *Wind, Sand and Stars*, "the wall of a garden can enclose more secrets than the Chinese Wall" (Saint-Exupéry, 1939, p. 114). I will start my analysis with very mundane examples of places, such as a garden or a kitchen.

Notice that I did not define place as what it affords but as a *node* of affordances. A node is only a node in a network. Think of a kitchen. A kitchen is a place for cooking, but this only makes sense in relation to other places connected to it. The kitchen is the place for cooking, the bedroom is the place for sleeping and being alone, and the garden is the place for barbecues. Together, they compose the house. The house is also a node. There are other houses, bus stations, places of work, study, and leisure. The most mundane of the places, such as a bedroom, might be the most important places in the process of a person living her life and forming her own identity.

Before I explain the relation between these places and identity, I have to start by explaining what affordances are. I have already talked about affordances in chapter 1, but in this current chapter, I will go a bit deeper into this topic, especially the issue of the relation between affordances and normativity.

### **2.1. What affordances are**

Affordances, as originally proposed by James Gibson (1986, p. 127), can be understood as what the environment provides the agent. A cave, for example, can afford shelter (or "getting-protected-from-rain"). A river affords "swim-in-it-able", and a solid ground affords "walk-on-it-able". Gibson proposed the theory of affordances as a theory of perception. For Gibson, we first perceive the affordances, and only then do we notice or infer physical qualities (1979, p. 58). For example, when you see a glass of water, what you first perceive is "satisfy-thirst-able" and "grab-able", and only then do you notice the physical properties, such as color and transparency. Gibson's theory, in a nutshell, is that we perceive affordances, and we act upon them, further exploring the environment.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Gibson defended the idea that perception is an action, i.e. the action of exploration (Gibson, 1966, p. 123; 1989, p. 146). For Gibson, perception is necessarily connected to how we value what

Affordances are not features of just the environment but of the compound agent-environment (Gibson, 1986, p. 8). A glass of water only affords “grab-able” if I have hands that can grab it. Regardless of whether Gibson is right or wrong in saying that we first perceive affordances or that perception is an action, for the purposes of this chapter, what matters is that there are affordances, which are qualities that can only be understood as features of the compound agent-environment.

A kitchen affords many things related to cooking. Usually, a kitchen has a fridge and other compartments for storing food. It usually has a stove-top and an oven, used for cooking the food. There are many instruments used for preparing food, such as pans, knives, and bowls.

## **2.2. Node of affordances**

A “node of affordances” is the association of an area with an affordance or family of affordances. The kitchen is a node of affordances related to cooking. This association assumes the form of functionality. A kitchen is a place for cooking. A storage room is a place for storing tools. Whatever tool you have, you store it in the storage room, as long as it is not related to cooking, such as a knife, in which case you store it in the kitchen. A bedroom is a place for sleeping and other private activities. You do not sleep in the shed, and you do not store a lawnmower in the bedroom.

One could argue that a shed does indeed afford “sleeping in it”. The bedroom has a comfortable bed, so that is why people do not sleep in the shed. This is true, but my answer to this objection is that we do not perceive all the affordances of a place. We do not have complete information about the environments we inhabit. Trying to get complete information would be too consuming. Instead of calculating whether it is better to sleep in the bedroom or in the shed, my argument is that we do not even engage in such calculation in the first place. This reduces the cognitive load, which unlocks more complex activities. I do not need to keep constant track of how much and what food I have at home. Whenever I feel hungry, I just open the fridge.

The network of nodes of affordance is the map we use to navigate the world and live our lives. It is with this map in mind that we make most of our intentions. This network facilitates agency,

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is perceived. However, this chapter is not about perception, so I will not present the debates about Gibson’s theory of perception.

both individual and social. I am presenting a very pragmatical argument for the concept of place. Indeed, the first part of my definition of place is rather pragmatical (i.e. places as nodes of affordances). This does not make it any less important. Humans have limited cognition. Given that, we need to think of how we can act in a world that has more information than we can process. I do not need to ponder about what places I have available for cooking and which one is better. If I am at home, I simply think of my kitchen, without such pondering. This pragmatism is rather similar to what Bratman (1999; 2014) says about the role of stability in intentions.

When Bratman presented his theory of intention as plans, his main argument was also pragmatical. He argued that intentions last through time. Thus, intentions should be understood as plans and not as the previous desire-belief model (Bratman, 1999, pp. 7-8; 2009, p. 228). Intentions and plans are, for Bratman, synonymous. Bratman argued that intentions follow norms of rationality that desires do not (Bratman, 1999, p.31; 2014, p.15). For example, it would be irrational to have conflicting intentions since we would be dooming ourselves to failure, but a person can have conflicting desires. One important norm of rationality is stability. If intentions were not stable, they would not last long enough. Thus, they would be useless. Stability is a purely pragmatical norm, and it is the main one for Bratman's theory because it is the one related to permanence over time. Inspired by Hebert Simon's (1981) notion of bounded rationality, Bratman considers humans to have limited cognitive power (Bratman, 1999, p. 10).<sup>51</sup> The stability of intentions allows intentions to be fulfilled, and it creates a resistance to further re-deliberation. Given our limited cognitive power, it is crucial to refrain from incessant re-deliberation. The core of Bratman's theory is the idea of coordination, both coordination through time and socially. Coordination requires linking different parts. Stability is crucial for organizing one's actions through time.<sup>52</sup> It was on top of this notion of intention that Bratman argued that intentions can

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<sup>51</sup> Bounded rationality means human rationality is limited. The term was coined by Simon (1997; 1981). The idea is that a human agent is not the same as an economic agent in classic game theory. Humans have limited cognitive power, which means we do not entertain thoughts of long or infinite chains of iteration between decision-makers (e.g. "I think that she thinks that I think that she thinks... that I will choose *p*"). Simon's idea is that people do not aim at the best outcome, but only at an outcome that is good enough, i.e. one that satisfies them.

<sup>52</sup> Bratman presented this notion of stability as a form of commitment (Bratman, 1999, p. 4). His notion of stability is so crucial that it was the main influence Bratman had on the field of artificial intelligence. This influence was mainly through the work of Philip Cohen and Hector

also extend socially, as shared plans (Bratman, 1999, p. 2).<sup>53</sup>

Whether we agree or not with Bratman's theory, Bratman is right in pointing out that intentions extend through time and socially.<sup>54</sup> For example, when a person decides to cook beans, she needs to go to the market, buy the beans, go back home and finally cook the beans. "Cooking the beans" is a complex activity which requires a series of actions, so the intention has to last over time. Human agency is usually complex in that sense. My argument is that, in addition to lasting over time, the intention of "cooking beans" involves the person operating with the notion of "her kitchen". She will open the cabinets and check if the beans are there. If they are not, she will use a notion of another place, namely "the market at the corner". She does not need to keep track at all times of whether she has beans and all the possible markets nearby her.<sup>55</sup>

We divide and categorize the world we live in places. This organization is crucial to enable complex activities. In addition to this organization, nodes of affordance have the form of a function. We associate a certain area with affordances related to cooking, and we name this "the kitchen". Once this association is done, the kitchen becomes the place *for* cooking. If a certain kitchen is not a good place for cooking, then it is a bad kitchen. Borrowing a term from Judith

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Levesque (1990), and their groundbreaking article "Intention Is Choice with Commitment". Just by looking at the paper's title, one can already identify the influence. The reader might get confused by the date of the reference of the books, so it is worth informing that Bratman's book *Intention, Plans and Practical Reasoning* (Bratman, 1999), which is referred to in this paragraph and also in Cohen and Levesque's paper, was first published in 1987.

<sup>53</sup> The reader might also notice how most of the pages I am referring to are from the first pages of the book. That is precisely because Bratman needs to first establish the importance of stability, since it relates to time, and this is the main aspect Bratman wants to focus on, which leads him to diverge from Davidson's (1963) desire-belief model of intention.

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert (2014) has a rather distinct theory of joint action, but she also puts emphasis on stability. One of her main arguments to support her theory of joint commitment is precisely that intentions (whether individual or collective) are fairly stable. She argues that a collective intention would persist even if one member unilaterally changed his mind (Gilbert, 2014, p. 40). Notice how stability is taken as, perhaps, the most important aspect of intentions.

<sup>55</sup> One could argue that nowadays everything is being pushed to the virtual world, in our phones. Instead of going to the market, she would use an app to get beans. Later in this chapter, I will talk about virtual places (Section 6).

Jarvis Thomson (2008), we could call it a *defective* kitchen. A toaster toasts bread. If the toaster is not toasting bread, then it is not a good toaster (Thomson, 2008, p. 208). A garage that cannot properly store a car is not a good garage. It might, however, be a good place for storing tools. If we stop storing cars there and start storing tools, it will cease to be a garage and become a storage room. We could still call it a “garage”, but, in effect, it is no longer a garage. When it becomes a storage room, then we no longer think of it when we think about where to park a car. In other words, it is no longer a node of “parking cars” but a node of “storing tools”.<sup>56</sup>

The function of a place only makes sense in relation to a network. Considering actions in isolation is an abstraction. “Preparing dinner” is always connected to other plans and practices. “Preparing dinner” is part of being at home and relaxing after a day at work. “Preparing dinner” can be opening a bottle of wine and listening to music while cooking, or maybe cooking with your special one. It is not only cooking, then, but also leisure and being together. The dinner is prepared having in mind eating it while watching a movie. The act of “watching a movie” cannot be dissociated from the act of “relaxing on the sofa”. Maybe a person watches TV only because she actually wants to sit on the sofa, and since she is sitting there, she might as well turn on the TV. My argument is that a person’s many actions at home are coherent. And this coherence relies on the network of nodes of affordances.

For most of our daily activities, thoughts of actions are thoughts of places, and vice-versa. When we think about cooking, we think about the kitchen. When we form the intention to cook beans, we use the notions of “kitchen” and “nearby market”. We are somewhat limited by the affordances of the places we inhabit. We can only cook what is available for us to cook, and we do not normally cook things that are too hard to get. This is one way in which places shape our agency. In this case, they shape by setting boundaries and limits. There is another way in which

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<sup>56</sup> This is different from stating that the kitchen is a more salient place for cooking. One way to analyze choice-making is by using game theory (which I presented in chapter 1). Some authors use the notion of salience to explain why we choose one thing over another when they both have the same value (see Schelling, 1963; and Lewis, 1969). Salience involves engaging in calculating and pondering about what is the best choice. Salience can solve dilemmas where choices seem to have the same value, but salience does not ease the cognitive load on the agents. If a kitchen were merely a salient place for cooking, then we would ponder about where to cook every time we think about cooking.

places shape our agency. As I said, thoughts of places are also thoughts of actions. Since we relate places with activities, when we inhabit a certain place, it will trigger thoughts related to the activities in that place. When a person wants to study, she goes to an appropriate place, which is normally her bedroom, her office, or the library. In contrast, when we are in the woods hiking the Appalachian Trail, we probably do not think of studying. In other words, the characteristic activities and affordances that compose a node of affordance exert a certain pressure on the agents. Again, this pressure is somewhat similar to the pressure of stability as a norm of rationality in intentions. The stability of intentions refers to a certain pressure, or resistance, not to change one's intention. Before I discuss how affordances can exert pressure on the agent, I will first explain how nodes of affordance are formed. The following presentation of how a place gains its function might seem a bit tangential at this stage of my argumentation. However, it is important to know how a place gains its function because I will refer to these three modes throughout my argumentation.

### **2.3. How nodes of affordances are formed**

There are three ways in which a place gains its function (i.e. in which an area becomes a certain node of affordances): through its history of use, through deliberation or through association (with other places, with the sheer volume of a certain group of affordances or with the activities currently occurring in that local). Let us consider the following situation: Bob is moving to a new house. The house has a big front yard covered with grass. The house also has a garage. Bob does not have a car, nor does he intend to have one. Bob can decide to use the garage as a storage room. The former garage becomes a storage room by Bob's decision. He stuffs it with tools and other things, such as wood planks. By stuffing the now-storage room with tools and building materials, it might even stop affording "parking-car-able". The decision to make it a storage room is the decision to treat it as a place for storing tools. It helps Bob to organize his agency. Even if Bob has not put any tools in it yet, when he eventually thinks about a place for storing tools, he will think of the storage room. It has become a node of "storing tools". In a shared house, we could say that Bob and Kelly decided to use the garage as a shed. This is how a place can gain its function by deliberation.

Now, let us imagine a variation of the same scenario. Bob moves to a house that has a garage, but Bob has no car. The garage is, in this case, a big empty space with a gate to enter it. It is perfect for storing the lawnmower, as it is big, heavy and dirty. The garage has direct access to the front

yard, so it makes sense to store the lawnmower there. As time goes by, Bob buys some tools and wood to work in the garden. He stores them in the garage. Bob keeps buying stuff and storing it in the garage. At a certain point, the garage will become the place for storing tools. This is how a place can gain its function through its history of use. In this scenario, it is not necessary that the room gets so stuffed with tools that it cannot any longer afford to park a car. Maybe that room never gets very stuffed, but because it has been used by Bob for storing tools, then it becomes a node for storing tools. This means that thinking of that place no longer triggers thoughts of parking a car, and when Bob thinks of storing a tool, he thinks of that room. In case it is a shared house, Kelly can see Bob using the room to store tools. When Kelly buys a tool, she will also think of that storage room. History of use is not the same as actually changing the affordances of a place.

Now, let us imagine another variation. Consider that Bob was filling the former garage with tools. Imagine that Kelly was not aware of Bob stuffing the garage with tools. Let us also suppose that Kelly would never visit the garage. Imagine that Kelly and Bob divorced. Bob left Kelly with the house as it was. Bob did not take a single object from the house, which means that the former garage will be left filled with tools. One day, after Bob had long left the house, Kelly opened the door to that room. She thought she would see a garage, that is, a place for parking a car. What she sees, however, is a storage room. The moment she opens the room, the sheer volume of affordances related to storing tools and the lack of other affordances (especially the affordance to park a car) will make her associate that room with other storage rooms she has come across in her life. In this case, the association was with other places she was familiar with. But it could very well be the case that Kelly never had seen or heard of a storage room. Even if that is the case, i.e. even if she had never seen a shed or a storage room before in her life, she would still associate that room with a place for storing tools. In this case, the association was solely with the sheer volume of a certain group of affordances. In this version of the example, Kelly was not aware of Bob's history of use of that room. When a person first enters a place, the person will normally automatically quickly categorize it. This process also takes into consideration the other nodes in the network. This is how a place can gain its function by association with other places.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> History of use can be understood as an association with current and past activities. The difference is that history of use does not need to have any relation with the volume of a certain

Besides the history of use and association with other places and the sheer volume of affordances, a place can also change its function due to current practices being performed there. For example, a street is a place for cars to drive at a relatively high speed, and sidewalks are the place next to streets for pedestrians. Imagine it is Carnival, and the street is filled with people. The current activity taken in the place changes the function of the place. It ceases to be a place for cars to drive, and it becomes a place for partying. This process is not rare. Events can change what a place is for. This happens in rituals, religious events, riots or even when, in Ancient Athens, they would summon the assembly in the Agora. This process is usually related to how places change according to time. By this, I mean how the same place can have different functions depending on the time of the day, the day of the week, and the day of the year. I do not consider this as a fourth way in which a place can gain its function, but rather as a mix of the history of use and association.

As the examples above suggest, these three ways in which a place gains its function are not mutually exclusive. Most of the time, there is more than one process happening at the same time. Bob and Kelly decide to transform the garage into a storage room. As they execute that, by stuffing tools in that room, it changes the actual affordances in the place. Doing that will, eventually, also lead to the process of association. It also forms a new history of use, which is another process. There might even be other processes, but I will limit my argumentation to only those three.

#### **2.4. Affordances and normativity**

I have said that we shape the places we inhabit and that we are shaped by the places we inhabit. The first part of that idea seems compatible with any other theory on agency. It seems ordinarily true that we change the environment we occupy. Of the three processes I presented about how a place gains its function, two were due to active agency. One was through deliberation, and the other was through the history of use. Both refer to the agent transforming the environment. The idea that we are shaped by the places we inhabit, however, might raise some conflicts with other theories on agency and on affordance.

When I say that our agency is partially shaped by the places we inhabit, I do not mean merely that we can only do what is possible in a given environment. My claim is stronger than that. I am

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group of affordances, since there can be a high volume of affordances in a place that are never acted upon.

claiming that the very structure of the agency is partially shaped by the relation between the agent and the environment. I am referring here to how an agent navigates the world they live in, i.e. I am referring to the web of nodes of affordance. That web of places changes how an agent perceives herself as an agent. This means a potential change in what the agent feels more compelled to do and how to do it. This claim is strong because, if agency is partially explained by the place occupied, then my explanation of agency would step out of the agent. That claim goes against two predominant ideas. One is the idea that affordances are not normative, but that they are simply an opportunity for action, e.g. a knife affords “cutting”, but that would not mean the agent ought to cut anything. The other is the mentalistic approach to agency, present in the literature on intentional agency.

So far, I have explained that places have functionality. A kitchen is a place for cooking. This functionality leads to a notion of normativity. I have already said how this presents us with a way to evaluate a place. For example, we could say that a kitchen where it is too hard or impossible to cook is a defective kitchen. My argument goes a bit further. When Bob transforms the garage into a storage room, Bob will think of the storage room whenever he needs to store or get a tool. If he buys a new tool, he will store it in that room, without pondering about whether that room would be the best place for storing it or not. My claim here is that the storage room does not merely provide an opportunity for storing tools, but that it also exerts pressure on Bob to store them there. This pressure makes cognition even easier, in that it refrains Bob from engaging in redeliberation or pondering about where to store the tool he just bought (notice the similarity with stability as a norm of rationality). Since the storage room is the place for storing tools, this hinders Bob from considering other rooms in the house as places for storing the tool he just bought. This hindrance is crucial to enable us, humans, creatures with limited cognitive power, to execute the complex activities that compose our daily lives.

I am claiming that the storage room’s affordance of “storing-tools-able” exerts pressure on the agent, and it is not simply an opportunity for agency. Such a claim can be contested. There is a debate about whether affordances can be normative or exert any sort of pressure on the agent. For Heras-Escribano (2019, 2016), affordances can never be normative because they are always only an opportunity for action, never a demand. Heras-Escribano and Pinedo disagree with Chemero (2009), who says that all affordances are normative because there are bad and good ways

to perform an action (see Chemero, 2009, p. 145). A ball affords “kicking”. According to Chemero’s reasoning, you can fail to properly kick the ball. If we can talk about failure or inappropriate ways to act upon some affordance, this means that we can talk about the normativity of an affordance. Chemero is talking about skills. So, for example, a football player should be able to properly kick a ball. I agree with Heras-Escribano’s criticism: not all affordances are normative (Heras-Escribano and Pinedo, 2016, p. 587). If all affordances were normative, then we would be buried under an immense load of normative pressures (see also Heras-Escribano, 2019, p. 110). If each affordance exerted normative pressure, they would cancel each other. In short, Heras-Escribano argues that an affordance can have an associated normative pressure, but that normative pressure is due to some other aspect.

Chemero’s notion of skilled affordances should not be so easily dismissed, though. We could admit that not all affordances have a normative pressure, but only those in which we have been trained, i.e. in which we have skill. A better argumentation, perhaps, would be to weaken the notion of a “normative” affordance. Some authors use the term “inviting affordances” (Withagen et al., 2017), others use “soliciting affordances” (Dings, 2018; Siegel, 2014), and others use the term “situated normativity” (Rietveld, 2008; Herik and Rietveld, 2021). They all mean the same thing: some affordances are not just opportunities for action - they somehow exert pressure on us to act upon them.

Many affordances depend on the agent being educated for it (Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014). Think of a person climbing stairs. It requires certain coordination in the steps; otherwise, the person will trip and fall. This means that there is an appropriate way to use the stairs. This fits my explanation of nodes of affordances. The process of acquiring a skill or being educated to perceive certain affordances is similar to the process of transforming the garage into a storage room. Rietveld and Kiverstein (2014) and Dings (2018) talk about the soliciting of an affordance. The soliciting is how relevant it is according to the needs, desires and intentions of the agent. This fits very well my definition of place. If Bob thinks of storing a tool, then the storage room’s affordance of “storing tools” solicits Bob to store the tool there.

Soliciting could be considered a quality of the affordances. It is in this sense that Withagen et al. (2017) talk about inviting affordances. So, for example, when a person finishes using a tool, the storage room’s affordance of “storing tools” invites the agent to use it to store the tool. Or

consider a person sitting on the couch in front of the TV. That situation affords “watching TV”, but we could say that this affordance has some power over the agent. It invites the agent to “watch TV”. As Withagen et al. argue, this does not mean that the agent cannot help but watch TV. The environment will most likely have many different inviting affordances, and it is up to the agent to manage these different attractions or to resist them (Withagen et al., 2017, pp. 16-17). The main point Withagen et al. present is that the environment is not inert.<sup>58</sup> They are inspired by Dreyfus and Kelly’s (2011) idea that the environment can be the source of agency.

Nevertheless, one objection could be that the demanding power of the solicitation comes from the agent’s needs and wants, and this would not be in conflict with the classic understanding of affordances as merely opportunities for action. Maybe “watching the TV” exerts pressure on the agent because it triggers some sort of addiction or desire. And when Bob needs a place to store a tool, it could be argued that it is this need that creates pressure on the agent, and not the affordances of the storage room. In this reasoning, it could be argued that the normativity of a place is secondary to the intention formed, to the desire or to the need. Without the desire or intention to store a tool, the storage room would not exert that pressure on the agent.

My answer to the above objection is twofold. One is that even if the storage room’s pressure on Bob to store a tool there derives from Bob’s desire, need or intention, the function of the storage room still exerts negative pressure on Bob’s overall agency. What I mean by negative pressure is the pressure *not to* store tools in other rooms of the house. This pressure exists regardless of Bob’s current desires, needs or intentions. Going back to the idea of skilled affordances, my claim is that Bob learned to store tools in the storage room. This means, also, that he learned not to store these tools elsewhere. A node is only a node in a network. Bob’s activity of fixing a broken step in the stairs will involve a series of actions. It will require Bob to navigate through different places. But Bob is not just fixing a broken step. Bob lives a full life, filled with many different activities. Bob

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<sup>58</sup> One could argue that my notion of affordance (as in nodes of affordances) might be better understood using Susanna Siegel’s (2014) concept of experienced mandates, which are a kind of soliciting affordances that really exert a demand (Siegel, 2014, p. 55). This means that certain affordances can be inviting but not yet exert a demand. In this chapter, however, I will not commit myself to any specific theory of “soliciting” affordance, but rather to the general idea that the environment does exert pressure on our agency, a pressure that goes beyond simply limiting what the agent can do.

cooks, eats, sleeps, watches the football game, listens to music, talks on the phone with his mother and spends time scrolling on his phone sitting on the sofa. The nodes of affordance compartmentalize his life. Makes it easier to live. Makes it easier to navigate the world. By creating a room for storing tools, Bob removes that functionality from other rooms. This is the negative pressure on other affordances. It is not a norm of the type “Bob ought to do x”, but of the form “Bob ought not to do x in y”. This normativity rests on a pragmatical reason. Humans are cognitively limited creatures. These norms about places make life easier and enable the complexity of our daily life.

The other answer to the objection is that places exert a positive pressure on the agent. I do not think that a specific affordance can exert pressure on the agent. It is not the TV’s affordance of “watching TV” that attracts the person to watch it. It is the whole situation, which is partially defined by the aspects of the place. Imagine you just prepared dinner, and you are alone. You have an open-plan kitchen and living room, so the TV sits right in front of the table. This whole situation highlights the TV’s affordances, which create or augment any desire to watch TV.

During the lockdowns, it was very common to hear people complain about having to work from their bedrooms. Many people feel uncomfortable working in the same place where they relax. People go all the way to the library to study, many times bringing their own laptop and not getting any books there. This is because studying in the library is easier than studying at home. Many people claim that the library has fewer distractions. A distraction is not only the presence of another person trying to talk to you. Being near the bed, the video game console, the TV or the phone is considered a distraction. My claim is that the bed itself is not what causes the distraction. It is the bedroom, as a place, which partially shapes the agency. The bedroom has a high volume of affordances that conflict with studying, and there is a history of using the bedroom, not as a place for studying. Meanwhile, the library is the opposite. Not only does it lack affordances that conflict with studying, but it also has a history of use related to studying. By history of use, I mean what the agents themselves have done in the past and what they perceived others doing. The library has other people studying, and this also adds to your own feelings regarding studying. These are very important factors for the definition of the place. One is the actual presence of certain affordances and their volume. The other is the use of the place, both by other people at the present time and also the history of its use.

How a place is used might not change the actual affordances of a place, but it changes how we perceive the function of the place. The history of use refers to the partition of activities through space. The library's existence on the network adds up to the bedroom not being suitable for studying. If there were no libraries, then there would be more instances of studying at home, which could change our dispositions regarding studying in the bedroom.

My argument here is that we partially make sense of our agency according to the places we occupy. So, for example, if one wants to sleep, one goes to the bedroom because the bedroom is the place for sleeping. The previous statement could be explained using only the notion of negative pressure. However, there is also a positive pressure, which is related to being more motivated to study when one is in a library. My argument is that when a person is in her bedroom, she will fit her agency with the characteristic function of the place. The bedroom is the place for sleeping, or also for spending time watching TV. If the person never had a history of studying in her room, coupled with a history of using the room for sleeping or watching TV, and a history of using the library to study, then that person will struggle to study in her room. It is not only the case that there is a negative pressure not to study in the bedroom. There is also a positive pressure to do the other things she usually does in her bedroom. The situation is different in the library. It is not only the case that the library is not a place for sleeping or watching TV. A library is a place for studying. Being in the library involves a positive pressure "to study".

This positive pressure is due to how the person perceives herself as an agent. My claim is that how we perceive ourselves as agents partially depends on the places we occupy. In chapter 1, when I talked about team reasoning, I said that when people are in a rowing boat in the middle of a lake, this transforms their agency into a collective agency. This situation leads people to perceive as "we". If a person perceives as "we", she will rebuke the other person who is not behaving as a group member. She will contest the other person for not perceiving that they are a group. That rowing boat situation is an example of how the place shaped how the agents perceived themselves as agents.

In order to better explain this positive pressure, I have to explain the relation between place and identity. The explanation will involve discussions on the philosophy of geography and narrative self. After explaining the relation between place and identity, I will return to this topic, i.e., the positive pressure. This positive pressure will become much clearer when I present how

places shape sociality, and how sociality is shaped by places.

### 3. Definition of Place: Identity

The connection between what a person thinks of themselves and the places she inhabits is not explored very much in the analytic literature. However, it is explored in the philosophy of geography in what is called the sense of place. They draw attention to the relation between identity and place. In order to better explain how place shapes agency, I will draw from this literature in the philosophy of geography, and I will also borrow some ideas from the literature on narrative self.<sup>59</sup>

Most authors in the philosophy of geography define place in relation to subjectivity and identity, such as Jeff Malpas' definition of place as "that within which and with respect to which subjectivity itself is established" (Malpas, 2004, p. 35). John Agnew's (1987) definition of place is, perhaps, the most influential definition in the philosophy of geography. Agnew defines place in terms of *location*, *locale* and *sense of place* (Agnew, 1987). Location refers to the objective coordinates of a place. When a person has a world map and asks, "where is India?", we can point at the location on the map. Locale refers to the features of the place. For example, Paris is not just a point or a region on a map. Paris is composed of buildings, roads and parks, and each building has its own architecture and size. And the sense of place refers to the subjective relation between the places and the people who inhabit them. To illustrate, let us consider a kid who has a home. His home has a location, i.e. we can locate it in comparison to other locations and point it on a map. On top of that, his home has a physical shape, i.e. it is a locale. It has different rooms, it has walls, and it has other people living in it. But only these features would not be enough to explain what his *home* is. His home is where he lives with his mom, dad and sister. It is where he plays

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<sup>59</sup> Proshansky et al. (1983) have also talked about the relation between identity and place. However, their notion of "place-identity" relies completely on self-identity. The problem is that this leads to a completely subjective notion of place. By this, I mean that each person will have their own perception of the places, which might or might not coincide with others. The reason why I use the concept of affordance is precisely to avoid reducing place to pure subjectivity. Moreover, Proshansky et al. talk about the relation between functions of "place-identity", but this functionality is briefly explained as the many social roles.

with his dog, whom he loves very much. Think of the home where you grew up. Most likely, you feel nostalgia. More than just remembering the actual shape or location of the house, you will remember the many feelings and events you had growing up in that place. As Gaston Bachelard once said, “a house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 47)

Many other authors in that literature analyze place in relation to subjectivity, though some might use different terms (Langegger, 2017; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996; Harvey, 2000, 2007; Massey, 1994, 2007; Cresswell, 2014; Tuan, 1974, 1977). The main idea shared by these different authors is that places are constantly changing according to how people relate to the places they inhabit. This is sometimes understood as the meaning of a place for some people. Tim Cresswell, reflecting on the works of Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977), argues that “place is the central concept which most perfectly expresses how humans create centers of meaning and fields of care in order to feel at home in the world” (Cresswell, 2014, p. 198). Think of the Appalachian Trail. If the US government decided to abolish the trail, there would be resistance. This is not only because of the actual benefits that the trail might bring to certain people, but how meaningful it is to them.

Places are meaningful in different ways. The Appalachian Trail can be meaningful for someone because once they hiked there and it changed their lives. That same person’s home is also meaningful to them, but for other reasons. The argument here is that a place is meaningful in relation to how a person conceives herself. That is, a place is meaningful because of its relation to a person’s identity. At first glance, this might seem rather orthogonal to my previous discussion about affordances and functions. However, it is not, and this is because a person’s identity is related to their agency. Here I will borrow some ideas from theories of narrative self.

I will not commit myself to any specific theory of narrative self. My focus is not on whether narrative self is the best way to analyze personal identity. My focus is on the relation between a person’s notion of herself and the places she inhabits. I defined place as node of affordances constituted together with people’s identities. Section 2 was about the “node of affordances”. This current section is about the “constituting together with people’s identities”.

### **3.1. Narrative self**

There are many different theories of narrative self. The main idea shared between them is that

what brings unity to the self is a process of narration. Think of the minimal self, like the Cartesian self in the cogito (the “I” in “I think, therefore I exist”). There is a question about what connects the “me” of right now to the “me” in the past and the future. As MacIntyre said, “The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 219). We have a notion of ourselves as an agent that leads our lives (Wollheim, 1984, p. 2). Some authors think that this narrative quest spans throughout a person’s entire life (Cavell, 2011; MacIntyre, 1984; Taylor, 1989; Ricoeur, 1994), while others think a person’s life involves a multitude of short and mundane narratives (Velleman, 2006; Nelson, 2003; and Schechtman, 2011). Either way, there is a process of inputting meaning into what we did and what happened to us. We perceive a series of actions we have done as composing a coherent whole. For example, consider a kid who visits their grandparents over the summer of 1954. The many mundane actions and events that took place there will compose “her summer at granny’s house in 1954”. All it takes to form a coherent whole is for the kid to perceive herself as leading her life, i.e. as an agent that acted and reacted during that summer.<sup>60</sup>

One of the main ideas I am borrowing from theories of narrative self is the idea that we perceive ourselves as agents that last through time. We make sense of our actions in relation to the things we have done and intend to do. It is by living life that we input meaning into our own lives. This means that it is by acting that we form our identity, and our identity will shape how we act.<sup>61</sup> My argument is that when we act, we are not only in the process of inputting meaning into our own lives but also inputting meaning into the place where we act. On the one hand, this refers to sleeping many times in a room until it becomes a place for sleeping (i.e. a bedroom). On the other hand, it also refers to something larger than the function. A bedroom is a place for sleeping and

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<sup>60</sup> Notice that the “meaning” here refers to a certain coherence, whereas the “meaning” of sense of place, as discussed by some philosophers of geography, refers to value. Consider, for example, what I said about the Appalachian Trail at the end of the previous section, where I used it to illustrate how the trail can be valuable to some people.

<sup>61</sup> There is a potential similarity between my argument here and Christine Korsgaard’s (2009) account of agency. The idea that we make ourselves as we live is also shared by Korsgaard’s notion of self-constitution. Without going into detail about Korsgaard theory, the main difference between her account and my theory is that, in my theory, we shape each other’s narratives through shared places. Thus, the process of self-constitution is, when living in society, always social.

some other private activities. However, the bedroom where you grew up is not just a place *for* something. It is the place *of* your childhood. Too many things happened in that bedroom, and this transcends the functionality of the room. It shapes the person's notion of herself.

This means, for example, that a football stadium is not only a place for supporting one's team but also a place of passion for one's team. The first aspect refers to the functionality of the place. The latter refers to the agent's notion of themselves regarding that place. Thus, a library does not only provide a good environment for studying. A library highlights the part of the identity of some people that is related to studies. Being in the library highlights oneself as a student. Being at the football stadium highlights oneself as a football fan. So, occupying places that are important to oneself means cherishing that side of your identity. The partitioning of the space into places helps us to organize the different sides of our identities. At school, a person can be quiet, but in the stadium, she can shout her lungs out.

### **3.2. Places compared to games: How place shapes our agency**

Think of playing a rugby match. Is it not a way to be more aggressive in a rather safe way? Games offer a good analogy for my argument about how place shapes agency. One way to understand games is as *magic circles*. The term was coined by Johan Huizinga (1949), and it refers to how games create a temporal arena in which the rules change so that certain actions performed within that "magic circle" do not carry over consequences to the "real" world. For example, lying is considered wrong, but when we play Poker, lying becomes acceptable, if not even a virtue. Recently, Thi Nguyen (2019) has argued that games are the art of shaping agency. While playing chess, we devote our energy to calculating strategic movements. While playing football, what matters is having dexterity with the legs and teamwork. While playing Poker, what matters is bluffing and seeing through other people's bluffs. Games are clear cases where we change the rules of behavior. My argument is that something rather similar happens everywhere in life. A school is different from a football stadium. At school, there is a certain way of acting, and the values praised in there are different from the values praised in a football stadium. Each place has its own functions, rules and history of practices. Each place comes with its own pack of ways of behaving and hierarchy of values.

Places shape us because when we inhabit a place, this will exert pressure on how we understand ourselves as agents. When a person is at the library, the student is constantly triggered

to think of her agency “as a student”. When that same person is at home (considering that she never studied at home), then she will not be triggered to think of herself as a student.

I am not saying that we are completely determined by the places we inhabit. Places are defined by the actions we take there. We are constantly shaping the places we inhabit. However, we are brought into a world that already has a history. This means not only that people have changed the actual affordances of the places we inhabit, but that we capture how others have used them, and this informs us what the place is. Growing up, or when we move to a different culture, we are educated about what are the places that compose the network we live in.

The main difference between games and places is that people play games voluntarily (Bernard Suits, 2005, pp. 54–55).<sup>62</sup> In contrast, we always inhabit some place, and sometimes we do not like where we are. Inhabiting a place can be sufficient to act without thinking much about it or even in a way that you do not like. Getting rid of old practices is much easier when we move to a new place. My hypothesis is that this is because of how we structure our agency. We are biologically disposed and culturally trained to perceive nodes of affordances (and this means perceiving its function and the pack of practice and hierarchy of values associated with it). Each place has its own practices and values. By syncing the structure of our agency with the place, it becomes much easier to act in that place. By the structure of the agency, I mean what motivates a person, what the hierarchy of values guiding her agency is, how she perceives the purposes of her actions, the rules that will exert pressure on how she will perform her actions, and even whether or not she will frame her action as part of a collective action. For example, in a library, people should not approach others. We are educated to learn that we should behave in that way when at a library. Moreover,

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<sup>62</sup> It might be worth noting that such statement is not a unanimity in the literature in philosophy of games. Indrek Reiland (2022) argues that what is necessary in order to play a game is that there are rules governing behavior. This can happen either by the participants accepting the rules, but it is possible for someone to force others to follow the rules. One possible objection would be that, if games are like that, then too many other human activities might be characterized as games. In this sense, Reiland’s account of games seems to fit Huizinga’s (1949) theory, as Huizinga uses games to analyze culture in general (e.g. war conventions as being “game-like”). For my purposes of this current chapter, the limits between what games are and what games are not is tangential. I brought games as an analogy to how places shape agency. In this sense, what matters most for my purposes in this chapter is Nguyen’s (2019) account of games as the art of shaping agency.

even if we were not educated, we could still capture the ways of behaving just by looking at how others are behaving. Thus, simply by walking into a library, we are triggered to be quieter and more introspective. In contrast, we can think of a party in someone's house. During the party, the house becomes a node for different affordances. It becomes a place for partying. People can be quiet during a party, but being quiet at a party usually means you are not having fun. If a person is not even trying to have fun, then the person is not acting accordingly to the party. Being at a party will exert pressure on you to try to have fun, even if you do not feel like having fun.

### **3.3. Identity of a place**

I have said that we form a notion of ourselves as we act and according to the places we inhabit. Action and place are tied. In this sense, it is possible to talk about the identity of a place. The identity of place always refers to how it relates to the identity of people. As I have said before, this phenomenon is what is discussed as the sense of place in the philosophy of geography. Let me explain the identity of a place using an example, the Appalachian Trail.

The Appalachian Trail is composed of a series of paths. It is a network of places, but it can be considered a place since it could be argued that most places are actually networks as well. It is a very long trail, thousands of miles. Most people only walk part of the trail. A trail is a path. A path is usually formed as people walk in it. Imagine a squared grass field. The easiest way to cross the opposite ends of the field is by crossing the middle of the field. As people walk on the grass, it kills the grass. This forms a clear path. At first, there was no path, just the affordance of the easiest way to cross it. Now there is a path. Paths can be formed unintentionally, as I have just presented. The Appalachian Trail, however, was planned. They intentionally put signs and opened ways in the woods. The intention was to connect the many settlements in the area. Opening the paths was a way to shape the environment and offer an easier way for people in the area to travel. These paths were in the middle of the wild. It afforded long walks in the country. In other words, it afforded hiking, a very pleasurable and challenging hike. At this point, we can refer to the trail as a place that was intentionally formed having the function of facilitating and thus encouraging travel between settlements. The actual affordances of the place, coupled with associating it with other places for hiking, made it a place for hiking. People started hiking in it, and the more people did that, the more it established it as a place for hiking. At first, there was a deliberation to form the place. The actual affordances and the association with other places presented the place as having

a different function from the one first intended. And as time went by, it was formed a history of hiking in that place. These are precisely the three ways in which a node of affordance is formed. It serves as an example of how these processes can overlap each other, and how places are in a constant process of being shaped.

The Appalachian Trail is very long, so it is a challenge to walk all the way. On top of that, there are certain parts that are especially challenging because of the mountains and wildlife, such as bears. Overcoming challenges are usually significant in a person's life, and so it is surviving encountering a bear in the wild. The more people hiked the trail, the more life-changing events happened there. Naturally, stories about the place started being shared. Books were written, and films were recorded. By listening to how important the trail was to other people, a person can form the intention to hike there precisely because she also longs for a similar experience. This is beyond the specific function of the place. It refers to its meaning in a larger sense. Hiking the Appalachian Trail is not merely walking from point A to point B. It is about having a break from daily routines. It is about having peaceful moments of reflection in the wild. It is about overcoming some challenges. The Appalachian Trail is associated not just with hiking, but understood as walking in the country. It is associated with a myriad of experiences. For many people, the Appalachian Trail is important for who they are. We can talk about the identity of the Appalachian Trail in relation to how it partially carved the identity of these people.

The Appalachian Trail is not just "hike-able". Hiking the Appalachian Trail means, for most people, travelling the same path where so many others travelled, and how important it was for them. There is one aspect that is shared by most theories of narrative self, namely, that we are co-authors of each other's lives (Cavell, 2011, p. 595; Taylor, 1989, pp. 35–36; Schechtman, 2011, p. 405; MacIntyre, 1984, p 99; Nelson, 2003, p. 33; and Ricoeur 1992, p. 172). My claim is that it is mainly through places that we co-author each other's lives. Visiting a historical site, such as Cambridge University, means walking the same halls that Isaac Newton did. Visiting one's childhood neighborhood means connecting with one's past. By visiting where our ancestors lived, we feel connected to them. And we indeed are, even when we are not aware of it. This is because all places we inhabit now have been shaped by those who came before us (Costall, 1995). We are born in a world that is already partitioned and filled with meaning. We form our identity always in relation to the values and practices of those who came before us and raised us.

Every single place has its history. The Maracanã stadium is a temple of football. Not only because of its size, but also, and mainly, because of its history. A site becomes holy not only because there is a holy person buried there, but because of every person's pilgrimage to that place. That is valid for the Camino del Santiago and for any pilgrimage to holy shrines. And the same is valid for every house and flat.

## **4. Shared Places**

I have already presented the core of my theory of places. I have explained what I mean by node of affordances and I have also presented the notion of how an agent perceives itself as an agent. When I presented how a node can gain its function, I briefly presented some cases of shared places. And when I talked about narrative self, I touched on the idea that we are co-authors of each other's lives. I want now to explore in more detail what shared places are. I have already started doing so, especially when analyzing the Appalachian Trail. But now I want to go a bit deeper into how different forms of sharing a place shape agency in different ways. I will explain what it means to share a node of affordances. I will also talk about the conflicting uses of a place. It is precisely when I talk about that conflict that it will become clearer what the positive pressure of nodes of affordances are. In short, this positive pressure (of the type "act according to x in y" or "do x in y") is related to the coherence of the sociality and, thus, the agency of those occupying the place.

### **4.1. Sharing a node of affordances: The Appalachian Trail**

Let us now use the Appalachian Trail to illustrate how a place can be shared, that is, how we can share a place in terms of node of affordances and also in terms of identity. I defined place as a node of affordance. As such, a place is shared when that node is shared. Co-presence is enough, absent pure aggressive attitudes, to make a place shared. However, a node can be shared without co-presence. It can be shared through accessibility and through time. The Appalachian Trail is an example of a place that is shared through time. Let me explain this in a bit more detail. The Appalachian Trail is a node for "walking in the woods" and "escaping city life". The trail is open to pretty much anyone. What this means is that the Appalachian Trail is a node that is shared because others can access it at any time and because others have walked it. As I have said before, the Appalachian Trail is meaningful to people nowadays because of what has happened in the past.

For example, a person reads books about life stories that happened in the trail. Then, that person decides to walk the trail. When she walks the trail, she is walking where those stories happened. She is sharing the trail with the same people that wrote the books she read. Notice the two aspects of the place: node of affordance and identity. The Appalachian Trail is a shared node of affordances, and this shared node has a certain meaning to the people who are connected to it. The same trail might be used in different ways by different people. Not everyone is from afar and walks the trail because of the challenge and its popularity. Some people live in a village by the trail. A person might have a small farm, and every now and then receive a walker. That farmer is also connected to the Appalachian Trail. By learning about the Appalachian Trail, a person can capture what that place is – this refers both to how it is used, what it is used for, and what it means to those who use or used it. In other words, the Appalachian Trail is shared through time.

#### **4.2. Sharing through accessibility: The café and the alleyway**

Places can be shared in a more mundane sense. Consider the café. I used the café as an example of gregariousness back in chapter 2. Some people might be in the café with friends, but the relation between that group and others is a gregarious one. More likely than not, there will be people by themselves. Imagine a person sitting at the edge of the café, facing the wall. She has a cup of coffee, but she is there to write. She has earphones and listens to music while being very concentrated on her writing. At certain times, she might be the only client in the café. It might even be the case that the only worker in the café takes a break and goes outside to smoke. In that case, that person will be alone in the café. In other words, there is nobody present besides her. My argument is that she still shares that place, and her attitude will most likely stay the same, even if she becomes aware that she is alone. A café is an open place. By open, I mean that anyone can enter it at any time, i.e. it is accessible.<sup>63</sup> It is not only that she cannot behave in the café as she behaves in her bedroom. My argument is that some core social aspects of the café do not rely on co-presence. Rather, they rely on this accessibility. Her attitude will not change in drastic ways because others are not there. The same goes for libraries too.

There could be a possible objection to what I argued above. In chapter 2, I said that

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<sup>63</sup> Later on I will explore the notion open places. For now, it suffices to treat it as a place that is accessible by others. Later, in Section 6.2, I will define open places as, besides accessible, lacking strong normativity regarding collective action or collective reasoning.

gregariousness requires proximity. If there is no one else in the café, this means there is no one else to be proximate to. Indeed, for the five minutes that she was alone in the café, it was not a gregarious state of affairs. My point is that her agency will not change in drastic ways for these five minutes. What I mean by that is that she will still conceive her presence as being in an environment that is open to others and for others to do things that do not involve her. If the café stays empty for too long, only then would she feel uncomfortable. The place will have changed. If a place is accessible but is not accessed by others, we might either suspect the truth of that accessibility or we might drop it from what constitutes the place. It is possible to sleep in the café, but nobody considers that possibility, so it is not taken as constituting that node of affordance. If accessibility no longer seems to constitute the place, then the café will become either a private or an isolated place. The café would no longer be a place for gregariousness. If, before, the presence of others would bring the warmth of sociality and also a sense of safety, the absence of the presence of others can bring a sense of danger. It can bring a feeling of danger in case the place is still perceived as accessible by others, but not as a place for gregariousness or not for other positive forms of sociality, especially if there is some expectation that there are aggressive people in that society. This is precisely the case with alleys in big cities. They are accessible by others, but they are rarely accessed by others. That place is a good environment for certain illegal activities, such as trafficking illegal drugs. Homeless people tend to either sleep in a busy street or in some fairly hidden place, but not in dangerous alleys, at least not alone. At the late night hours, most streets become just like that type of alley. If, by any chance, you find yourself in such an alley, your attitude will not be the same as the girl writing alone for five minutes in the café. Her attitude is the same as if there were others there. So, we could say that she has a gregarious attitude, even though during these five minutes, there was no gregariousness. The attitude of the person in the alley is different. In case there is someone else in the alley, the attitude is not one of warm sociality. Rather, it is a case where sociality is tense. Tense because there is a potential aggression, a potential conflict.

The examples above describe how we change our attitudes according to the places we occupy. There is a dynamic relation between the attitudes of agents occupying a place and the place shaping that attitude. We can make a place dangerous depending on our attitudes. And we assume a defensive attitude when we find ourselves in dangerous places. On the one hand, we sync our agency with the place. On the other hand, we are capable of changing the place through our

attitudes.<sup>64</sup>

### 4.3. Agency coherence: The coherence of affordances

The café and the alley examples also show how places ease the cognitive effort related to living in society. If I am at a café, then I consider the agency of others in a certain way (in this case, one that fits with gregariousness). If I am in a dangerous alley, then I will have a defensive attitude, which is to be prepared for aggression, and I will also expect others in the alley to have a likewise attitude. Instead of having to exchange words with others, we can have a notion of their agency based on the node of affordance. I have said before how nodes of affordance facilitate an agent to organize her life and navigate the world. Nodes of affordance, in their sharing capacity, facilitate social organization and people to navigate the social world. If I am in a restaurant and I see a person dressed in an apron with a knife, I will not be alarmed, i.e. I will not perceive that as a potential threat. However, if I see someone with a knife in a dangerous alley, regardless of whether that person is wearing an apron, I will perceive it as a potential threat.

In chapter 1, when I talked about the feeling of ownership of agency, I argued that people contrast their agency with their mosaic of affordances. What I want to add now is that people contrast their agency with the node of affordance. A knife affords “cutting”, but depending on the place, this might afford a threat, or it might afford the means to learn how to cook (e.g. if one is in a cooking class). Affordances are related to activities, and this refers to a context composed of many other activities and affordances (e.g. when a person sees a knife in a cooking class is not the same as when a person sees a knife in a dangerous alley). What I am presenting in this chapter is an extension of what I already presented in chapter 1. In chapter 1, I said that we do not perceive

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<sup>64</sup> There is a certain pleasure that we could call “reverse sociality”. It is this pleasure of being alone in a place that is normally shared. There is a certain pleasure in driving on an avenue, which is always with heavy traffic during the day, but it is empty during the night (see Lofland, 2017, pp. 90-92). This pleasure only exists because it is the opposite of the sociality that constitutes that place. What I am saying here is that the pleasure of being alone, or almost alone, in these places is not the same as the pleasure of being on an isolated island. It is precisely because it is a shared node of affordance that the place can provide that kind of pleasure. It is a kind of reversed sociality. This point is important because it indicates the idea that being alone is not merely lacking co-presence. There are many different ways to be alone. Even gregariousness can be conceived as a form of being alone in a crowd.

affordances in isolation but in a mosaic of affordances. In this current chapter, I am saying that we do not simply perceive an affordance, but we conceive our activities having in mind specific nodes of affordances. It might be possible to store a lawnmower in the bedroom, but the bedroom is the place for sleeping and the storage room is the place for storing tools, such as the lawnmower. The same happens at the social level. A knife in the hands of another person in a restaurant does not trigger panic. And, in a restaurant, you might hold a knife to eat the food, but holding a knife in that context does not involve perceiving the possibility of using that knife to attack others. We probably do not even perceive that capacity for aggression because the agency that syncs with the restaurant is not an aggressive one.

Games can offer another example to illustrate it. Having control of a ball only affords an opportunity to score a goal if you are playing a football game. If you are not, then there is no goal to score.<sup>65</sup> If you are in a restaurant and there is a ball there, most likely, you will not even perceive the ball affording kicking it. I said “most likely” because it is possible to perceive that affordance. It is a waste of cognitive effort since you should not act upon it. But let us say that you do act upon it. Not only might the ball hit others, so it is dangerous, but it is also nonsensical in a restaurant. Our agency can be judged according to the coherence of the agency in a place. If that is the case, then there is a question about how to solve conflicting uses of a place.

#### **4.4. Conflicting uses of a place: The pier**

I have said that people sync their agency with the node of affordance. However, what if people have conflicting uses for a place? This is not the same as a place for conflict, such as the ring in a boxing fight or the arena in a gladiator fight in the Colosseum. In these cases, there is no conflict about what the place is. What I want to deal with here is when different people consider the same place to have different uses, leading to conflict. The same place can refer to different activities for different people, but in a harmonious way. A café can be a place for relaxation and gregariousness for a client, but it is a place of work for the barista and the cashier. The same goes for the security

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<sup>65</sup> If you are at a football field, you can practice shooting at the goal, but it still does not count as a goal, since the football field only becomes the place for playing football when a game is being played. This is very similar to how the House of Parliament only stands as place for political decision making when the parliament is in session. This process is the same as when a street becomes a place for partying during Carnival, which I have already discussed back in Section 2.3.

guard at a football match and the cleaners in a library. However, in these cases, these different activities not only co-exist in the same place, but they are also actually required in order to make the place what it is. Without cleaners, we cannot have a library adequate for studying. All these previous cases are not problematic. What is problematic is when people have conflicting uses of the same place.

Consider a beach with a pier. A pier is a place for boats to dock. That pier, however, is almost never used by boats. On a sunny afternoon, there are many families enjoying the beach. Some start sitting on the pier to picnic, since there are no boats around. Then, a boat appears on the horizon. At first, no one cares about that boat. But as the boat approaches the pier, it becomes clearer that the boat is going to dock on that pier. And the boat is approaching fast. So fast that it is hard to get the kids out of the water before the boat arrives. The boat docks at that pier. The families on the pier, and also some families who are on the beach, form a crowd condemning the man who is navigating the boat. They complain that there are families around and that he puts the kids in danger. The man leaves the boat and defends himself, “a pier is a place for boats to dock”. That is an example of a conflict in the constitution of a node of affordance.<sup>66</sup>

For the families, the pier was a place for picnicking. The kids could swim near the pier, and this was safe since the families could easily reach the kids. For the families, the boat put the kids in danger and was a nuisance on their sunny afternoon at the beach. For the helmsman, the pier was a place for docking boats, so the kids put themselves in danger by swimming nearby the pier, and the families should have known better. Who is right?

In my account, the functionality of places is not completely subjective. As Gibson said, affordances are neither completely subjective nor completely objective (Gibson, 1986, p. 41). Affordance depends on both features of the agent and features of the objects and elements in the environment. As I have presented before (in Section 2.4), my account is sympathetic to theories of affordance that relate affordance to skills and education. That is, skills and education are features

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<sup>66</sup> This example is based on a real-life event. A British politician, George Osborne, was the man in the boat ruining everyone else’s day on the beach, back in the year 2008. This story was reported in the British journal *The Guardian* (23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2008): <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/oct/23/georgeosborne-corfu> (Accessed on 25 November 2022).

of the agent, besides bodily features. This means that a knife affords “cutting” for everyone sharing the same environment, as long as they can use a knife. It also means that a book affords reading for everyone, as long as they know how to read. Returning to the pier, it is both true that the pier affords picnicking and that it affords docking boats. The families’ complaint and the helmsman’s complaint both refer not to what the pier affords, but to its function. As I have said before (Section 2.3), just deciding that a room will be a kitchen does not make it a kitchen. In that same section, I also said that the processes that define a place are not mutually exclusive, i.e. they can happen at the same time. In the pier case, there is a collective decision to provide places for boats to dock, namely, piers. And there is also a history of using piers to dock boats. However, there were families there. The actual activities taking place were not related to docking boats. The more families were there, the stronger their pressure on reshaping the place was. For example, the more kids are swimming nearby, the more kids are put in danger if a boat comes to the pier. The families’ use of the pier clashes with its use for docking boats. In Section 2.3, I said that a room that has no kitchen appliances is not a place for cooking, regardless of any decision to make so. A room filled with kitchen appliances, but also filled with people sleeping there, is not a place for cooking either. Thus, my answer is that the pier was not, in that context, a place for docking boats.

What could be argued is that the pier *should* be a place for docking boats, the same way that people should not be sleeping in the kitchen. What a place should be depends on agreements, conventions and decisions. It might even depend on morality. Maybe the pier *should* be a place to dock boats, but it *is* not.

#### **4.5. The two levels of normativity: What a place should be and what one should do in a certain place (i.e. according to what a place is and not what it should be)**

There are two levels of normativity here. One is related to shaping the place, and the other is related to places shaping us. One is about what places should be, and the other is about what we should do in a place. Consider the kitchen filled with people sleeping. It is no longer a kitchen. Maybe it should be a kitchen, but it is not. In this case, if I turn on the stovetop and start cooking, I will be trying to rescue the function of the place as a kitchen. Maybe that pier should be a place to dock boats. But it was not. As such, it was the helmsman that put the kids in danger, not the kids who put themselves in danger. The kids were acting according to the function of that place, namely, as a place for picnicking. According to that, there is no rule regarding not swimming nearby.

For certain shared nodes of affordance, there can be a social norm to act accordingly. Not all shared places have a strict function. Some gregarious places, for example, require a minimal constraint on people's actions. Consider a park. People can do so many different things in a park. They should not commit crimes, but that is because the park is part of the domain of the government. But people can be by themselves smoking, they might throw a party, they might have a concert and so many other things. Other gregarious places have a narrower "window of activities". A gym is a place for exercising, and not much else. A library is a place for studying, and not much else. Certain places have a narrower set of activities, and this refers to the function of the place, i.e. to what it is a node of. If you go to the library and you start singing, you will interfere with the function of the place. A library is a place for studying. When a person is at the library, she will most likely perceive herself as a student, and she will perceive others as likewise.<sup>67</sup> This does not refer to a shared activity, since each is doing their own individual studies (e.g. it would not satisfy Bratman's conditions for shared agency). The library has a rule against speaking loudly, so as to guarantee the place is for studying. If a library does not have such rules, it might risk not being a library at all (which is akin to how not following the rules of football risks destroying the game). It is not necessarily the case that people would be harmed by destroying the library. Maybe they all consider that it would be better to transform the library into a pub, and the compromise would be to study at home and only access books online. My point is that, while this place is a library, people should not sing in it. That is, people perceive the coherence of their agency largely in accordance with the node of affordance.

#### **4.6. How that normativity (of acting according to what the place is) can emerge without prior interactions**

In the case of libraries, societies create activities of studying and places for studying. This means that people decided to create places where there will be books and tables, and people cannot do things that conflict with the activity of studying in these places. For such a case, maybe a theory like Gilbert's (2014) theory of joint commitment might be sufficient to explain the normativity

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<sup>67</sup> In a library, there are also workers –ranging from librarians to cleaners. However, cleaning a library while it is open is not the same as cleaning a warehouse. The library requires silence. The workers in the library guarantee that the library works well, that it is a good library (and not a defective one).

related to not singing in the library. However, norms regarding agency in shared places need not be formed through a collective decision-making process. The pier was such a case. The families did not have to perceive the pier as a place for docking boats, formed the decision to subvert that function and make it into a place for picnicking. It might very well be the case that the families did not perceive the pier as a place for docking boats, to begin with. They simply perceived it as a nice place for picnicking, maybe because there were no boats in sight. They did not have to form an agreement with other families. After all, there must be the first family to occupy the pier, and they might have done that just because it was a good place for picnicking. After many families occupied the pier, the rules we can suppose to hold would be like the ones in a park, i.e. not setting any specific activity but minimally constraining troublesome activities (such as aggressive attitudes). The boat coming at high speed towards the pier is an aggressive attitude and, given the transformation of the place, is incoherent. What I mean is that the sheer volume of picnicking activities (which refers to current use) shaped the pier into a place for picnicking. Any member of that society should be able to perceive that it is now a place for picnicking – the same way that any normal member of that society would not consider a knife as a threat in a restaurant. It became a node for picnicking. As such, a boat docking becomes a problem, just like someone holding a knife is a problem when we are outside a restaurant or a kitchen.<sup>68</sup>

The norm that one should not dock his boat on the pier derives, on the one hand, from a pragmatic reason, namely, that people should act in accordance with the function of the place; otherwise, we will not be able to save cognitive effort. On the other hand, it derives from a general rule that one ought not to harm others (which itself can be a moral rule or just a rule in the constitutional laws of that society). Since the place is now a place for picnicking, it was the helmsman who put the kids in danger, and not the kids who put themselves in danger.

#### **4.7. Social coherence: This normativity (of acting according to what the place is) is related to the coherence of agency and sociality**

Related to the pragmatic reason to save cognitive effort, there is yet a third reason why one should not dock the boat on the pier. It is about the coherence of sociality. I have briefly discussed

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<sup>68</sup> I will return to this discussion about the possibility of explaining places through the notion of joint commitment later in Section 5.1.

narrative theories of the self (in Section 3.1). What I wanted to highlight is that we make sense of our agency as composing a coherent narrative. We judge ourselves according to that narrative. We regret things we do because of that narrative. This regret is a judgement. I should have stood my ground. I should have called the police. I should not have helped him. We judge these things not only according to what the outcome was and what it could have been (e.g. if only I had done this, I would have got that). We judge our actions and performances according to how we make sense of ourselves. Sartre talked about the dilemma of a young man in Paris, when it was occupied by the Nazis, between taking care of his mother at home or joining the resistance (2007, p. 39). My argument is that these choices are related to two identities: one as a son and the other as a French antifascist. The young man might decide to take care of his mom because, as a son, that is what he feels he should do. This decision undermines the French antifascist identity and reinforces the “son” identity. In chapter 1, I said that we judge our own performance by contrasting our agency to the mosaic of affordances. If I am in a rowing boat, holding a paddle, I will perceive myself as the “navigator” of the boat. And if there are others in the boat, I will perceive this “navigating” as collective, leading to the joint ownership of agency. Though we are not completely determined by the given environment we currently occupy, we make sense of our agency partially according to our relation with the environment. This “making sense of the agency” refers precisely to the coherence of the agency, which is what theories of narrative self so frequently highlight.

When the man was going high speed with his boat towards the pier, he was breaking the social coherence of that shared place. This social coherence is the connection of the sociality in that place with the many activities and people in that place. It was a nice sunny afternoon with many families on the beach. But it became a case of conflict.

#### **4.8. Social coherence: The positive pressure that shapes agency**

I have said that we sync our agency with the place, and I attributed that to making our agency coherent. This process need not be just a modification of certain social norms. It can be a modification in more significant ways. According to the theory of agency transformation, which I have discussed in chapter 1, the hierarchy of payoffs that guide an agent is not fixed. In that chapter, I talked about how it can shift from an individual one to a collective hierarchy of payoffs. If a person perceives the coherence of her agency at the collective level, then she will perform team reasoning. According to the theory of place I have presented, the hierarchy of payoffs can change

by just occupying a different place. As I have argued, places are constituted by affordances and activities. A library is a place for studying. This means a certain way to perceive the coherence of your agency. Going to the library might help to study because it reinforces the identity of being a student, which reinforces the coherence of studying. This can very much be understood as a change in the payoff hierarchy if one uses a game theoretical account to explain agency. In a library, there are rules for not being loud, but there are no rules for spending your whole time checking Instagram. However, it could be said that, in a library, checking Instagram is frowned upon, and that would be largely due to clashing with the studying activity.

According to my theory, what happens is that a library is a place for studying. Not studying might not risk this activity to others, but it beats the point of being there. You go there to feel more compelled to study. Being there highlights your identity as a student. Being there reinforces the coherence of your studying activity. As an analogy to games, playing football is not just following the rules of the game, but actually trying to score goals, play as a team and perform dribbles. Playing football is about taking a specific form of agency, which might not require winning, but it requires dexterity in controlling a ball with your feet and cooperative reasoning in playing in a team. The library is not just about following rules of silence. Libraries are about studying. Sometimes, places have a function with a clear goal, as is the case of libraries (the goal being studying). Other times, places have a function about how to act, but not a clear goal. The rowing boat case, from chapter 1, involves pressure to act as a group. The park example from before involves only minimal constraints to guarantee gregariousness. The gym, on the other hand, like the library, has a specific activity (i.e. to exercise). As such, syncing with the place can mean anything from a change in social norms, to a change in the hierarchy of payoffs, to a change in the perception of the subject of agency (i.e. from “I” to “we”), to a change in the specific activity to be performed. My point is that places have coherence, which also is coherent in a network of nodes. This pressure for acting in coherence with the place is the positive pressure that I mentioned in Section (2.4).

## **5. Two Possible Alternative Theories of Place**

I want now to briefly address two possible alternative accounts of place. One would be an

account of place that is based on joint perception and the other would be one based on communication. For this, I will briefly discuss an account based on joint perception, put forward by Axel Seeman (2019). For an account based on communication, I will talk about Gilbert's (2014) theory (which was inspired by Charles Taylor, 1985). My argument, in short, is that the latter would fail to explain places that emerge without communication and it would fail to grasp non-normative aspects of places. Regarding the former, I will argue that joint perception is not enough to distinguish sociality from pure conflict.

### **5.1. Shared places: Joint-perception**

Axel Seeman (2019) has recently proposed an account of how we share the world. To be precise, what he presents is more of an account of joint perception (which I will take as synonymous with joint attention) than an account of shared environments. According to Seeman, we make sense of the external world through a process of triangulation. I perceive myself, an object, and another person who also perceives or could perceive the object. This triangulation would be at the fundamental level of sharing an environment.

Maybe Seeman is correct, but his account faces two limitations. First, his account applies to all forms of co-existing with someone else in an environment. This triangulation will happen even in a situation of pure conflict. This is not in itself an objection to his theory. It could be taken as proving how fruitful his theory can be, as it can be applied even to situations of pure conflict. The problem is that triangulation, and joint attention in any form, is not enough to distinguish a situation of pure conflict from a situation that is social, like a gregarious state of affair.

The second limitation is that it is possible to share a place even without joint attention. Consider the café, where there is one person facing the wall at one edge, paying attention to her laptop and listening to music on earphones. Now, consider another person at the other edge of the café. It is hard to explain this situation in terms of joint attention, since what the laptop person attends is not attended by anyone else in the café.

I am not saying that joint attention is not an important element in understanding how we share environments. What I am saying is that there is more to it. Gregariousness can hardly be explained in terms of joint attention, but most especially, sharing through accessibility cannot be explained in terms of joint attention.

My account is based on the notion of perception since it is based on the notion of affordance. However, my account is not based on the notion of joint perception, nor does it excludes joint perception as possible or even necessary for certain kinds of sociality. When it comes to sharing a node of affordances, joint perception is not always required. I have presented earlier the example of a person in the café, sitting against a wall, listening to music through earphones, and paying attention to her notebook. She can be aware that she is in a shared environment, and be aware that she is in a café, without engaging in joint perception with anyone else. Or consider a worker at a communal kitchen in her workplace. She can recognize it is a shared kitchen without ever actually sharing co-presence with other workers in that kitchen. To be clear, I am not arguing that Seeman's theory has problems in its argumentation. What I am arguing is that it has limitations when it comes to explaining certain features of sociality and agency.

## **5.2. Shared places: Communication and joint-commitment**

Some authors think that the social world has its foundations in communication and agreements. In the current literature on social ontology, Gilbert (2014) defends a contractarian approach to the social world. Gilbert was influenced by Charles Taylor's (1985) work. For Taylor, there is more to sharing an environment than just joint attention. Imagine it is a hot day, you are on a train and there is a stranger sitting just in front of you. You feel hot and you are aware that the stranger also feels hot. This satisfies common knowledge and also joint attention. Now, imagine you say to the stranger, "What a hot day!". At this point, Taylor argues, the information that the day is hot becomes *entre nous* (Taylor, 1985, pp. 264-266; "*entre nous*" means "between us" in French). It can no longer be denied *between us* that it is a hot day. Taylor says that it is through communication that we establish the public world (Taylor, 1985, p. 264). Taylor's account inspired Gilbert's theory, more specifically, her notion of mutual recognition of co-presence (see Gilbert, 2014, p. 331). For Gilbert, we need to acknowledge to each other our presence in order to establish that this is a shared place.

In chapter 2, I argued that the concept of joint commitment cannot grasp gregariousness. One counter-argument would be to agree, which would put some limitation on the explanatory power of Gilbert's theory, but to affirm that we need joint commitment in order to have a place like a café. In this way, joint commitment would be foundational for the social world, even though not

the “atom” of the social world.<sup>69</sup> The main idea here is that we establish an agreement through communication, whether by actually taking part in collective decision-making or by learning from others the rules of that society. For example, earlier (in Section 2.4), I argued that we are educated to know what a library is. That could be understood as learning that there is an agreement regarding spaces for studying. Maybe sociality cannot be reduced to solely an analysis of norms and intentions, but the idea here would be that norms and intentions are at the foundational level of society.

I do not deny that communication is crucial for societies. However, I do not think that all sides of the social world have their foundations in agreements. I am not only saying that there are aspects of sociality, such as gregariousness, which cannot be explained using a concept like joint commitment. My argument here is that a shared place need not have its roots in communication, nor does it require communication in order to change. What I mean by this is that places change without communication and that we can obtain a strong sense of normativity even without communication.

In chapter 1, I presented the rowing boat case as an example of how people can enter a state of team reasoning and feelings of normativity to cooperate, and it did not require communication. Let us use the pier case I discussed earlier in this current chapter. One could argue that there was a previous joint commitment to treat the pier as a place for docking boats, and that as the families started using the pier for picnicking, they formed a tacit agreement to treat the pier as a place for picnicking. The helmsman was not part of the families, so he was not part of that joint commitment. What is more, the helmsman would claim that there was a joint commitment (in that society) to treat piers as places for docking boats. Since joint commitments require unanimity to alter it, then the helmsman would be right. What this would mean is that the kids put themselves in danger by swimming nearby the pier, and the sleepers put themselves in danger by sleeping in the kitchen. If we accept that, then the social world would be a rather inflexible machine. Inflexible, because places would not be able to have more fluid transformations. And a machine, because the social world would be moved only by protocols.

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<sup>69</sup> I am paraphrasing Gilbert here, who claims that joint commitments are the atom of the social world (Gilbert 2003; Gilbert, 2014, p. 18).

According to the theory of places I have presented, it is possible for a place to be established without agreement between those who share it or can access it. Returning to the Appalachian Trail, the initial idea was to connect the villages. Thus, the initial agreement was far more modest than what the trail has become. The trail became a place of life-changing experiences because of all the things that happened there. It is true that people write books about it, so communication plays a role. But in this case, communication is not establishing an agreement, or explaining an agreement. The communication here is more personal and more related to the meaning of the trail for the life of the authors.

The idea that agreements are the foundation of the social world puts emphasis on how we shape the places we inhabit, but it gives no attention to how the places shape us. It is not only deliberation that shapes places, but also the actual affordances and practices. Practices which do not need to be collective actions (e.g. being one of the first to walk, by yourself, the Appalachian Trail; or being the first person, and alone, to occupy the pier for picnicking). Our actions do not need to be joint actions in order to be connected to society. Walking the Appalachian Trail alone can be, and usually is, connected to sharing experiences. It can be about being there and feeling what others have felt.

Consider the street that becomes empty and, thus, a dangerous street. It does not matter if there was any agreement about the street. When it becomes empty, it changes the place, i.e. the actual affordances and practices change the place. As I have said before, the families might have occupied the pier just because they did not perceive it as a place for docking boats, as there were no boats. The place becomes something else. The normativity on the pier, as I have argued, is derived from the coherence of the affordances, practices and people who were occupying the pier.

I am not saying that agreements and communication are not one of the most important elements of societies. What I am saying is that there is more to the social world than just agreements and communications. Not only are joint commitments not the atom of the social world, but they also are not always at the foundation. I said earlier in this chapter that we learn about the places that compose the society we live in. However, when we are educated about the places and practices that compose our society, we are not simply learning the rules. We are learning the coherence, the narrative. Libraries, for example, are not simply places for studying. They stand as a mark that the city cares about the preservation and pursuit of knowledge. We learn the rules

about how to behave in a football stadium. But football stadiums are a mark of celebration of football. And football fields next to streets mark the community's relation to that practice. As we grow up, we try to make sense of our position in the society we belong. It is not only about learning the agreements. It is also about capturing the shared narrative.

## 6. The Future of Sociality

Any form of communication impacts the connection between people. The telegraph, the telephone, the radio, the TV – all these technologies have had huge impacts on societies. However, it is with the Internet that we entered the age of information. The pandemics only accelerated a process that was already on the march. We have online classes. We consult books and papers online. We do our grocery shopping online. With the TV and the radio, most people were passive, in that they were not active parts in whatever was communicated through the TV or the radio. In this current age of the Internet, we are all active and passive agents. Videos are no longer produced only by big television companies, but by anyone with a mobile phone and access to the Internet. I think it is safe to say that the future of sociality is virtual. And this future is not distant from us. Our lives are already half real and half virtual.

In this last part of the chapter and the thesis, I will talk about virtual places. I will talk about the Internet, as that is the future of sociality. First, I will argue that Internet platforms, such as Twitter and WhatsApp, are places. That is, Internet platforms provide nodes of affordances, and they are part of the map that we use to navigate the social world and organize our agency in our daily lives. Then, I will address the intersection of politics and the Internet, especially on Twitter. A very rich man, Elon Musk, said a few months ago that Twitter is the bedrock of democracy, that it is the contemporary Agora. We have seen how politicians like Trump and Bolsonaro have used Twitter, not only in their campaigns, but during their governments. I will argue that Twitter is not a contemporary Agora and that we should be worried about doing politics on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or WhatsApp. Based on my account of place, I will present two new concepts: *strictly public places* and *radically open places*. A strictly public place is the city council, or the Pnyx in Ancient Athens (the place where they would hold the assemblies). A radically open place is something like an abandoned town square. Anyone can access it, but it is dirty and no one really

cares about it. Internet platforms are valuable, but they can also be dangerous. The secluded form of sociality that has shaped the Internet until very recently is a very important form of sociality. Not all forms of sociality require strong normativity, commitment and cooperation. But politics is definitely not the realm for that kind of sociality. According to my theory, we shape places but places also shape us. Using platforms like Twitter to do politics means doing politics in an arrangement of secluded and light sociality.

Hegel once said that “The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk” (Hegel, 1991, p. 23). If Hegel is right, then now is the time for philosophers to analyze the sociality related to radio and TV. We are nowhere near the dusk of the Internet. We are at its dawn. Hegel might be right, but looking back on the thesis, I have already talked about sociality through the Internet. I talked about the possibility of gregariousness online in chapter 2. And in chapter 3, I used the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment to illustrate loose collaboration. Maybe the owl of Minerva spreads its wings in the twilight – the twilight of the dusk, but also the twilight of the dawn.

### **6.1. The Agora, the Pnyx and the abandoned town square**

Recently Elon Musk said that Twitter is essential for democracy in modern times. He said: “Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated.”<sup>70</sup> A few days ago, Elon Musk bought Twitter. Maybe what he wants is for the “bedrock of democracy” to be his backyard. The fact that politics has actually been done in Twitter, and the fact that Twitter is privately owned should be worrisome since it reveals that the democratic model of society we have might not be so democratic after all. When I say that politics is already being done on Twitter, I have in mind figures like Trump and Bolsonaro, but not only them. Diplomats use Twitter. International diplomacy has also been done through Twitter. We cannot deny the importance of Twitter, WhatsApp or Telegram. For example, the Islamic State used Telegram accounts to assume authorship for a certain terrorist

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<sup>70</sup> His tweet can be accessed at (Accessed on 25 November 2022):

[https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1518677066325053441?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1518677066325053441%7Ctwgr%5E4be26f1c08c1cc0513b001b2694f8bb31be85267%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theverge.com%2F2022%2F4%2F25%2F23041754%2Felon-musk-twitter-free-speech-messaging-app](https://twitter.com/elonmusk/status/1518677066325053441?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1518677066325053441%7Ctwgr%5E4be26f1c08c1cc0513b001b2694f8bb31be85267%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theverge.com%2F2022%2F4%2F25%2F23041754%2Felon-musk-twitter-free-speech-messaging-app)

attack.<sup>71</sup> What I will offer here is an attempt to better understand what a virtual place like Twitter is and how it can (and has been) impact politics.

Let us consider Musk’s claim about Twitter being the digital town square. The “digital town square” would be where people debate their future. Musk referred to Twitter as the digital *Agora*. In Ancient Athens, there was a square in the middle of the city. It was called “*Agora*”. The term *Agora* can be found in Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, and it refers to a gathering, usually when the king summons other noblemen to make some decisions (see Smith, 2013, p. 24). In Ancient Athens, the *Agora* was the heart of the city. Not only was it a place for commercial activities, but also for civil activities, such as marriages and festivals. During the early times of Athenian democracy, the assembly would take place in the *Agora*. The assembly, in Ancient Athens, was the process through which free male citizens would make decisions for matters of the city.<sup>72</sup> As time went by, the Athenians started having the assembly in the *Pnyx* (See Smith, 2013, pp. 361–362). The *Pnyx* was a place just for holding the assembly. The *Agora* was still the heart of the city, but the brain was moved to the *Pnyx*. The *Agora* was an extremely important area of Ancient Athens. Many Greek cities had an *Agora*.

Going further in time, Roman cities had the *forum*, which was like an *Agora*. Most modern cities have parks and squares. In Latin countries, almost all smaller cities have a square with a church on one end and the city council on the other. Open areas where people gather, i.e. squares, were not an exclusivity of the west. Towns and villages all over the globe have squares. And, until very recently, all commerce had to be done in person. Virtual forms of interaction are a very recent phenomenon. Many of us no longer buy fruits in street markets.

Think of the *Agora* in the Ancient Athens. Picture how lively it must have been. Marriages, commerce, and even philosophical debates took place in the *Agora*, the town square of Athens. Now think of a modern town square, especially in metropolises. The image that comes to my mind

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<sup>71</sup> See the BBC report available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-50545816> (Accessed on 25 November 2022). Polices all over the globe try to suppress Islamic State’s online presence, but they evade this suppression by using temporary Telegram accounts. It is through these Telegram accounts that the Islamic State claims responsibility for terrorist attacks.

<sup>72</sup> Though it is tangential to my argumentation, it is important for us to always remind that the Ancient Greek democracy was not a democracy of the whole people.

is of an abandoned place. Unless you live in a developed country, it will be normal for you to see abandoned town squares. They are dirty, nobody takes care of them, and many times they are dangerous places. People still cross them, so the use of that space is shared. On the one hand, nobody feels accountable for how the square is being used, as nobody rebukes anyone else for not taking care of it. On the other hand, nobody can restrain others from accessing it.

Is Twitter the counterpart of the Athenian Agora? Not much commerce is done on Twitter. Instagram is very much used for commerce, but even then, it is not the same as a street market. For example, people buy food online nowadays, but not through social media. They do so by accessing the website of markets or using a food delivery app. In both these cases, the interactions are secluded, in that they are more direct channels between buyer and seller, with few interactions between them, and no interaction with others. That is definitely not the case in street markets.

## **6.2. Open places and public places**

While the Athenian Agora was very different from the contemporary abandoned town squares, the Athenian Pnyx still shares core similarities with its contemporary counterpart, namely, the city council. The city council is where matters about the city are resolved. Many activities that would take place in the Agora in Ancient Athens, such as marriages, now take place in city councils (e.g. registering marriages). Parliaments are the contemporary counterpart to the Pnyx, in that it is in parliaments that matters of the nation are resolved. Parliaments and city councils are public, and so is an abandoned town square. Nobody can claim private ownership of such places and restrain others from accessing them. In certain cases, some people can be forbidden to enter the city council, but this would have to stem from a decision made by the political body. When we say that something is public, it is always implied who is part of that public. Democracy might be the government of the people, but there is always a limitation on who is part of the “*demos*” (i.e. of the people). Generally speaking, public refers to the whole that composes the *demos*, while private refers to individuals or small groups of citizens within that *demos*.

I will call *open places* the places that any people can access and use somehow, but there is a lack of elements of strict cooperation in these places. A shopping center is accessible to everyone, even though it is private property. The notions of public and private use should not be confused with the notions of public and private ownership. Think, for example, of the bathroom in a city

council. It is a public building, so the bathroom is public. This does not mean that the activities performed in that bathroom are “public”. They are still “private”.

An example of an open place is a beach. Anyone can access the beach. Being on the beach means occupying a place that is shared (sharing through current co-presence or sharing through accessibility, which I have already discussed in Section 4.2). It is possible to perform activities that involve strict cooperation on the beach, such as playing volleyball on the sand. However, the beach is not a place for playing volleyball, i.e. being on the beach does not mean being under pressure to play volleyball with others. Let us consider the Athenian Agora. One could be in the Agora and refrain from engaging in any interaction with others. One could be just sitting at the edge, watching people go on with their lives. This is a case of people-watching, and it can be considered a case of gregariousness. That was not possible, however, in the Pnyx, just as it is not possible in contemporary Parliaments. The Pnyx was the place for the assembly. This means that if an assembly was taking place, this place was only for that activity. You could only be there if you were taking part in the assembly, and being there meant taking part in the assembly. The same goes for the Parliament. If something is being discussed and voted on, and a certain politician is not paying attention (i.e. his mind is elsewhere), he will be poorly performing what is required of him. That type of place involves strict cooperation. It involves a feeling of joint ownership of agency. It involves collective reasoning. The Pnyx and the Parliament, in specific, involve engaging in collective decision-making.

The Pnyx is an example of what I will call a *strictly public place*. The difference from open places is that strictly public places involve elements of strict cooperation in the characteristic sociality of these places. Using my theory of places as nodes, open places are nodes where the sociality is gregarious or loose (as in *loose collaboration*, see chapter 3), and strictly public places are nodes where the sociality is of the strict cooperation form. Loose collaborations are joint agencies that do not involve norms regarding cooperation and do not involve collective reasoning.

The fact that a place has some norms of behavior does not mean it is a strictly public place. As I have discussed in Section 4.6, norms of behavior can stem from the coherence of the activities of the place. In that section, I used the pier example to illustrate how it was a gregarious place, that it had norms regarding not threatening that gregariousness, but it did not require any collective decision-making or any feeling of joint ownership (of agency). I should say, however, that societies

normally have norms that apply to the whole society. This means that a constitutional norm “not to rob” applies anywhere in that society. In this sense, any place in that society has a supervening layer that is strictly public, since it refers to the constitution (i.e. decision-making regarding everyone).

As I have defined the terms open and strictly public places, they are relative, just like the terms public and private. They are relative to the set that composes the “demos”. For example, a house is private, but it can be shared in a strong sense between the house members. Thus, a house can have strictly public places and open places, but both refer to a set of people that is limited to house members.

### **6.3. Is Twitter the contemporary Agora?**

Now that I have presented the terms open and strictly public places, I can assess what Twitter is. Is the billionaire Elon Musk right? Is Twitter the bedrock of freedom of speech, and thus of democracy, just like the Agora was for Ancient Athens? I do not think he is right. Twitter is an open place, and so was the Agora, in that everyone could access it and it was not required to engage in strict cooperation. It is true that discussions about public matters happen on Twitter, but they happen in the middle of jokes and memes about songs, movies and literally anything. Twitter is a place for anyone to say whatever they want and to read what others are saying. That seems like freedom of speech. Indeed, it is a side of freedom of speech, which is fundamental for democracy. But Twitter is not a Pnyx. And it is not an Agora either.

Musk might be right in saying that Twitter is a digital town square. However, Twitter is more similar to an abandoned town square than to the Athenian Agora. Both the abandoned town square and the Agora are open places, but their structure is different. There are many other examples of open places like the Agora. The café is such an example. The library and the gym too. They are open places because they are not places for strict cooperation involving everyone in these. But the café, the library, the gym and the Agora share one similarity: they have a normative foundation. I have rejected Gilbert’s (2014) theory to explain the entirety of the social world, but I said that normativity is one of the most important elements. Consider the Agora. The laws that regulate the Agora were decided in the assembly. In this sense, the Agora had a foundational level that was strictly public.

Now consider the abandoned town square. It was established by the city council. In theory, there are rules regulating it, such as fines for those who litter there. But places are not defined solely by the intentions when building them. The Appalachian Trail was not intended to be what it currently is. The fact that people litter in the square, that it is dirty and uncared and that nobody gets fined create a history of use that reshapes that place. For this reason, when analyzing virtual platforms like Twitter, we have to take into account the history of use of similar Internet environments. As it will become clearer, some virtual places are not so different from abandoned town squares. There is no foundational normative level. It is a *radically open place*. It is loose in the loosest way we can conceive. Things have been changing regarding the Internet, in that platforms like Twitter are being better policed. But this is more like restoring an abandoned town square. According to my theory of places, one of the processes through which a place gains its function is through the history of use. Understanding the history of use of virtual platforms is crucial to understand the type of sociality characteristic of Twitter.

#### **6.4. Twitter is neither an Agora nor a Pnyx**

The Internet is not a place. The Internet is a way to connect computers (and mobile phones). The Internet, as we know it, is basically a protocol. Every single device connected to the world wide web uses an IP address. IP stands for Internet Protocol. The Internet was gestated and nurtured in academic environments. The essence of academies is the pursuit of knowledge. When it comes to programming, there is a form of shared trust in each other's work. Consider open-source software. The idea is that people will try to improve such software, and they need not be paid for this. Open-source software is software that has its code open, i.e. anyone can access the code of that software, which means that anyone can add modifications to that software. Windows, Microsoft word, and Spotify are software but they are not open-source. Open-source programs are widely used, though. Android, the operating system that runs on most mobile phones that are not produced by Apple, is open-source. The point here is that when the Internet was conceived and gave its first steps, the environment was one of trust between collaborators. At that time, back in

the 1970s, no one thought that the Internet would be the stage for fake news and the manipulation of elections.<sup>73</sup>

Let us consider two of the oldest forms of virtual interaction which still exist: emails and forums. Let us first consider emails. When we talk about what is done on the Internet, unless we are talking about how devices share data, we are always talking about platforms. E-mail is a platform. There are many different email services, but they all communicate with one another. Some email services belong to private companies (e.g. Outlook, Gmail or Yahoo). Some belong to governmental institutions (most governments have their own email service, and most universities have their own email service, and many of these universities belong to a state). Others are created by social movements (Riseup.net is an example of an email service created by an anarchist organization, so it is neither privately owned by a company nor owned by a state). Since emails are shared between different email services, I will say that they together compose a platform: the emailing platform. That platform is a network of places. Your email account is like a house, a house composed of many rooms, and each of these rooms is shared with someone else. The specific email conversations are these rooms. Think, for example, of how some work activities are performed by email. When a person accesses the email to work, she is accessing her workplace. It is through the email platform that she is contacted by others, that she contacts others, and that she performs her work. This structure is also the same in chat apps, such as Telegram or WhatsApp. The difference is that only WhatsApp accounts can talk to each other (the same goes for Telegram).

Emails are usually a secluded form of interaction. But not always. Consider an exchange of emails between two friends. The only ones who can access the content of an email are the people who sent the emails, the ones who received them, and whoever controls the emailing service. That is a secluded form of communication. But now imagine an email sent by a director to all students and teachers at a school. Imagine some teachers answer that email, and these answers are sent to the same public. That form of communication amounts to official school communication. The director and the teachers have to be careful in what they write because they are writing *as a director* or *as teachers*. That conversation between emails, sent to all these people, is a parallel to an

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<sup>73</sup> Not even the literature on dystopia in the 1980s and 1990s, the cyberpunk genre (the main classic being *Neuromancer*, 2016, by William Gibson, first published in 1984), considered that the Internet would interfere in that way in politics.

assembly at the school with everyone present. When the person who works as a teacher is at school, he is there as a teacher. That same person participating in that email conversation is also participating as a teacher. This is an example of digital sociality that is not secluded.

What is important to notice in the example above is that there can be strictly public virtual places. Recently, with classes done via Zoom, and even courts having online sessions, we are getting more and more strictly public places. But this is something rather recent. Older virtual platforms were mostly radically open places. As I said, besides emails, forums are also a very old form of online interaction. Virtual forums are composed of a series of threads. Each thread has its own topic. Thus, virtual forums are separated into areas, which are nests of separate sub-topics. Take Reddit as an example. Reddit is composed of a series of “sub-threads”. One is for people who love Quentin Tarantino, the movie maker. That sub-thread has its own regulations, e.g. not talking about things that are not related to Quentin Tarantino. And that sub-thread is itself composed of a series of “sub-sub-threads”, which is where the conversation actually happens.

When the use of the Internet expanded outside the confines of the academic environment, it was used for all sorts of reasons. Many times, in a “darker” form of sociality. Dark in the sense of being secluded, private, away from the public eye – which is not necessarily something bad, but it can be. Some politicians nowadays, like Trump or Bolsonaro, make wild unproven claims either in interviews or in posts on Twitter. We can analyze fake news as bullshit (Mukerji, 2018). We can analyze polarisation and echo chambers (Nguyen, 2020). But these things come from the same background, the same history. We can trace this type of behavior (i.e. not committed to truth and “us versus them” type of attitudes) all the way back to the first Internet forums. Trump’s campaign makes use of QAnon, which originated in 4Chan in 2017. QAnon is a conspiracy theory, where supposedly there would be members in high positions in government who want “the best for the nation”, and they are about to uncover how “the government and the big media” are controlling everyone. Skepticism about vaccines, skepticism about the shape of the planet, crazy obsession in claiming that their political adversaries are pedophiles, and all sorts of nonsense. All this madness started in digital forums, like 4Chan. 4Chan started in 2003, but it also comes from a tradition of virtual forums where what matters is sharing a passion and anonymity is the rule (i.e. radically open places). To be specific, 4Chan is an imageboard, which is a type of online forum where people post images and people can comment on these images. One of the first imageboards was a

Japanese website called Futaba, which was centered on food, anime and sports. 4Chan is directly inspired by Futaba.<sup>74</sup> As one can suppose, these forums were places for lighter forms of sociality. They were places for sharing opinions and jokes. Places where you could cherish together with others a certain passion. In and of itself, these forums are not bad. Quite the opposite, they can be important and valuable. At the beginning of the Internet, hiding your identity was a measure of protection. It still is, to a certain extent.<sup>75</sup> Besides, the way people used the Internet had no relation to their public lives. For example, forums for gamers had nothing to do with what the users did for a living or where they lived. All that mattered was their common passion for a certain game, or for cats, and that they talked about that. To this day, forums still have that same structure. Reddit is divided into sub-groups which are defined by common passions, and providing your real name is not forbidden, but it is not required, nor is it encouraged.

These private digital environments provide an escape from certain social norms. This is not always bad.<sup>76</sup> Privacy is important. And, sometimes, the very concept of privacy seems not to apply. Think of the Wikipedia. People do not check who wrote the article in Wikipedia, as it is

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<sup>74</sup> Futaba dates from 2001, and was inspired on 2channel, which dates from 1999. 2channel was a textboard.

<sup>75</sup> To this day, it is still considered a safety measure. For example, during live streams on YouTube, viewers can interact in a chat. YouTube automatically displays a message encouraging people to interact through the chat but warns people to take care of their privacy, which, given the history of the Internet, clearly refers to concealing one's identity or personal information.

<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, the term "Globin mode" won the Oxford Word of the Year 2022. Globin mode is "a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations." (<https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2022/> – Accessed on 10 December 2022). That already indicates the value of releasing from social constraints. This is the first year that the Oxford Word of the Year was decided by public vote, which was done, unsurprisingly, online. Most likely, that term is just a short-lived trend. Nevertheless, it indicates how we are when we are relaxing at home and, more and more frequently, using the Internet. As I am arguing in this section, many virtual platforms are places where we meet, but we do not start from a rigid collective foundation. Much the opposite. In these virtual places, each one of us departs and is anchored on the privacy of their home or mobile phone. We meet on these digital platforms not as citizens, but as goblins, and this is not necessarily bad. It is good, if not necessary, to be goblins sometimes, i.e. to have privacy but also sociality deprived of so many constraints and expectations. The problem, as I argue in this section, is when presidents and notorious public figures participate in politics as goblins.

usually a multitude of people making additions and alterations. There is no need to know who wrote it. There are exceptions, of course, but for the vast majority of cases, it does not matter. Wikipedia does not require that commitment to revealing our real names, our public identities. And Wikipedia is perhaps the most successful collective digital enterprise. Wikipedia came from wikis, which date all the way back to 1995 (see Leuf and Cunningham, 2001). Wikis are not exactly forums, but wikis are websites that are open in the sense that others can make their additions to them. What wikis, and Wikipedia, share with forums is that what matters is the topic being discussed. For all good that this brings, it also brings some damage. Once we form an environment where privacy is the norm, we conceal the identity of users. Then how can we hold them accountable? In the year 2022, we are still struggling to find ways to merge the Internet with accountability. It should not be a surprise, since the Internet was a no man's land. It was the wild west. As I have been saying, practice is what matters. If, in practice, there is no accountability, then these norms vanish. It is the same as the theoretical fine for littering in the abandoned town square.

The structure of digital forums was similar to the abandoned town square. We achieved sociality without any strictly public level. Time passed and, nowadays, a lot, if not most, of social activities are done online or have a foot in the digital world. In the past, the Internet was a private environment, so there was a smooth connection between the privacy of one's bedroom and the secluded forms of sociality on the Internet. The same cannot be said for all types of digital sociality nowadays. Many users on Twitter use their real names. Facebook became almost an official platform where people carefully think about what to post, since their boss or their grandmother might see it. In comparison with digital forums and imageboards, 4Chan has been called the "anti-Facebook" (Stryker, 2011). It is true that Facebook does not encourage anonymity like 4Chan. However, Facebook is far from being a place of strong accountability. The type of sociality that characterizes Facebook or Twitter is largely similar to digital forums and imageboards. It is possible to have fake profiles on Facebook and Twitter, which means that it does not rule out anonymity. And, as I have argued in Section 2, we need to take into account the history of a place in order to understand its current form. Facebook was built in 2003 for university students, where they could upload pictures. Users were prompted with two pictures and asked to rate who was more attractive. It was basically a ranking website. Later, they included the feature of commenting below an image, which is pretty much the structure of an imageboard, and it is still the structure

in Instagram. The type of sociality in early Facebook was not so different from the one in Futaba or 4Chan. Facebook, and Twitter, grew in this environment of light forms of sociality.

Nowadays, Facebook and Twitter have moved away from anonymity. However, this does not mean it moved away from lighter forms of sociality. What we have nowadays are precisely online environments where people do not hide their identity, but they still feel comfortable sharing opinions and jokes without fear of strong accountability. Nowadays, we talk about things like “cancelling culture”, which is a way to bring accountability to these online environments. This “cancelling” consists of stopping following a person after she says something outrageous. This cancelling behavior is considered, by some, as ruining the fun in these environments. Indeed it ruins the comfort. It makes the light sociality into a heavier one. This cancelling is not the same as the accountability that exists in strictly public places. For example, if a teacher at a school says something outrageous in class, that teacher will probably be fired. But, besides the fear of being fired, a class is not the place for sharing opinions and jokes like a digital forum. A class is constituted by a strict cooperation. My argument is that it is far more likely for that teacher to share that outrageous statement on his Twitter or Facebook than in class, and our perception of accountability is different depending on where the teacher shared the outrageous statement.

We might have online environments that no longer encourage anonymity, such as Facebook and Twitter. But that does not mean the sociality has changed significantly. This is not a problem for Twitter. Maybe Twitter should be just that: a place for people to vent without worrying about negative reactions in their lives outside the digital realm. But Twitter is not just that. Twitter is used by politicians and diplomats. Notice the danger. Twitter comes from a history of very secluded forms of sociality. Twitter comes from an environment where truth mattered less than passion, and accountability was rare, difficult and unwelcome.<sup>77</sup> Twitter still is a place where what matters the most is sharing a passion. This is at the foundation of the algorithms in Twitter and Facebook. They provide the user not only with things the user likes, but also what the user dislikes

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<sup>77</sup> There were groups on the web that pursued accountability. The hacker group Anonymous actively hunted pedophiles. But that hacker group, as you can infer by the name, encouraged the anonymity of the members. They were, and still are, a loose type of organization. Looser than ALF or the Underground Railroad, which I discussed in chapter 3. Anonymous has cells, but it does not require cells. And even when there are cells, there is no strict cooperation in that layer either.

or hates. They are both forms of sharing a passion, not so different from an image of a disliked football player being shared in Futaba or 4Chan, followed by tons of commentaries sharing the same opinion. Again, that is not a problem for Twitter. It is a problem when that type of sociality gets mixed with politics, in the sense of politicians not only using these platforms, but mostly on how the characteristic sociality of these places is now becoming a way of doing politics even in strictly public places.

Wikipedia is probably one of the largest and most noble massive shared digital production. In the past, it was thought that the internet could revolutionize democracy. It could enable forms of direct democracy, as it gives a voice to everyone. Anyone can say whatever they want and be heard by thousands of other people. It is incredibly frustrating that quite the opposite happened. Instead of revolutionizing democracy, it seems to be poisoning it. Spaces like WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and Twitter, are being used for all sorts of sordid causes. People say whatever they want without feeling accountable for it. It is not only that the internet offers private spaces where some groups can share and endorse each other's prejudices. The problem is that it offers open spaces, much like abandoned squares, where all gutter is dumped. These massively shared open spaces do not provide the feeling that they are jointly owned (by this, I mean the use, and not the property). Nobody is entitled to rebuke anyone, at least not in any strong form, and this is because nobody feels accountable for what they say in these open spaces. Things get much more problematic when the officials in the government prefer to make use of these spaces. Trump's obsessive use of Twitter is how he got into power and how he addressed the population at large even during his term. He can say whatever he wants, as he does not feel accountable for it. Bolsonaro refused to take part in the televised debates in the run-up to the 2018 election, the one in which he got elected. He only used Facebook and WhatsApp. While in power, he still made official speeches using these media, which are open spaces. They avoid accountability. They refuse to debate at the public level because they want to alienate certain groups of the population from the *polis*, to gradually destitute them from the status of citizenship. They refuse to jointly own the polis with the other groups. What is worse, when they do perform politics where it should be done, such as in parliaments, they bring with themselves a lack of accountability. In the run-up to the 2022 elections in Brazil, Bolsonaro participated in televised debates. In these debates, he said all the atrocious things he always says, but it was not a shock to anyone, and it was passively tolerated, without barely any attempt to make him accountable.

Athenians did not share the Agora because of common passions. The Agora was not a place for forming communities around shared passions. While the Pnyx was strictly public through and through, the Agora had different layers of sociality. The Agora was an open place, as I have argued before, but it had a normative foundation. There was a strictly public foundation. The Agora is shared because of many reasons. It was pretty much a necessity to share the Agora, much like we share streets and libraries. Agora and libraries are the kinds of places where we start from a public point in order to reach individual activities or light forms of sociality. In Twitter, we start from the private. The foundational layer of Twitter (and most social media) is the private environment – and in the private realm, others hold no entitlement to holding you accountable. This structure of sociality can be of use for many things, such as playing Pokémon together with thousands of strangers (i.e. the *Twitch Plays Pokémon* experiment). But it does not serve for making politics, for collective-decision making about matters of the whole society. In politics, we do not reach a collective level. We start from a collective level. We start from the demos, which is not defined by common passions, but by the fact that we share the city we inhabit.

Nowadays, politicians and celebrities are, more and more, being held accountable for some of the things they say online. But, on a closer look, we will see that the leniency regarding absurd and aggressive statements is far higher in virtual platforms, such as Twitter, than in, say, the city council, or even in a café. Inasmuch as there is a movement to make Twitter have a normative layer, i.e. to make the Twitter environment more serious, there is also a movement in the reversed direction. The radically loose form of sociality characteristic of Twitter and WhatsApp groups is now spreading towards strictly public places. At first, we had people saying absurd things online. Now, we have people in power saying absurd things in parliament houses. It is important to have secluded forms of sociality. Twitter is nice, but we cannot do politics in an abandoned town square. Before the Athenians built the Pnyx, the assemblies were done in the Agora. It was possible to transform the Agora, for some time, into a strictly public place, with the assembly being a strict cooperation. No assembly can be summoned on Twitter. At best, we can make collective decisions about the algorithms. But these decisions have to take place in parliaments, in the Pnyx. An assembly is not done with jokes. With passerby. With people-watching. Inasmuch as gregariousness and loose collaboration are important, societies cannot be held together without strong forms of cooperation.

## 7. Conclusion

Sociality is a complex phenomenon. I am not even sure if we can put it on a spectrum. There are too many variables, too many kinds, and to each variable, too many degrees. I am not sure if we will ever be able to put sociality in a cartesian graphic. The shape of the social world is of a rather bizarre form of geometry. And all of its sides have their value, and their dangers and problems. A rich society is one that enables the multiplicity of different forms of sociality. We need places for strong forms of cooperation, but we also need weaker forms of interaction. We need to be near others, but sometimes we need to be alone. We need strictly public places, but we also need radically open places.

In this long chapter, I presented a novel account of place. I defined place as nodes of affordances constituted together with people's identities. Nodes exist in networks. By compartmentalizing the world into places, we enable complex agency. Humans have limited cognition. We cannot keep track of all things at all times. For example, we do not need to keep track of each specific food item and its location in our houses. We have kitchens. When I feel hungry, I go to the kitchen. I do keep in mind some food items, but I do not need to do it for everything. For example, I can remember that I do not have much food at home. Before going to the market, I can go to the kitchen to check what exactly I am lacking. Though this might seem like a simple action, we have to bear in mind that we do a multitude of things every day. Everyday life is very complex. Think about all the activities you perform in a week. A node of affordance eases that cognitive load. The kitchen is the place *for* cooking. The bedroom is the place for sleeping and some other private activities.

Places, therefore, have functionality. Since we use places to navigate the world, the functionality of places is connected with the coherence of our agencies. In this chapter, I used the example of a library. A library is a place for studying. If a person was not used to studying in her bedroom, she probably suffered during the lockdowns. She *can* study in her bedroom, but her bedroom is not a node for studying. The library is. It is easier to study in the library. This is not only because of the lack of distractions. A person can take her phone to the library and carry with her all sorts of distractions. But there is an incoherence in being in the library and not studying.

The coherence of a place refers not only to what the place is *for*, but what it is *of*. Think of a holy shrine. It is not only a place for praying. It is a place of religiosity. By going to the holy shrine, one syncs their agency with that node. Back in chapter 1, I defended the theory of team reasoning and agency transformation, according to which a person can shift from thinking in terms of “*I*” to thinking in terms of “*we*”. That was a change in the hierarchy of payoffs that guided agency, and also in the reasoning (from *I* to *we*). In this current chapter, I extended this agency transformation. Our agency also transforms because of the places we occupy. When a person is at the football stadium, just behind the goal, together with thousands of other hinchas (organized supporters), it is a place where the identity of that person as a supporter of that team is highlighted.

Places have coherence because we have coherence in our agency. Going back to the library example, it is not simply that a library affords “studying”. A person makes sense of her agency in a much larger sense. A person understands herself as a student. Going to the library also means cherishing that side of her identity.

Our relation with places is dynamic. We shape places, but places also shape us. When a kid learns that the library in the neighborhood is a place for studying, that kid is not simply learning the function of that place. That kid is learning about the coherence of the city she lives in. We do not simply learn functions. We learn values and meaning. We are not simply guided by rules of rationality, such as means-end coherence. Our actions are guided by values, and we make sense of our agency. In chapter 1, I talked about feeling ownership of agency. I used the example of the train dilemma. Regardless of whether the person pulls the lever or not, she is the one behind the lever. She is the “pilot” of the lever. Driving a car involves a certain rationality. If she wants to move forward, she has to push down the accelerator. But a person makes sense of her agency also in terms of whether she is the driver or not. The theory I presented in this chapter is that we make sense of ourselves as agents partially according to the place we inhabit. In this way, demolishing the neighborhood’s library because of pay-cuts means removing that place from the coherence of the neighborhood.

In the final section, I applied my theory of places to the Internet. According to my theory, a place is defined according to deliberation, history of use, and association. Association refers to the actual affordances of a place. Instead of analyzing the affordances of a place like Twitter, I talked about the history of the use of similar virtual platforms. My argument was that Twitter comes from

a history of anonymity and lack of accountability. Many virtual platforms were, and still are, to a lesser degree, places of secluded forms of sociality. While that is good, the problem is in doing politics in such a place. Inasmuch as Wikipedia and open-source software prove that loose collaboration can be honest and achieve spectacular achievements, we cannot write a constitution in a wiki. Political decision-making is serious, and it belongs to strictly public places, such as the Pnyx or the parliament. The real danger is that these places for political decision-making are getting infected by the form of sociality characteristic of Twitter and 4Chan. Politicians already use Twitter, and here I am not referring only to figures such as Trump and Bolsonaro, but also to diplomats. As public figures started using Twitter to make official announcements, we brought some accountability to Twitter. Still, the accountability on Twitter is far more lenient than in a place like a parliament or even a café. The danger is that politics done in parliaments are now becoming like politics done in Twitter. The borders between secluded sociality and public life are getting mixed. Because of this, secluded forms of sociality that should be light now feel heavy. And strong forms of sociality, especially politics, which should be serious and carry all the weight of the city, are now being treated in a lenient and light way.

This does not mean that the future of sociality is bleak nor that the past was better. Politics always had exclusion of minorities. But it is important to understand the way in which this exclusion happens nowadays. This very PhD thesis relied heavily on virtual platforms, especially the library's website and search websites like PhilPapers. If it was not for WhatsApp, Telegram, Skype and Zoom, studying during lockdowns would have been pretty much impossible. And it is thanks to open-access academic journals, which is a feature of the Internet, that I was able in Brazil to have access to material that simply did not exist in physical format in my country. The future is both dark and bright.

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