The Sankofa Self
By Mel & Blockface

Nietzsche: God is Dead.

Jung: Right on schedule.

—

Foreword: The Self Under Siege by Roderick

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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.

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.

Chapter 1: The Self Bound by Spirit

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.

The Whispering World - The Shamanic Self of Genghis Khan

Imagine waking not to the sterile silence of insulated walls, but beneath a canopy of rustling leaves, the air thick with the scent of damp earth and woodsmoke. This is thel life of the early Mongol tribes from which Genghis Khan (Temüjin) emerged. Their existence was intimately tied to the rhythms and forces of the vast Central Asian steppe – the wind, the sky, the rivers, the animals, the very earth beneath their feet.

For the early Mongols, like the description in the source, stones possessed warmth and offered protection, ashes retained the life of the fire, and actions had to be performed with respect lest unseen forces be angered. Their identity was rooted in sensation, feeling, and collective experience, a direct, unmediated participation in the flow of existence.

Temüjin was born into a world where survival was dictated by the harsh realities of geography and environment. For the early Mongols, their felt reality was one where the natural world was alive with spirits and forces.

Their traditional belief system, often described as animistic and shamanistic, saw spirits inhabiting the sky, mountains, rivers, and animals. There was no clear boundary between the self and the world; everything was interconnected in a dynamic web of relationships. The wind wasn't just moving air; it was a presence that could touch and change you. This was a "World Alive".

Consider Temüjin's early life, marked by hardship, betrayal, and constant struggle among warring tribes. His reliance wasn't solely on human cunning, but also on seeking favor or understanding the will of unseen forces. Shamans (known as büü or udgan among the Mongols) were central figures, seen as mediators between the human and spirit worlds, capable of communicating with the divine and interpreting signs. They embodied the communion with the unseen, which the source highlights as defining selfhood through relationship to the spiritual realm. Their experiences reinforced the collective understanding that the self was porous, influenced by forces beyond the immediate physical senses.

My Life

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.

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.

Who I Am: I am a body that carries many spirits. I do not end at my skin. The wind touches me, and I change. The rock I hold has its own desire, just like me. Sometimes I feel a mood or pain that I know comes from something outside—maybe the fire spirit, maybe the water.

My Place: I am one thread in a web I cannot see. I don't control things—I negotiate with them. I plead with the forest not to abandon me. I listen to the birdcalls to know what kind of day it will be. If something is wrong in me, it means I've offended a thing that thinks.

One Self: Identity as Participation, Not Possession

The self was not divided or separate; it was shared across people, land, and cosmos. Myth and ritual shaped identity at a collective level. Unity of being was more important than individual expression. The self was known through story and participation, not introspection. There was no concept of personal ownership of selfhood.

In this interconnected world, the concept of a bounded, individual self, separate from the group and the environment, had little purchase. Identity was not individual but relational, embedded in nature, myth, and ritual. The self was not something one had, but something one participated in. It was experienced as collective and sacred, inseparable from the land, the shared stories, and the spirits.

Survival in the harsh conditions faced by hunter-gatherer bands, dictated by the constraints of their geography (GGS), depended absolutely on group cohesion; Ibn Khaldun called this *asabiyyah*, or group identity. Individual identity was subsumed within the identity of the band, the tribe. Rituals – involving dance, rhythm, chanting, and perhaps altered states of consciousness – were not performances but enactments of collective identity, reinforcing social bonds and shared cosmology. Expression was identity. Through these shared experiences, the boundary between 'I' and 'we', and 'we' and 'the world', became fluid.

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 in Ancient Athens

The concept of self in Periclean Athens was deeply embedded within its civic and religious life, fitting the description of the Polytheistic Self in the sources. Athenians revered a pantheon of gods, with each god having a task and presiding over specific aspects of existence: Athena, goddess of wisdom, crafts, and strategic warfare, was the city's patron deity; Zeus ruled the sky and was king of the gods; Poseidon controlled the sea; Hermes was the messenger and god of trade. This wasn't a diffuse spiritual world, but one organized by specialized divinities.

Gods Among Us: A World of Specialized Divinities: The description "Each god has a task—one brings rain, one protects the crops, another watches over childbirth" is a direct reflection of the Athenian pantheon. Citizens would appeal to different gods depending on their needs. A farmer might pray to Demeter for a good harvest, a sailor to Poseidon for safe passage, and a soldier to Ares or Athena before battle. Pericles, as a leader, would participate in public rituals and sacrifices aimed at securing divine favor for the city's success in war, politics, and prosperity. This public dimension of worship underscores that the world is still intensely spiritual, but the spirits now had names, faces, myths, and temples.

Negotiating with the Divine: Ritual, Sacrifice, and Fate: Life in Athens, as in other polytheistic societies, involved constant negotiation with these powerful, often capricious, deities. Rituals became more formalized, centered around temples managed by a specialized priestly class, a direct consequence of societal complexity and specialization. The Acropolis, topped by the Parthenon dedicated to Athena, wasn't just a collection of buildings; it was the spiritual heart of the city, the focal point for elaborate public ceremonies and festivals like the Panathenaia, where citizens offered sacrifices and gifts to the gods. Offerings and sacrifices were made not just to show respect, but to appease anger, solicit favor, or fulfill bargains. This mirrors the source's description of the relationship being transactional. Even everyday activities, like trade in the agora, might involve murmuring a prayer to Hermes for a fair deal, acknowledging the divine influence over specific domains. The flooding of temples or other natural disasters could be interpreted as signs of a god's displeasure, reinforcing the idea that the gods watched and could punish or bless. Fate often loomed large, with human destiny potentially subject to divine whims, as depicted in Greek tragedies. 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: An Athenian gripped by uncontrollable rage might feel possessed by Ares; intense passion might be seen as a touch of Aphrodite; strategic brilliance might be attributed to Athena's favor. The self was not yet a unified, autonomous entity but rather a vessel or a battleground for these divine influences.

My Life

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.

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

My Life

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. We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

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.

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.

The Internalized Judge: Soul, Sin, and Salvation

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 Easter 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.

This contrasts sharply with earlier conceptions. The self is no longer merely shaped by external divine forces or defined solely by collective participation; it possesses an inner core, a soul, that persists beyond death and is subject to divine scrutiny. Concepts like sin (transgression against divine law), guilt (the internal awareness of that transgression), and salvation (the possibility of redemption and eternal life through faith, repentance, or divine grace) become central to identity. The inner life – thoughts, intentions, beliefs – takes on unprecedented importance. A conscience develops, acting as an internalized representative of the divine gaze, a concept explored with profound depth in works like Augustine of Hippo's Confessions, where he meticulously documents his inner struggles and search for divine grace.

Chapter 4: The Self Defined by Reason and Abstraction

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.

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My Life

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.

Beyond Gods: Seeking Universal Principles

The sun is demoted from deity to natural force, subject to principles that reason can potentially uncover. Curiosity replaces supplication. The world is still full of wonder, but the explanations sought are moving from the supernatural to the natural, albeit often conceived in abstract terms.

As the Theological Stage waned, humanity embarked on a new intellectual quest, marking the transition into Comte's Metaphysical Stage. The explanatory power of direct supernatural intervention began to yield to a search for underlying, abstract principles governing reality. While not yet fully embracing empirical science, thinkers sought explanations beyond divine whim, looking towards inherent forces, natural laws, and the power of human reason itself. This era witnessed the rise of philosophy as a distinct discipline, grappling with questions of essence, justice, rights, and the fundamental nature of existence, moving the locus of understanding from external deities to internal rationality and abstract concepts.

This shift was fueled by significant historical developments, echoing the themes of Guns, Germs, and Steel. The Renaissance rediscovered classical learning, the printing press disseminated ideas far wider and faster than ever before, the Age of Exploration revealed diverse cultures and challenged Eurocentric worldviews, and the consolidation of nation-states created new political and social contexts. These factors fostered an environment where traditional explanations were questioned, and new frameworks for understanding the world – and the self within it – were sought.

Chapter 5: The Western Rational Self

Descartes: My Thoughts Are My Self

Living in a time of profound skepticism, fueled by religious wars and the crumbling of old certainties, Descartes, famously meditating in his stove-heated room, embarked on a radical quest for an unshakeable foundation for knowledge.

Yet, in the very act of doubting, 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.

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.

The life of Descartes himself exemplifies this dedication to reason. His Discourse on Method laid out principles for rational inquiry that heavily influenced the development of the scientific method.

While Descartes anchored the self in rational thought, this didn't necessarily eliminate the religious concept of the soul inherited from the Monotheistic Stage. Instead, the soul was often re-clothed in the garb of reason. The rational mind became the defining characteristic of the soul, the faculty that distinguished humans from animals and connected them, in some views, to the divine intellect.

Chapter 6: Inverting Descartes

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."

Parallel to the Western philosophical journey culminating in Descartes' rational self, Eastern traditions, particularly those originating in India, embarked on a profoundly different exploration of identity, also fitting within Comte's broad Metaphysical Stage but arriving at radically distinct conclusions. 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.

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.

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

Chapter 7: The Scientific Self

My Life

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.

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.

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.

I Am What You See Me 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.

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.

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.

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.

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."

Chapter 8: The Fifth Industrial Self

The Sankofa of Silicon and Spirit

The emergence of the Supra Self, as explored in the previous chapter, is not merely an individual project of self-reclamation; it points towards a broader societal transformation, often conceptualized as the Fifth Industrial Revolution. This is embodied in the concept of Sankofa – to move forward, we must look backward.

Unlike the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven primarily by the technological capabilities of Silicon (AI, big data, IoT), the Fifth Revolution seeks an "alchemical marriage" – a conscious integration of these powerful technologies with deep human values, ethical considerations, and timeless wisdom traditions.

It envisions a future where technology serves humanity's well-being and flourishing, rather than simply optimizing efficiency or maximizing profit at the expense of the human spirit. The Supra Self, with its emphasis on awareness, integration, and conscious creation, is both a prerequisite for and a product of this emerging era.

This integration involves revisiting and revaluing the insights gleaned from earlier stages of human understanding, particularly the Theological and Metaphysical. The profound sense of interconnectedness felt by the Shamanic Self, the ethical frameworks developed within Monotheism, the introspective depth of Eastern philosophies, and the emphasis on reason and universal rights from the Enlightenment – these are not relics of the past but vital resources for navigating the future. The challenge lies in translating this ancient wisdom into practices and principles that can guide the development and deployment of modern technology.

Consider the potential of AI. Left purely to the logic of optimization and data analysis (the culmination of the Positive Stage), AI can perpetuate biases, exacerbate inequalities, and create systems that dehumanize. However, guided by ethical principles rooted in human dignity (Metaphysical Stage) and a sense of interconnected responsibility (Theological Stage insights), AI could be developed to enhance creativity, foster empathy, solve complex global problems like climate change, and support individual well-being. This requires moving beyond a purely technocratic approach and engaging in broader societal dialogue about the values we want to embed in our tools.