

# Sankofa Self

## By Mel & Blockface



Nietzsche: God is Dead.

Jung: Right on schedule.

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# Foreword: The Self Under Siege by Roderick

Social relations have disappeared between humans because humans have begun to disappear.

*The human beings consumed each other rapidly in what they call, 'The Act Of Love' or else settle down to a mild form of conjugality; we seldom find a mean between these extremes.*

- Camus

In the view of Baudrillard, society has reached a point at which it has literally been overcome by its technology. The new issues aren't about things like the non-believer or the non-offender but about the non-person.

In fact, Baudrillard thinks that reality itself is in the process of disappearing.

For Baudrillard, the post-modern reaches full potential when we stop unplugging the computers and the computers start unplugging us.

The postmodern is a blurring of the lines between human beings and machines, a blurring of the line between reality and image. For Baudrillard, the apocalypse has already occurred. It wasn't religious or anything, it was not atomic bombs. At some point in the development of Technology human beings ceased to be the reason for things and the things took on a reasoning of their own.

Baudrillard's definition of the real itself is that which can be simulated, xeroxed, and copied. So whether you're talking about a human body where you can make a holograph of it or you're talking about the Bible which you can Xerox or whether you're talking about the sexual act which can be simulated either through repetitive pornographic films. In a very near future it will be able to be uh simulated with virtual reality where you'll wear a full body suit and make love to your ego ideal thus making it pointless to uh to search out all the Freudian implications you can just pick your ego ideal, punch it into the laser beam program, slip into the virtual reality suit; thus rendering that relation even that intimate relation relation sexual relation technological simulatable reproducible to Infinity.

I talked about how children used to learn morality from their parents and now I think that Super Mario Brothers they spend much more time with Super Mario Brothers and are much more like emotionally involved with Nintendo than they are with their aunts their uncles their mothers and their fathers I asked one of my children why are you yelling at a machine when he began to play his Nintendo and he looked at me as though I were a being from another world and because of that there is a post-modern trajectory. I am from another world. I'm still as it were caught in the modern he's not.

So if it sounds superficial – good – because in theory, the world he occupies is superficial.

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# Introduction: The Labyrinth of Self

We stand at a peculiar juncture in human history, a threshold where the very definition of 'self' feels both intensely personal and bewilderingly complex.

For millennia, humanity has grappled with the fundamental question:

Who am I?

[De Gyal Dem Sugah - Beenie Man]

The answers have echoed through caves adorned with ancient art, resonated in the chants of temple rituals, been debated in philosophical academies, codified in religious doctrines, dissected in psychological laboratories, and now, are being mirrored, modeled, and monetized in the digital ether. This book, *\*Becoming Supra\**, embarks on a journey through this labyrinth, tracing the evolution of our self-concept from its earliest glimmers to its potential future in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and pervasive technology.

**Now you might be thinking to yourself...**

**...wait – didn't Yuval Harari already cover this in *Sapiens*?**

The answer is no. Yuval did not cover what we're about to discuss in *Sapiens* through the lenses we're about to use. In fact, Yuval fell down the same path most leetcode failures do: they forget about the jurisprudence of data structures when optimizing for time and memory constraints. After an exhaustive review of *Sapiens*, we decided to publish this book.

Our exploration is guided by several key frameworks, notably, Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages.

We lean on Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages, which posits that human understanding progresses through theological, metaphysical, and positive (or scientific) phases. Interwoven with Comte's stages is the lens provided by Jared Diamond's seminal work, *\*Guns, Germs, and Steel\**. Diamond compellingly argues that geographical and environmental factors, rather than innate superiority, dictated the fates of human societies – why some developed agriculture, complex societies, and technologies (the 'guns' and 'steel') faster than others, and how the 'germs' resulting from animal domestication played a crucial role in conquest. We extend this concept, adding 'Silicon' to the triad.

Just as geography shaped the possibilities for developing guns, germs, and steel, the rise of silicon-based technology – semiconductors, computers, the internet, AI – represents a new environmental force profoundly reshaping our societies and, critically, our sense of self. This 'Silicon Age,' or Fourth Industrial Revolution, accelerates the Positive stage's tendency to measure and model, creating algorithmic reflections of ourselves that challenge traditional notions of identity and agency.

# Part 1: The Theological Stage - The Self Bound by Spirit

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## Nature, Man & Woman (Alan Watts)

A floor of many-colored pebbles lies beneath clear water, with fish at first noticed only by their shadows, hanging motionless or flashing through the liquid, ever-changing net of sunlight. We can watch it for hours, taken clear out of time and our own urgent history, by a scene which has been going on just like this for perhaps two million years. At times, it catches us right below the heart with an ache of nostalgia and delight compounded, when it seems that this is, after all, the world of sane, enduring reality from which we are somehow in exile.

But the feeling does not last because we know better. We know that the fish swim in constant fear of their lives, that they hang motionless so as not to be seen, and dart into motion because they are just nerves, startled into a jump by the tiniest ghost of an alarm. We know that the “love of nature” is a sentimental fascination with surfaces—that the gulls do not float in the sky for delight but in watchful hunger for fish, that the golden bees do not dream in the lilies but call as routinely for honey as collection agents for rent, and that the squirrels romping, as it seems, freely and joyously through the branches, are just frustrated little balls of appetite and fear. We know that the peaceful rationality, the relaxed culture, and the easy normality of civilized human life are a crust of habit repressing emotions too violent or poignant for most of us to stand—the first resting place which life has found in its arduous climb.

## Chapter 1: The Whispering World - The Shamanic Self (Fetishism)

### I Feel Therefore I Am

\*Morning: I awake under the canopy of trees. The stone beside my bed is still warm—it protected me. I bow my head and whisper my thanks. The fire has gone out, but the ashes still hum with life. I stir them carefully. If I rush, I'll anger them.\*

Stones possess warmth and offer protection, ashes retain the life of the fire, and actions must be performed with respect lest unseen forces be angered. Identity here was rooted in sensation, feeling, and collective experience, a direct, unmediated participation in the flow of existence.

### The World Alive: Animism and Early Consciousness

\*Day: The river spirit is silent today. She usually bubbles when pleased. I offer a carved feather at her edge. As I fish, I speak to the spear, asking its spirit to see my need. Perhaps the wood remembers the tree it came from, the stone point remembers the mountain; their combined spirit holds the potential for success. If the fish escape, it is because I disrespected something – perhaps I approached the river too loudly, or failed to offer thanks for the previous day's catch.\*

\*Night: I whisper to the wind before sleep. Spirits pass through the forest at night. I ask the bark of the tree to hold me safe. The moon watches. She always watches.\*



## The Great Clod's Belch by Zuangzi

The Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth nothing happens. But when it does, the then thousand hollows begin crying wildly.

Can't you hear them, long drawn out? In the mountain forests that lash and sway, there are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts. They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan, and howl, those in the lead calling out yeee!, those behind calling out yuuu! In a gentle breeze they answer faintly, but in a full gale the chorus is gigantic.

And when the fierce wind has passed on, then all the hollows are empty again. Have you never seen the tossing and trembling that goes on?

# Chapter 2: The Pantheon Within - The Polytheistic Self

## Gods Among Us: A World of Specialized Divinities

\*Morning: Today is the festival of the sky god. I paint blue lines across my face and walk with the others to the temple. Each god has a task—one brings rain, one protects the crops, another watches over childbirth. We pray to many, depending on our needs.\*

\*Day: I trade cloth at the market. Before each deal, I murmur a prayer to Hermes. If the price is fair, he blesses it. If not, he punishes greed. My friend brings news from the coast: Poseidon's temples are flooded. A sign, surely.\*

\*Night: At home, I offer olive oil to the goddess of the hearth. My child is sick—we'll go to the healer tomorrow, and maybe to the temple of Asclepius. Each god has power over a part of life. We must keep them all in balance.\*

Life in a polytheistic world involved constant negotiation with these powerful, often capricious, deities. Rituals became more formalized, centered around temples managed by a specialized priestly class – another consequence of societal complexity. Offerings and sacrifices were made not just to show respect, but to appease anger, solicit favor, or fulfill bargains. The relationship was transactional, reflecting the burgeoning economies of these early civilizations.

Myths played a crucial role, providing narratives that explained the origins of the world, the nature of the gods, and humanity's place within the cosmic order. Stories like the Enuma Elish from Babylon, the Osiris myth from Egypt, or the rich tapestry of Greek mythology provided archetypes and moral lessons, shaping the collective understanding of life, death, virtue, and fate. These myths weren't just entertainment; they were the operating system of the culture, explaining why floods happened (Poseidon's wrath), why trade sometimes failed (Hermes' displeasure), and where one might seek healing (Asclepius's domain).

Fate often loomed large in polytheistic worldviews. While individuals could act and make choices, their ultimate destiny might be subject to the whims of the gods or predetermined cosmic forces, as seen vividly in Greek tragedies like *Oedipus Rex*, where a prophecy foretelling patricide and incest relentlessly unfolds despite Oedipus's attempts to evade it. The self was an actor on a stage largely set by divine powers, struggling with agency within a preordained narrative.

## The Fragmented Soul: Echoes of Divine Archetypes

\*Who I Am: I am a soul given shape by the gods. I have a purpose, but it is assigned by powers above me. I might be born to be a soldier, a mother, a farmer, or a priest. What I feel—love, anger, ambition—echoes the emotions of the gods who made me in their image.\*

\*My Place: The gods watch, and I act. I may choose, but only within their bounds. I exist between divine will and human duty. If I suffer, it is because of a god's anger. If I thrive, it is their gift. My honor, my fate, my name—all trace back to them.\*

# Chapter 3: The Singular Gaze - The Monotheistic Self

## One God, One Truth, One Self

\*Morning: I wake and pray toward the sunrise. There is only one God now, and He is everywhere—seen and unseen. My first words of the day are thanks. Not to a river, or the sun, but to Him alone.\*

## The Internalized Judge: Soul, Sin, and Salvation

\*Who I Am: I am a child of God. I have a soul, singular and eternal. I was created with intention. I am known completely—my every thought and sin are visible to Him. My self is not just flesh or feeling; it is judged, tested, and capable of redemption.\*

\*Day: I work, guided by His law. I do not bargain or trick. The Book says: Do unto others... and I try to live that. A man speaks against our faith in the square. I feel anger rise, then shame. Judgment belongs to God.\*

Perhaps the most significant impact of monotheism on the concept of self was the development of the individual, eternal soul coupled with an internalized sense of moral responsibility. If God is singular, omniscient, and concerned with human actions and intentions, then the individual self becomes the primary locus of moral struggle and divine judgment.

As we'll discuss later, the key difference between Western Monotheism and Eastern Monotheism lies in original sin. There is no original sin in Taoism. The way that can be spoken is not the true way. God didn't create us in his image; God is the Way of Things.

## Thy Self: Morality and the Eternal Contract

\*My Place: I am fallen, but I can be saved. Life is a journey toward divine approval. I am not here to serve many gods, but to align my will with one. I must quiet the self, deny the body, and listen to the higher voice that calls me to goodness.\*

\*Night: We eat, pray, sleep—all in His name. My children ask questions: Why did God take Uncle? I do not know. But I tell them: He sees what we cannot. Trust Him.\*

## Part 2: The Metaphysical Stage - The Self Defined by Reason and Abstraction

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### Religion Seldom Survives Philosophy (The Durants)

This is the tragedy of almost every civilization: that its soul is in its faith and seldom survives philosophy.

The Pharaoh placed almost limitless wealth at the disposal of his talons and this favored artist became so famous that later Egypt worshiped him as a god.

For the most part, however, the artist worked in obscurity and poverty and was ranked no higher than other artisans or handicraftsman by the priests and potentates who engaged him. Egyptian religion cooperated with Egyptian wealth to inspire and foster art and cooperated with Egypt's loss of empire and affluence to ruin it.

Religion offered motives, ideas and inspiration, but it imposed conventions and restraints which bound art so completely to the church that when sincere religion died among the artists the arts that had lived on it died, too.

This is the tragedy of almost every civilization: that its soul is in its faith and seldom survives philosophy.

# Chapter 4: The Unseen Order - The Rise of Abstract Thought

## Beyond Gods: Seeking Universal Principles

\*Morning: I rise and feel the sun's warmth. I no longer think of it as a god. It's a force—a principle of nature. The light brings life, but it is not divine. I wonder why heat moves the way it does. There must be a reason beyond belief.\*

\*Day: I read a treatise on "natural rights." The idea that humans are born free, equal, that society should serve reason—it inspires me. The old kings ruled by divine right, but now we ask: What gives them that power?\*

\*Night: I write and question. The world is not ruled by gods, but by laws—yet those laws are abstract, hidden. I search for justice, for essence, for truth. Perhaps all things arise from "vital energy" or "universal substance." These are my new gods: reason, spirit, liberty.\*

\*Who I Am: I am a rational being—conscious, moral, capable of abstract thought. I am not here by divine command, but by natural law. My rights, my dignity, my reason are inherent. I am both mind and matter, but it is the mind that defines me.\*

\*My Place: I live in a world governed by ideas—liberty, justice, energy, causation. I struggle to balance my passions with my ideals. I ask: What is the essence of man? What is the self beyond sensation? I may not know all the answers, but I know they exist, waiting to be reasoned out.\*

# Chapter 5: The Thinking Reed - The Western Rational Self

## I Think Therefore I Am

Within the broader sweep of the Metaphysical Stage, a pivotal moment arrived with the work of French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes found his Archimedean point: the undeniable fact that he was \*thinking\*. Even if he was doubting, or being deceived, there had to be an "I" doing the doubting or being deceived. This led to his famous declaration, \*"*Cogito, ergo sum*"\* – "I think, therefore I am."

This statement, seemingly simple, marked a profound revolution in the Western conception of self, becoming a cornerstone of modern philosophy. Identity is rooted in thinking and reasoning. Descartes' cogito marks the beginning of modern Western selfhood: I am my thoughts.

## Descartes' Revolution: The Self Anchored in Thought

The significance of the \*Cogito\* cannot be overstated. For Descartes, the act of thinking became the ultimate proof of existence and the bedrock of identity. The self was no longer primarily defined by its participation in a spiritual cosmos (Theological Stage) or solely by its place within abstract natural laws (broader Metaphysical Stage), but by its own conscious, rational activity. The essence of the self was located squarely in the mind.

# Chapter 6: The Mirror of Consciousness - The Eastern Enlightened Self

## I Know Therefore I Am (Experientially)

If the Cartesian motto was "I think, therefore I am," the Eastern counterpart, might be phrased "I know (experientially), therefore I am" – or perhaps more accurately, "Through knowing, I realize what I am \*not\*."

While Western metaphysics often sought to define the self through reason, logic, and abstract principles, Eastern thought, particularly in traditions like Buddhism and Vedanta, emphasized direct experience, introspection, and the transcendence of the individual ego.

The self is not a fixed thing to defend but an illusion to awaken from. Here, identity is seen as impermanent, interdependent, and ultimately non-personal. Knowledge is not conceptual — it is direct, experiential, and liberating.

This approach contrasts sharply with the Western focus on solidifying a rational, individual identity. Instead, it positions the conventional self as something to see \*through\* rather than build up.

## The Illusion of "I": Awareness Beyond Identity (Buddhism - Non Self)

Remove the thinker, remove the thoughts.



Buddhism, originating with Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) around the 5th century BCE, offers one of the most radical critiques of the notion of a permanent, independent self. Central to Buddhist doctrine is the concept of \*Anatta\* (Pali) or \*Anatman\* (Sanskrit), often translated as "non-self" or "no-soul." This doesn't necessarily mean that nothing exists, but rather that there is no enduring, unchanging, independent entity that constitutes a "self" at the core of our being.

Core to the Buddhist view is the doctrine of anatta — the idea that there is no permanent, separate self. This opens the way to liberation by releasing attachment to ego.\*

The core points elaborate:

- \* \*The self is impermanent and interdependent.\* (Everything arises in dependence on other factors).
- \* \*Clinging to a fixed "I" leads to suffering.\* (Attachment to an illusory self is the root of dissatisfaction).
- \* \*Realization of non-self brings emotional and psychological freedom.\*
- \* \*Self is more like a river than a rock — always changing.\*
- \* \*Letting go of identity creates space for compassion and peace.\*

Through practices like mindfulness meditation, Buddhism encourages practitioners to observe the constant flux of thoughts, feelings, and sensations without identifying with them. Imagine sitting quietly, watching thoughts arise like clouds in the sky – some pleasant, some stormy – but recognizing that you are the sky, the awareness in which they appear and disappear, not the clouds themselves. By seeing that there is no permanent thinker behind the thoughts, no unchanging feeler behind the feelings, the illusion of a solid self begins to dissolve. This realization is considered liberating because it undermines the ego's tendency to grasp, attach, and defend, which are seen as the primary causes of suffering (\*dukkha\*). The life story of the Buddha himself – leaving his princely life, witnessing suffering, and ultimately achieving enlightenment under the Bodhi tree through profound meditation – serves as the archetypal narrative for this path.

## The Ocean Within: Merging with the Absolute (Vedanta - That Self)

Vedanta, a school of philosophy rooted in the ancient Hindu scriptures known as the Upanishads, offers a different, though equally profound, perspective on the self that also transcends the individual ego. While Buddhism emphasizes the emptiness or non-inherent existence of the self, Vedanta posits that the true self, \*Atman\*, is ultimately identical with the ultimate reality, \*Brahman\* – the unchanging, infinite consciousness that underlies the universe.

That Self: Explores the Vedantic view that the true self (Atman) is not individual but identical with ultimate reality (Brahman). Identity is dissolved into the infinite.

Key points include:

- \* \*The ego-self is an illusion; the true self is boundless consciousness.\*
- \* \*"Tat Tvam Asi" means "You are That" — no separation between self and source.\*
- \* \*This view emphasizes fullness and unity rather than emptiness.\*
- \* \*The self is transcendent, not constructed.\*
- \* \*Enlightenment comes from recognizing what was always true.\*

In this view, the individual ego, the sense of being a separate person, is seen as a temporary manifestation or illusion (\*maya\*) obscuring the deeper reality of unity with the Absolute. Liberation (\*moksha\*) comes not from dissolving the self into nothingness, but from realizing its true nature as infinite, boundless consciousness – the ocean recognizing itself within the wave. This realization is often sought through practices like self-inquiry (\*vichara\*), meditation, and devotion, guided by teachings from Vedanta masters and scriptures.

Both Buddhism and Vedanta, despite their philosophical differences, represent a significant departure from the Western trajectory within the Metaphysical Stage. They locate ultimate reality not in rational constructs or abstract principles alone, but in direct, experiential knowing that transcends the limitations of the ordinary, ego-bound self. They emphasize introspection, the impermanent or illusory nature of the conventional "I," and the potential for liberation through a fundamental shift in understanding and awareness. This Eastern perspective, focusing on awareness itself rather than the contents of thought, offers a crucial counterpoint to the Western rational self and provides vital resources for navigating the challenges of identity in later stages, particularly when confronting the fragmented and modeled self of the Silicon Age.

## Part 3: The Positive Stage - The Self Measured and Modeled

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# Chapter 7: The Observable Engine - The Scientific Self

## Measuring the Immeasurable: The Rise of Positivism

The profound shift in mindset is captured in the Positive Stage:

\*Morning: I check the thermometer. Temperature: 18°C. I note the pressure, the humidity. I observe—not to please spirits or satisfy gods, but to understand patterns. The data tells a story, and the story tells a truth.\*

\*Day: I work in a laboratory. Today we test a hypothesis about disease spread, perhaps inspired by the work of Pasteur or Koch. We use control groups, meticulously sterilize equipment, compare outcomes under the microscope, and prepare our findings for publication. Belief in miasmas or divine punishment must yield to repeatable evidence showing the action of invisible microbes. Superstition clouds action. Science clears it.\*

## The Looking-Glass Self

Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the "Looking Glass Self" posits that our understanding of our own identity is primarily shaped by how we believe others perceive us.

This theory suggests that we imagine how we appear to others, we imagine their judgment of that appearance, and based on these imagined judgments, our self-concept is formed. It's as though others serve as a mirror ("looking glass") reflecting back to us who we are, and we internalize these reflections to construct our identity. This process isn't about what others actually think, but what we imagine they think. The sources touch upon related ideas, particularly in the context of the digital age (the Silicon Shadow, Algorithmic & Monetized Self, and Fractured Mirror) where identity becomes increasingly externalized performance and is monitored and evaluated by both human audiences and algorithmic systems. We curate our online personas and perform different roles across platforms, and the feedback we receive (likes, shares, comments, algorithmic targeting) acts as a modern, data-driven "looking glass," reflecting a version of the self that is tracked, modeled, predicted, and packaged. This leads to a self defined by observable digital actions and consumption rather than internal intentions or beliefs, blurring the lines between authentic expression and strategic self-presentation.

## From Soul to Psyche: The Birth of Psychology

*\*Who I Am: I am an organism shaped by biology, environment, and experience. I am self-aware because evolution gave me a brain that models itself. My thoughts are electric, my moods chemical. My "self" is not fixed—it can be observed, studied, changed.\**

*\*My Place: I am part of a system. I exist in relation to others, to history, to the known universe. I don't ask why I was made, but how I came to be. I am both subject and scientist—curious, pattern-seeking, humble. If I understand enough, I can improve myself and help others thrive.\**

*\*Night: I sit by my daughter's bed. She's learning mathematics. "Why do we fall?" she asks. "Because gravity acts upon mass," I say. She smiles. Tomorrow, she'll ask about the stars. I'll show her the telescope—not to pray to the heavens, but to measure them.\**

# Chapter 8: Gears, Steam, and Steel - The Industrial Self

## Foreword Revisited: This Should Make Sense Now

Social relations have disappeared between humans because humans have begun to disappear.

*The human beings consume each other rapidly in what they call, 'The Act Of Love' or else settle down to a mild form of conjugality; we seldom find a mean between these extremes. - Camus*

In the view of Baudrillard, society has reached a point at which it has literally been overcome by its technology. The new issues aren't about things like the non-believer or the non-offender but about the non-person. In fact, Baudrillard thinks that reality itself is in the process of disappearing. For Baudrillard, the post-modern reaches full potential when we stop unplugging the computers and the computers start unplugging us.

The postmodern is a blurring of the lines between human beings and machines, a blurring of the line between reality and image. For Baudrillard, the apocalypse has already occurred. It wasn't religious or anything, it was not atomic bombs. At some point in the development of Technology human beings ceased to be the reason for things and the things took on a reasoning of their own.

Baudrillard's definition of the real itself is that which can be simulated, xeroxed, and copied. So whether you're talking about a human body where you can make a holograph of it or you're talking about the Bible which you can Xerox or whether you're talking about the sexual act which can be simulated either through repetitive pornographic films. In a very near future it will be able to be uh simulated with virtual reality where you'll wear a full body suit and make love to your ego ideal thus making it pointless to uh to search out all the Freudian implications you can just pick your ego ideal, punch it into the laser beam program, slip into the virtual reality suit; thus rendering that relation even that intimate relation relation sexual relation technological simulatable reproducible to Infinity.

I talked about how children used to learn morality from their parents and now I think that Super Mario Brothers they spend much more time with Super Mario Brothers and are much more like emotionally involved with Nintendo than they are with their aunts their uncles their mothers and their fathers I asked one of my children why are you yelling at a machine when he began to play his Nintendo and he looked at me as though I were a being from another world and because of that there is a post-modern trajectory. I am from another world. I'm still as it were caught in the modern he's not.

So if it sounds superficial – good – because in theory, the world he occupies is superficial.

## The Self in the Machine Age

The Scientific Self, with its focus on observation and analysis, emerged alongside a force that was physically reshaping the world at an unprecedented pace: the Industrial Revolution. Beginning in Great Britain in the late 18th century and spreading across Europe and North America, this period saw the harnessing of new power sources like steam, the development of mass production techniques, the rise of factories, and the explosive growth of cities. This wasn't just an economic or technological shift; it fundamentally altered the fabric of society, the nature of work, the structure of communities, and ultimately, the experience and understanding of the individual self. The gears, steam, and steel of industry forged a new kind of identity – the Industrial Self, deeply embedded within the Positive Stage's emphasis on observable systems and quantifiable outputs.

## Identity Forged in Factories: Labor, Class, and the Mass Man

The transition from agrarian and artisanal economies to industrial capitalism brought millions from the countryside into burgeoning cities like Manchester or Lowell, seeking work in the new factories. Life became regimented by the factory whistle, the relentless clatter and rhythm of machinery, and the demands of wage labor, often stretching for 12 or 14 hours a day. For many, identity became increasingly defined by their role in the industrial machine – worker, foreman, owner. The intimate connection to the land or the holistic craft of the artisan, who might see a product through from start to finish, was replaced by specialized, often repetitive tasks within a vast production process, such as tending a specific machine on an assembly line.

This era saw the rise of distinct social classes based on economic relationships to the means of production – the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) and the proletariat (wage laborers), as famously analyzed by Karl Marx. Class consciousness became a powerful component of identity, shaping individuals' allegiances, political views, and sense of belonging. The shared experiences of factory life – long hours, dangerous conditions, economic insecurity, but also solidarity and collective action through emerging labor movements – forged strong group identities that often overshadowed older forms based on religion or locality.

The sheer scale of industrial society also gave rise to the concept of the "mass man." Individuals were increasingly seen, particularly by social theorists and state administrators, not as unique souls or rational agents, but as components of a larger population – measurable, manageable, and subject to statistical analysis. This perspective, while enabling advancements in public health and urban planning, also carried the risk of depersonalization, reducing the individual to a data point within the larger industrial and social machinery.

## I Am What I Eat

Thorstein Veblen, in his seminal work *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), critiqued the social stratification and economic behavior of the late 19th century, particularly focusing on the upper class. He introduced the concepts of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. Conspicuous consumption refers to the practice of purchasing and displaying expensive goods and services not for their intrinsic value or utility, but primarily to signal wealth and social status to others. It is consumption used as a form of competitive social display. [Outside Source] Conspicuous leisure, similarly, is the non-productive use of time – avoiding manual labor or paid work – to demonstrate one's freedom from economic necessity and thus signify high social status. [Outside Source] Both concepts highlight how identity and status become intertwined with economic activities, specifically the public performance of wealth and idleness, within a stratified society.



# Chapter 9: The Silicon Shadow - The Algorithmic & Monetized Self (Fourth Industrial Revolution)

## Introducing René Girard's Mimetics and the Socially Constructed Self

René Girard's theory of mimetic desire proposes that most human desire is not spontaneous or innate but is imitated from others. We desire something not because of its inherent value, but because we see someone else, a "model" or "mediator," desiring it. This imitation of desire shapes our identity, as we strive to emulate our models and acquire the objects of their desire. The self, in this view, is heavily socially constructed, built upon a foundation of aspirational characters and the complex dynamics of imitation, desire, and potential rivalry they inspire. This perspective provides a powerful lens through which to understand how external influences don't just shape the self but actively dictate what the self wants and becomes by providing the very models of desire.

## I Consume Therefore I Am (Tracked)

The Positive Stage, having scientifically analyzed and industrially organized the self, entered a new, accelerated phase with the advent of digital technology – the era of Silicon. The development of the semiconductor, the microprocessor, personal computers, the internet, mobile devices, and increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence has unleashed the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This revolution, built on silicon foundations, is distinct from the previous industrial era defined by steam and steel. It operates on data, connectivity, and algorithms, and its most profound impact may be on the very nature of human identity. If the Industrial Self was forged in the factory, the contemporary self is increasingly shaped in the digital network, leading to the "Monetized Self" – a self defined less by what it produces or even thinks, and more by what it consumes, clicks, shares, and searches, all under the pervasive gaze of algorithms.

This marks a critical extension of the \*Guns, Germs, and Steel\* framework. Silicon represents a new environmental force, creating unprecedented capabilities for communication, computation, and control. Those who master silicon-based technologies gain immense economic, political, and cultural power, echoing the advantages once conferred by steel or gunpowder, but operating in the intangible realm of information and attention.

# Chapter 10: The Fractured Mirror - The Fragmented Digital Self

## A Path With A Heart by Carlos Castaneda

Don Juan said: "If you complete the second step successfully, I can show you only one more step. In the course of learning about the devil's weed, I realized she was not for me, and I did not pursue her path any further."

"What made you decide against it, don Juan?"

"The devil's weed nearly killed me every time I tried to use her. Once it was so bad I thought I was finished. And yet, I could have avoided all that pain."

"How? Is there a special way to avoid pain?"

"Yes, there is a way."

"Is it a formula, a procedure, or what?"

"It is a way of grabbing onto things. For instance, when I was learning about the devil's weed I was too eager. I grabbed onto things the way kids grab onto candy. The devil's weed is only one of a million paths. Anything is one of a million paths [un camino entre cantidades de caminos]. Therefore you must always keep in mind that a path is only a path; if you feel you should not follow it, you must not stay with it under any conditions.

To have such clarity you must lead a disciplined life. Only then will you know that any path is only a path, and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you to do. But your decision to keep on the path or to leave it must be free of fear or ambition. I warn you. Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. This question is one that only a very old man asks. My benefactor told me about it once when I was young, and my blood was too vigorous for me to understand it. Now I do understand it. I will tell you what it is: Does this path have a heart? All paths are the same: they lead nowhere. They are paths going through the bush, or into the bush. In my own life I could say I have traversed long, long paths, but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now. Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead nowhere; but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One makes for a joyful journey; as long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One makes you strong; the other weakens you."

## What Self in a World of Avatars?

The relentless tracking, modeling, and monetization described in the previous chapter – the defining characteristics of the Silicon Age's impact on the Positive Stage self – have a profound psychological consequence: the fragmentation of identity. As we navigate an increasingly digital world, we present different facets of ourselves across a multitude of platforms, contexts, and roles. The professional persona on LinkedIn, the curated family moments on Facebook, the witty commentary on Twitter/X, the anonymous opinions on Reddit, the adventurous avatar in a virtual world – each represents a slice of identity, performed for a specific audience and governed by the distinct norms and architectures of each digital space. What Self is a growing sense of confusion and disconnection, a fractured mirror reflecting multiple, often contradictory, images.