

EDIFICES: A CRITIQUE OF HOME MANAGMENT

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

MAY 2018

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Keywords: Phenomenology, Economics, Confucianism, Structuralism

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a critique of economics. It approaches this science as a cultural inheritance that is heavily invested in geometric scalability. My analysis is provoked by the premise of Xenophon's play, *Oeconomicus*, in which Socrates asks if household management is like other arts where its knowledge is applicable generally. In other words, *if I know how to manage my house do I not know how to manage another's?* Taken together with another concept manifest in this play- that the excellence of economics is to "grow the household"- I understand contemporary economic theory, such as neoliberalism or capitalism, as consonant with some of the earliest concepts of our term *economics*.

Where our word *economics* comes to us from the Greek roots *oikos nomos*, meaning *home management*, I argue that contemporary critiques of political economy share a common denominator with their objects of protest: codes, perfection and interchangeability. The operative presuppositions are that the whole of society is family and that the nation is *home*. All such *economic* theory purports to know how others should manage their homes. I argue that the preoccupation with other homes obscures the way particular homes are folded into the political. I build my case by showing how geometry is reflected in social, domestic and subjective experience. In so doing, I draw out a contrast between home and politics in which the former is a realm of inexhaustible difference and the latter is a social will to sameness, equality, or at the very least, minimal difference.

This analysis makes a philosophical argument against ontological sameness. As far as that argument succeeds, it follows that *demographic* politics, policy and thought are all fundamentally violent. I then proceed to theorize homemaking using non-geometric philosophies of difference. I draw from Confucianism, phenomenology, poststructuralism and biology to argue against an epistemological embrace of perceiving sameness. At the same time, I attempt to portray the home not only as a point of access for all things political, but also, as scale of life in which sovereignty is contiguous to agency.

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## INTRODUCTION

*This introduction has three goals. First, I argue that geometry, the epistemological foundation of Western thought, is manifest in ordinary thinking, discourse and politics. The problem is that geometry over-promises elegance in the world, and as a consequence, lays waste to even the best of political expectations. Secondly, I argue that problems with geometric theory of knowledge cannot be solved politically; they have to be approached “economically.” And here I am drawing from the Greek roots oikos nomos, or home management. Finally, I turn to the schema of reflection. I try to show that reflection exposes the violence inherent to geometric politics, and at the same time, it empirically demonstrates home as the upper limit for thinking ethically about the good life.*

## LEARNING THE HUMANITIES / LEARNING TO BLAME CAPITALISM

Before I took control of my own research interests, much of the education provided to me was a critique of capital, if not implicit then it was explicitly. If not a direct critique, it would critique its symptoms. “Economics” is a vague object of critique against its historically more culpable species of social organization: Capital. The list of antisocial “necessary evils” ascribed to Capital (like class inequality, resource waste, alienation, disenchantment etc.) are written and taught with as much frequency as intensity. Capitalism, which is in no place that a person can point to, yet is reflected in everything, is treated as some sort of hegemonic force with an excellence and agency of its own. Capitalism devours the soul, but in balance, it achieves a narrowly defined *greater good*. For capitalists, the only greater good that matters is to grow the household, to raise the tide that lifts all boats. Fear, respect and loathing of this force in the world are owed to its tenacity, flexibility and power as well as the corresponding, grudging dependence

that escalates with its hegemony. My interest is not in capital per se, but the genre of its critique. Why is critiquing capital so unhelpful?

If hegemony is the problem (colonizing society, the family and the mind), then it is not without some irony that critiques of capital so often seek to replace it, eliminate it or otherwise respond in kind to the totalizing aspect of their object of scorn. Capital may be the most lucid expression of hierarchy and idealism manifest in the genes of Western thought. In our time, it is the apex of all causes. With little taste for subtlety, it is natural that Western critics of capitalism would aim for the top. Revolution is hardly a bad word in the West. *If you want different orders to obey, kill the commander.* This makes sense at one level, but at another, this seems a rather circuitous, risky and unstable route to decolonize the homes and minds of ourselves and our neighbors. It amounts to a desire to change one's world in order to purge an intolerance from one's mind. Even the first step to situate the self as *same* with respect to class (or race, or occupation) is already complicit with forms of family or mind colonization. The irony is that in order to decolonize the family or the mind, the scorn directed at capital seeks to edify subjectivities through *social* channels. It assumes that our dependence upon it cannot be mediated, but must be overturned- and until the overturn, complicity is inescapable.

The problem with ascribing some nature, agency or telos to capitalism is that it overdetermines the reality of the concept that is otherwise a floating signifier. Few in the Humanities can conceive of this system as anything but inimical to souls and life on Earth, yet this closes off all but the narrowest channels in the field of possibility in the form of a false choice fallacy. For a quorum in the Humanities, some form of socialism was the replacement for capitalism and globalization. The overdetermined reality of Capital that signified an unsustainable amount of evil in the minds of the educated elite has collapsed in the face of

potentially scarier things- at least from that self-same perspective. Strange alliances against globalization exist on the right and left but with radically different intentions. Where the left points to lands and lives laid to waste by globalized capital, the right points to suffering white people and the unfairness of being a superpower. What are we to call this alliance? More problematically, what has become of “Capital” when its most prominent exponents are answering factually to leftist critiques, but with polarized values. What is *capitalism* when an ostensibly communist country represents its superlative intensity? The once palpable force of capitalism is crumbling beyond recognition and this presents us with an opportunity to ask what it has to do with “economics.”

## **WHAT IS ECONOMICS?**

It is clear that a system of private ownership of the means of production has very much to do with the exchange of goods and services. Here, the defining character of capitalism can relate to the academic discipline Economics. The entire inquiry of capitalism was always already ahead of itself because it already presupposes the more important question: what does this Economics have to do with *economics*? In other words, what does the study of the exchange of goods and services have to do with *oikos nomos*, literally, *home management*?

Because Economy is the organizing principle of the entire human population, because it is so critically important, it is worth risking being pedantic enough to look at Greek roots. Initial conditions matter. Just like making atomic bombs, it is entirely possible to do the dumbest things in the world with the highest levels of rigor, intelligence, sophistication and expense of resources. So, why a globalized network of stock markets, banks, diplomats, currencies, factories, think tanks and degree programs to *manage the home*? If all of this is doing something



other than managing homes, why do we call it economics? Or if this is indeed economics, whose home is being managed? This issue is not clarified (at least etymologically) if we point to “domestic economy” because this too points toward some polity rather than a domicile or home as the kind of place where I could cook and nap. Further, if this term is in fact twisted beyond recognition, where would one turn to learn the science or art of home management?

Interestingly, we may only have the etymologically redundant “home economics” to turn to. But this anachronistic discipline has given way to the very bourgeois-sounding “Family and Consumer Sciences.” Is the concern for managing a domicile truly as insignificant as the space afforded to it in our repertoire of signs and symbols? My proposition is that any critique of capitalism has already dignified it as a form of Economics, but more egregiously, that *oikos nomos* is a form of Economics. If capitalism is problematic, we would be wise to not repeat its own poor presupposition: we need to ask after home management in the first instance.

To go from home management to the study of the exchange of goods and services could (perhaps should) entail a complex genealogical/archeological research project. But if we start more conventionally, at a plausible beginning, the path to capitalism is already reflected in some of the earliest discourses. The most conspicuous origins of economic theory are Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*. These opening lines must be quoted at length:

“Tell me, Kritoboulos,” he said, “is management of the household the name of a certain kind of knowledge, as medicine, smithing, and carpentry are?”

“It seems so to me, at least,” said Kritoboulos.

“Then just as we are at no loss to say what the work of each of these arts is, can we also say what the work of household management is?”

“It seems, at any rate, said Kritoboulos, “that it is the part of good household manager to manage his own household well.”

“But if someone were to entrust another’s household to him,” said Socrates, “could he not manage that, if he wanted to, as well as he does his own? For the one who

knows carpentry can do equally for another what he does for himself; and so too, presumably, can the skilled household manager.”

“It seems so to me, at least, Socrates.”

“Is it possible, then,” said Socrates, “for one who knows, even though he happens to have no wealth himself, to manage another’s household, just as a builder can build another’s house, and earn pay for it?”

“Yes, by Zeus, and he would earn a lot of pay,” said Kritoboulos, “if on taking over, he were able to do what’s necessary and, in producing a surplus, increase the household.”<sup>1</sup>

Even though initial conditions are critical, it would be an overstatement to say that this seminal text foresaw capitalism as an inevitability. What I want to suggest instead is that the academic discipline of Economics is hardly a corruption of ancient Greek attitudes toward *oikos nomos*. Our contemporary usage of Economics is apparently authentic in two ways. Firstly, the household is conceived *objectively*. There is nothing aesthetic about the experience of homemaking or home management in this passage; it is merely something to be operated on functionally. Secondly, the purpose of home management was construed singularly. The purpose of the home is to “increase the household.” When disenchantment, alienation, functional rationality and resource exploitation count among the foremost critiques of capitalism, an *appeal* to a better time or more authentic usage of *oikos nomos* is not going to charm most contemporaries. Our contemporary condition is neither corrupted nor unnatural in terms of culture; we may find more continuity in the genealogy of economics than mutation. In light of the contemporary experience of the increasing functionality of homes under Economics *qua* population management, the objection cannot take place at the vernacular level, but instead at the level of etymology.<sup>2</sup> Foregrounding experience, aesthetic value, or enchantment calls into question the

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, Carnes Lord, and Leo Strauss. *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse. An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus by Leo Strauss. With a New, Literal Translation of the Oeconomicus by Carnes Lord*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. p. 3, 4

<sup>2</sup> Foucault notes that there are few ways to investigate power without recourse to economics. He also notes that the scale and application of power in our time is “massifying.” In agreeing with this analysis, I am taking it as

purpose of home altogether. Capitalism as evil already implies disaffection to the capitalist functionalism of homes-as-same. It is hard to imagine Socrates' question being met with the same blithe acceptance today- which raises anew the question, *what is the point of 'home'?* To entrust the management of one's home to another would rob "home" of the very aesthetic value that is under threat by Capitalism. Having one's home or life calculated in advance is precisely the dystopia that has pressed such a sustained critique of functionalist home management.

## **ANCIENT GREECE AND GEOMETRY: HOME MANAGEMENT AND GEO-ECONOMICS**

Because my concern is neither future-oriented nor forensic, but to use an Aristotelian term, *epideictic* (meaning about the present),<sup>3</sup> what I hope to expose is that both Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and contemporary capitalism are beholden to a cult of geometry. And because geometry is reflected at the apex of hegemonic Economics, it follows that geometry would be reflected in the children of this hierarchical structure. This cult of geometry is most conspicuous in Pythagoreanism and but also his admirers, chiefly Plato. If there is any truth to the legend of Plato's academy having an inscription above the entrance that says, "No one ignorant of geometry enter here,"<sup>4</sup> then Whitehead's quip about footnotes was probably already too late.

Even if the inscription is no more than an utter fabrication, its apocryphal status is sufficient for

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straightforwardly problematic. So many critiques of power and economics are so clear, that I argue we question fundamental definitions. See Alessandro Fontana, Francois Ewald, and David Mace. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador, 2003. P. 13 and 242-4.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Rhetoric* Aristotle explains that there are three different kinds of speaking and each has a specific relation to time. Of course, his emphasis is on political persuasion which is oriented to the future. Epideictic, as I understand it, is with the intention of shaping the present. Forensic is about *shaping* the past- in the case Law, for instance. Politics tries to shape the future with abstractions from the present. My project is an attempt reform the meaning of economics as it exists today. See, Aristotle, Ingram Bywater, W. Rhys Roberts, and Edward P. J. Corbett. *Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 1984.p. 32-3

<sup>4</sup> In, Plato. *Delphi Complete Works of Plato* (Illustrated) (Delphi Ancient Classics Book 5) (Kindle Location 552). Delphi Classics. Kindle Edition.

the standards informing the present. It is sufficiently plausible to move past historicity to consider the implications of an epistemology that is founded on points, lines and planes.

To ask, *what is the point of home?* is not entirely sarcastic nor is it merely a pun. To ask *what is the point* asks after the foundation of all that follows- whether it is an argument or a figure. Points certainly are not substances. A point is the 0-dimensional, arbitrary foundation of geometry. It is from a single point that a second is added to get to a line. This too is a theoretical concept of a single dimension. Like a single point it can be represented but cannot exist. To a line can be added a third point to create a plane. Like points and lines, this too can be represented but does not exist. It is a notion. The representation itself is already 3-dimensions. A plane is two dimensional and the world of experience only knows of 3 or more dimensions. Geometry is a veritable Theogony. All of geometry is built on these things that do not tangibly exist and are meaningless in isolation from the others. Early geometers were quite literally pulling notions from nowhere, putting them into conversation with one another, and subsequently explaining empirical phenomena with this tool of the mind. Calculating heights of pyramids and the circumference of the Earth could not have helped but to have inspired awe and power in the capacities of the human mind. And the enthusiasm had not worn off in the time of Plato.

In geometry, there is a lot of subterranean theory at work before we get to the real. The distinction of real and ideal was not simply a distinction between perfect and shabby, rather, geometry inspired confidence that its implications were not limited to shapes. This whole way of thinking that was devoted to defining terms outside of experience, putting them into conversation with one another and then solving real problems clearly inspired what Plato was going to teach at the Academy. What politics needed were its own "undefined terms," its points, lines and planes; it needed truth, justice, virtue. He explains in his dialogues that Socrates was a mid-wife: he

would elicit these immaterial truths from people's minds by constructing the right questions.<sup>5</sup> Socrates could solve all kinds of problems with this kind of thinking that was not narrowly geometric, but more expansively, it was reason. We can see this process of Socrates' at work in Xenophon's play. Without much fanfare or deliberation, however, the *point* of home is thrown down in the infinite abyss of 0-dimensional space: increase the household. From this *point*, it is the work of *Oeconomicus* to draw the lines, planes and *conceive* of the theorems for household management. What is more devastating (or exhilarating depending on how you feel) is the notion that in the realm of the ideas, two things can be *same*, perfectly same. Nowhere in the world is there the experience of "same." Sameness, a concept whose radicality is treacherously underrated, is more hegemonic than modes of production, alienation and *inequality*. This is the presupposition that snuck up on Marx. Marx was all about sameness, and this much he shared with capitalist, functional reason- which capitalist, functional reason shares with Pythagoras.

## GEOMETRY AND THOUGHT

Experiencing the beauty of geometry in Homeric times must have been truly sublime. Before geometry Western thinkers were groping for a foundation for understanding the world as we know it. Unlike the East, which emphasizes nothingness,<sup>6</sup> the West was desperately groping

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<sup>5</sup> This is most famously performed in the *Meno*. Here Socrates is able to show the eternity of the Pythagorean theorem by eliciting the formula from an uneducated slave boy. It is in the general context of the question as to whether virtue can or cannot be taught. Following his theory about recollection being born out of dialectics, he demonstrates that like *points* political forms can be taught. See, *Meno* in, PLATO. Delphi Complete Works of Plato (Illustrated) (Delphi Ancient Classics Book 5) Delphi Classics. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Nishida Kitaro probably most famously articulated the "place of nothingness" in "Eastern logic." His claim has been associated with all sorts of controversy. I am not particularly interested in supporting, validating or owning this claim, however, the concept of nothingness in the East has a conspicuous gravity- especially when compared to Western philosophy. I see this minimalizing tendency *reflected* in many of the ancient Chinese philosophers that I reference and allude to. It would perhaps please Kitaro for me to add that I do not want to overstate nothingness as "absolute cannot be One." See introduction and postscript for overview of his East-West distinctions, Nishida, Kitaro, and David Dilworth. *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1993.

for the unit of somethingness. Importantly, it presumed this basic unit of somethingness to be fungible, *same*. Everything is water was met with a theory that everything is air which is met with everything is fire.<sup>7</sup> The problem was not in the reasoning as each put forth some plausible cases.<sup>8</sup> The problem was that each of the reasonings were as mutually exclusive as they were plausible. They all were plausible which actually demonstrated that none of them could be right. In this ancient brush with modernist reductionism, the sophists ushered in the first postmodernism. For Sophists, anything goes, *so long as it increases their personal households*.

Before geometry, the success of a thinker, speaker or philosopher was not cast against eternal forms, but instead was a function of how many people found their words persuasive. Plato loathed the Sophists. This theme vies even with virtue and the “good life” for primacy in his dialogs.<sup>9</sup> In Socrates he learns of the weapon that can win the audience and the *truth* all at once. Dialectic edified where sophism abets. Dialectic inoculates the audience of persuasive fallacies. It erects an edifice of knowledge where sophistry and relativism are groundless, Sisyphean theatrics. Like geometry, dialectics brings discourse to a *point* from which further things can be built. Like geometrical points, truth, justice or virtue are things that cannot be grasped but can be perceived. Even if these points could not manifest on earth, it was Plato’s (or Socrates’) mission to make the *same point* perceivable to all who were witness. Not only was Plato going to supplant Homer’s heroism with dialectical reflection, but he was going to put an

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<sup>7</sup> For a fragmentary survey of extant writings of pre-Presocratics, see Diels, Hermann, and Kathleen Freeman. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Transl. of the Fragments in Diels, "Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> By at least one argument, Socrates took philosophy away from "natural philosophy" toward more "rational" ends when he was dissatisfied with the ambivalence of natural perspectives. Robert Bartlett argues that the Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is one of the clearest examples of Socrates "Second Sailing" where he becomes himself a "Socratic" rather than a "pre-Socratic." See Robert, Bartlett C. "Xenophon and Socratic Philosophy." Lecture, Masters of Greek Thought: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, The Great Courses, Chantilly, VI, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> See, Sugrue, Michael. Lecture, Plato, Socrates and the Dialogues, The Great Courses, Chantilly, VI, 2008.

end to *anything goes* by adapting points, lines and planes to politics. Dialectics would edify persons and build an edifice for the state.

Writing since 2016, with much ado about “fake news” and fears of completely unmoored standards of legitimate discourse, we may sympathize with Plato. If not for exactly financial reward as with the Sophists, there is today a similarly potent virtue in speech (usually quite pithy) insofar as it is an attractor. This effect of speech is not only dismissive of “rational” discourse, but quite the opposite, it thrives on shock and superficiality. Before these affective values were amplified by social media, there was a more robust critique against the over-determination of “facts,” the overuse of “experts,” and excessive functional rationality to the logic of economics and the world order. But where there is an apparent acceleration in Sophistic rhetoric at the expense of “rational” discourse, Plato’s irritation (even if not his response) is palpable to many of us now.

Today, the critique of Plato needs to be tempered, because rather than carving a place for aesthetics out of an overly rational, functional world, we find ourselves confronting a greater problem that is neither artfully aesthetic nor remotely rational. In the critique of rationalism, we end up with an obvious but unforeseen opposite that is not the opposite we hoped for: irrationalism. This situates our time in an interesting position to recast the argument for aesthetics because the simplicity of the false choice between Sophistry and Dialectic has been drawn clearly. It was never one or the other, nor is it a matter of being limited to what is between. The primary weakness of Platonic thought is that it permits of no *in-between* where Sophists, just like Chairman Mao, find excellence in the chaos under heaven. For Platonic thought, the binary is absolute: true/false; real/sensible; spiritual/terrestrial and good and bad. While the best is never Ideal or perfect, it is still superlative. In Platonism, “better or worse”

takes its measurement from the Ideal. In Sophistry, “better or worse” takes its measurement in a floating, market-oriented measure of success. An aesthetic cannot be grinding dialectically and asymptotically against perfection, but it nonetheless needs some edifice of understanding to be meaningful.

## **GEOMETRIC THINKING AS CULTURALLY NORMAL**

“Something else” is what will populate the following pages. That “something else” is what will clarify all of these hasty generalizations about the Western canon and contemporary capitalism. Before turning to it, a few things need to be said about the consequences of Platonism as normal. There are a few concepts that are invisibly natural but are quite radical when they are exposed as presuppositions. Firstly, equality does not exist. No two (or more) things are the same. The only thing that can occupy the “same” time-space is self-same, but by this very fact cannot be equivalent to another. For two things to be the *same color* points all the more to perception because the sameness is localized in subjective experience, not in the two things occupying different time-space. Any conception of “same” reveals that it is an abstraction that has nothing to do with the substances in question. If “sameness” is claimed on account of frequencies, spectrometers and facts, nothing is proved but how productive it can be to *abstract*: their lowest common denominators are useful information. This does not mean that they are *same*. We cannot forget that human abstractions are just that; they are not facts about the world.

This is more than a question of finer details of language and philosophy because it is reflected in the Socratic notion of functionalizing the home no less than it is reflected in standard practices of demographic analysis. Standardizing the practices of home management functionalizes home out of a reason for existence- home becomes barracks. But as plain as it is



that each person's experience of home forms a subjective epistemology of “normal,” it is plain that home is an aesthetic, even ineffable, notion that ceases to *be* under systematization. It should be equally clear that one person’s experience of blackness is radically different from another’s. It should be equally clear that one woman’s experience is radically different from another’s. If it is plain that sameness does not exist, then the remaining question turns on if the abstraction is for better or worse. And this question is going to be utterly ambivalent because the judgement of “better or worse” is entirely contingent upon the *point* from which the measure is taken. Regardless, whence the abstraction comes into existence and exerts a force in the world, it adds to the general milieu of affective forces yet another. In this way, the abstraction cannot even be strictly ambivalent because it adds a measure of complexity. Every functional innovation populates the world with another Golem and all of its unforeseen consequences.

Secondly, perfection does not exist. Perfection, too, is an abstraction. This may seem obvious and that it is plain that *nobody is perfect*. However, perfection is *real* insofar as it is an historical force, an abstraction that has inhabited the mind. Not only is perfection a notion that lives in the mind, but it also has a specific character that is fundamentally unbalanced. Perfection is the ideal that the anthropomorphic “best” approximates. Plato’s dialectical perfection is peculiar in that nothing is already perfect, but rather, things need to be purified of their imperfections in a rigorous and systematic way. This is the exercise that Socrates repeats. Somewhere is a perfection that can never be achieved, but maybe glimpsed for moments. Purified of art, poetry and nature, there is nothing left but pure, clean function. Plato's disdain for art is an overcompensation that is reflected in contemporary structures of "legitimacy." This is the specific kind of perfection that we inherit from Plato, that is carried all the way up to the enlightenment (obviously), and into maximizing profits. But Plato’s notion of perfection already

has agentic failure built into the equation. We are always inadequate to the realm of the Ideal- of points, lines, and planes. Humans doing their best will always be inadequate to inaccessible perfection. Whatever the impetus is that causes things to be set in motion (whether *force*, *conatus*, *will* etc.) the directionality in perfection imbues that force of human effort with the anxiety of impossible aims. This is what is problematic in the Western emphasis on something compared to the Eastern emphasis on nothing. We could debate for eternity about the nature of the *point*- this most basic unit. To the question of nothingness, talking is already far too much. Like perfection, nothingness is also inaccessible, however, the context of their respective inaccessibilities leads to radically different ethics. The ethics of perfection mean that the work is never done. The ethics of nothingness mean that we have already done too much.

A third cultural presupposition reflected in geometry is the very fact that Plato opposed the “real” to anything (whether ideal, false or deception). This invited the most productive accident of history. This is probably the most challenging and curious problem of philosophy because the conception of “unreal” means that this very fakeness is a force in the world. We inhabit a world in which “false” is real. Fake news is ‘real’; it has somebody’s truth in its expression. The opposition of anything to the real, while it engenders the spirit of skepticism that drives science, discovery and progress, simultaneously founds everything on speculative points, lines and planes. Even if this is merely a story, the question of reality sets culture in motion. It places the carrot before culture’s chasing legs and it blinds singular people to the apparatus that holds it in place- like setting your watch fast to help you show up to appointments on time. Chasing perfection is running in circles, but far from pointless, these circles themselves take on an agency of their own. A culture obsessed with true or false, real or fake has taken the more

pragmatic *better or worse, superior or inferior* into zero-sum, all-or-nothing stakes. It is one thing to hold an inferior position, but it is altogether more devastating to be wrong.

The duality of ideal and sensible is built into our language so comprehensively that it is difficult to speak at all without reverting to the question of real existence. Take illusions for instance. The whole concept of an illusion presupposes that *there is* a correct view, that we have been deceived rather than having been witness to a legitimate, alternative sight experience. When observing any optical illusion, for instance, why is the falsity on the side of subjective experience? Why is the real truth, the “actuality” of the situation on the side of the “thing” that is “outside?” Why is the chair that I am sitting in “actually” mostly empty space? Energy? It is because of the Ideal/non-ideal distinction that such things are granted different ontological statuses. This is what enables Aristotle to categorize, organize, and hierarchize all of the beings of the world. The opposition to the real, born of “imaginary” points, lines and planes, shows that the creation of the unreal *is real*. Ideas do not cross any sort of ontological barrier to manifest themselves in “the world.” Rather, all of these things, apples, justice, emotion and hammers are infinitely open to having anything else reflected in them. Any such reflection is real which is why “fake,” too, is also real insofar as it is a force in the world. “Fakeness” is a quality that is reflected in things like leather or flavors, but fakeness cannot have an ontological status distinct from real. And the hierarchy that establishes its relative distance from the Ideal, like geometry, completely falls apart if the *point* of something is shown to be illegitimate. Illusions and disillusionment are not fundamentally different, they merely trace a transition from one reflection to another. Aesthetically, one reflection may be more fitting or better to a particular context, but neither is true or false, real or fake. They just are; they are reflections.

A *point* is something of a Faustian bargain that trades the opacity of infinity for the transparent clarity and concreteness of a presupposition, for something to put some bricks on, something from which we can begin to build an edifice of knowledge. It is the point from which lines and planes are extended, from which hard, material things crawl into reality. Never mind that the points, arithmetic and physics say more about human perception than they do about “reality.” The price of this progress is that its starting *point* will be a vulnerability in the edifice as long as it stands. The second price of progress is that with eyes cast toward a future perfection the way that we stir up the present is liable to be overlooked. When the *point* of home is established as increasing wealth, increasing wealth becomes a point in and of itself. It becomes a point from which other things take shape and acquire their own force in the world.<sup>10</sup>

In trying to theorize the home and family as *pointless*, I aim to hold these ordinary aspects of life open so that sovereignty can be understood as the ability to negotiate their meanings. Home is a place where there is sufficient agency to act on the surroundings that, in turn, act on subjectivity. Family has less to do with kinship or matrimony than it does with sympathy, or same feeling. It seems in fact, that home and family need to be pointless to meet either of these criteria because norms, codes and formulas will impose too great of a burden on these fragile montages. To be pointless is not to be meaningless or less attentive to the violence that happens in actual concrete homes. Instead the pointlessness is a way to insist that we must direct our attention to the ways in which codes like patriarchy, racism, classicism, ableism

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<sup>10</sup> As I understand it, this is the phenomenon that Foucault traces throughout much of his career, beginning, explicitly, in *The Order of Things*. In his discussion of money, for instance, "And just as words had the same reality as what they said, just as the marks of living beings were inscribed upon their bodies in the manner of visible and positive marks similarly, the signs that indicated wealth and measured it were bound to carry the real mark in themselves." Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

invade the home and disrupt the moments of real intimacy that make ethics present to us rather than regulated by the political world.

## **THE PROBLEM WITH ONTOLOGIZING AS A METHOD**

When considering how abstractions take on wills of their own, it is easy to see how conservative tendencies may arise where things become detached, alienated or cheapened in new found functionality. “Economics” supplies some of the clearest examples. This word itself inheres the logic of degrees of separation that detach the signified from the signifier.<sup>11</sup> It is only because naive equivalencies are posited that we can go from home management to the exchange of goods and services. Language facilitates this frictionless transition between ontological categories because, without any resistance, it allows *home* to be reflected in two otherwise unlike things: dwellings and nations. Language enables them to share the same point: *increasing the household*. It is also on the basis of language that dwellings and nations can *be* different.

When ontology permits of categories, *beings* become subject to value judgements and prioritization rather than simply existing in tension with non-existence. This distraction to the question of being *qua* being is the very moment that ontology becomes politicized. Hence, something *fake* suffers social- “ontological” legitimacy despite the fact that it is an existing force in the world. Or the ‘reality’ of something can attain political force by *being* more important. What is good for the nation is good for the household (is good for General Motors) politicizes the *being* of the nation as more important than the household because it schematizes a dependence. Because of this convention, one may expect that my argument for *edification* would

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<sup>11</sup> This too is a part of Foucault's general thesis in *The Order of Things*. See his analysis on the "four similitudes" in particular in, Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. p. 17-25

consist in showing that geo-economy is wrong, inauthentic or fake. Rather, I simply want to show that there is different, insightful meaning hiding in plain sight. In language we already see that things that are reflected in one another become exchangeable in a new valence of representation. There are rules to this valence of exchange that trade up for the efficiency of discoursing over matters while diminishing the aesthetic complexity of each *sameness*. This rule played out in geo-economy. Geo-economy is a being. It is not fake nor can it be made non-existent or erased. What we learn from ontology (in its tension with nothingness) is that *being* attends to every reflection. So, it seems, any answer to capitalism would not be destruction or replacement because it cannot *not* exist. Rather, reflecting on it longer and/or differently will make it *be* differently.<sup>12</sup>

Further, the demands of linguistic grammar are peculiar to representation and radically alter the message. Imagine asking for help without language. What is the difference in expressiveness? It is more efficient to use words, it may even be “better,” but ultimately the difference is ambivalent because the primary change occurs in the degree of complexity and the speed with which more messages can be communicated. We can survive in places where we don’t speak the native language, but things occur at a much slower pace. Distinctions about efficiency, complexity, good or bad are hard to clarify until a new technological efficiency renders *that present* a background for contrast. Using hand signs vs. speaking is an immediate

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger is the most important philosopher for keeping ontology in a framework of reflection. In sum, I read his understanding of the copula as a reflection that links two things rather than a hard and fast bridge between things. Hence, being is not about essence, but a temporary essentializing. I think that this is best captured in his term *dwelling*. Between the Stambaugh and Macquarrie and Robinson translations, this term is alternately translated as dwelling (M&R) and “spending time” (Stambaugh). I think that this discrepancy is telling because dwelling, for Heidegger, certainly is an expenditure of Dasein. This is what distinguishes it from “factual existence.” See Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010. P. 388 and/or Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. Malden: Blackwell, 2013. P. 388.

example, however, contrasts made through other technologies of language permit far more rarified comparisons.

If progress is ambivalent with respect to the good life, that is, if this whole operation is running in circles, it would be a mistake to neglect the agency of these circles. There will always be some who lament the old ways after they have been supplied with (or inhabit) a new vantage point that enables them to witness the old normal as superior to the new normal. There may be values ensconced in the old inefficiencies or there may be resentment about the new dependencies. We cannot forget that language, especially written language, is a technology that permits things that could have faded into non-existence to *be* in the world now. Socrates didn't write and likewise may have been rather irritated with Plato's dialogues, but detractors of written language are relatively few.<sup>13</sup> Anything can be the object of conservatism, but as normality evolves, so too do the objects of nostalgia. The evolving geo-economics has elicited perennial calls for self-reliance, stoic recalibration and crystallized "normalities" of the traditional family. Despite the conservative *going back*, each of these historical markers are unique to each here-now.

We might say that language does as much harm as good, however, it is impossible to even reminisce its absence. It is probably impossible by dint of will power for the mind erase its knowledge. Within the grasp of agency, however, are matters related to exchange. In the exchange of goods and services, currencies displaced practices of barter that would supplant several vectors of value that would have to converge on a trade.<sup>14</sup> These were (infrequently still

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<sup>13</sup> The best glimpse of pre-literacy is something of an ode to orality, a book written by Walter Ong. In this book he theorizes how the mind was radically transformed by the invention of writing. Particularly interesting are certain habits of mind that atrophied with writing, namely, mnemonics. See, Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 2002. p. 33-36

<sup>14</sup> With respect to differences of value that become signified in simplistic *facts*, Georg Simmel gives a good analysis. See especially the section on the *Psychological fact of objective value* in, Simmel, Georg, and David Frisby. *The Philosophy of Money*. London [u.a.]: Routledge [u.a.], 2010. p. 59-61

are) complicated exchanges where the object of one's labor reflects time, experience, effort, resource networking, marketing acumen and countless other personal and emotional factors that determine subjective value. With currency, all of these different factors become simplified and streamlined into a numerical interpretation of value. When an ostensible equivalency is established between the two, that is, when an impossible "sameness" is posited, the efficiency of currency does things that the other messier interpretation could not do. If this were not illustration enough that the two values are unequal, the life taken on by the latter does all but leave the former obsolete.

In general, it appears that purported equivalencies extinguish the more aesthetic side in favor of efficiency and function. As the sophistic equivalence makes the inefficient practice obsolete and makes the efficient practice *exist* more forcefully, new problems emerge that were impossible prior to the introduction of monetized sameness. For instance, practices of debasement and manipulating the weights and measures were considerable problems before floating currencies. When currencies themselves were liberated of their representative status, when they became free-floating values unto themselves, the abstractness of value grows all the more estranged from their origins. Critics nostalgic or longing for fewer degrees of separation from materiality (Weber, Marx, Habermas etc.) are often trapped in the language that regards these increasing degrees of separation as somehow inauthentic, fake or false. This is why "false consciousness" is a political tool masked in an ontological claim. If there is any loss that is registered, it cannot be a loss of reality as these new valences of complexity so profoundly make their presence known. Especially in the case of finance and economics, the drive for wealth and security outpaces knowledge of consequences at each new footing. That singular point of increasing wealth evolves over involutions of equivalencies, where the strange logic of the



grammatical double negatives found its counterpart in finance, like credit default swaps. Computerized trading shatters “exchanges” into divisions of time that are beyond human perception. Economics was always complex but is today becoming astronomical. Geo-economics is not wrong, but it is uncanny. We cannot be at home in its inscrutability, so it is time to reflect on home management.

Economics as the management of the national home, where the exchange of goods and services writ large is the proxy abstraction of groceries and chores, has been flattening into politics as once politics was conflated with war. *Class* is where the distinction washes out to a point of indistinction. The taxonomy of populations that render naive equivalencies among experiences of skin color, income, levels of education, sexuality and countless other demographic points, lines and planes bring to life real, abstract agencies. The functionalism of these demographics is not the conspiracy of evil or altruism, but is an ambivalent *techne* adopted no less by civil rights activists than racists. Solidarity and discrimination turn on the same Ideal, geometric plane where two things can be same.

Ethics, which I define as the question *what to do?*, is nullified in geometric, demographic reasoning. This is because the very act of demographic reasoning entails an irrevocable violence that conceives of at least two singular persons *as same*. Ethics is nullified because the question *what to do?* is closed and answered in policy. The policymaker cannot possibly respond to all who received his or her message. Demographics are efficient, like currency, but they add to the complexity of the social milieu because nobody accepts having their singularity rendered *same*. Identity politics is many things, but simple is not among them. That the temptation to functionalize humans in demographic terms is alluring to Nazis and Proletariat alike raises the question of the ethical stakes of geometry and politics. Is it ever ethical to apprise another of his

or her enslavement? What if I didn't realize that I am in chains until Marx called my attention to it?<sup>15</sup> What if I weren't attuned to the inauthenticity of my experience until I was disillusioned (that is, to be disabused of the false view)? Persuading others *qua* demographic, is not wrong, but it is violent, arrogant and intolerant. Whether there is a time and place for moral higher ground is beyond the scope of economics; it is a question for politics. Politics always wants *you all* to see *my point* and carve up the polity accordingly.<sup>16</sup> Even with the best intentions politics is ambivalent at best and complexifying *at least*.

Nonetheless, critique of alienation reflects a certain kind of experience. It is not a fake experience, but it not an experience of alienation until this notion is encountered, until subjectivity can see this notion reflected in its own experience. Every generation doubtless inhabits *some* previous generation's vision of dystopia. It does not take a lot of imagination to see the capitalist hell predicted by the Frankfurt School reflected in "reality" television, twitter shallowness and Google's read-your-email advertisements but is the experience as bad as the fear?<sup>17</sup> Ordinarity may be more of a testament to human adaptability than anything else. Humans have an ability to recalibrate "normal" at an astonishing pace. Despite this ability to adapt, it is nonetheless the state of things that abstract knowledge is accumulating and accelerating. In the present, we continue to accumulate knowledge of Aristotle's time that he

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<sup>15</sup> "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." I want to ask if "consciousness raising," is ethical. Despite the best of intentions, I suspect that this one-two move that first claims that all are same and secondarily mobilizes this solidarity to crystallize another *sameness* is cause for all comparisons of war and politics. This violence of sameness seems to me a greater violence than any *wrong* identified by an individual theorist. See, Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich. *The Communist Manifesto* (p. 32). Public Domain Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>16</sup> Rancière, while not directly relating the conversation to geometry, says, "The political begins precisely when one stops balancing profits and losses and worries instead about distributing *common* lots and evening out communal shares and entitlements to those shares, the *axiai* entitling one to community." In Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. p. 5

<sup>17</sup> Marcuse is a good example. For instance, he says, "Nature, scientifically comprehended and mastered, reappears in the technical apparatus of production and destruction which sustains and improves the life of individuals while subordinating them to the masters of the apparatus." See, Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon, 1991. p. 167

could not have known (i.e. archeological), so even amidst human adaptability, the question of selection of knowledge, of what to direct attention to becomes a pragmatic question no less than an ethical one. We can be sure that we will never be omniscient- even collectively- so “reality” will always be out of reach. Speculating that “reality” is modeled on geometry is at least dubious, but definitely unethical. Ethics is inherently incompatible with the epistemology of points, lines and planes. Where the problems that the humanities overwhelmingly ascribe to capitalism can be conceived as a problem that reflects *sameness*, the pragmatic question of where to direct attention points to an epistemology of difference for a start.

### **CHINESE *OIKOS NOMOS*: FAMILIAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POINTS, LINES AND PLANES**

What if the fake were not invented as a concept? What if the epistemological (psychological) foundations of understanding were not inspired by the magic achieved in geometry to extend this phenomenon into all of existence, such that “reality” transcends the “sensible” world. If reality escapes our knowledge, does it exist in any other form its own question? What are the implications of this notional reality for the present? At the very least, this hypothetical enables us to *weird* the present, to cast it as arbitrary, alternative or better or worse than something else. To critique capitalism and offer a solution, to make a political argument for necessity and futurity can only complicate the present by infusing it with more stuff. The political mode of thought institutes a positive feedback system, the kind of system whereby an increase of inputs *increases inputs* and subsequently cranks up the volume on alterity. Not only is the political mode of thought an engine of alterity, but we would not have this particular

engine without Plato, points, lines, planes, binary reality, purified perfection and sameness.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis, there are too many claims to refute, but my intention is not to refute anything nor to say that Platonism was wrong or mistaken. I am interested in an epideictic case, to inform the present by curating it from an aesthetic valence, starting from an aesthetic epistemology: the family.

Where the ancient West was understandably animated by geometry and made it the foundation of all subsequent thought, relative contemporaries alien to Plato laid down an epistemology on the mere fact that all people are born.<sup>19</sup> If Confucian epistemology of family seems quaint compared to Thales' epistemology of water or Heraclitian fire, it would be misleading. For one thing, we would be misled in that Confucianism (like Marxism or Christianity) as an ideology reflects its instrumentalization more than the philosophy *qua* philosophy.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, there are many affinities and resonances between Chinese philosophy and counter-Platonic trends in the West (e.g. process philosophy, phenomenology, new materialism, etc.). If these were not a strong enough show of force against a political/ontological value judgement, the sheer scale of influence cannot be denied. Eastern familial epistemology is at least as monolithic as Western points, lines and planes. Dwelling and reflecting on it reveals things that cannot be seen when looking at our own reflection in the mirror.

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<sup>18</sup> Bruno Latour makes an argument for networks. He identifies two ontological zones, human and non-human, that make the work of purification possible. His critique about the problems with the concept of modernity are similar to my argument about geometry. Ultimately, however, he takes aim at humanism and wishes to fix a social perspective. I would argue that this desire to "fix" anything is symptomatic of geometrical thinking. See, Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002. p. 11-15

<sup>19</sup> Specifically, this a reference to the *Xiaojing* 孝敬, a classic Confucian text with uncertain authorship. In the first chapter of this text, to paraphrase, it says that your parents gave you life and the gratitude or respect that you show them for this is the root of all learning. See, Rosemont, Henry, and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the "Xiaojing"*. Honolulu (T.H.): University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. 105,6

<sup>20</sup> In Roger Ames words, "Internally, Confucianism has all too often been appropriated by the powers-that-be to reinforce class and gender inequalities. More than a fair share of despotic rulers has ruled imperial China over the centuries and have oppressed generations in the name of Confucian values." See, Ames, Roger T. *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. p. 19

An epistemology of the family points first to the idea that when we are, to use Heidegger's notion, thrown into the world,<sup>21</sup> we are not simply a creation of one, but we create countless other "things" at this very moment. For instance, when a baby is born it *creates* a father and a mother- so the logic goes. It creates extended relatives and makes aunts out of sisters and grandparents out of parents.<sup>22</sup> It is a cliché to say that everything changes when you have a child, in Confucian epistemology this is taken as literally as it can be.

Starting in the middle happens in fits and starts in the Western canon. *En media res* struggles to take positions that do not collapse mind and cosmos, consciousness and process, or experience and "the world." It is often difficult to distinguish in philosophy whether the subject is the cosmos veiled in discourse about the mind or vice versa. Starting in the middle, often takes a similar form to starting at the beginning because the *point* is just a point. It could stand for anything. Spinoza is explicit about geometrically assimilating God and Mind.<sup>23</sup> There are many echoes of Plato's "real" as Ideal that haunt the best attempts to start in the middle.

The Confucian middle is decidedly concrete by contrast. If there is anything of a spiritual residue left after the pragmatics of the present, the ancient Chinese allocate this a sort of wonder at spontaneity itself.<sup>24</sup> If the real, the perfect, the *point* or some other out-of-the-present factor is

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<sup>21</sup> Heidegger makes a more general point about thrownness, that, as I understand it, calls attention to every moment, not simply being born, but the general phenomenon that we are "entangled" (*Verfallen*) in an unconditional, non-negotiable way. I am adapting thrownness to the epistemology that begins with being born to include how birth, as Roger Ames points out, creates moms and dads at the same time that it creates sons or daughters. See Heidegger, Martin, and Dennis J. Schmidt. *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. p. 130-3. See also, Ames, Ames, Roger T. *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. p. 73,4

<sup>22</sup> Rosemont and Ames make this point and warns against the idea of individual and argues instead for a relational self. See, Rosemont, Henry and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the "Xiaojing."* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2009. 31-2.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, in his geometric proof of God, Spinoza writes: "P1: Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing." See, Spinoza, Benedictus de, and Edwin Curley. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994. p. 117

<sup>24</sup> Spontaneity, creativity and constituent aspects of a *being*. Ames and Hall are at pains to describe the Chinese term 誠 as creativity against other translations of "integrity," for instance. They cite Daoist tendencies to emphasize spontaneity and then define this word by drawing attention that *being* should be approached as *becoming* on because

the engine of wonder for Platonism, dilating the scope of the present would be the *effort* of Chinese thought.<sup>25</sup> This is no less the case for the well-known practices of ancestor worship, because this does not constitute looking back to inform the future. In Aristotelian terms, the forensic and the political collapse on the epideictic because to focus on particular ancestral events focuses these reflections of the past *into the present*, always. Allusions, or the entire Confucian project of editing ancient texts, occurs in the present, brings new things into being in the present and informs the present.<sup>26</sup> Transcendent, ideal, “true” history or facts are problematized to a much greater extent in Plato’s echo- to the point of crisis in Postmodern times.<sup>27</sup> In Chinese thought, “What really happened,” is not at issue in recalling ancestral themes, but instead, allusions sort of enchant the context of the present moment in order to clarify an aesthetic that is attempted in discourse. In other words, Confucius is not driving after purified truths so much as sharing an historical reflection in the present. When quite literally an infinite number of things could be said at any given moment, an historical allusion works at a far more complex level, than, for example, stating the obvious or changing the subject. They work laterally like a shared inside joke at the same time that they draw every epoch of quoters into the room. Shaping the context to find some sort of good thing in the present is very much the

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creation is not concentrated on a single substance, but whence something is created, it can only be apprehended an intensive change at a focus amidst a cumulative change in the “field.” See, Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Focusing the Familiar a Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. 2001. p. 31-2

<sup>25</sup> “This language of extensive field and intensive focus suggests that one nourishes one’s *qi* most successfully by making of oneself the most integral focus of the most extensive field of *qi*. See, *Ibid*, p. 24

<sup>26</sup> The *Xiaojing* (several passages of the Analects, among others) ends most of its chapters with a short quote from the book of songs. Apt to the discussion, Chapter 1 of the 孝經 ends, “In the ‘Greater Odes’ section of the *Book of Songs* it says: ‘How can you not remember your ancestor King Wen? You must cultivate yourself to extend his excellence.’” In, Rosemont, Henry, and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. 2009. p. 105

<sup>27</sup> Baudrillard is probably the most notorious critic of “reality,” he writes, “History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth...The great event of this period, the great trauma, is this decline of strong referentials, these death pangs of the real and of the rational that open onto an age of simulation.” I read him as something of sophist/nihilist because he argues that reality is “lost” to fake things. See, Baudrillard, Jean, and Sheila Faria Glaser. *Simulation and Simulacra*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. p. 43

*dilating* ethic that Confucius labored to cultivate at the same time that he explicitly militated against other-than-present motivations for acting in the world.<sup>28 29</sup>

It is probably misleading to even frame the epistemology of the family in terms of starting from the middle because this is already suggestive of rarified *points* of time-space in ways that connote Cartesian *x-y* axes.<sup>30</sup> It probably has to be pointed out that time is not on a line, but that a line is just a way that we can represent it. Since Zeno's paradox forced a confrontation with the difference between representation and events it has been clear that these are different things, but this knowledge does not preclude shaping a particular experience of time as backward and forward.<sup>31</sup> There are different notions at play in space as well. In particular the ancient Chinese concept of space has been characterized as radial or field-like where spatial discreteness is de-emphasized.<sup>32</sup> This is already somewhat the case in making present the voices

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, "The master said, 'Do not plan policies for an office you do not hold.'" Master Zeng Commented, 'The thoughts of exemplary persons do not wander beyond their station.'" In, Ames, Roger T.. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (Kindle Location 3080). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>29</sup> One study takes the question of context and logic into a laboratory. In this study they demonstrated that different results to a logic question could be radically altered by housing a logic problem in an alternative facade. Where their research aims to take this aesthetic feature of choice into strict analytical terms, the idea of context shaping the present is also easily witness where a defendant's intentions change the "facts" of a crime or how an attitude can change when things are "gamified," i.e. exploiting the rewards system to provoke particular (usually undesirable) tasks like mathematics. All of these demonstrate that present conditions can be radically altered by manipulating the context. I think in Confucian aesthetics, this field is taken as infinite, in Platonism (like the scientists mentioned above) this knowledge *ought to be deployed* for achieving specific outcomes. See Cosmides, Leda, and John Tooby, "Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange." In: *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*. Eds. Jerome Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 182-3.

<sup>30</sup> I think the Chinese had a concept of time that is more closely articulated by Bergson than other Cartesian concepts of time. He says, "We must distinguish here between our own duration and time in general. In our duration- the duration which our consciousness perceives- a given interval can only contain a limited number of phenomena of which we are aware." In Bergson, Henri, N.M. Paul, and W.S. Palmer. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books, 2016. p. 206

<sup>31</sup> In at least one argument, this notion of time as back and forward has been concretized in language. Problematically, we are left with few ways to discourse over time in an intelligible way that evades the 'arrow of time' that has a back and forward. Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. p. 41,2.

<sup>32</sup> The first Chinese Sociologist, Fei Xiaotong makes this distinction himself. He imagines Western society as bundles of hay, where individuals are separate but bound together. By contrast "In Chinese society, the most important relationship- kinship- is similar to the concentric circles formed when a stone is thrown into a lake...The networks woven by marriage and reproduction can be extended to embrace countless numbers of people- in the past, present and future." He also notes, "there is always a self at the center of this web. But this self amounts to egocentrism, not individualism. See, Wang, Zheng, Gary G. Hamilton, and Hsiao-tung Fei. *From the Soil, the*

of ancient sages, because to make them *present* means making them *here and now*.<sup>33</sup> In Chinese thought, the emphasis would be that time and space are two aspects of the same thing, of events, rather than existing as the components from which the present is formed: they are reflected in one another. The present is not at the intersection of time and distance, nor is progress a measure of the slope of this line. An attitude of calculation and purification are not only inimical to spontaneity, but they also stage path dependencies by erecting walls on otherwise open terrain. That is, *purpose* itself can form a corridor with limited options. Confucianism is largely concerned with the proper adherence to rituals, but beyond bringing the past to the present, the specific practices have no specific 'purpose' - the purpose is epiphenomenal to the practice. Where talk of weird sleeping positions and ritual headwear probably strikes most Western readers as *pointless*, fastidious or even dumb, this may actually constitute the virtue of the ritual.<sup>34</sup> If the point is overdetermined or functionalized, the act becomes disembodied, calculated and predictable. It is the same point Weber makes emphatically much later: function and calculation is disenchanting.<sup>35</sup> Confucius draws transversals through the Platonist shortest distance between two points.<sup>36</sup> This aesthetic is obvious in the scorn directed at commercializing

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*Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo, With an Introduction and Epilogue.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. P. 63, 69

<sup>33</sup> Hegel's section in the phenomenology on here and now approximates this same notion in that the only thing two here's and now's have in common is that they are here and now. Because the impossibility of an objective here and now, but only the common phenomenal experience of here-now, the phenomenal experience implies the irrelevance of objective facts. See the first section of "Consciousness: Sense Certainty: or the 'This' and 'Meaning' in Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 58-66

<sup>34</sup> In the Analects, 9.3 Confucius explains his departures and fidelities to accepted and ritualistic practices. On my reading, rituals are obeyed because they extend the past into the present and as far as their practices are not cause for concern, they should not be. The passage is noteworthy for uncharmed Western readers because Confucius is *not* simply conservative, nor is he numbly observant. In, Ames, Roger T. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (Kindle Location 2305). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>35</sup> He writes, "Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, the disenchantment of the world." In, Weber, Max, David S. Owen, Tracy B. Strong and Rodney Livingstone. *The Vocation Lectures: 'Science as a Vocation,' "Politics as a Vocation."* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004. p.30

<sup>36</sup> Transversal is a word the Felix Guattari make use of often. Guattari, because of his work at La Borde, the psychiatric hospital in France, provides an interesting post-structuralist reflection of Confucian epistemology of the family. His approach to psychiatry could be interpreted as trying to rebuild "family feeling." His innovations, along



experience in tourism or holidays, or to interrogate the *purpose* of celebrating Christmas. In Confucianism, the emphasis on the minutiae of ritual displaces an interest in function; more good is done by sharing the ritual as a fact of life than is perfecting its purpose. The question is not whether you like this or that because it is not as if the ego is in one place and its objects of desire are *over there*. It is not a question of taste, it is an ethos of putting effort into liking what is a fact of life, which is the present.<sup>37</sup> This would be Stoic if not for the fact that Stoics identified a *point* shared by all: judgement as to what is within and without your power.<sup>38</sup> Where Stoicism conceives of a lonely idealized individual, Confucian epistemology puts ego in tension with others to the extent of indistinction. Neither individuals nor ‘relational-selves’ escape experience, but clearly experiences can diverge on these cultural perceptions. Chinese thought helps to show that attention overly trained on *points* risks decontextualizing them, getting lost in them. If the Chinese economy of attention is accurate, then being drawn into *points* would cause a person to be a reflection of the environment rather than consciously reflecting *upon* it. The person would cease to *be*- for Confucius and Heidegger alike.

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with Jean Oury have been quite successful in treating patients. What institutional psychiatry shares with Confucian thought is an emphasis on context rather than putting purpose and problem into direct confrontation- like a doctor with a patient. What is more important is that people are integrated into sort of interdependent relationship with rituals and routines, responsibilities and relationships. See Chapter 3 in, Dosse, Francois, and Deborah Glassman. *Intersecting Lives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Ames promotes a Confucian philosophy of enchantment precisely because Confucian thought is a “human-centered religiousness” that is focused on taking ordinary facts and spiritualizing them. Ritual is framework, but the enchantment is an emotional effort. See, “Confucian Religiousness: The Flower of Inspired Living” in Ames, Roger T. *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> “Then examine it [an impression] and test it by these rules that you possess, and first and foremost by this one, whether the impression relates to those things that are within our power; and if it relates to anything that isn’t in our power, be ready to reply, ‘That’s nothing to me.’ In, Epictetus, Hard, Robin, and Christopher Gill. *Epictetus Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. P. 287.

## CONFUCIAN POLITICS?

Where functionalist governmentality is, by definition, going to try to improve its function, Confucius pushes back against techniques of governing at least two times. In one, he explicitly asks a group of students how they would perfect their state. After three students offer policy-style solutions pointing to military or social welfare, the fourth student talks about how he would bathe in the river and come home singing. Confucius responds with enthusiastic agreement.<sup>39</sup> This passage is a serious stain on the credibility of Confucianism as read by Western eyes. It is even impudent, but elsewhere when Confucius is asked why he doesn't seek government office, he responds that in minding his family and friends he *is* doing the work of government.<sup>40</sup> Seeking ways of governing is ultimately counterproductive because projects to make "society" happy without attending to the people in your presence makes no sense. There is no way to inhabit a happy world if the *middle* (ego and its subtending relationships) is skipped over- like a mad, hermit architect of utopia. This simple, Confucian logic is precisely what is lost when *oikos nomos* finds a new reality in Economics. It is precisely this *skip* that I think plagues professional and lay political theorists alike.

Confucius speculates about the logical limits of social relationships, but he is ultimately a theorist of friends and neighbors. Eastern minimalism is reflected in social theory that is superficially an anathema to Western readers, yet, is more pragmatic than it is anti-social. It is ok if some people are *nothing to me*. Not only is it fine, but it is inevitable. According to the *Analects*, "do not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as you are."<sup>41</sup> Unless one is to take a social media definition of this category of relationship, practical matters limit the number of

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<sup>39</sup> See Analects 11.26 in, Ames, Roger T. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (Kindle Location 2657). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, Analects 2.21

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 1.8

friends that a person can have. Friends are voluntary, family-like relationships. Because people are mutually reflected in one another, it stands to *analectical* reasoning that the self will be diminished by home-making with people who diminish you.

On the other side of this apparent elitism, is, in contrast to the biopolitical west, an ethos of benign coexistence. Enemies are conspicuously absent from Confucian politics. This is remarkable because Confucius was teaching as the Warring States period was ascendant. It is in the milieu of war of all against all that Confucius was figuring out a politics that was not quite Daoist psycho-cosmology nor politics *for the sake of the state* (as Legalism will later usher in functionalist reasoning *par excellence*). Confucius conceived a politics of thrownness rather than a politics of utopia, ideals and expectations. In other words, his “politics” is not political at all because it is not oriented to the future: it is epideictic because it makes meaning of the present through the past. I think that this schema is the more radical social theory than anything contained *within* geo-political/geo-economic theory. It is a radical rejection of objectivity, sameness and equality- democratic equality notwithstanding. “Do not plan the policies of an office you do not hold.”<sup>42</sup> Where it is a national pastime to “solve the world’s problems,” the ethics of this inclination are dubious. Given the scarce resources or attention, this is just waste in an epistemology of family.

## **GEO-ECONOMIC / GEOPOLITICAL HEDONISM**

Taking *analectical* reasoning as a foil to contemporary political divisions discloses by contrast something of a hedonistic desire to abstract the Other and to persuade others to see this *point* in geo-economics. Against this backdrop, geo-economics appears to prescribe a duty to

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 8.14

*plan policies for offices one does not hold.* Social media have proved powder kegs waiting to blow democracy to pieces rather than the “democratizing” platforms for a utopian, crowd-wise society. In a general milieu of increasing complexity, proliferating identities (naive samenesses), and accelerating means of exchanging *points*, the affective valence of persuasion frictionlessly shuttles relatively low-risk/high-reward provocations. The art of persuasion has largely devolved into casting sparkly lures into turbid ponds. Power only needs to attract the eyes, not win hearts and minds, but this *dividualization* of the human body’s affective register is not without its tensions. Where polarization is indicative of mutual intolerance, America is, by most accounts, less friendly than it ever has been.<sup>43</sup> As a social media phenomenon, “echo chambers” cause small bits of news to get outsized attention because social network algorithms pass along what your contacts read- regardless of quality or source.<sup>44</sup>

There are also psychological phenomena that point to a hedonism for imaginary change. We are learning that the brain’s rewards system responds to both enumerating desires and satisfying desires with similar registers of pleasure.<sup>45</sup> That is, planning policies for an office you don’t hold can be as, or more, *rewarding* than effecting some “policy” in private. In the same way that we feel good while pledging to others that we will make a change in our lives, we can also feel good about ‘changing the world’ over coffee, in an article or in a speech. The rewards system is just as generous to our emotions for making *promises* as it is for actually following

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<sup>43</sup> "Republicans And Democrats Don't Agree, Or Like Each Other — And It's Worse Than Ever". 2018. NPR.Org. <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/05/555685136/republicans-and-democrats-dont-agree-dont-like-each-other-and-its-worst-than-ever>. Accessed 1/17/2018.

<sup>44</sup> Colleoni, Elanor, Alessandro Rozza, and Adam Arvidsson. 2014. "Echo Chamber Or Public Sphere? Predicting Political Orientation And Measuring Political Homophily In Twitter Using Big Data". *Journal Of Communication* 64 (2): 317-332. doi:10.1111/jcom.12084

<sup>45</sup> Gollwitzer, Peter M., Paschal Sheeran, Verena Michalski, and Andrea E. Seifert. "When Intentions Go Public." *Psychological Science* 20, no. 5 (2009), 612-618. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02336.x. And, Balleine, Bernard W, and John P O'Doherty. 2009. "Human And Rodent Homologies In Action Control: Corticostriatal Determinants Of Goal-Directed And Habitual Action". *Neuropsychopharmacology* 35 (1): 48-69. doi:10.1038/npp.2009.131. doi:10.1038/npp.2009.131.

through with them. Like any other dopaminergic addiction, a hedonistic desire for political rhetoric will prefer cheap thrills over any measure of delayed gratification.

I am not interested in solving this social problem. Rather, I am showing that it is not a problem, because it cannot be solved. This gap between imagination and material substance is phenomena, not a problem. It is also a matter of emphasis in attention and I am convinced that the harder one (or all) try to imaginatively fix *society*, the more explosive it becomes. Our only option is to comport ourselves differently and I think that showing how political hedonism is reflected in geometric epistemology helps to reveal this. Planning policies for offices you do not hold is evidence of, at least momentary, dwelling in the Ideal; it entails *real* fantasy where coding strives for predictable outputs- like the Pythagorean theorem can predicts lengths and angles of notional triangles. Where attention (but not memory or knowledge) is limited, social attention can be regarded as at the opportunity cost of *unimaginary*, immediate, and proximal offices. This is where the real/sensible distinction is the unhelpful legacy of geometric epistemology. The political fantasy is couched in a notion of sameness that is real and affective but incommensurable (as such) with material substance.

Dwelling on one side of the binary occludes the other, and Plato is the first to point out that we have no concrete access to it.<sup>46</sup> The binary taken as an ontological principle is what enables one to inhabit either of these real/fantasy/sensible/illusory/natural realms just as easily as another. The value judgements about which of these realms *matters* most is the contest of politics. They are all faceless points that can be ordered on any sophistic whim. Where geometry

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<sup>46</sup> Plato's *Laws* is where he most quickly abandons the application of geometry for the sake of 'edification' and turns instead to apply it to social control- allowing numbers to do ruling. The whole dialogue is poignant because it seems to register failure. Socrates does not appear. The "second best" is a recurring theme. See, PLATO. Delphi Complete Works of Plato (Illustrated) (Delphi Ancient Classics Book 5) (Kindle Location 51059). Delphi Classics. Kindle Edition.

was once the deft reply to Sophistic philosophy, it has given rise to sophistic politics ever since it failed to found the Euclidean counterpart in Platonic politics. The sophistic hedonism of this scenario is often revealed when the Idealist is brought back to earth, forced to disavow the dogma of sameness, when a hypothetical, particular family member is algebraically exchanged for the faceless demographic. *What if it were your daughter who were raped and needed an abortion? What if your daughter killed herself with the gun? What if it were your father who lost his job to the foreigner? What if your brother were deported?* In other words, *what if your code is executed face-to-face rather than between one faceless category and another?* Whatever the instance, geometric politics has always been vulnerable to a critical epistemology of family. The family-member-hypocrisy-test has doomed political careers; however, totalitarian political statements increasingly satisfy wild claims with a shrug. This shrug is a cultural nod to the tacit drive behind all policy: the greater good. Perhaps most shockingly is an infamous statement made by a presidential candidate, "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters."<sup>47</sup> To his voters, his vision for the greater good is worth the sacrifice- no matter how gratuitous. While this is an extreme statement of political hedonism for the public realm, this sort of detachment and idealism is common in ordinary democratic discourse- social media comments are saturated in such rhetoric.

## **POLITICS AS A MODE OF THOUGHT**

If such extreme words are not really *meant*, then what are they? At the very least, they are evidence of something. There are many theories that (in various different terminologies) suggest

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<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Diamond, CNN. 2018. "Donald Trump Could 'Shoot Somebody And Not Lose Voters' - Cnnpolitics". *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/23/politics/donald-trump-shoot-somebody-support/index.html>. Retrieved 11/18/2017

that aggregating is the activity that the mind cannot help but to do.<sup>48</sup> Without overstating this as the essence of humanity, I simply want indicate that the aggregation of notions is a significant force in the human world and that it can be attended to in different ways.<sup>49</sup> If, then, aggregation is an action of the mind, then geometry perhaps tells us more about how the living minds work than it tells us about how the world is. That is symmetry, isomorphism, synonymy are aspects of mind that condition the kinds of *contrast* that a life can register. Thomas Nagel demonstrated this elegantly by showing that bats would aggregate in a radically different way because of their particular sensory endowment: their samenesses and contrasts would be different than ours.<sup>50</sup> This was established with even more scientific precision by Lettvin in a famous 1959 article, “What the Frog’s Eye Tells the Frog’s Brain,” where he says, “eye speaks to the brain in a language already highly organized and interpreted, instead of transmitting some more or less accurate copy.”<sup>51</sup> Because we see with the mind no less than the eyes, the way this tool is shaped by education and culture (if these are even different) phenomena are highly contingent. On the one hand, we cannot escape our own sensory capacities; there is no knowable sameness that can be abstracted from a human’s, frog’s, or bat’s mind. And contrariwise, there is no use in figuring

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<sup>48</sup> Having discussed sameness as metaphysically impossible, we need to turn to the phenomenon of sameness because the mind most certainly does conceive sameness. I think that Bergson catches this metaphysical impossibility/cerebral function best. “Matter, in our view, is an “aggregate of images. And by “image” we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which a realist calls a *thing* - an existence placed halfway between a “thing” and the “representation.” I am influenced by Bergson’s claim that “realism and idealism both go too far.” See Bergson, Henri, N.M. Paul, and W.S. Palmer. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books, 2016. p. 9

<sup>49</sup> Berkeley has one of the most interesting accounts of aggregations. He makes the very interesting observation that we can abstract something and have a “complete” picture of something all the while countless (infinite, actually) details are left out. For instance, “And here it must be acknowledged that a Man may consider a Figure merely as triangular, without attending to the particular Qualities of the Angles, or relations of the Sides.” To this we could disrupt the completeness of the mental image of the triangle by asking questions like *what color is it? What is its texture?* Etc. See Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982. P. Introduction through 7.

<sup>50</sup> Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435-50. doi:10.2307/2183914.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Programmed Visions*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014. p. 155

out the reality of the object presented to these three witnesses. What constitutes the thing for one is going to be different for another, utterly. This is also true amongst humans using different sorts of optical instruments. At this scale there is even a presumption that all humans would aggregate in the *same* way, which is cannot be the case either.<sup>52</sup> For instance, we know that certain cultures are able to perceive different ranges of colors.<sup>53</sup> In such cases, we know that people can share a sameness, but it first has to be put into the world (like the invention of geometry, or the *name* of a color) and subsequently impressed upon a person's mind. For every singular human, there is a unique historical accumulation of assimilated samenesses and contrasts- some taught, some thought. In this way, geometry is a cultural phenomenon that speaks both to historical contingency as well as human sensory abilities. Humans perceive patterns, but culture, education or training make sense of them. And because in the West geometry has proven a model of truth, it is now reflected in many places- politics and economics not least among them.

Obviously, this only grows more nuanced (and significant) when we recognize that no two people can hold the *same point* of view- both because of historical *a priori* and for the very pragmatic issue that our eyeballs simply cannot occupy the same time-space. Where every *thing* is an aggregation against an astronomically complex background, it is clear that *ways* of aggregation are *tools* that will fashion different things out of the Open. The Platonic/geometric implement of aggregating samenesses and contrasts has clearly been productive at purifying, isolating and reducing things into smaller and smaller things. This is in fact how Bruno Latour

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<sup>52</sup> For a meticulous study on the agglutination of subjectivity, its singularity and its totality, See Shutz, Alfred, Thomas Luckmann, Richard M. Zaner, and H. Tristan Engelhardt. *The Structures of the Life-World*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

<sup>53</sup> Winawer, J., N. Witthoft, M. C. Frank, L. Wu, A. R. Wade, and L. Boroditsky. "Russian blues reveal effects of language on color discrimination." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, no. 19 (2007), 7780-7785. doi:10.1073/pnas.0701644104.



distinguishes between East and West: the former “proliferates hybrids,” the latter, purifications.<sup>54</sup> Where these styles of approaching the world present a choice between *one* infinite mixture (i.e. without limit) and, in the West, *two* realms that always seem to be approaching a singularity, the two-world Platonic scenario is always haunted by its ostensible nearness to the truth.<sup>55</sup> This narrow but unbridgeable gap is what conditions norms and codes that compel us to keep trying to “figuring it out,” to make the code and the material a singularity. The presumption of a code that bears a more important ontological status than the sensuous, human experience is a philosophical orientation that unnecessarily situates humans as an inferior *being* to their own brainchild as we collectively idolize and increasingly emulate the apotheosis of our technological achievements: computation. But where computation does indeed *know* one-to-one correspondence, this certainty is left wanting in human experience.

Despite this impossibility, geo-politics hedonistically tries to crack this code that is composed of impossible sameness, demographics and policies. Despite the obviousness of this *political impossibility*, the ironic response to homogenization is often rejection of homogenization. This *is still* political because it conceives sameness wherever capitalism leaves its mark. It perceives that capitalism has a code and that this code is responsible for everything capitalism-haters *hate*. For better or worse, people are having happy, human moments at

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<sup>54</sup>Bruno Latour, I think, is the contemporary thinker who most clearly articulates our contemporary impasses in terms of cultural norms. I largely agree with his analysis, however, where he argues that *we should stop being modern*, I take his argument as still focused on society. I am trying to suggest that modernity predicts that we would desire such a solution- as opposed to a subjective solution. See especially Chapter 3 for his distinction between East and West. Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993

<sup>55</sup> Whitehead probably most forcefully makes the case that Western Philosophy is haunted by its “bifurcation.” Where Whitehead turns away from substances and toward processes, the reflection that I am speaking of is not quite either of these, nor is it *process* either. Nonetheless, Whitehead helps clarify the problem. He writes that one, “...way of phrasing this theory which I am arguing against is to bifurcate nature into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness.” Whitehead, Alfred North. “The Concept of Nature,” *The Tarnier Lectures Delivered in Trinity College, November 1919* (p. 17). Kindle Edition.

Starbucks and working in retail. Capitalism is not the only code; there are many that are no less anxiety-inducing. Hedonists of all sorts are slow to register faces in ideal society. But some people may have compelling reasons for abortions and others may get some peace of mind from having a gun in their homes to protect themselves, because they live in truly dangerous places.<sup>56</sup> My rational position about what is good for society as a whole is inevitably arrogant because there is no homogenous ethics. I think we can only say that having an opinion about others ‘chains’ is selfish and controlling rather than caring and tolerant; surely people more meaningful to home-making would benefit from such an expenditure of reflection. The second irony is that enchantment does not depend on social engineering, it just depends on changing one’s mind about things. Geo-politics would predict that education would turn into mind-subjectivity entrainment. It would conceive of the ego, *ideally*, as self-identical with the mind. Where Liberal Arts has largely fallen prey to Economic exigencies, I think we are largely without a pedagogical tradition that approaches the mind as a tool distinct from subjectivity- so that subjectivity can distance itself enough from its mind to get a lever beneath it.

In making this case, it is important to note that politics is inevitable. What I take to be lost is the fact that it must be cautious and minimal because every notion of sameness will cause some violence. If this is the necessary evil of politics, it is on account of this that any *good life* will demand that the *volume* of politics is both low and quiet. Democracy is almost violent by design because it is a civic duty to conceive of a vast nation in terms of samenesses. Now that individual voices can be arbitrarily heard at loud, high volumes, the blithe notions about large republics cancelling out factions and producing better politicians is coming back to haunt us

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<sup>56</sup> An important book for rethinking the gun debate is: Bloom, Joshua, and Martin, Waldo E. *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. Ironically, this book reveals a quite effective, and I think constitutionally legitimate, use of “bearing arms” as central strategy to the Black Panther movement.

from Federalist 10.<sup>57</sup> Infighting hasn't silenced factions. Rather, all of them are just getting louder in a very unminimal politics.

## ANALECTICAL ECONOMICS

Where contemporary democracy has *each* trying to teach *all* a lesson, turning to Confucius puts politics on a different pedagogical axis.<sup>58</sup> The “greater good,” if it registers at all, is epiphenomenal to homemaking. To the question of government, Confucius cites *The Book of Documents*, “Just being filial to your parents and befriending your brothers is carrying out the work of government. In doing this I am employed in governing. Why must I be ‘employed in governing’?”<sup>59</sup> The *Analects* is not a landmark of thought if not for the deliberate resistance to social engineering. In the West, our geometric mind-eyes are probably liable to latch onto an apparent, seminal authoritarian patriarchy, however, this needs to be read without extrapolation: this *actually is* just a statement of *oikos nomos* contra politics. Where I mention that there is an hypocrisy test grounded in an epistemology of family, such questions are the foreground of Confucian dialogues rather than the *afterthought*. Where contemporary politics shrugs off the immediate, self-reflective implications of a demographic statement, the inverse is the case of *analectical* reasoning: behavior at home has to make sense. The only neighbors that register are friends, which are basically surrogate family. All others can be shrugged off until they cannot. It

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<sup>57</sup> Madison writes, “There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests.” To this, I would add a third: diminish the reliance on policy and polity for a sense of the good life. Hamilton, Alexander; Madison, James; Jay, John. *The Federalist Papers*. Kindle Edition. Loc 700-702

<sup>58</sup> Mentioned before, I said that politics is something of a formula where each individual has the confidence of the teacher. Confucius states, The Master said: “Reviewing the old as a means of realizing the new—such a person can be considered a teacher.” Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Loc. 1545-1546

<sup>59</sup> Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Location. 1583-1585

is for this reason that I am arguing that Confucius makes a sincerer attempt at the question of home management than Socrates did in the *Oeconomicus*.

In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, political hedonism is reflected in its rhetoric of property and power insofar as the *point* of each is to grow. The ubiquity of Western capitalism is reflected in this ancient appetite for wealth and expansion. Confucian aphorisms, by contrast, press the will to power against an emotional economy of non-demographic, non-abstract relationality. The Confucian context of all-against-all, *Warring States*, makes his pithy lines relevant to our own times because *caring* about a *society* that is drowning itself in its own addiction to teach others a lesson is increasingly at the expense of subjective/domestic well-being. As these polarized times are revealing, one cannot be political without trampling over the values of people close to them. The late 2010's is showing how absolutist political positions are splitting up families, for instance- where ideology is proving stronger than blood ties.<sup>60</sup> Rationalism need not be isolated to geometric, logical positivism. Quite the opposite, this is *aneconomic* rationality. From an epistemology of family, it is the most irrational thing to conceive of a threat or enemy in the absence of any material/proximal/existential evidence. It is perhaps worse to abstract from some relatives' opinions that they are enemies when thrownness makes it a fact that these should be the most dependable people in one's life. Yet, home is a prism of social existence and we all have family members that are *reflections of their milieu* rather than subjects who reflect upon it. I speculate that there is an impasse where relationships with people who, by self-identifying with

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<sup>60</sup> Seelye, Sabrina. 2018. "Political Divide Splits Relationships — And Thanksgiving, Too". *Nytimes.Com*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/us/political-divide-splits-relationships-and-thanksgiving-too.html> and Ingraham, Christopher. 2018. "Analysis | Politics Really Is Ruining Thanksgiving, According To Data From 10 Million Cellphones". *Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/11/15/politics-really-is-ruining-thanksgiving-according-to-data-from-10-million-cellphones/?utm\\_term=.9f6130ffbbc4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/11/15/politics-really-is-ruining-thanksgiving-according-to-data-from-10-million-cellphones/?utm_term=.9f6130ffbbc4). Retrieved 11/20/2017

their minds, cannot change them or tolerate others. This is not a political problem; it is a pedagogical problem.

In classical Chinese society, strangers are understood through a familial cognate, a brother, sister, aunt or grandfather and their corresponding degrees of detachment and respect.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, political hedonists are far less organized about how they love and hate their neighbors. This intensity of ambivalence here is much stranger than between family and neighbors. At home it is obvious that the subjective experience of being *cared for* easily crosses a threshold into *control*- this gets negotiated with careful subtlety. In geo-politics, this thin line goes out of bounds. Even in the Western genealogy of thought, politics and ethics are utterly incompatible. This has been explicit at least since Machiavelli. For *analectical* reasoning, abstractions and particularities are in operative tension in all behaviors.<sup>62</sup> Unapologetic, self-righteous abstractions (politics) are on the other side of the gulf between home and neighbors. It is quite simply a scale that ordinary minds inhabit to their own (and their family's) detriment. This *uncanny* emotion is evident to Westerners where holidays are stained by politics and religion. Where people *didn't mean* their harsh words used in the midst of argument, these words are still evidence of the *bad mood* that is politics.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> See "Self and Society," in Wang, Zheng, Gary G. Hamilton, and Hsiao-tung Fei. *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo, With an Introduction and Epilogue*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. p. 24-27

<sup>62</sup> The *Zhongyong* is largely about figuring out the hard ethical space of home as a pedagogical pre-condition for behaving in the world. "Promoting the centrality of family relations is an attempt to assure that entire persons, without remainder, are invested in each of their actions." For me, this line points to the shrug as a failure of *oikos nomos* that should have forestalled any *political* opinion. See, Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Focusing the Familiar a Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2001. p. 39

<sup>63</sup> I argue that politics is a mode of thinking that *is* a bad mood. Heidegger writes, "'Mere mood' discloses the there more primordially, but it also *closes* it *off* more stubbornly, than any *not*-perceiving. *Bad moods* show this. In bad moods, *Dasein* becomes blind to itself, the surrounding world of heedfulness is a veil, the circumspection of taking care is led astray." In, Heidegger, Martin, and Dennis J. Schmidt. *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. p. 133.

## CONFUCIANISM, PHENOMENOLOGY AND HOME MANAGEMENT

Confucian thought pushes against functionalism, but a large body of Western philosophy does this as well. Confucianism can inform many branches of Western philosophy because much of Western philosophy, while explicitly opposed to Plato, is still ensconced in his language game that engages *the real*. It has to prove itself against ‘bifurcated’ geometry to assert its legitimacy. Chinese philosophy spares these minor strands of philosophy of an inferiority complex so that it can build on a foundation that does not reject it. That is, Chinese philosophy is untroubled by ontological distinctions between codes and materials. *Being* answers its own question: it is what it is. Ancient Chinese philosophy emphasizes accommodating subjectivity to *what is*, rather than subjectivity trying to figure out *what it is all about*.<sup>64</sup> Phenomenology works in a similar mode by describing situations more than it explains them.<sup>65</sup> Confucianism shares with phenomenology an attitude where fleshing out descriptions reveal tendencies or phenomena outside the inquiry into substance and noumena. A second reason why Confucian thought informs phenomenology is that it *humanizes* what is something of a law in phenomenology, Husserl’s claim that “consciousness is consciousness of something.”<sup>66</sup> Unhaunted by the question of what is really real or illusory, Confucianism turns to the ethics of shaping consciousness around what simply

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, in the *Mencius* 4A5: “The root of the world is the nation; the root of the nation is the family; the root of the family is in one’s own person.” This is just another example of Chinese philosophy always coming back to subjectivity. Cited in Rosemont, Henry, and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009. P. 93,94

<sup>65</sup> Husserl makes a point of charting out a particular attitude of phenomenology that is not hung up on ontology, but instead, just accepts things as phenomena and brackets the unknowable questions so that analysis can make use of description. Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> Husserl writes, “...as consciousness of something, every consciousness has the essential property, not just of being somehow able to change into continually new modes of consciousness of the same object (which, throughout the unity of synthesis, is inherent in them as an identical objective sense), but of being able to do so according to indeed, only according to those horizon intentionalities. The object is, so to speak, a pole of identity...” Not only is this view more felicitous with Confucian thought, but it also helps to tie Confucian thought to the Liberal Arts former ethos of training the mind- as independent of identity. See *Ibid*, p. 45.

is. Where the West has specialized in materials and sensory experience, Confucians are more attuned to humans and emotional intelligence. They complement each other this way.

Confucius is not a teacher of the truth but teaches a *way* through *the Way*. On its own terms, Western philosophy, as a method, makes its *way* by identifying the presuppositions of inherited wisdom. A new philosophy or philosopher that overcomes such a wall does not simply take a line further, but it brings all of Western philosophy with it.<sup>67</sup> Confucius doesn't put such weight on his shoulders nor does he make bold and brittle claims, quite the opposite, he appears inconsistent and fickle. This appearance of inconsistency, however, is not only accurate, it is its virtue and method. *Analectical* reasoning is not *anything goes* Sophistry, however. Confucian stability is not sourced from the ether or Ideal realm, but takes its bearing from a phenomenon: the feeling of being at home.<sup>68</sup> Where a Western philosopher will challenge the Confucian claim about the presuppositions of being born (and one has to admit it is formidable even on Western terms), Confucius would observe a presupposition in Western philosophy that there is any such thing as a fixed point, stable substance or stillness anywhere in the world.<sup>69</sup>

## **SURROGATE PARENTS FOR WESTERN ORPHANS**

It is undeniable that the code/substance distinction in Western philosophy has been productive. Even if late to the show in entertaining the possibility that there are more actors in

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<sup>67</sup> Laruelle's opening lines, "One philosopher does not succeed another without claiming to succeed philosophy itself as a whole." In, Laruelle, Francois, Nicola Rubczak, and Anthony Paul Smith. *Principles of Non-philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. p. xxi

<sup>68</sup> "The Emperor who loves his own parents would not presume to hate the parents of others; he who respects his own parents would not presume to be rude to the parents of others." Rosemont, Henry, and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. p. 106.

<sup>69</sup> "Just as there is no final whole, so there are no ultimate 'parts'. The world is a field of many things and the "things" are not discrete objects but are themselves states of becoming; they are happenings." Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Focusing the Familiar a Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2001. p. 11

this world than humans, relatively recent lines of Continental Philosophy are pushing ancient ideas of animism into strange, new and interesting places.<sup>70</sup> An inquiry into economics is entirely inadequate if it cannot confront a contemporary world that is not only more complex, but becoming more complex at the hands of non-human agency. Only minor strands of Western philosophy, however, are comfortable in the kind of contingency that serves as the basis for much Chinese thought. Much of this is lost on Westerners who are still disposed to the more successful *misinterpretations* of Confucianism. Confucianism is plagued by the Oriental Despotism reading that is not only the dominant reading in the West, but also the preferred reading of virtually every government in Chinese history. The functionalization of Confucius is an irony that is not lost on careful readers, but careful readers are always a minority.

Contemporary scholars have done a thorough job to disabuse Confucian prejudices. I learn from them that much of a new Liberal Arts tradition makes more sense when the orphans of Western philosophy find their foundation in Chinese thought rather than rebelling against their own family tree. It applies the mind to home and subjectivity rather than society.

Synthesizing philosophies is not the object of this project. Quite the opposite, the problem at hand is that *home* is adrift in a sea of signifiers that has swept it off its feet. At least since industrialization, the West has been in search of something *real*, authentic and true with respect to the human's presence in the world. Over this same period, it has also been anxious about alienation, disenchantment, discipline, control. It has identified huge, hegemonic culprits as the source of *anomie* and has perennially pursued huge and hegemonic ideas to supplant them. If not trying to supplant the culprits, in Marxist fashion, political theory labors to show how

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<sup>70</sup> There are several different schools that all take common cause in giving autonomy to things other than humans. This is almost an embarrassment to Western philosophy if not for the novelty of its themes that are structured by history. More on this in later chapters. I think one of the best overviews is in opening chapter of, Shaviri, Steven. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.



“people of the world” are slaves, victims and subjects of an apparatus of control that transcends all but our collective, revolutionary efforts. Even theories that promote minor or “grassroots” actions are only thinly-veiled seeds of ill-fated revolutionary aspirations. Perhaps not unlike Confucius witnessing the war of all against all on the horizon, it is an appropriate time for neighborly theory, time to consider that forces of control actually transcend our collective, revolutionary aspirations, but *not* home management. In the West, Stoicism remains bomb shelter theory of last resort that enjoys perennial revival in end times, but a theory of *oikos nomos* does not turn on such austerities.

Confucian economic theory has neither promises nor aspirations to save society. It is anti-social in so far as it rejects the notion that an experience of society is anyone’s to behold. Family/neighbor theory cannot directly care about society because this particular species of *care* inheres violence to the particular. Care attenuates relative to the subjective capacity to grasp particularity in relationships. I think that this is the threshold where it gets confused with control. Caring for society is unethical by design because it necessarily treats particulars *as* demographics. Nor does Confucian economics makes promises or have any aspirations to save souls. That is, it is not theory for rugged individualism because home is the demonstration that subjectivity comprises other people, things and events. The self is not located at some *point*, at the pineal gland or other part of the body. Self *itself* is as wide of a space that can contain everything that makes home feel home. And the mind is the only tool available to make oneself at home. None of these notions are entirely exotic, they have their correspondences in Western philosophy, science and psychology. These correspondences, however, are often lost in cultural and academic provincialism. Now, while I am not trying to solve society or synthesize philosophy, I do propose a structure that makes all it of intelligible. In the rest of the introduction

I turn to the phenomenology of reflection. It is what I will nominate as a first discipline of a reformed Liberal Arts that I call *Edification*.

## THE PHENOMENON OF REFLECTION

The phenomenon of reflection can interpret some of the most fundamental questions of philosophy. Approaching Chinese philosophy through this phenomenon helps to mitigate a Western epistemology that is biased toward linear, logical, or dialogical consistency as the only mark of quality thought- without laying to waste many of the concepts borne of this bias. Over the next few pages, I want to present the phenomenon of reflection as a metaphysical interpretation- an interpretation that is felicitous with both of these otherwise awkwardly juxtaposed lines of thinking. Reflections enable a sort of physics of the imaginary. By this I mean that in so many places that Western philosophy runs into contradictions and paradoxes, *reflection* supplies an existential, empirical and observable phenomenon to overcome apparent incommensurabilities. This word *reflection* is ubiquitous and I think that this undermines the uniqueness of this phenomenon to make sense of so many other phenomena- which is precisely what makes it such an apposite candidate for learning to use the mind as a tool. We are familiar with *reflection* as a metaphor (as when I reflect upon some event), but as we begin in a very mundane way, then compound its effects (reflections of reflections), the metaphor eventually ceases to be metaphorical. That is to say, ontological claims cease to be *like* or *as* looking in a mirror, but instead, philosophical things become accessible through the ordinary experience of reflection.

Ontology, the question of being itself, is already peculiar to the West. In the absence of displacements about what is really real, the default position in Chinese philosophy is that things

are what they are *as what they are for other things*.<sup>71</sup> That is, there is no “self” until there is *another* toward which it can *be*. This is problematic for geometric reasoning because geometry reduces to points, not entanglements. To an analytical tradition, *being* that is predicated on otherness is tautological, paradoxical and nihilistic- positions that few Western philosophers will stand in front of. For the majority who won’t stand in front of these, there is legitimate demand for a fuller explanation of how that incomplete self could have a complete experience of subjectivity, how that self-less being experiences its own body, or even has anything *to be* a thing in its relation toward that “other.”<sup>72</sup> Western philosophy is awash in such theory, but it truly struggles on the question of materiality, limits, discreteness, insides and outsides.<sup>73</sup> I think that this is because it has long conflated a particular mechanism of perception manifest in the human study of geometry to be more than a mechanism of mind, but an ontological principle and a dogma of the world. I also believe that this conditions an interpretation of infinity as a linear sort (i.e.  $n$  plus 1) rather than a *totally* open field, without *any* limits. Being radically open (relativistic) as a legitimate intellectual endeavor took a devastating blow in Plato’s dialogs and has ever since earned *relativism* a connotation of unmoored, immoral and random. But that is a

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<sup>71</sup> “...in reading Confucius, there is no reference to some core human *being* as the site of who we *really* are and that remains once the particular layers of family and community relations are peeled away. That is, there is no ‘self’, no ‘soul’, no discrete ‘individual’ behind our complex and dynamic habits of conduct.” Ames, Roger T. *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011. p. 96

<sup>72</sup> Sartre is working both against a Platonist kind of substance, but also against the vacuity of being. He says, “Since consciousness is not *possible* before being, but since its being is the source and condition of all possibility, its existence implies its essence.” See Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Hazel E. Barnes. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992. p. 15

<sup>73</sup> As one example, Graham Harman has written very interesting works, however, the inability to abandon a real interior is my point of departure. In my terms, he is guilty of considering aspects of a reflection independent of one another. For instance, “The point can be seen more clearly if we imagine two people staring at each other. Clearly we have two intentional acts here, not one. If intentionality unfolds on the inside of some object, as claimed earlier, then we will have to speak of two separate objects. But when we intend, note that we cannot be described as the “active” ones, even if it is we who must engage in a frenzy of perceptual arrangements. On the contrary it is I who am the passive one, since it is I who have been drawn into a new space by the object I encounter. Harman, Graham. *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays & Lectures*. Washington: Zero Books, 2010. Kindle Edition p. 133

longstanding over-reaction. Plato elevated geometry's precepts to the point where truth was mistaken for its own claim: ideal.

The phenomenon of reflection challenges the false choice between substance and codes because reflections are *of things* and we use them *like things*, but they are nonetheless as immaterial as a code. They are immaterial like a code because they cannot be localized. One can point to mirrors and bodies, but the "thing itself," that thing we call a *reflection* is suspended between the two. Any interruption between the two reflecting surfaces destroys and creates reflections *immediately*. If a person walks between a mirror and me, my reflection is destroyed and his or her reflection is *immediately* created. The reflection registers any change that occurs within its infinitely divisible poles.

Reflections are unmediated, without limit and completely simultaneous. Aside from reflections, I can think of no other terrestrial experience where such concepts are materially demonstrated. These reflections are clearly part of living experience such that they should satisfy the most conservative materialists. It is not *merely* in my imagination that there is an automobile behind me when I peer into my side view mirror, but neither is that automobile that I apprehend *an automobile* or a substance: I apprehend a reflection. The automobile is not materially *there*, nor is it an hallucination in my mind alone. We may say that the mirror points to, or gives us access to *the thing*, but as regards the reflection itself, we cannot say where a *reflection* is located. It cannot be pinpointed in the ether between myself and the mirror, nor can it merely be located on the surface of the automobile in question, nor can it be on the surface of the mirror, nor can it be merely in my mind-eye: it is all entangled. The reflection lacks both the materiality that is associated with the sensible *and* a determinate time-space.

Dualism overdetermines the poles, relational ontology presupposes them; reflections simply are everywhere, and consciousness is what draws “things” out its infinitude. Perceiving discreteness is a fact of consciousness; what would a non-discrete perception be? The mistake is to conceive of this perception that is defined by limits to be the rule of the unperceived world as well. We need only dwell on one perception for some time to gain a new perspective of it. So if the discreteness of some perception drawn out of reflection is this unstable, then we can see that positing *any* stability is all the more suspect because it would hastily ascribe a nature to things that is easily disrupted- even within the selfsame perceiver. The assumption of stability in nature is more radical than apprehending our perceptions as such *as* mere humanisms. Untroubled by the question of reality, *reflection* can help us to see that both the *thing* and *consciousness* are reflected in one another when *consciousness is consciousness of something*.

Where the combination “no self” and “being for another” presents a *contradiction*, the human linear mode of discoursing in terms of subjects and objects becomes paradoxical in terms of reflection because all are simultaneously *reflected in one another*- and not in sequence, but simultaneously. Reflection shows cause and effect to be the paradox (because each is already reflected in the other). *Cause and effect* is just our feeble way of accommodating the phenomenon of reflection to the protocol of human syntax.

In terms of language, it is this fact that I suggest guide readings that deal with ontology and metaphysics. Neither pole in a reflection *causes* the other to do something. All events that compose a reflection cannot be hinged on one reflective surface within it. A reflection is always an infinite-totality (not a paradox in reflection) in which the slightest change constitutes a different reflection.<sup>74</sup> I mentioned that Confucian thought is applying a relational ontology of

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<sup>74</sup> Non-Euclidean geometry has long since broken out of old dogmas to confront these sorts of situations. For instance, we could compare a reflection’s totality/infinity structure to a Koch snowflake. This is an instance of finite

sorts to humans and interpersonal relationships. Here the analogy or the metaphor is clear: the other is a mirror. Between two people, each pole is saturated in the others' expression to a point of indistinction. Between two people, agency is irreducible to either because it is impossible to purify one agency from the influence of the other. As in a reflection, the two consciousnesses are entangled.<sup>75</sup>

This mirror is helpful but too schematic; it needs to be diffused one step to point out that all that we *see* is reflected light. So far, this is entirely literal, not an overextension of the metaphor. In the case of the mirror, one may mistake the mirror as being the only reflecting surface because it is the most conspicuous one. The body looking into the mirror, however, is also a reflecting surface. My body is reflecting light from the environment that I see in the mirror as *color*. We can see that the reflection is not just between two opposing poles or two parallel planes. Instead, the body as a reflecting surface is reflecting light from multiple sources. Perhaps one side of the body reflects natural light coming in through the window, while the other side of the body reflects incandescent, overhead light. These qualities are then reflected in the images that are reflected back to my eyes. In this way, the reflection that is suspended between the body and the mirror has transcended the narrow space *between* an observer and a mirror, the reflection is drawing from much more than two bodies. And likewise, light that bounces off my body will get reflected into places that I cannot see.

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area located within an infinite perimeter. Mandelbrot also shows a similar phenomenon in his article about the infinite coast of England. The coast actually becomes longer and longer with each increase of detail in measurement. All the while, the area of the shape remains fixed. See, Mandelbrot, Benoit. "How Long Is the Coast of Britain? Statistical Self-Similarity and Fractional Dimension." *Science* 156, no. 3775 (1967): 636-38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1721427>.

<sup>75</sup> Quite literally in the case of mirror neurons, another person's actions are lived out in a person's brain. When parents feed their children and their mouths open up in sympathy is on example. Under brain scans, neurologists have been able to demonstrate that brains light up empathetically, acting out in imagination, *reflecting* others' behaviors in the "unconscious." See Iacoboni, Marco. *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect With Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

Not only does the reflection transcend the initial, obvious structure of the scenario, but it will also transcend my consciousness. My consciousness is limited, but reflection, this present state of affairs, is not limited to my account, description or representation. One need only to try being conscious of *everything* in the scene to prove this point. There is more reflection occurring, always, that I can recount, be aware of, or even retrospectively account for. All the more, I cannot look into a mirror and be conscious of all that is simultaneously suspended in the reflection. Even with eyes fixed in one direction, it is possible to fix consciousness in a different direction. I could try to *detect* something at the fringe of my peripheral vision, for instance, drawing more resources from some “mental” operation than from my eyes that could perform the task more easily. If in one step, peripheral vision detects the sun’s rays, then secondly consciousness turns back into line with the direction the eyes are pointed, the person can be aware of an assemblage. She can be aware that there is a difference between seeing and conscious attention. There is a difference between conspicuous and subtle reflections, yet when consciousness returns to the direction of the eyes, the image seen in the mirror *could be* imbued with an awareness of the sun’s effect on the image. I think something similar to this scenario or phenomenon is why *reflection* is such an ordinary philosophical term. It is more transitive and expansive than to say, *think about* such and such specific object.

If we can put ordinary objects on the same theoretical plane as a mirror, to see all such objects as reflectors of light, then we can see that not only is consciousness a factor in the dilation of perceived reflections, but so too is the environment. For instance, sitting in a room before sunrise, in complete darkness, little if anything is reflected into my eyes. Slowly as the room grows brighter, a limited number, a countable number, of things are reflected in the scene. I may see only the white curtains hanging in the window and a few lightly colored or metallic

items in the room. As the room grows brighter things will imperceptibly pass through a reflective threshold to become perceivable. At the moment it becomes perceivable, I am almost incredulous that it was invisible just a moment before. It seems like it was there all along. As this occurs, I can start to maneuver with increasing ease as large pieces of furniture and stairs become more conspicuous. Eventually, an innumerable sum of reflections will saturate the scene. I can finally locate my keys or my watch or do some task that requires a higher acuity. As each moment passes, the entire assemblage changes. I can know after the fact that these countless items were there all along, but in the twilight, my behavior must be structured by groping in the dark. In utter blackness, the knowledge of what is “really” there is of little consequence. In the blackness of night, there are not *things* with which my consciousness can be conscious of. The “reality” becomes an absurd concept to entertain. Our behavior is structured by what is suspended in reflection, what is reflected in one another. I can know no other reality than the one that suspends me in reflection. It is only as the room brightens that the limits of reflection transition from the aperture of the eye to the aperture of conscious attention. With too many things to see, my eyes are less limiting than my mind.

The mirror is no longer needed as a tool to clarify this interpretation of reflection. The mirror is just a sort of diplomatic gesture to geometric thinking toward a phenomenon, to structure the physics of immaterialism. Reflection (even holding to light) is always already reflected everywhere. It is possible to imbue my vision with particular knowledges. I *know* for instance that colors are “actually” particular wave frequencies and I can imbue my gaze at the sky with this knowledge to *see* this reflected light differently. I can look at a comic and choose to see pixels or forms. I can look at an object and be perfectly certain that I see an array of dots or I can be taught how to look at an auto stereogram and then *see* a 3D image pop out of the flat



illustration. We are disposed to call such things illusions or tricks, but optical illusions call into question the meaning of what is *really* real. We are disposed to regard one as false and one as true, rather than regard both “visions” as being suspended between the viewer and the reflective surface.

## REFLECTING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

In the West, we are disposed to find *points*, unequivocal meanings so that all other lines of thought collapse. We often ask *what is the point?* Our cultural fetish for univocity in a world that is flush with increasingly incompatible *lines and planes* of thought, is what Sophists exploit. They know that the possibility to *make the weak argument the stronger* is always possible when in *fact* there is no singular truth, but in practice, everyone wants one. For instance, I can look out of a window at dusk and choose to see my reflection or choose to see through the window. These are different, legitimate reflections just like I could hear someone literally or figuratively. Sophistry exploits this feature of reflection to frustrate fragile truths. It is not that I am sitting in a solid chair *or* an arrangement of “empty space” (atoms), I am very much sitting in both at the same time. Each perception is reflected in my different dispositions toward the chair. I do not suffer an illusion or deception when I experience the solidity of the chair. Nor is it an illusion in the viewfinder of a compound microscope. Depending on how I am oriented to the chair as an object of reflection, I can see either of these “visions” reflected in the scene. The chair has no singular truth. There is no truth *in it*, but only a multiplicity of truths that suspended in reflections with other things and beings.

If these aspects of reflection are what are presupposed in Chinese philosophies (like the general’s survey in *The Art of War* or intersubjectivity in Confucianism), then we can read into

these varying lines of thought a recognition that its epistemology is both infinite and total. The *reflection* does indeed have limits (the field of battle, or scene of two people together), but there are no limits to the particular aspects in this total reflection that my consciousness could be conscious of. For Western thought, the discovery of the Pythagorean theorem appears to have been such a significant event that this epistemology preceded ontological questions, it conditioned ontology. Euclid's "undefined terms" did something divine: they codified the sensible and subsequently started doing divine things with the use of this code. Because of the peculiar distinction made possible by geometry (the code and the material), the question of ontology and the "reality" of *being* itself was made a possible object of inquiry. "Discovery," seeing what is predicted by the code (like the periodic table or the Higgs boson) becomes an intention of thought; it distinguishes itself from sophistry in the qualitative consequences of its effort. In sophistry, by contrast, relative success amongst peers is the measure of knowledge. Dialectic aspires to the purity of *points, lines and planes*- things that appear to be reflected in nature, but probably more accurately reflect life's mechanism for *grasping* visions in the world.

Taking reflection as a foundation, Chinese thought informs the perennial theme of "self-responsibility" by taking it and epistemology into non-Euclidean territory.<sup>76</sup> Reflection is a non-reducible metaphysics that helps to make sense of philosophy at the same time that it saves science from the dogma of the theory of everything. On the one hand, the fetish for geometry has been the most complexifying force in the world. The endless search for purity has enabled otherwise impossible *scientific* reflections- largely through augmented sensory apparatuses and

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<sup>76</sup> Self-responsibility, I think, is a particular kind of freedom that philosophers are always trying to carve out of dogmas that they discover in themselves. To this discussion, I would like to point out the Husserl's politeness in calling on his readers to reflect upon Descartes this way. "Cannot the disconsolateness of our philosophical position be traced back ultimately to the fact that the driving forces emanating from the *Meditations* of Descartes have lost their original vitality- lost it because the spirit that characterizes the radicalness of philosophical self-responsibility has been lost?" Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982 p. 5-6.

entrained minds. On the other hand, this vestige of Pythagoreanism, this duality, remains the embarrassment of philosophy.<sup>77</sup> It is an embarrassment to science that it should be conceived as cracking a code that is ostensibly *independent of human consciousness*- which is precisely where this imaginary code will remain by its own design. Productive as it has been, this conundrum is now mostly political and indefensible.

Because metaphysics and epistemology are reflected in one another, we can know that Economic theory is grounded in this code/substance metaphysics. Geo-economics unreflectively accepts this Pythagorean/Xenophon-ic dogma. This gives the worst of Sophism access to the most banal forms of functional reason and categorical culture. Confucian *oikos nomos* cuts a transversal line through our conundrum because it is neither sophist nor logical positivist. It is ostensive, but also reflective. The structure of idealism and geometry *points away*. Confucianism is somewhat cybernetic because it always comes back around in a negative feedback loop. Family feeling is both the intention *and* the origin- which makes little sense unless we consider what occurs when we look in the mirror, when we *look at ourselves in the mirror*.

## **SOME OTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR REFLECTION**

There are two other aspects of reflection that need to be covered in this introduction. I will start with the notion of *immediacy* and then turn to *infinity* before outlining the subsequent chapters. Taken literally, immediacy means *without mediation*, that is, to be without something intervening. This includes the absence of *time-intervention*, but the first implication of

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<sup>77</sup> Sartre opens *Being and Nothingness* this way, “Modern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it. Its aim was to over- come a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by the monism of the phenomenon. Has the attempt been successful?” Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Hazel E. Barnes. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992. p. xlv

immediacy for reflection is that a reflection is one thing with multiple aspects. Objects that are suspended in a reflection (many objects in a room, for example) are immediately reflected in one another similar to the way that gravity is acting amongst all of those objects. The perceivable aspects of the objects of are all entangled. Where we are habituated to say that one thing causes another, reflection points to a much subtler balance of affect. While this may seem straightforward, it demands a reconsideration of many of the most naturalized experiences.

One consequence is that convention of distinguishing between the signifier and the signified is revealed to be overly transitive. Things are not passively available to our active naming, rather, the name and the thing are reflected in one another. Terms are arbitrary, but they are not random. There are explanations for the names that find themselves attached to artifacts of culture and physics. Our linguistics terminology would need to loosen its grip on the poles of this distinction, to admit of the singularity of their pairing. Signifiers and signifieds need to be approached with respect to reflection as entanglement. There is nothing holy that binds one to the other, quite the opposite signs are things and things are signs: all are objects of reflection. But even our grammar traps us into *direct objects* that receive *actions* from *nouns* by referring signifiers and signifieds. Cause and effect is almost inescapable. Reflections reminds us that a sentence has no agents when aspects are isolated. To reflect upon a sentence, we can see that its sequence abets us to take a sentence's form as a true statement about reality. A sentence states a sequence; however, its subjects, verbs and direct objects are all immediately reflected in one another. If any part is removed, the entire sentence/reflection collapses.

Reflection also explains that a printed or spoken word *immediately* reflects many things and its obvious referent is merely among them. It is not a single material object that comes to mind when I see a printed word, but a whole feeling- poetry otherwise would not work. A word

is a thing with its own orbit of affects, connotations and meanings. It is entirely independent of the thing it stands for except for the minor thread that binds it to some perceivable thing. This is how *economics*, for instance, has a life of its own independent of authenticity, ideality or substance. Presently “economics” *reflects* a constellation of notions related to goods and services and it is only with a significant effort that it can reflect *home management*.

This aspect of immediacy, the ‘unmediatedness’ between signifier and signified, challenges the dogma of ideals because the very practice of taxonomy (and today’s taxonomic practices of race, class, gender etc.) presume a superstructure of categories and essences. The dialectic and its penchant for terms like truth and justice was the very practice of getting asymptotically close to these structuring categories by using our signs and language. But this name-to-ideal, one-to-one correspondence was a fragile moment in dialectic- not an idea that turned to stone. Aristotle’s meticulous categorization and identification of forms of things with respect to their ends reveals a similar, but conventionally distinct aspect of immediacy: time.

Where ideals mediate between statements of true/false, real/fake and signifier/signified, time presents another dimension of mediation, hylomorphism, in which one thing changes into another across an arrow of time. No reflection holds indefinitely, but Aristotle was not thinking in terms of reflections. The perception that a transformation is one thing turning into another is just that, it is a perception. It presupposes that there was a stability of form in the first instance. It presupposes that one sensible object follows a temporal path (like an acorn to an oak) to *realize* its end as another stable form. The presupposition that there is an absolute, and unchanging realm of forms that governs “things” across “time” is a radical one when there is no evidence of any absolute stability anywhere. But incremental change is only a subtle improvement because it still more accurately reflects the way we perceive than the way things are *for real*. Stability is a

phenomenon of the mind.<sup>78</sup> “Instants,” like frames in film reel, invoke a perception of stable things that are trans-formed through a process of incremental changes.<sup>79</sup> This needs to be the tacit caveat of all observation, yet much of science and philosophy discourse as if a reality outside of human perception is possible. It is not that our perception is *wrong*, or illusory. It is what it is. It is merely that our perception is not capable of apprehending infinite, immediate reflection.

With more direct implications for politics, reflection does not permit sameness. Take for instance, if you want to see precisely what I see in the mirror, your attempt to stand in my place would obviously supply a different image than I see, namely, you would see yourself. Reflection makes intuitive the idea that ideals do not mediate sameness among objects. There is no code that produces uni-Form outputs. Rather, the closest thing that reflection permits to “sameness” is an inference. I can get very close to an understanding of your reflection by inferring your reflection from my own, from reflecting on your reflection, but I cannot get the *same*. Where sameness is not even valid within human perception, its application to politics, science and philosophy are all the greater of an error.

The immediacy that is inherent to reflection has other implication for time. It deflects the burden of reality away from history and temporalities. Everything is simultaneous and only simultaneous. On the face of it, this seems like a contradiction with respect to sameness, because simultaneity refers to the *same time*. But the alternative conceives of time can be cut up and that

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<sup>78</sup> “Homogenous space and homogeneous time are then neither properties of things nor essential conditions of our faculty of knowing them: they express, in an abstract form, the double work of solidification and of division which we effect on the moving continuity of the real in order to obtain there a fulcrum for our action, in order to fix within it starting points for our operation. In short, to introduce into it real changes. They are the diagrammatic design of our eventual action upon matter.” Bergson, Henri, N.M. Paul, and W.S. Palmer. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books, 2016. p. 211

<sup>79</sup> See “Mind Moments” Section in, Thompson, Evan, and Camlin, Alex. *Waking, Dreaming, Being: New Light on the Self and Consciousness from Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*. 2015. p. 34-40.

it can be discrete when these are just the way we represent time. In this kind of representation, all kinds of geometries are possible with events- alternative histories, counterfactuals and alternative futures. But *time* is an abstracted aspect of movement that helps humans comprehend the world, and thus, is a reflection of the way the mind works not how the world *really* is. Starting at reflection, *it is what it is*, and everything is enveloped in multiplicitous reflection at the same time. There is nothing but infinite here-now's and when we concern ourselves with the past, when we reflect upon it, it is just that: a reflection. There is no *true* history that is the *same* for every observer of it. Rather, just like I can infer your perception when standing next to you in a mirror, I can infer a sequence of event by reflecting on them.

When it is understood that all movement in front of the mirror is simultaneous, it is easy to challenge the limits of consciousness and the detail it can register. If there is movement in the scene of reflection, for instance, my description and thoughts will be limited to my capacity to abstract and arrange it all in some sort of order, but I am helpless to get the entire scene into my consciousness at once, much less encapsulate this infinity within the proverbial thousand words. Any sequence that I recount, will be at the expense of other details or different sequences altogether. My description will have to abide limits of perception, limits of explanation and limits of consciousness attention. All the while I can separately acknowledge that more occurred than was captured by my consciousness. Consciousness needs discreteness, limitations and patterns to get a grasp of any *thing* and to express it. These same limitations are all the more evident when we reflect on past events to reconstruct how something happened. Eyewitness accounts are sometimes worse than nothing. We can only abstract a line of thought from the lasting impressions that are retrievable in memory, but the retrievals often say more about the

retriever than they do about *real* history.<sup>80</sup> Small slices of the scene are haphazardly made conscious and even more crudely retained in memory.

To be political, that is, to be rhetorically oriented toward the future, compounds the feebleness of our detection.<sup>81</sup> Compare a reflection upon the future with a reflection upon the past. The past is simultaneous to the present insofar as past intensities continue to be reflected in here-now's. In reflecting upon the past, it makes no sense to identify or regard oneself as dwelling in the past *or* the present because the reflection envelopes both. In reconstructing how events occurred, historians are not going back to the past, but instead, they are reflecting on event that are not present to infer the *reality* of another time-space. We might compare this to looking in a rearview mirror. Some of the furniture of past events is better lit than other pieces so causation can be narrated using either conspicuous or nuanced reflections that will coexist.

Reflecting on the future, on the other hand, is more problematic because the act of mind is a reflection on a code that is already an inference from past events. It is a reflection upon an unreliable reflection. Orienting oneself toward an idea of the future makes a reflective surface of our hopes, fears, ideals, and *sames* in one schizophrenic mirror to the present. This is not to say that reflecting on the future is not real, but it is *realizing* events that are several degrees removed from an existential scene of reflection. Being oriented toward the future is a commitment to a particular, ostensibly stable code or perception. The more one depends on a code that is

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<sup>80</sup> In many studies on "inattention blindness," we find that very significant aberrations (like gorillas) in a scene of reflection are easily overlooked with we have our conscious resources directed at unrelated, specific tasks (like lung nodule detection). This is one famous experiment: Drew T, Vo MLH, Wolfe JM. "The invisible gorilla strikes again: Sustained inattention blindness in expert observers." *Psychological science*. 2013;24(9):1848-1853. doi:10.1177/0956797613479386.

<sup>81</sup> I am pulling this definition from Aristotle's rhetoric, "Political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something: one of these two courses is always taken by private counsellors, as well as by men who address public assemblies...The political orator is concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter that he advises, for or against." Aristotle, W Rhys Roberts, and Ingram Bywater. *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*. New York: Modern Library, 1984. p. 33



otherwise not reflected in scene, the more hedonistic the attachment is- like an addiction that makes a person lose sight of all but a singular substance of desire.

Functional reason depends on events occurring in sequences, sequences that resemble linear causation, or at the very least, probabilities that gesture to a final *point* of decision or likelihood. Sequence is so fundamental to experience that it demands an explanation from reflection. Does the perception or expression of a sequence say something about reality or does it merely say something human experience? If something occurs unexpectedly, if it occurs out of sequence, what is the meaning of it being “wrong” or calling it an error? To say something is wrong or evil is only a couple of reflections away from metaphysics and epistemology. Now is it wrong according to nature? Morals? Culture? Does wrongness constitute an instance of non-existence, the creation of a gap or negativity- something that needs to be fixed, mended or patched? Or is wrongness only relative to “rightness” without any absolute *point* of “objectivity.” And what does normativity establish about truth?

A feeling that something *should be* a certain way or that its function is somehow preordained, is, at base, an enculturated metaphysics reflective of codes and materials, geometry and substances. I argue that this feeling or expectation is *cause for reflection* because an expectation informs us about how our minds apprehend a particular scene. To self-identify with this mode of apprehension is, in one step, a disavowal of ethical leverage over oneself. Because our expectations are *immediate*, they are honest expressions of the very intimate intentions of our unreflective bodies. This aspect of reflection makes it critical to politics, ethics and education.

What is true of sequences is also true in more subtle acts of mind. When taking the object of attention for what it “obviously is,” this is not subjective reflection. Quite the opposite, what the object “unreflectively” is, reflects not *its* nature, but the subject’s historical experience that

made such a thing obvious.<sup>82</sup> There is immediacy to this scenario. For instance, when I look at a word in English, I cannot *not* see it in my language. The word is immediately *the word* before I can take it *as* pencil markings, pixels, odd shapes or anything else.<sup>83</sup> The same is true for our *reading* of the sound of a car pulling into the driveway (a dog hears something more), a glimpse of a madeleine or hearing two notes of a familiar song. All of these things *reflect* familiarity in the subject. None of these things are broken into fragmented components, rather, once they are in the scene they are an infinite-totality, immediately complete and limitlessly affective.

## REFLECTION AND INFINITY

Infinity would seem to be a word more amenable to univocity than most. How many ways can “without limit” be conceived? The “signified” of this signifier ‘without limit’ is fundamentally without any *thisness*, so how can it be so variously understood? But the very act of *designating* “without limit” *already* circumscribes it in definition- and hence makes it *finite*. It gives it *thisness*. *Infinity* is a contradiction in a single word. It pins down something that cannot be pinned down, which in turn, leaves it open to interpretation. In the shadows of geometry, infinity takes on many forms of finitude. There is actually an infinity of infinities. In the first instance, a point which has no dimension can be placed anywhere. A point posits a notional starting point from an infinite field. Secondly, another point can be notionally placed. It will have a distance relative to the first, but importantly, when connected the two points form a line. This

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<sup>82</sup> Hegel’s depiction of orders of thinking is helpful here. He identifies differences between sense-certainty (lowest), perception and understanding (highest). In sense certainty, “Our approach to the object must also be *immediate* or *receptive*: we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *apprehending* it, we must refrain from trying to *comprehend* it.” In, Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 58

<sup>83</sup> Walter Ong’s book is a fascinating theory of the impact of writing on consciousness. He notes that the very deliberate effort to learn writing has fundamentally altered the way we apprehend these particular symbols. See section, “The Inward Turn,” in, Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 173

line, notionally, can be extended in either direction into “infinity.” The second type of infinity is actually extremely limited to all but a singular direction. It is conceived in the mode of *imagine the longest distance you can, then add another unit*. Now, a third point creates a plane. A plane transforms one-dimensional infinity into a 2-dimensional constraint. If constrained in one way, it is totally unrestrained in scale: the Pythagorean theorem lists no units because they are irrelevant to the infinite scalability of its code. Now, 2-dimensions make it possible for an inside and an outside. If the fourth point is on the same plane it is inside, but if it is not on the same plane, it forms a solid- the forms of sensible things. Geometrically, the forms can be rotated or translated infinitely while maintaining their integrity. What matters is that in a solid we have a place to stand; we can forget about infinity. The sensible world is eminently limited and this is the world that makes sense to us even if we can handle one kind of infinity at a time. Philosophy born of mathematics repeatedly anthropomorphizes infinity. Math and geometry are already inadequate to the question of limitlessness because math tells us about ourselves, not the reality of nature.

Obviously, these different kinds of infinities are indicative of different kinds of reflections, but what are we left to make of the meaning of *without limit*? Can we call a line infinite if it actually does have limits? Conditionally unlimited? If I can hold the notion of a point in front of an infinite field, what does this say about the abstraction of the field? If I have abstracted the notion of infinity, does the representation reflect anything about *without limits* or does it only reflect the only possible way that a human can conceive of infinity?

The counterpart to the question *what is really real?* is the question *what is ‘without limit’?* Are limitations precisely what give the non-ideal its reality? Or, are limits the essence of the Ideal? Ideality clearly has a limit because a universal is infinite sameness. Between Plato’s

two realms, it seems, there is actually no concept of limitlessness, but only varying characterizations of limits. I think that the impact of geometry to *tame infinity* cannot be underestimated because it enculturated a philosophical problem in a very specific way. This Pythagorean philosophy is now a political problem because this understanding of reality and infinity is so ubiquitously reflected in *here-now*. Critics of capitalism will argue that a homogenizing mode of thought is colonizing minds the world over. If geo-economics subdues the remaining mutual exoticisms between East and West, it would be a tragedy to deprive home management some Eastern incomprehensibility before the whole world succumbs to calculation.

In these last several pages, I have argued that *reflection* is a helpful response to a philosophy of calculation. Reflection also helps make sense of Chinese philosophy by grounding it in ordinary experience. And in doing this, we can see how minor strains of Western philosophy are reflected in Chinese thought, and vice versa. But more importantly, the mirror is a pedagogical tool that demonstrates that reflections are immaterial, immediate and infinite. By extension, these concepts are extended to the reflected light that composes the images we see. Further still, we know that the limits of subjective reflection are not limits on the object of our attention. Such limits are reflections of our expectations, but not the object's possibilities. The simultaneity of these reflections is what composes an object, like gravity holding bodies in place. This is why it is such a gamble to hinge our expectations on codes rather than contingency. There was no quarantine from the symptoms of Pythagoreanism in Western philosophy. This matter of infinity is potentially the most serious consequence of this because this philosophical question is not the preoccupation of lonely thinkers. Rather, the code is a ubiquitous feature of politics, ethics and education.

The most important reason to use ancient Chinese thought to ground Western thought is because of its disposition toward infinity. Ancient Chinese thought was not only quarantined from Pythagoras, but it emphatically pushed against finitude, sameness and the Universal where it saw it reflected, not least of all in the constant fog of warfare. Where Plato is always walking *up* and to the bright sun, Chinese philosophers evoke suspicion, even contempt toward apparent clarity. Where clarity or perfection is the ultimate end of studying points, lines and planes, clarity itself was a thing that had to be balanced with the humility or the awareness that clarity is a brittle pole between consciousness and the limitless *everything* else.<sup>84</sup> The feeling of certainty is the cue to look for more uncertainty lest we think we have seen the future- which is absurd. The onus of ethics is not to discover what is over-the-horizon, rather it is to imbue the present with more reflection before answering *what to do?* Ultimately, home is always twilight.

## CHAPTERS

The subsequent chapters stage an interpretation of home management by curating domesticity through the notion of reflection. In turn, this reading of economics will pick up where this introduction leaves off to the cause of shoring up the notion of reflection, at least through repetition of this nuanced usage. It is my intention to give reflection some materiality. The word has been overused to the state of near transparency and this denies it some of its most salient aspects, namely, immediacy, infinity and immateriality. Not only are these aspects of

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<sup>84</sup> I could simply point to *Zhuangzi* as a whole to make this point. The entire text is filled with ironies about taking things as they seem. For instance, he tells a story about a man who sold a family recipe for balm for profit. The person who bought it then presented it to the king. In a strange turn of events the merchant was made a general and gained a title. The moral being, “The power to keeps the hands from chapping was one and the same, but one man used it to get an enfeoffment and another couldn’t even use it to avoid washing silk all winter.” The point being that the consequences of this action were incalculable. Nobody could have seen all of this reflected in the balm; it was a mistake to see anything of the future in it. Zhuangzi, and Brook Ziporyn. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009. P. 8

reflection, but they are also aspects that inhabit the phenomenon of feeling at home. This very nebulous, undefinable feeling is the Confucian counterpart to the Pythagorean *point*. If all of the symptoms of the capitalist syndrome point toward some sort of functionality and purpose, then this feeling entails an entirely different valuation of domesticity. What is reflected in *Oeconomicus* is reflected no less in contemporary suburbia. There is a notion that the home *is* functional, and its purpose is to increase wealth- whether private or national economy. From a Confucian standpoint, home is an intuition or *familiarity*. Management of a national economy does not even make sense.

It is impossible to experience the feeling that society has, nor is it possible for *home* to be construed so abstractly. What follows will not save the world. It is, in fact, critical of this objective. It also makes no claim to the future, which technically means that it is technically apolitical. I want to show that thinking and acting to save the world may indeed be the biggest obstacle to achieving it. If this is the case, *this* would be useful to know because so much of our thoughts, lives and education are disposed precisely to this purpose. Unlike many times before, society is far beyond the grasp of human control- neither individuals or in common. What we call *society* is nothing more than a description, a reflection of what we subjectively apprehend when we look out innumerable lives. In this essay, then, I turn away from prescriptions and codes in order to reflect on home making, things, walls, utilities and people.

Chapter 1, “Things,” charts an immaterialist theory of things that aspires to be somewhere between solipsism and objective realism. The burden of this chapter is to show that things are a reflection of thought and that thought is a reflection of things. I make the most forceful argument that I can to show that these are two aspects of a singular reflection. To

cement this intention, I refer this reflection as a thin[g]k to emphasize that thoughts and things are coextensive.

I will use reflection to engage various philosophers and traditions including more recent work that ascribes agency to things. After charting a path through this philosophy, I turn to a more terrestrial application by engaging Chinese martial theory and its approach to a scene of reflection. Home management is informed by war theory because in this tradition, a mind is applied to apprehending how certain things in a scene are reflected, not only in subjective consciousness, but also, how things are reflected amongst themselves. Turning this way to a scene of reflection deflates a strong sense of Western agency. It also demonstrates how this way of using the mind *changes the mind*. This raises the question of how changing one's mind is possible at all if the mind self-identifies with the thoughts that arrive passively. If things and thoughts are coextensive, artifacts in the scene of reflection will literally *change the mind*- which has important implications for home making and edification.

Chapter 2, "Walls," is about the context of thought. Where thoughts and objects are coextensive and immediate, it stands to reason that intervening in our thoughts will largely occur indirectly. Where "Things" may give the impression that we simply turn our heads to change the mind, this chapter turns toward a higher-order intervention in thought that involves the material conditions of possible thoughts. In this way, home is very much an extension of the mind because the things present in the scene of reflection will play a structural role in the kinds of reflections that come to mind. By now, it should be clear that there is no one-to-one correspondence between things and thoughts, signifieds and signifiers. Because of this, I will argue in this chapter that *one can only act on context, not content*. All the more, the way we structure our access to particular things will structure, not our thoughts directly, but instead, the

contingency of our reflections. And contrariwise, the reflections that we have will structure the material consequences of our response to the question *what to do?* In this way, the material conditions of thought will edify the *historical a priori* of everyday life. These choices, behaviors, things and walls will all conspire to wall off certain possibilities to act in the world, and at the same time, they increase the probability that other behaviors within a circumscribed range will follow.

Chapter 3 “Utilities,” addresses the social scale of the phenomenon of walls. Here, I will engage structuralism and critique it in terms of the geometry reflected in it. I then turn to its overcorrection, *poststructuralism*, and argue that it is vulnerable to Sophism. After laying this theoretical groundwork, I turn my attention to the politics of utilities- these infrastructural monoliths that structure ordinary life. I argue that, contrary to democratic ideology, utilities are the primary access point for an individual to touch society. In the space of the home, people are routinely, if unreflectively, leaving their marks on shared social space. People directly leave marks in the oceans, in the air and in the land. Also, the way that utilities are delivered to the home (pipes, wires and cars) go a very long way to shaping the conditions of possible ways to act in this world. Because politics and edification both concern ways to act in the world, I argue that there can be no freedom in the absence of reflection upon how these things organize the preponderance of our daily lives. Structuralism helps us see how much of our behaviors are decided for us. Finally, as with politics, changing infrastructure is not within the power of singular people. And, as with politics, freedom is not how we impose our will on utilities, but instead, how we reflect upon them and comport ourselves to them.

Chapter 4, “People,” returns to thin[g]king but with a much closer look at the human body. In this chapter, I draw from phenomenology and biology to argue that the body comprises



many different reflective functions that can easily operate beneath conscious reflection. I draw from several theorists who contest Descartes's mind-body distinction. In response, I argue that the anachronistic body-soul distinction is actually more appropriate. The ego, it turns out, is not the same thing as the mind. Nor is it merely an extension of the body. Instead, it is a much more fragile presence than ordinary discourse ascribes to it. There are many different factors in the world and the body that influence the intensity of the ego's presence. I show that in the absence of conscious reflection, the body is well disposed to act according to patterns of behavior and thought. As with things, walls, and utilities, if we do not have well developed concepts of these functions and phenomena of the body, the soul is without any means of leveraging its body to reflect a change that the soul desires. I revive my case that these *reflections* are a necessary component of the historical aims of the Liberal Arts to learn to use the mind. And finally, I extend this theory of the body into politics and home management. I argue that such a failure in self-reflection is only compounded with an insensitivity to the way the world and the body acts on others with whom we live. The politics of the world are an endless problem for speculative improvements, but nothing stands to eat away at the soul like a bad roommate.

## CHAPTER 1: THINGS

*This chapter has a few goals. First, I want to discuss how sameness as a geometric ideal correlates to things as actual encounters. Secondly, I try to get some leverage on this catchall term by developing some different degrees of thingness: from concrete to completely obscure. Finally, I will draw from phenomenology and ancient Chinese philosophy to discuss how things are coextensive with thought and that subjectivity is edified in this way. And again, all three of these goals are in support of the overarching theory that homemaking and reflection are more vital than politics and persuasion.*

### THE DISPENSIBLE PRESUPPOSITION

The word edification is probably not immediately taken as a homonym, but regarding it in this way helpfully brings together two very different notions that intersect at the concept of home. It calls on both materiality and idea-ism by referring to both architecture (edifices) and thinking (edifying) respectively. Despite this disciplinarian disparity, I think that the two are very much reflected in one another. I most certainly think and feel differently when I inhabit different rooms. So too, when I alter a room (by turning on music, the heat, or position) I alter the possibilities of thought at the very same time. Most obviously, flipping a light switch in a dark room instantaneously changes the reflection spanned between thinking and architecture. The edifice *is* entangled with the *building up of one's soul* i.e., edification.

If this much is obvious, it is mysterious that phenomena so intimately bound up with being and experience weigh so lightly on law, civil engineering, politics, science, or any other of the major disciplines that structure human existence. These disciplines are perhaps more interested in *shaping* souls setting them up to build themselves. If this is a problem, then, it is a

pedagogical one. And it is one that has to be approached from a clean slate, because if edification is not obviously a homonym, then the two meanings that are reflected in it are correspondingly obscure. But more confounding still, if the two meanings of this ostensible *homonymy* are truly bound up with one another, this redundancy folds the homonym back in on itself. Edification is synonymous to itself because thought and architecture, from this perspective, are two poles of the same reflection. To start this problem from scratch, I am turning to the lowest common denominator of last resort: things.

The meaning of this word *thing* is always answered one way or another. More often than not the answer is implied with a presupposition. These presuppositions risk making the speaker unwitting to his or her own beliefs about them. I want to answer the question deliberately, rather than leave the question *what is a thing?* to the opacity of obviousness.<sup>85</sup> The study of home management will encounter too many kinds of things to ignore the potentials inherent to them and the differences among them. Are things only “material” objects? Is a chore a thing? Is good news a thing? Are political or religious arguments *things*? Is a rearrangement a thing? As heterogeneous as these things may be, the notion of a thing reflects this multiplicity of different concepts, emotions, events, and objects. This is not merely discursive. *One thing leads to another*. For instance, bad moods can quickly manifest broken items in a home. A certain decoration could consistently ignite controversy and catalyze bad moods (maybe leading to more broken stuff). In ordinary language we use the word *thing* precisely for the lack of a better word.

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<sup>85</sup> Heidegger writes, “Thingliness itself needs to be demonstrated in terms of its ontological source in order that we can ask what is now to be understood *positively* by the nonreified *being* of the subject, the soul, consciousness, the spirit, the person.” In terms of reflection, one is always expressing more than we say. I will *say* more about what is expressed by this word. Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010. p. 45

A *thing*, however, has more technical dimension than this and this needs to develop lest home management conceive of things *as same*, or uni-Formly.

We have to understand what things have in common and how they can be different from one another. How can everything be unique, yet all be referred to by the same noun? Somewhere between this contradiction there are more reasonable, complementary reflections. Things affect other people and they also affect other things independent of human involvement. Some things can be repurposed- and become new things. Some things alter the patterns of daily life, repurposing the human that brought them into the scene. Politics and education bring things (like concepts) into the home. Advertising can bring one kind of thing into the home (a desire) that manifest as another kind of thing (an appliance). Some of these appear to be material things and others appear to be notional things, but this strict difference does not hold up well under scrutiny because any *thing* is immediately more than it states it is upon some reflection. Rather, like a reflection, there will always be a surplus of immaterial reflection to complement the apparently singular artifact that captures our attention. In this way, the *reality* of the artifact that we reflect upon is beside the point because it will *be* however it is reflected upon- which will evolve with more reflection. This is why it is obvious to collectors that an heirloom is irreplaceable. It seems, however, that we are less apt to consider our apprehension of an illusion as an evolved thing, we tend to see ourselves as disillusioned instead, to grasp its *reality*. Instead, both heirlooms and illusions are evolved reflections. All things have this in common.

If all things share this concept, it is nonetheless absolutely the case that no two things are the same substance.<sup>86</sup> The only substance that is absolutely the same is *self-same*- which is

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<sup>86</sup> As an aside that need not detain us, monists *do* consider all to be one substance and what we apprehend as individual things to be aspects of that substance. Most notably, Spinoza uses geometrical proofs to develop a monist metaphysics, “By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.” As a second aside, while I am not using his

unhelpfully redundant. Sameness is a specific, perceptual phenomenon unique to life. This is not a frivolous observation because it is common to do a calculation that looks like this:  $1+1=2$ . It must be acknowledged, however, that “2” is an *interpretation* of  $1+1$ . They are not the same in substance even if we elevate its truth to dignity of *hard facts*. We only need to look at the two sides of this equation to *perceive* that we are looking at different things that are *conceived as* equal. That is, as a function of history, culture, learning and thinking, we subjectively make them the same, but the backstop of this veracity is a social assumption. An heirloom or a tool evolves through subjective experience, but learning mathematics is the subjective experience of a cultural conception not a subjective one. When we learn math we materialize this idea.

This mathematics quickly becomes political because the *Oeconomicus*, for instance, conceives of such things along this convention as well. Home is conceived uniquely for unique people and universally for populations. This political mode of thinking is reflected in Socrates’ question about managing homes. *If I know how to manage one home, won’t I know how to manage another?* Answering in the affirmative implies that homes-in-plural is merely the sum of fungible, mutually interchangeable individuals. By this logic, one home plus another home is simply two homes. But there is no standard, traditional or normal homes; rather, specific homes are what define subjective normality.

## THE SOCIAL PROBLEM OF *SAME* THINGS

In this mathematics, home is purified of particularity and staged for the algebra of geoeconomics. The fundamental assumption about sameness lurks beneath all policy and

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notion of substance, his concept of infinity is helpfully explicit. “I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it.” In, Spinoza, Benedictus De, and Edwin Curley. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. p. 85,86

demographics because these necessarily obliterate difference in order to work with magnitudes.<sup>87</sup> It is important to consider the irony of how often this occurs with the well-meaning intention to increase diversity. We need to ask, is the manipulation of raw numbers of a demographic worth the homogenizing violence done to that very group of people? Perhaps this is *the* social exigency that makes politics structurally unethical, but it is gratuitously unethical to repeat this face-to-face. That is, to treat a singular human being, face-to-face, *as* their demographic is the ethical dilemma imagined in policy but executed by police (as a matter of politics in the *polis*). Cities must be managed differently than homes, but this needs to be conscientiously disentangled where democracy makes a virtue of caring about the political.<sup>88</sup>

Demographic patterns are going to be reflected in singular people, but it is political to reflect upon this at the expense of their singularity. This is the necessary philosophical distinction between home management and political theory. Home management cannot extrapolate this kind of sameness because the violence of this will be immediately reflected in the tiny space of home. Economics cannot even assent to  $1+1=1+1$  because each of these symbols are absolutely different. Conceiving their sameness is actually the more radical turn of mind which is why absolute *sameness* must be identified as unique to mathematics. If carried over to politics, when this thing (concept) is imposed on other things (like people) it alters them

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<sup>87</sup> Hegel writes, “In mathematical cognition, insight is an activity external to the thing; it follows that the true thing is altered by it...the *evident* character of this defective cognition of which mathematics is proud, an on which it plumes itself before philosophy, rests solely on the poverty of its purpose and the defectiveness of its stuff, and is therefore a kind that philosophy must spurn. Its *purpose* of Notion is *magnitude*. It is just this relationship that is unessential, lacking the Notion.” Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 25

<sup>88</sup> Foucault’s lectures from ‘82-’83 offer an interesting historical context for the way I am distinguishing between politics and economics. He investigates the concept of *parresia*, that is “...a virtue, duty, and technique which should be found in the person who spiritually directs others and helps them to constitute their relationship to self.” All of this is reflected in the democratic ethos, yet, I find that the technique is lacking. I also believe that humans are not the only resource to draw from to inform the relationship to self. See, Foucault, Michel, Frédéric Gros, and Graham Burchell. *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1982-1982*. New York: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. p. 43

in a violent way. Home imposes a different theory of knowledge (though politics is informed by it as well) that *difference* is prior to math:  $1+1 \neq 2$  and 2 only re-presents  $1+1$  as an equivalency. If these are magnitudes of people, the social absurdity of this proposition is evident by replacing numbers with faces.

The extenuating predicament of politics turns into comedy and tragedy in the realm of domesticity. It is the scripting of comedies when the military-dad archetype runs a home *functionally* like the proverbial tight ship. It is the scripting of tragedy when Don Draper sees Betty as a demographic equivalence. To him, she is mostly *a* wife, and only occasionally “Birdie.” The geo-economic mode of thinking is widespread and requires careful reflection to reveal how it infiltrates domesticity. Don Draper’s geo-economic mode of home making is obvious to us today, but what is *not* obvious about contemporary home making? One cannot help but to look at historical racism and sexism and feel that *they should have known better*. We seldom acquit historical characters on grounds of ignorance, and yet, the democratic ethos still leans on the rising tide of social progress to lift all boats. Passive ethics and pro-active politics, more than any specific *cause*, is the anachronistic sequence that destabilizes democratic society. It is a political problem that cannot be solved *politically* because the way that the political mode of thinking conceives *things* is fundamentally violent.

Demographics are so dangerous because the allure to unite into one for common cause obscures the risk of effacing oneself. Joining for common cause to defend rights, for instance, performs the otherwise controversial bio-political taxonomy for the very institutions that need to manage populations.<sup>89</sup> Materializing the self *as same* has its mirror image. Because politics

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<sup>89</sup> This is a topic that Foucault develops most extensively. On my reading, biopolitics reflects geo-economics. It conceives of one home to manage. Foucault is interested in the meaning that *life* has for government, but I am more concerned with the problem of analogizing the home to politics. To conceive of them as *same* does enormous violence at the level of demographics. Nonetheless, his analysis of biopolitics informs geo-economics. He explains

thrives on sameness, organizing comes at the cost of making oneself legible to the logic of politics- for better and worse. Even if for the better, it is much harder to undo sameness than it is to demonstrate it.<sup>90</sup> Ostensible equivalencies between things in the home are so conspicuously *not the same* that they need only to be looked at to observe the *faux pas*, the misstep, made in that kind of interpretation. This habit or culture of seeing sameness so saturates democracy that its violence can only be identified if it is conceived as a problem in the first instance. This is why it is an epistemological problem. It cannot be *solved* socially or with policy because difference cannot be systematized.

## THE LIMITS OF DIFFERENCE

It is clear that politics conceives of sameness where it cannot possibly grapple with difference, but difference has pragmatic limits. Math brings violence to the disciplines that so desperately want a part of its elegance because it represents contrasts more distinctly than any other discipline. While ordinary language is decidedly less elegant this way, *sameness* is a constitutive aspect of it. Language breaks down if a phoneme cannot be repeated or if what it names does not stick at least temporarily. Even if upon reflection we can know that absolutely nothing is *same* as another. Life is nothing if not the patterns, orders and sequences that are the

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that population is taken to be one thing and that as a “collective phenomena which have their economic and political effects, and that they become pertinent only at the mass level.” Populations are “aleatory and unpredictable when taken in by themselves or individually, but which, at the collective level, display constants that are easy, or at least possible, to establish.” That is, such a home is only manageable when individuals are made same. In, Foucault, Michel, Mauro Bertani, Aslessandro Fontana, Francois Ewald, and David Macey. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-1976*. New York: Picador, 2003. p. 245,6

<sup>90</sup> In “7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “The State...is a phenomenon of intraconsistency. It makes points *resonate* together, points that are not necessarily already town-poles but very diverse points of order, geographic, ethnic, linguistic, moral economic, technological particularities...it operates by stratification; in other words, it forms a vertical, hierarchized aggregate that spans the horizontal lines in a dimension of depth.” In, Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011. p. 433



preconditions for conceiving contrasts. Sameness may be absurd in terms of artifacts in the world, but for humans, it most certainly is a thing.

Because sameness is a thing, we cannot overstate its material impossibility. Edifying oneself depends on negotiating this tension between the pragmatics of *perceiving* sameness and the ontological impossibility of substantial equivalence. This much already explains that sameness is something that minds conceive *of artifacts*. Sameness is the kind of thing that cannot exist without the mind that conceives of it. The phenomena of reflection shows us that, while sameness cannot be without the mind that conceives it, nor can it be without the artifact that is apprehended by it. If either the artifact or the mind is abstracted from the spontaneous *sameness* immanent to the reflection, it cannot *be*. The essence of sameness cannot be in the human mind any more than I can be the essence of my reflection. My reflection does not exist without a mirror; sameness does not exist without an artifact perceived as such. There is no *essence* because to isolate one aspect of a reflection is to destroy *that whole* reflection. That said, sameness is a kind of thing that is without limit in consciousness, even where consciousness homogenizes something so vast as society and obliterates untold difference in its singular thingness.

Sameness can alter big universals as frictionlessly as small universals in the smooth space of subjectivity. There are few material limitations on the kinds of patterns people detect- which is why contradictions do not teach us much about *reality*. Because conceiving of sameness alters or *evolves* the artifact, this act of mind has more consequences than the natural effort(lessness) suggests. A contradiction can be resolved with either a new conception, or it can be resolved by believing that what contradicts the preferred conception is *false* or *illusory*. The latter takes almost no effort, but the violence is greater. Perceiving demographics in the family makes an

ethical *faux pas* just like social-engineering a population. In politics it occurs, though, with grander, more systematic violence. The thought itself is unethical whether we are powerless to act on it or not because we have already closed off the question *what to do?* So when many argue that capitalism needs to be replaced with some other system to fix society, this would not escape the problem of colonized minds and families; it would just be a different contagion. It would merely change the geometric formulas while keeping all the logic of math in place.

## MAKING DIFFERENCE

Because *conceivable* sameness is without limit, the artifacts of the world do not automatically impose new *perceptions*. Rather, the sense-making of such ideas are liable to be inversely related to time spent in reflection.<sup>91</sup> We need reflect for only a few moments to understand that not only are no two “capitalisms” the same, or to realize that it is impossible for an alternative system to abide its own geometric ideal (like a “true” socialism or an “authentic” neoliberalism, etc.). Intentions govern, or steer, the contrasts and similarities that people perceive, so these labels that inhere a distinguishing logic are subordinate to those intentions.<sup>92</sup> This couldn't be clearer than in the word *economics*. The word itself does not explain or express anything absent of its context. Intentions and consequences are reflected in one another, but these are the least of their reflections because each is independently enveloped in countless others.

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<sup>91</sup> Husserl writes, “For the sake of further clarification, however, it should be added that we must distinguish “straightforwardly” executed grasping perceiving, remembering, predicating, valuing, purposing, etc., from the reflections by means of which alone, as grasping acts belonging to a new level, the straightforward acts become accessible to us. Perceiving straightforwardly, we grasp, for example, the house and not the perceiving. Only in reflection do we direct” ourselves to the perceiving itself and to its perceptual directedness to the house.” Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. p. 33

<sup>92</sup> Husserl writes, “Perfect evidence and its correlate, pure and genuine truth, are given as ideas lodged in the striving for knowledge, for fulfilment of one's meaning intention. By immersing ourselves in such a striving, we can extract those ideas from it.” See, Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. P. 12

What matters more than the authenticity of this word is the distinction between intentions. My intentions are different than Xenophon's and his from Adam Smith.

Sameness is most violent, though, when it is *presupposed* instead of being regarded as an axis over which ethics turn- when someone unreflectively identifies with intentions. Perceiving sameness or consistency is one of the most critical thresholds for our cultural notion of reality. Truth is inaugurated by independently reproduced results. The violent ethical presupposition, however, is not the in the repeatability but in the presupposed weight of *truth*.

*Knowing* reality, or the truth, is dangerously close to a belief in an ability to *perceive* reality. And this is very close to hedonism because self-reflection is structurally omitted. This is Hegel's sense certainty.<sup>93</sup> Sense certainty is low-order thought because *consciousness is merely a reflection of the artifact*. No soul, ego or subjectivity intervenes between the thing and the artifact. Subjectivity has no leverage over the body in its apprehension of the artifact. This minimum of reflection occurs in a *perception* of an observation *as an observation*.<sup>94</sup> That is, subjectivity at least recognizes that its apprehension is *its apprehension* and not an absolute reality. In this way, the subject is not merely reflecting the artifact; the subject is reflecting on the body's apprehension of the artifact. In my reading of Hegel, the furthest that we can get away from this presupposition is an *understanding*: a reflection of a reflection.<sup>95</sup> *Understanding* reality

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<sup>93</sup> Hegel's specific words are "...certainty as a *connection* is an *immediate* pure connection: consciousness is 'I', nothing more, pure 'This'; the singular consciousness knows a pure 'This', or the single item." Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 59

<sup>94</sup> "Thus, it becomes quite definite for consciousness how its perceiving is essentially constituted, viz. that it is not a simple pure apprehension, but *in its apprehension* is at the same time *reflected out of the True and into itself*. This return of consciousness into itself which is directly *mingled* with the pure apprehension [of the object]--for this return into itself has shown itself to be essential to perception--alters the truth." *Ibid*, p. 71-2

<sup>95</sup> "*For us*, this object has developed through the movement of consciousness in such a way that consciousness is involved in that development, and the reflection is the same on both sides, or, there is only one reflection. But since in this movement consciousness has for its content merely the objective essence and not consciousness as such, the result must have an objective significance for consciousness; consciousness still shrinks away from what has emerged, and takes it as the essence in the *objective* sense...This truth follows out of its own essence, so that consciousness plays no part in its free realization, but merely looks on and simply apprehends it." *Ibid*, 80

disintegrates earlier, naive certainties because understanding is a reflection upon *perceptions*- which grasps the fact that perceptions are infinite, and hence, reality cannot be singularly analogized.

I read *reflection* into Hegel in an attempt to sketch an ethics of consciousness because I understand politics as necessarily trapped in the lowest orders of reflection. Policy cannot be made without winning a sense certainty or establishing *reality* for others. This fact is scarcely the wiser for coming into being through a battle of perceptions or crowd wisdom. This explains why philosophy or Hegelian *understanding* is incompatible with politics- it is intransitive. Nobody can see what I see in a mirror and an understanding of pure difference is at odds even with the best intentions of progressive, diversity politics.

Pure difference in the world may be the most plausible inference we can glean from reflection, but life scratches an existence out of earth because it *conceives* order in all this difference.<sup>96</sup> There are only systems that have functional, *notionally same* parts. In this way politics and Economics are both systems that appear orderly from the stratosphere. But oikos nomos *qua* edification is the mirror image of both because these systems and countless others collide in the space of home. The poles of these reflections are different, but mutually implicated, forms of life. Humans conceive patterns and geo-politics as a macro-human epistemology oriented toward materializing *social* rhythms. There is no limit to *conceiving* sameness, but *conceiving* geo-political sameness is ancient post-humanism. The ethical question for non-political subjects is whether home is or is not modulated to those rhythms. The ethical question

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<sup>96</sup> Terrence Deacon writes, “Such concepts as information, function, purpose, meaning, intention, significance, consciousness, and value are intrinsically defined by their fundamental incompleteness.” I read this inversely, that is to say, where the punchline for him is that things do not fit together mathematically, I am drawing on him to show that a critical mass of order is constitutive of live consciousness. See, Deacon, Terrence W. *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013. Kindle Edition. p. 23

cannot be whether consciousness can conceive of a better social rhythm. Both the Liberal Arts and the democratic ethos are mistaken in this.

Where philosophy is interpreted as a way of life, social rhythms are the background against which edification can occur. Society's rhythms are given and constituent of thrownness, rather than a token of negotiation. The only nonviolent ethics is within the reflection *upon* society, because conceiving a more perfect society cannot answer the question: *what to do?* This is a violent thought with no leverage on making the difference it intends.

## **KINDS OF THING**

Ethical behavior has its origins in acts of mind, not in the consequences of behavior. And from the perspective of reflection, an act of mind is not reducible to the brain, but also how the brain is entangled with the body and the body is entangled with things in space. So now I have to emphasize the other half of a reflection and to discuss a more nuanced lexicon of *things*. One cannot talk about things without *involving or* folding ourselves into particular perceptions of them.<sup>97</sup> Because consciousness is reflected in the *things* it is entangled with, *things* are direct interventions with consciousness. So not only do we position ourselves to apprehend things in a physical sense (the topic of Chapter 2), but we can also apprehend those things in different ways (which will occupy us for the remainder of this chapter). Accounting for things in terms of different kinds of perceptions, then, gives consciousness some space to reflect upon its

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<sup>97</sup> Heidegger explains that to talk about metaphysics involves two things: "First, every metaphysical question encompasses the whole range of metaphysical problems...second, every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is present together with the question, that is, is placed in question." See Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008. P. 93

apprehension of them. It de-identifies consciousness with the object it is otherwise “sense certain” of.

Here I am going to discuss two kinds of things. Then I will propose that an “understanding” of *things* eventually arrives at the notion that all things are co-extensive with consciousness itself. In this way, and in terms of reflection, things will always be understood as both infinite and singular. That is, there are no limits to conceivable things and each thing is a singular moment of consciousness. To reflect this terminal understanding of them, I splice things and thoughts into the single word: thin[g]king as a verb and thin[g]k as a noun.

There are only two kinds of things that concern us: materials and objects. A *material* is an ordinary physical object. Materials are *hard* things, the kinds of things that realists and materialists take for *real*. I am using this word to emphasize their ordinary, phenomenal reality—nothing about absolute reality. In using the word material, I am emphasizing physicality while trying to avoid the baggage inherent to atomism, substance, etc. Skeptics and idealists alike will suggest that these *hard* things are illusions. I will not call them illusions, because I do not hold them to a standard of objective reality. But perhaps skeptics would accept reflection as a way to maintain their conclusions without reducing the world to illusion. Skeptics and I will both agree that I cannot see what you see in the mirror. But whether we arrive at solipsism or a world of reflections, we nonetheless both have phenomenally physical objects that we must contend with. The materiality of things presents us with a particular mode of reflection and apprehension.

This will also be true of *objects*, the second kind of thing. Objects are *immaterial things* that can be reflected upon. Again, I am referring to a phenomenal objectivity without implications for real/fake distinctions. An object can be a code, a memory, an idea, a process or an event. I can also reflect upon reflections— and *those* reflections are objects. This is the only

way to understand something. Anything that can receive action from a verb, like a direct object in sentence is an object. This means that the idea of causation is an *object* that we apprehend as being reflected in material. Importantly, the change *qua* change is not in the material but can only be said to be reflected in it. This is because the change is registered against reflections (which do materially exist), not forms (which only exist as an object of reflection). Finally, even if I am affected by some uncanny feeling that I can only describe in the vaguest of terms, so long as it has some *thisness* to conceive of, it is an object.

While both materials and objects are exponents of thought, there is an ethical distinction between the two. To materialize something is to posit some substantial selfsameness to some artifact. To objectify something is to codify or impose some concept upon it. At some level this distinction is indeterminate. The objectivity and materiality of a color becomes indistinguishable in reflection. And at a grand level it is more obvious that an ethical faux pas occurred, as when a person attempts to materialize an object. For example, gender is just an object-concept whose potential for violence is manifest when it imposes on materiality- when the violence of conceptual sameness risks raining down on a face. This misstep falls prey to degrees of vagueness that I turn to next.

Because the reference to objects and materials as such emphasize their independence from subjective consciousness (and hence open for other lives to reflect upon), I refer to these things collectively as art-of-facts.<sup>98</sup> Their factual existence is there for others to reflect upon, but

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<sup>98</sup> I have to make a new term in order to make a clean break from the question of reality. I am not trying to say reflections *are real*, I am saying that reflections help us to make sense of the world. Steven Shaviro has a couple of passages that help orient reflection with respect to similar (but different) modes of thought. He writes, “Whitehead refers to the ‘really real things’ that ‘constitute the universe’ both as ‘actual entities’ and ‘actual occasions’. They are alternatively things or happenings. These two modes of being are different, yet they can be identified with one another, in much the same way that ‘matter has been identified with energy’ in modern physics. When Harman rejects Whitehead’s claims about relations, he is not being sufficiently attentive to the dual aspect of Whitehead’s ontology.” Shaviro continues, “For Whitehead, ‘in the analysis of actuality the antithesis between publicity and privacy obtrudes at every stage...’” This is something important to my understanding of reflection. The cleanest way

they are nonetheless *made* (i.e. artficed) singularly. For the sake of clarification, materials are physical things, objects are immaterial things. Both objects and materials are art-of-facts, emphasizing the part of a reflection open to others to reflect upon. Thin[g]king bodies are coextensive with art-of-facts, but the word thin[g]king emphasizes the leverage within a reflection. When in reflection my behavior is a reflection of the logic of some art-of-fact, the leverage is on the side of it. When I dwell on some art-of-fact and evolve it by reflecting upon it, my subjectivity has leverage over the art-of-fact.

### **PALPABILITY OF ART-OF-FACTS**

Next, I want to address that *palpability* of objects and materials. Materials and objects can be further broken down in terms of how *fully* consciousness apprehends them. This is important because impalpable things are not *fully* materialized or objectified thin[g]ks. In this indistinction, art-of-facts are vulnerable to mutation in consciousness from material to object and vice versa. A propaganda concept of a threatening demographic can *materialize* in faceless fear. A face-to-face encounter with a foreigner or a person living on the street can be objectified in numbness. For consciousness to apprehend a thing, it will have to be materialized or objectified. By this, I mean that the art-of-fact of reflection must be correspondingly *material* or *object* in subjectivity.

I will regard these two things by three degrees of palpability: “There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are

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that I can disentangle our similar concepts is to say that I reject *the question* of actuality, ontology and reality. I reject these on the basis that they invite the problem that they hope to resolve. Reflection, by contrast, can be experienced on its own terms- it can be demonstrated rather than explained. That said, those problems gave rise to many intuitive concepts that I think *are explained* in the demonstration of reflection. See, Shaviro, Steven. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. p. 35



things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know."<sup>99</sup> A known-known is the kind of object or material that is obvious. It is completely palpable, and potentially too much so because in its obviousness, it demands no further reflection because we are sense certain of it. We are resistant to things that contradict our known knowns. Either materials or objects can be known knowns. I could know that I know that I am looking at the moon just like I can *know that I know* my right to carry a firearm is "inalienable." I could know that I know that a tool in my hand is a hammer just like I can know that *I know obscenity when I see it*. To subjectivity, these things are *hard* to contradict because they have so thoroughly materialized and become objectified in the mind. This is why reflecting on known knowns is critical to edification. Soul building ceases if subjectivity identifies with its known knowns and rejects contradictions. Contradictions are *opposed to what is said*, not opposed to *reality*. Known knowns present problems within the architecture of the home because habits are more rigid than the material conditions of social spaces- which are far more fluid by comparison.

Importantly, a singular art-of-fact can in one moment be a known known, and in another moment, be enveloped in known unknowns.<sup>100</sup> Whether spontaneously or through a cultivated

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<sup>99</sup> In addition to this, Zizek adds to Donald Rumsfeld's philosophy a fourth, "'unknown knowns' - things we don't know that we know, all the unconscious beliefs and prejudices that determine how we perceive reality and intervene in it." I mention this in footnote because *knowing what one knows* largely describes my overarching problem of Liberal Arts and edification. For the present, this is too distracting to engage because for all practical purposes, unknown unknowns will serve the same function. See, Slavoj Zizek. "Rumsfeld And The Bees". 2018. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/28/wildlife.conservation>. retrieved 1/26/2018

<sup>100</sup> Heidegger writes in his notorious tool analysis, "The structure of being of what is at hand as a useful thing is determined by references. The peculiar and self-evident "in-itself" of the nearest "things" is encountered when we take care of things, using them but not paying specific attention to them...The references themselves are not observed, rather they are 'there' in our heedful adjustment to them. But in a *disruption of reference*- in being unusable for...--the reference becomes explicit. It does not yet become explicit as an ontological structure, but ontically for our circumspection which gets annoyed by the damaged tool." That is, when something breaks, not only is the art-of-fact altered, but so too is sense certainty, or the known-knownness of the reflection. It *immediately* turns the scene into one in which I know that I do not know everything about this art-of-fact. See Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010. P.

habit, a moment of known uncertainty is an occasion for reflection that conceives new perspectives (i.e. Hegel's reflecting upon an ego's apprehension of something). Known unknowns are not always the result of disrupted certainty. A known unknown may have never been palpable, but its possibility is. The cure for cancer is an example of this. We can talk about one despite the fact that it has yet to materialize. Only the object possibility is palpable until the cure itself becomes a known known. Until the cure materializes, it is an object. It is something open for all to reflect on, but nonetheless *immaterial*.

*Material* known unknowns are the kinds of things that we are not familiar with, but we know others are. An apprentice of some craft will go through a process of making these kinds of things' material *palpability* correspond to that of the mind. When I am learning something new, I point at things and ask *what is that?* in an attempt to *wrap my mind around it*, to make its apprehension palpable like its texture. In the scene of reflection, it has emerged from invisibility (unknown unknown) and I want it to become a known known. The question *what is this?* points toward an expectation of palpability.<sup>101</sup>

This points to a final kind of thing: unknown-unknowns. Unknown unknowns do not even present any *thisness* for subjective reflection. Ironically, this makes it the most specific thing of all because it stands in for nothing else. This *thing* cannot be an idea, hammer or process. This kind of thing can only be an *unknown unknown* and nothing else. It is something

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388 and/or Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. Malden: Blackwell, 2013. p.74

<sup>101</sup> Wittgenstein calls this "ostensive teaching" and his point is worth a remark because it so tight-knittedly demonstrates the *ultimate* uselessness of distinguishing between objects and materials- and hence an ultimate reality beholden to one or the other. Where ostensive is *teaching by example* he asks, "Are 'there' and 'this' also taught ostensively?" That is, how do we distinguish the concepts "this" and "there" independent of the *direct* application of these terms? There is nothing in materiality or objectivity that helps us with the inference that when I say *this is a pen* I am emphasizing the connection between the word *pen* and the object I am calling a pen instead of the word "this" and the word "pen," as if the two words were synonyms. See, Wittgenstein, Ludwig, G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Shulte. *Philosophical Investigations*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009. p. 9.

that I can neither apprehend with my senses nor my imagination, yet in the vaguest way, we still know that unexpected things happen. Before you ask me about unwitnessed trees falling in forests, this concept is an unknown unknown. *After*, it is a known unknown- I infer it must happen objectively even if not in material particularity. Simply acknowledging contingency means that unknown unknowns are things- not nothing, fake or illusory. Nonetheless, their character is peculiar because the moment they *have* materiality or objectivity, we become aware of latent aspects of a scene that conspired to bring them into reflection. The moment the unknown unknown becomes a *this*, it floods the present with new information. Unknown unknowns constitute the condition of the possibility for an object to come into being. Our memory of ignorance is their truth.

Unknown unknowns will be more meaningful to the discussion of walls in Chapter 2, but I do want to signpost their later significance. When a wall to an unknown unknown is brought down, we *immediately* think differently, and these walls are brought down all the time. Learning of a grumpy person's genuine misfortune explains all kinds of behaviors *after the fact*. The *post hoc* discovery of pregnancy explains all of the unattributed moods, diet changes and symptoms. The *post hoc* discovery of a broken floor board reveals a secret world of termites. The diagnosis of some disease retroactively explains all kinds of *uncanny*. Spontaneous discoveries of affairs, stashes or any other art-of-fact simultaneously illuminates countless other things. All of a sudden, their previously unknown presence is reflected in all the by standing art-of-facts that were sensed with certainty, but now are *more(?)* certain. An unknown unknown signals its departure with a disco ball- reflecting a little bit of everything in the scene.

## SAMENESS AND AMBIGUITY OF MATERIALS AND OBJECTS

Before moving any further, I want to caveat my use of categories because of the contradiction implied to using categories while critiquing sameness. I have already mentioned that sameness *is* an object without materiality; however, as an object it is important to underscore what is so powerful about it. Even outside of geometric ontology, it is a single word over which an entire context can pivot. Take Heraclitus' famous dictum about never stepping into the same river twice.<sup>102</sup> There are several layers of irony to this phrase and each play against the isomorphism/complementary framework of reflection. It may be helpful to walk through each. In a naive, geometric and material sense, the statement is simply untrue. I am *me* and the river is the river. I can step into it three times if I want to. This naive sense is, of course, precisely the reason why the phrase is thought-provoking. Taking a more rigorous material sense, the molecules of water will not be the same as the first time. The river is different. Less conspicuously, a similar molecular flow of cells (like blood) is occurring in the river-stepping human body. From this angle, the river is the "same" but I am stepping into it as re-formed person: I am different. Even at the level of materiality there is truth to Heraclitus' claim. That is to say, if hard bodies were colliding with soft currents, there is truth to this claim regardless of which perspective is adopted.

It is also true in the case of signs. This whole dictum is a *dictum* because it is an attempt to express a universal truth in terms of objects. In an utterly different kind of reflection, it is true that literally "you" is an open-ended pronoun referring to an infinite number of people. The same is true for "same river." It could refer to countless bodies of water and infinite footsteps. Just as

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<sup>102</sup> See fragments, Diels, Hermann, and Kathleen Freeman. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Transl. of the Fragments in Diels, "Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1996. p. 31

with materials we can take the object-reading in terms of known-knowns; I could take the claim at face value and *not problematize* its objectivity.<sup>103</sup> I know that we are talking about a person stepping into a river, but I do not know who it is. Nor do I know which river. But it doesn't affect the particular *thisness* or object that is created out of the thing suspended in reflection. The concept is palpable. Finally, this whole thing bursts open. When I read this phrase, I cannot step into the same message twice. If I read it twice it will take on a new meaning after more reflection. If I reflect on it, I will change, and I cannot read the *same* words twice. Through piling up reflections, consciousness can edify a more general understanding. Where we find *sames*, maybe like DNA's complementary base pairs, we always know there will be the opposites. It is only *same* as an ontological precept that is suspect. It is clearly a powerful/dangerous *techne* in a schema of thought.

## **ALTERNATIVE ANTHROPOCENTRISM VS ALTERNATIVES TO ANTHROPOCENTRISM**

Things, or art-of-facts, have always been an important concern for philosophy, but increasingly they are of interest to politics. All the well-worn critiques of capitalism now have a thing-perspective. Nature was once big enough to provide a buffer for the hubris of geo-metering the art-of-facts of the world, but the error in conceiving nature as a code to be cracked is increasingly revealed in our lack of collective control. Anthropocentrism, or the criticism of it, is

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<sup>103</sup> Heidegger in his letter on humanism discusses language is the house of being. Words are multiplicities. Also, "Language thereby falls into the service of expediting communication along routes where objectification- the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone- branches out and disregards all limits. In this way, language comes under the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as intelligible." In, Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008. P. 221

largely responsible for a revitalization of the question of the thing.<sup>104</sup> This renewed interest in things shares in the observation that *things* do not simply, passively accept the actions of human beings; they react to them and they also act against one another.<sup>105</sup> In contemporary studies of things, one approach is to interpret the behaviors, reactions or transformations of things in terms of anthropomorphized agency.<sup>106</sup> The political ends of these theorists are well served by this approach to things, and my understanding of edification is indebted to these perspectives. The lack of reflection upon the problems that they identify is owed to cultural habits that (from their perspective) need to be disabused *politically*, structurally and *en masse*. Edification is only *political*, however, in that it reflects upon the social for the sake of managing home. So, while much of my politics and intentions will correspond to those of thing-theorists, edification occurs at a different scale of agency: subjective not social, pedagogically not politically.

Where the scale of agency changes, edification as anti-politics has to double down in *politically incorrect* places. It has to embrace anthropocentrism because the alternatives to being human-oriented all belong to religion, politics and science fiction. Critics of neoliberalism will argue that society is too materialistic; I have to argue that people are not materialistic enough.

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<sup>104</sup> Timothy Morton writes, “Hyperobjects have dragged humans kicking and screaming (when they feel anything at all, rather than being merely blank with denial) into the *Age of Asymmetry* in which our cognitive powers become self-defeating. The more we know about radiation, global warming, and the other massive objects that show up on our radar, the more enmeshed in them we realize we are.” His position toward objects is similar to New Materialists, Object-oriented Ontologists and Speculative Realists where all share in the critique that humans have been asymmetrically imposing themselves on nature, and now nature, is asymmetrically imposing its will on the future of humanity. All of these strains of thought are politically motivated in that things need to be folded into the calculation of human life and organization. In, Morton, Timothy, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. p. 160

<sup>105</sup> Jane Bennett writes, “This habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) is a “partition of the sensible,” as we use Jacques Ranciere’s phrase. The quarantines of matter and life encourage us to ignore the vitality *of* matter and the lively powers *of* material formations, such as the way omega-3 fatty acids can alter human moods or the way our trash is not “away” in landfills but generating lively streams of chemicals and volatile winds of methane as we speak.” See, Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. p. vii.

<sup>106</sup> For instance, Jane Bennett endorses using *anthropomorphism* as a means of mitigating the worst of anthropocentrism. *Ibid*, 99

Homes become filled with things with scarcely any appreciation of how those things are reflected in subjectivity, yet day in and day out their presence is reflected (somewhere) in subjective experience.<sup>107</sup> Nothing in the home is *innocuous*; all things are reflected in the body- even if the body rejects this as false, and if it remains an unknown unknown to the ego. A stronger sense of materialism would turn up the volume on these *matters'* affects. It would apprehend materials with respect to their effect on the human body. Over-consumption and disposal are problems not because people like things too much, but because they don't like them enough. If people fetishize material things, the fetish is too short-lived. They send things *away*. And where? - apparently to a place that is not subjectively materialized. A long-term fetish is more like an indisposable passion.

Where critique identifies anthropocentrism as a problem, it is actually the case that people are unreflective about humanity in the first place- much less oriented to it. Not only are people not anthropocentric enough, but they are not even narcissistic enough to realize that many of their behaviors are against their own self-preservation. To understand what is good for humans or one's own conscious life would radically alter behavior because short-term interests, in general, prescribe the polar opposite ethics of long-term interest.

This phenomenon of short and long-term desire presents subjectivity with a very clear, very reframed question: *what to do?* To be oriented toward long-term desire reflects one kind of subjectivity; to be oriented toward short-term desire reflects an entirely different subjectivity. Who is "I" here? I think this point can be made clearer yet. A subjectivity is scarcely present at

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<sup>107</sup> In a study that asked how people describe their homes, there was a positive correlation established between clutter and stress hormones. I am reading these findings as a blunt description of how indeterminate things in the home are manifesting in a negative feeling. The use of the word "clutter," refers to a sort of superfluous thing, but at the same time points to the presence and the effects of them. See, Saxbe, Darby E, and Rena Repetti. "No Place Like Home: Home Tours Correlate with Daily Patterns of Mood and Cortisol." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (2010): 71-81.

all in a short-term desire, because short-term desires are art-of-facts that apprehend a body- to make the body *a reflection of the desire*.<sup>108</sup> The leverage of thin[g]king in this reflection is on the side of the art-of-facts, effacing subjectivity. This is another way of saying that subjectivity is surrendered to society because the polis has been structured around exploiting short-term desires to secure political power.<sup>109</sup> The success of capitalism is precisely this mastery of exploiting desire and proliferating the perception that that desire *is good*.<sup>110</sup> Short-term desires take possession of bodies where realizing long-term desires demands that a subject reflect upon them and then compound those reflections. Long-term desire detaches subjectivity from the art-of-facts that possess them, and reflects upon that possession. In other words, an ego, conscience or subjectivity needs to intervene somewhere, *anywhere*, in the limitless positions in the reflection between a body and an art-of-fact. And nobody can do this for another person.<sup>111</sup> Politics always

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<sup>108</sup> Hegel writes, “But this is how *self-consciousness* is constituted; it likewise distinguishes itself from itself without production any distinction. Hence it finds in observation of organic Nature nothing else than a being of this kind; it finds itself as a thing, *as a life*, but makes a distinction between what it is itself and what it has just found, a distinction, however, which is none.” Similar to how I have mentioned before, self-identifying with desire is actually an obliteration of the ego because it makes the body indistinguishable from the art-of-fact, but in being so possessed, the reflection emphasizes the body as an art-of-fact to desire’s own logic. In, Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 157

<sup>109</sup> William McNeil has a fantastic lecture on this view where he refers to *collective* efforts of human society as “macroparasites.” As such, society would be quite literally *preying* on individuals. There are two lectures on this topic in, McNeill, William Hardy. *The Human Condition: An Ecological and Historical View*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

<sup>110</sup> In making a general point, Žižek argues that Confucianism (qua state governmentality) and capitalism share this general feature. I include the whole quote because it reflects earlier points made, however, it is the ideological good that pertains to this particular footnote location. “It is also interesting to note how the Chinese Legalists, these proto-‘totalitarians’, already formulated a vision later propounded by liberalism, namely a vision of state power that, instead of relying on people’s mores, submits them to a mechanism which makes their very vices work for the common Good.” In Žižek, Slavoj. “Living in the End Times.” London; New York: Verso, London; New York, 2010. p. 15

<sup>111</sup> This is the familiar refrain of existentialism. Sartre writes, “If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. The word “subjectivism” is to be understood in two senses, and our adversaries play upon only one of them. Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is the latter which is the deeper meaning of existentialism. When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men.” In, Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Wade Baskin. “Essays in Existentialism.” New York: Citadel Press, New York, 1968. p. 36-37



takes itself to be in the others' long-term interest, and sometimes altering the structure of society may do this objectively, but it can never do it subjectively. Society cannot know my long-term interest unless it implants it into me, so its leverage in this reflection is maintained. There is no policy that can intervene to detach a subject from art-of-facts *in general*.

The banal version of materialism takes *matters* for what they obviously are. This is what thing-theorists are calling attention to. A naive sense of *objectivity* has deprived objects of their multiplicity to declare what they are for once and for all. Postmodernists pointed this out long ago. Nonetheless similar sorts of objectivity and materialism are manifest in an anthropocentrism that takes the human as a known known. Humanity is a question not an answer. "For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone."<sup>112</sup> The diversity of behaviors and identities among things is obscured by habit and with narrowly-defined human self-interests that are blatantly short-term. Consumerism is socially acceptable with respect to biological urgency, political exigency, economic necessity and all the logics inherent to geo-economics. If humans were self-centered with respect to longevity, the calculus of their comportment to things would radically alter.

This is tantalizingly close to a political problem because it would seem that through taxes, consciousness raising or penalties the government could cause people to think twice, to reflect or to abstain. And from a demographic perspective, some policies are encouraging, however, it remains that people smoke less today, not because of reflection, but because cigarettes are prohibitively expensive. People bring their own bags to go shopping because they have to, not because a policy was their first notification of an environmental problem. Even if

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<sup>112</sup> Spinoza, Benedictus De, and Edwin Curley. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. p. 155

these changes in behavior are cause for reflection, the potential for reflection existed prior to society's forced *being reflected in policy*. It is still late. Politics can only coerce, steer or herd. It only causes thin[g]king on account of its failures which is why this thin[g]king is better directed to domestic existence.

## THINKING ABOUT THINKING

There is a long-standing recognition of the ethical depravity of treating humans like objects. Contemporary theorists are reminding us that we should not even treat objects like objects. But I think reflection more accurately describes what is at stake in thing-studies. In the absence of reflection, the question of human *being* is lost. In the absence of reflection, the self *self-identifies* with the body. But the question of self cannot be addressed without caring how its human body works- and by extension how *thinking* works. What can a thought amount to if it is expressed in the absence of a notion of what thinking is? It is unthinkable that so much "learning" occurs without a schema for thinking and how the body is involved with it. How do we start learning before we have apprehended what thinking is? When we are thinking about thinking, we are schematizing the very plastic process of thought. Schematic concepts of thought have always brought the material/objective distinction to a point of indistinction because concepts of thought materialize, and contrariwise, brain-body matter conceptualizes.

Geo-economic medicine tries very hard to maintain the distinction. Doctors are disposed to the materiality of the body. Medicine *qua* conceptualizing the body is only gradually clawing some credibility in the Western high science of medicine.<sup>113</sup> Today, patients with little material

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<sup>113</sup> In a book written in 1991, Francisco Varela wrote, "If we examine the current situation today, with the exception of a few largely academic discussions cognitive science has had virtually nothing to say about what it means to be human in everyday, lived situations. On the other hand, those human traditions that have focused on the analysis, understanding, and possibilities for transformation of ordinary life need to be presented in a context that makes them

understanding of the body still delegate healing to medical materialists. In the patient's absence of self-reflection, the doctor's perspective of materiality of the body is the total reality. One asks the uncanny question, *am I going to be ok?* The irony is that most of health problems are problems of habitude, *perspectival* problems that conflict with short term desires. If the body were apprehended as the site that reflects its world, subjectivity would probably already know if *I am going to be ok.*

Instead, lifestyles are social, and today, medicine is more complicit than it ever has been in abetting social lifestyles because a resolutely material medical apparatus has managed to counter the consequences of short termism with prolonged material existence. When I ask, *am I going to be ok?* I have staked my body, and my reflections upon it, to another's yes or no answer. Chapter Four "People," will be a more thorough analysis of humanity's object-matter plasticity, but I want to signal now that reflection is a schema for thinking about thinking that is not bothered by a *real* distinction between matter and object. Object, matter and palpability are just schema for apprehending reflections. By recourse to the experience of reflection, matter/object, real/ideal, physical/mental health all find legitimacy of their schema without paradox even if they are contradictory. In this case, lifestyle concept is immediately reflected in the materiality of the body. How the body thin[g]ks and apprehends thin[g]ks affects how the body thin[g]ks and apprehends things. This is not redundant because, in a mirror, it is the immediate mirror image.

*Thinking* is the most curious *thing* to presuppose. Wouldn't *all* be lost in this presupposition. "Most thought provoking of all is that we are still not thinking."<sup>114</sup> That is, as soon as we say *I think*, we have bound our bodies to expressions that obscure the whole process

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available to science." More than a quarter century later, Western medicine still measures other sciences quite unfavorably. See, Varela, Francisco J., et al. "The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience." Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991. p. xv.

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, Martin., and J. Glenn Gray. *What is Called Thinking?* New York: Harper Perennial, 2004. p.4

that elicited it. Our expressions reflect our thoughts, but they are not one and the same. This is more satisfying for geometry than *life* because the former needs one-to-one correspondence. But the process immanent to the reflection that contains a body's expression *and* the art-of-fact that provokes it *is the subjectivity* that is obscured if the self identifies the body with its expression. It repeats the errors of objectivism on a body that seems to otherwise only apprehend itself on the basis of what provokes the body to *express*. While it is probably impossible to stare into a mirror and apprehend that image objectively as the truth and the whole truth, this is what occurs in sense certainty and in the absence of thinking.

The answer to *what is thinking?* is as diverse as the schema anyone could possibly propose as its answer. The reality of the answer (which is a bogus question) matters less than the schematizing of the question. "We come to know what it means to think when we ourselves try to think. If the attempt is successful, we must be ready to learn thinking. As soon as we allow ourselves to become involved in such learning, we have admitted that we are not yet capable of thinking."<sup>115</sup> This, like many of Heidegger's lines, are confounding because the predicate corrupts the subject of the sentence. If the discursive sequence is jarring, the experience of reflecting tracks this quite well. Learning changes thinking in loops, not in points, lines, and planes. The history of thought about thought proves that we are incapable of geometrically pinning down what thinking is for once and for all, but this is precisely the virtue of thinking. Thin[g]king gets better only compared to itself, not with respect an objective metric. It is edifying this way. The schema swell with further reflection. If I conceive of my body as mechanical, it will manifest in my reflection. If I conceive of thinking in terms of computer jargon, it will be manifest in the whole reflection that contains my body and the art-of-facts it

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 3

apprehends. History is flush with examples of analogizing thought-processes and many are reflected in society as a whole- that is where the analogy resonates among many singular humans in society.<sup>116</sup> Where philosophy is a discipline of disabusing presuppositions, reflection *is* the building of a soul.

There are innumerable unknown unknowns in the orbit of every known known. Things are necessarily bound in thought, and are, for any subject in question, inconceivable outside of thought.<sup>117</sup> Geometric thinking wants to disregard all but singular known knowns. In this schema of thought, it is naively confident of the object's *objective* reality. This naive confidence of an object's singular reality is simply unsustainable whether it is approached in terms of language (expressed differently), math (measured differently) or sensory apprehension (sensed differently). There is no perfect language that expresses the truth of a thing absolutely. There is no mathematical unit or ideal system of numbers (Roman, Arabic, Chinese, decimal, hexadecimal etc.). And there is not one species or one instrument that is able to catch the *essence* of any thing. The only objective reality that could possibly exist would be predicated on an omniscient and Omni sensory form of life (or non-life)- which is absurd. The burden to pass this threshold of *reality* is clearly harder than solipsism. And where solipsism disturbs some with the

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<sup>116</sup> A really interesting read on this topic was written by Antoine Bousquet. In this book, he analyzes the different epochs of technology and its concomitant warfare culture. It follows that these technological epochs had cultural counterparts in how humans apprehended themselves. See, Bousquet, Antoine. *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

<sup>117</sup> I need to mention that my approach to this very far from one thing-theorist, Quentin Meillassoux. What I have just described is very much what he describes as "correlationsism." While his position requires a response that would go too far afield, I merely want point to his claim that "all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object itself." My short response is that geometry is a reflection of the human body's apprehension of things. Where math and geometry are reflections of humans, applying these schema to objects does not get us any closer to it "reality." Reality in every instance, is a bogus question. See, Meillassoux, Quentin, and Ray Brassier. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. New York: Continuum, 2008. p. 3

notion that people share “illusions,” I think that a schema of reflection can help us think about things and think about thinking.

## THIN[G]KING

Reflection disrupts the idea of possession that is otherwise implied in thinking. That is, when someone says, *I think*, it is implied that the thought *belongs* to her. At the same time, each word that follows implies that there are properties that belong to the predicate. It is important to remember that even in declarative sentences, *I think* is an implied fact. So when I say, *this is blue*, I am expressing several things. First, I am implying that the object possesses blueness. Secondly, I am implying that it *is really blue*. Thirdly, I am implying that the thought process that belongs to me corresponds to *the reality perspective* of the object. In this case, by omitting *I think* from the sentence, I am implying that my mode of thinking is the objectively true *one*. In terms of possessions, I possess the *real* mode of apprehension when *my thinking* declares to me that the object *possesses* blueness.

Thinking through reflection dispenses with all possessiveness. This is because the expression [*I think that*] *this is blue* is a singularity that is broken when any part is changed or removed. Nothing is possessed; rather, each is irreducibly a function of the other. It makes no sense to schematize their existence, essence or reality as independent of the faculties that compose me. Blueness is simultaneously a function of human vision, English, and perceptions. None of these cultural/biological *objects* are properly “mine” unless my subjectivity *self-identifies* with the body, if it takes ego and body as one and the same (which is the end of agency). Each of these are a function of my body and are simply *also* present in the scene. Englishness suffuses the scene of reflection no less than the light. These are decidedly not mine

because the blueness in question is predicated on a material thing being presented to the human body that is the necessary but insufficient condition of my *ego*. Further, that material thing does not *possess* qualities independent of other *material* conditions in the scene. The blue in question is a function of its particular lighting, its position relative to other objects of other particular colors, etc. Most “illusions” hinge on exploiting such *inter-objective* phenomena that disrupt the ordinary scene of reflection for humans.<sup>118</sup> Blue adjacent to red is perceived as a different blue when it is adjacent to gray. The idea of anything *possessing* properties (primary or secondary) is a cultural, anthropomorphic and discursive way of describing reality.

I am not trying to demonstrate that the notion of possession is *wrong* because I have no interest in *reality* as such. The question of reality is one that I am unqualified to weigh in on. So, where a metaphysics or ontology of reflection will doubtless prove inadequate to these disciplines, it is simply out of bounds for home management. I can only argue that the question of reality is ill-fitted to edification. Not only is the philosophical problem of reality irrelevant to home making, it gravely diminishes one’s ability to *make home* because the question of reality implies *proper thinking*- which is inherently political. At home fake leather is real something. And so is the object-concept of fakeness. What matters for edification is how these *somethings* are apprehended and how it affects other things. This carries for all other things in the home. At home, the only kind of thinking that can edify, or build one’s soul is one that actually *builds* rather than assembles from *given* components.

Words like illusion, mask and deceptions reveal the politics inherent to proper thinking because they leverage an attachment to the notion of reality to debase the other’s legitimacy.

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<sup>118</sup> Merleau-Ponty devotes many informative passages to this sight-specific phenomenon of inter-objectivity. The whole of the work is a study of art-of-factual inter-objectivity. See “Constancy of Color” in, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes, *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012 p. 318-327

These are discursive maneuvers cloaked in an ontological claim. But as soon as any of these words are invoked, a subject is already presented with at least two perspectives. The thing is either authentic or illegitimate in the broadest sense. And this is where geometry is so problematic because one-to-one correspondence conceives of these two perspectives as a choice to be reduced back into one perspective. Instead, in terms of reflection, two-perspectives is a starting point.<sup>119</sup> With two-perspectives, one is already disabused of sense certainty. The person has unsettled an automatic apprehension, and in the process, extended some space for the reflecting ego to reconceive how the body apprehends the object. Reflection does not demand a choice as proper thinking would. Nor does reflection beg for any transitive action whatsoever. Even in the ordinary (and ironically *unreflective*) way that people invoke the word reflection, it connotes a sort of unfolding *pointlessness*. Reflection is always prior to some objective. Proper thinking has an objective in mind even before it starts thinking.

In a mode of reflection, the art-of-fact suspended in reflection is explicitly more to the subjectivity than it had been *given* to the body. In this mode, a known known becomes skeptical. It acknowledges that known unknowns are in its orbit and the *only* way to apprehend these is through further reflection. This is because the known knowns are subjectively particular to the body that conceives them. So too, the known unknowns can be steered by nothing other than an ego imposing its doubts upon its body. The ego has to direct the body to dwell on the object for further reflection. For subjectivity, the very Being of the art-of-fact suspended in reflection is held in the balance of an inapprehensibly complex, fast and unrepeatable sequence of

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<sup>119</sup> Roger Ames translates lines from the *Daodejing*: 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物: “Continuity gives rise to difference, Difference gives rise to plurality, And plurality gives rise to everything that is happening.” This like Hegelian orders of consciousness show reflection as inherently unfolding rather than reducing. See, Ames, Roger., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. Locations 2874-2875



consciousness that is bearing down on it. When I am finished reflecting, when I am more or less satisfied that it is a known known, thin[g]king is also finished. The art-of-fact will have been materialized or objectified for subjectivity such that in the next encounter *it can be the same as it was*. And insofar as this thing *is what it was* my body will be a reflection of *that* acquired certainty. My ego, somewhere between my body and its object of attention is leveraged by the art-of-fact as far as it is concerned. My ego will reflect that *fact*.

It is easy to see how geometric thinking has adaptive success. A food that is unfamiliar to me on first encounter need not occupy so much preoccupation the next time. We do not need to relearn the world with every waking moment. Reflection does take time and is not appropriate (or possible) for every aspect of every scene. On the other hand, living in a world flush with proper thoughts, it is easy to see how freedom is at risk. To perceive everything as having already been calculated, *what to do?* is disarming because it circumscribes the manner of thought.<sup>120</sup>

The risks and rewards of geometric thinking play out at the level of population as well. We may describe geo-economics and all of its homogenizing apparatuses as having been preferentially selected for at the social level. In sum, *society* prefers sameness in a way that is repugnant to many individual people. But this repugnance is nonetheless directed at a scale of being that repeatedly demonstrates that our objective thin[g]king about it has no effect on its material existence. Unlike reflecting on the schema of one's own body, where all reflection is immediate, reflecting on other bodies risks schematic mutations where I *materialize* some

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<sup>120</sup> In Weber's famous lectures he parallels a kind of thinking that I think has its roots in geometry with existential despair. "Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world." I think that there is much to admire in his lectures. His analysis is pretty clear, but both the fact that his critiques are pedagogical and that they regard politics as a "vocation" in the first place are two conversations severely lacking today. I am referencing this whole work, but the quote is in, Weber, Max, David S. Owen, Tracy B. Strong, and Rodney Livingstone. *The Vocation Lectures: "Science as a Vocation," "Politics as a Vocation"*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004 p. 30

foreign object in my body. As for some, the repugnance of capitalism (an object-concept) is subjectively visceral (with material consequences). But subjectivity (not capitalism) stands only to suffer from thin[g]king this way because the arc of capitalism is unaffected by my gravity. We are in a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship because it largely structures the way we live.

This is our empirical relationship with such “hyperobjects.”<sup>121</sup> Society is given. It eludes our measurement and manipulation at its scale. When reflecting across the threshold of this scale, the implications for reflection present utterly different possibilities for *what to do?*<sup>122</sup> To thin[g]k something as vast and contingent as social wisdom can serve only to subordinate consciousness to its constant change. The scene of reflection that contains an ego and *society* is so vastly asymmetrical that the latter must be rarefied beyond even the most specious and dogmatic thresholds of *reality*. In traversing this scale, I cannot be in *immediate* reflection with society. I cannot see it, feel it. It is an ethical *faux pas* to apprehend it as anything that I can subject to the *power* of my measurement. What one can measure are the ways that aspects of these known unknowns manifest in and around the body. And in terms of reflection, home management is the only orbit of agency.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> “Hyperobject” is Timothy Morton’s neologism that he uses in the context of Object Oriented Ontology- one of such thing-studies. Some of the features relevant to reflection are: “Hyperobjects are *viscous*, which means that they stick to the people involved with them. They are *nonlocal*; in other words, any manifestation of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject...Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time.” In, Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. p. 1

<sup>122</sup> I think that Morton is doing well to deflect attention from what we collectively can do about enormous problems, instead of finding ways to live within them. He concludes, “Hyperobjects have dragged humans kicking and screaming (when they feel anything at all, rather than merely being blank with denial) into the *Age of Asymmetry* in which our cognitive powers become self-defeating. The more we know about radiation, global warming, and other massive objects that on our radar, the more enmeshed in them we realize we are.” *Ibid*, 160

<sup>123</sup> This will amount to a clearer point later, but to qualify this signpost for now, Roger Ames writes that he considered translating of the title of the *Daodejing* as, “Feeling at Home in the World.” This is because this “focus” and “field” philosophy always comes back to subjective living. In, Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. 324-5

## REFLECTION AND PHENOMENOLOGY

In this section, I want to use reflection to interpret apparent contradictions from phenomenology and Chinese philosophy. I want to show a few ways that the two are conversant so that Chinese philosophy is informed by phenomenology. With this, I can show in the last section how phenomenology helps to re-appropriate Chinese philosophy, an epistemology of home, as a contra politics. I will try to reveal a distinction that phenomenology is thinking about thin[g]king, but it largely reflects on the content of consciousness, or what consciousness is for subjectivity. Ancient Chinese thought, on the other hand, is also thinking about thin[g]king, but it is all about the context of consciousness. In any case, they are complementary, and I first want establish their common ground in reflection because on their own terms (in prose), much of this philosophy can affect the reader as gratuitously pretentious, complex or convoluted. But at least in these cases, they are quite intuitive through reflection.

Hegel writes, “But the simple, self-identical uni-versality is itself in turn distinct and free from these determinate properties it has. It is pure relating of self to self, or the medium in which all these determinacies are, and in which as a simple unity they therefore interpenetrate, but without coming into con-tact with one another.”<sup>124</sup> This last line in particular is paradoxical in prose but completely practical in terms of reflection. When I look into the mirror, I see particular things, but neither are they localized (as in a car in the rearview mirror) nor is this reflection *materially* encountering anything. My consciousness “interpenetrates” with physical objects (like a car in a rearview mirror) but they are not touching in the span of reflection. Of course, Hegel’s point is much grander than looking at a mirror, but this does help apprehend the idea that the content of consciousness are these phenomena that are immaterial, immediate and non-local. In

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<sup>124</sup> In, Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 68

abstracting poles of a reflection, the idea of “pure relating self to self” cannot make sense. This is why “self” can only correspond to this *span* of reflection. The mirror most clearly illustrates this self-reflection. But within my own body I can *materially* draw out such a span as when I feel pain and negotiate it with perceptions. More *objectively* I could also reflect on some memory or concept. I can alter the concept only if there is some distance between it and my consciousness, but not if I am identified with it (as in an unreflective habit).

In another passage Hegel writes, “Being, however, is a universal in virtue of its having mediation or the negative within it; when it expresses this in its immediacy it is a differentiated, determinate property. As a result, many such properties are established simultaneously, one being the negative of another.”<sup>125</sup> When I look in the mirror, what I see is the negative of myself. I see the light that is running away from the surface of my body coming back at me. What I see in the mirror is both “me” and the opposite or “negative.” In the case of the mirror this *negative* is not abstract or imagined. It is the opposite because what I see is the *mirror image*. The mirror image is going to be the reverse constituted by the line perpendicular to the reflecting surface. More intuitively put, it is the same phenomena that would occur if we put an image in wet paint on one side of a sheet of paper and then folded it onto itself. The unfolded result would be two images that are the same, but opposite. Reflection always involves a reversal because a reflecting surface is not available for its own apprehension. *It is what it is for the other.*<sup>126</sup> Taken

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>126</sup> There are a couple passages that are characteristically challenging in Hegel, but I hope are edified through this concept of reflection. It is also worth noting that a thing-studies reading of Hegel is an interesting one. First, “The conceptual necessity of the experience through which consciousness discovers that the Thing is demolished by the very determinateness that constitutes its essence and its being-for-self, can be summarized as follows. The Thing is posited as being *for itself*, or as the absolute negation of all otherness, therefore as purely self-related negation; but the negation that is self-related is the suspension of *itself*; in other words, the Thing has its essential being in another Thing.”

Secondly, “...the object is *in one and the same respect the opposite of itself: it is for itself, so far as it is for another, and it is for another, so far as it is for itself*. It is for itself, reflected into itself, a One; but this ‘for-itself’, this reflection into itself, this being a One, is posited in a unity with its opposite, with its ‘being-for-another’, and hence

for the whole span of reflection, it has itself and its opposite all as one. They are both isomorphic *and* complementary which appears paradoxical in Hegel's prose but again is clearly the actual case in reflection. Geometry has always over-reduced its terms, and recourse to paradoxical language is often a symptom of this overdetermined atomism.

If we extend the above to Husserl's famous conclusion, the "...universal property of consciousness: to be conscious *of* something..." the *content* of consciousness becomes quite explicit.<sup>127</sup> In consciousness, the object of attention both saturates subjective experience at the same time that it is *other than subjective consciousness*. The source of irony in this is that consciousness is culturally apprehended *selfishly*, as if it were all mine. Reflection, however, forces a dispossession of self (in the body) to include a span of "self" that includes the object of reflection. The poles of the reflection, *in terms of reflection*, are always on equal terms because they are what they are for the other, simultaneously. Consciousness can no longer possess the whole body.

Phenomenology evolves to conceive consciousness as increasingly nuanced- as a phenomena or epiphenomena of the body- just like a reflection is a phenomena or epiphenomena of two bodies oriented toward one another. This whole assemblage must be taken in as a whole because to do otherwise necessarily means that we are ignoring the negative that is always a constituent of the reflection, the thing or the self.<sup>128</sup> With phenomenology, a feeling of certainty,

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only as cancelled; in other words, this being-for-self is just as unessential as the only aspect that was supposed to be unessential, viz. the relationship to another." See Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, A. V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. p. 76 paragraphs 126 and 128 respectively.

<sup>127</sup> Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. p. 33

<sup>128</sup> For Hegel, this is characteristic of a "sense certainty." As I understand it, it is a when consciousness is so certain that what it sees *is what it sees* that consciousness can be taken to be merely reflecting the environment rather than reflecting on the assemblage. Hegel articulates three orders of consciousness that can be interpreted through higher and lower (or better and worse) orders of reflection. "Sense certainty" is a situation in which consciousness merely reflects the environment. "Perception" is when consciousness acknowledges both sides and interprets from one of them. "Understanding" is a reflection on the assemblage of reflection. That is, when consciousness and its negative

substantiality or common sense is actually the sign or the alarm that sounds when a “half” is mistaken for *whole*, as self-sufficient.<sup>129</sup> In these passages it is evident that consciousness refers to a very cerebral function. As phenomenology evolves, so does the prejudice against unreflectiveness. Phenomenologists start to suspend their judgement of unreflective behaviors to analyze them as critical to the phenomena of *human being*. This turn makes its most decisive break with mind (qua brain)-body dualism and emphasizes their mutual implication, and the problem of distinguishing between them.

Merleau-Ponty explains, “...reflex movements... are still merely objective processes whose development and results can be observed by consciousness, but in which consciousness is not engaged.” He continues, “...reflexes themselves are never blind processes: they adjust to the “sense” of the situation, they express our orientation toward a ‘behavioral milieu’ just as much as they express the action of the ‘geographical milieu’ upon us.”<sup>130</sup> I read this as saying the body’s parts are capable of reflecting art-of facts in the scene independent of this much more narrowly defined concept of consciousness. I could, for instance, reflect upon my beating heart when I am nervous and observe its fast pace. I could also observe my heart in a setting that is so quiet that I

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are taken as one and subsequently understood as “unconditioned absolute universality.” That is when reflection *qua* universal feature of everything is grasped, “consciousness here for the first time truly enters the realm of Understanding.” See Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, A. V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. p. 77

<sup>129</sup> Husserl used the term “epochè” as a methodological injunction to “bracket” and suspend judgement of the world *as it is*. “This- universal depriving of acceptance, this “inhibiting” or “putting out of play” of all positions taken toward the already- given Objective world and, in the first place, all existential positions (those concerning being, illusion, possible being, being likely, probable, etc.), or, as it is also called, this “phenomenological epochè” and “parenthesizing” of the Objective world therefore does not leave us confronting nothing. On the contrary we gain possession of something by it; and what we (or, to speak more precisely, what I, the one who is meditating) acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything meant in them...” In, Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. p. 20

<sup>130</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes, *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012. p. 81

believe that I hear it. I cannot *directly* control the pace of my heart, but I can observe how my heart, independent of my conscious intention, is reflecting different environments.

Importantly, it is not my brain independent of my body that enables me to reflect this way. The brain *is* part of the body. It is even intimately entangled with my beating heart whether it is what I am conscious *of* or not. My heart will continue to reflect the “geographical milieu” whether my attention is directed toward it or some other thing. By extension, the body comprises innumerable, independently reflecting behaviors that consciousness cannot possibly reflect on simultaneously. This is why architecture will figure so prominently in edification. In *building a dwelling* (...edification, home making) we can know that our bodies will be reflecting things independent of executive cognition. It is important to observe that when Merleau-Ponty says that “objective processes” can be “observed by consciousness,” this consciousness is non-localized. Even if I am reflecting on my heart beat, I cannot see this material thing. It is a reflection immanent to the body observing itself (by calling on cultural knowledge) and the otherwise useful distinctions between material and objective collapse on the body. Does this not throw the entire notion of materiality into doubt? I think so. Nonetheless, because phenomenology is fundamentally oriented from the scale of human experience, materiality has a place alongside (not subordinate) to objects. If the materiality dissolves at the scale of infra/hyperobjects this too is part of experience.

This consciousness that is epiphenomenal to the body and the environment is most explicit in some contemporary theory. Drawing from various disciplines, including neuroscience, contemporary phenomenologists show that the mind, too, is autonomous like the heart.<sup>131</sup> In fact, among the ways that the brain is autonomous is that it controls the heart in ways that are largely

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<sup>131</sup> Thompson, Evan. *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. p. 13-15

opaque to an untrained person. From this perspective, "...subjectivity cannot be understood without situating it in relation to these unconscious structures and processes."<sup>132</sup> This strong statement obviously turns on the definition of subjectivity. It is ironic because as an experience subjectivity simply *is*. On the other hand, how could I understand myself when parts of body, perhaps a quorum of them, are reacting to environmental phenomena beneath my conscious awareness. What is subjectivity if it is not spanned from the body enough to force a reflection? Is experience only a saturation of *feeling* in the absence of the ego?

Consider how the audience of a horror film enters the theatre knowing that their bodies will be overcome by nothing more than light being reflected off a screen. People scream, cry, shake. Their hearts race and their bodies tighten up. We watch these films *to be possessed*, because trying to overcome this possession defeats the purpose of watching it. On the other hand, in a scene of existential threat, we might know that the panic is worse than the consequence. We may reflect upon the heart, muscles and breath in an attempt to try to calm down. I might forcefully think of objects in an attempt to mitigate panic. *It will all be over soon, this is just a dream, or there is no place like home.*

Phenomenology helps to focus the complementarity of reflection and feeling because the two are so easily taken for *same* with respect to consciousness, ego or subjectivity. Phenomenology shows that thinking, things and feelings are all intimately entangled. I think that phenomenology fundamentally alters the objective of the good life. How can a life be good if it is not conscious of how it feels? Is being *in the right* a sufficient alternative? I have referred to politics in terms of hedonism and bad moods because angst seems to be the foundational *feeling*

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 12. This is taking subjectivity in a strong sense. In this strong sense, I can agree that edification is immeasurably benefited from an understanding of biology, however, I would disagree that singular subjectivity *needs this*. This is bit out of context, but it is important to my argument that *schema* is salutary where it is otherwise absent- whether it is "right" or not.



in caring for society. Disadvantage is what takes possession of the body and forces it to get loud, active and thin[g]k with violent sameness. And injustice is what inflames political *care* because *it should not exist*.

“Certain of the nothingness of the other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty...” Hegel continues, “In this satisfaction, however experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding the other: in order for this supersession can take place, there must be this other...it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well.”<sup>133</sup> This is the paradox of hedonism, addiction and politics. Satisfaction reproduces the object of desire. The self is *reflected in* its object of desire- as if the object of attention *possessed* the ego altogether. Even if only momentarily, life is lost in the object. Where politics of any age leaves much to be desired, it is also timelessly a bad object of reflection. I think phenomenology helps us to understand that reflecting politics is a vicious cycle of reflecting upon bad things--the more disadvantaged, the more bad this will feel. It is because of the immediacy of feeling that the “reality” of injustice is not a third term. Instead, *injustice* is a bad feeling when I reflect upon it.

## **ANCIENT CHINESE, PHENOMENOLOGY AND EDIFICATION**

Within the confines of Western philosophy, I read phenomenology as an overcoming of geometric philosophy. Because it is something of a triumph, however, it comes with all of the baggage that sustained its struggle against reductionism, logical positivism and ideal reality. In

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<sup>133</sup> Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 109

the absence of these particular struggles, Chinese philosophy developed with radically different problems. Unlike ancient times for the Greeks, perhaps the scene of ancient China did not present a similar allure of the ideal state. During the Warring States period, statecraft was warcraft. China's ancient history was saturated in contingency and impermanences. "Cities were walled and fortified only to be breached; borders were drawn up only to be redrawn; alliances were formed only to be betrayed; treaties were signed only to be reneged upon."<sup>134</sup> Even where philosophy is not explicitly martial, the scope of philosophy is often very terrestrial. Its *unapologetically* non-ideal scope of philosophy saves it from weighing into *hyperobjective* schemes of social organization. Even where it muses over harmonious societies, such consequences remain epiphenomenal, because the philosophy is for subjective reflection. In this section, I will continue the comparative reflections with reference to martial and cosmic thin[g]king in Ancient China. I save reflection with respect to Confucianism for the last section to gather all thoughts on things, reflections, politics and edification. In every case, however, I want to call attention to a particularly Chinese aesthetic for the intransitive: more *listening* than explaining, more *looking* than seeing, and more sensing than acting. This aesthetic is a suspended skepticism that always admits of known unknowns and always asks *what to do?*<sup>135</sup>

“‘What are we to do?’ Sun Wu replied, ‘The principle governing contested territory is that if you let the enemy have it, you can get it, but if you try to get it, you will lose it...What he wants we give him, and what he abandons we take.’”<sup>136</sup> Irony and contradiction play a different

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<sup>134</sup> Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. Locations 117-118

<sup>135</sup> “The Master said: ‘There is nothing I can do for someone who is not constantly asking himself: ‘What to do? What to do?’” Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Locations 2930

<sup>136</sup> Ames, Roger T. *Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. p. 205

role in Chinese philosophy than they do in phenomenology because they are not trying to dig their way out of over-reduction. This irony is characteristic of reflecting on the other's reflections. The *meaning* in pithy, wise statements *depends* on the listener. It is implied that the meaning in the prose lay in a higher order reflection. In this way, the irony includes the listener in the meaning (it also makes for more efficient texts). In Chinese philosophy there is something of a formula where *you can never change the thing; you can only change the context*.<sup>137</sup> And this is precisely what is occurring in this otherwise contradictory prose. The general reflections upon the context of the opponent, not the opponent itself. At face value, these are foolish statements, but this apparent foolishness is actually empathizing with lower order thinking. The general knows what the opponent wants, and he is going furnish the other with an apparent success in order to have a higher order control on the scene of reflection. The *art* of war is a competition in subtlety, to listen and sense with greater acuity so that the loser is the *activist*.

“The crucial point in this strategic thinking is to *minimize the armed engagement*...’the victorious troops [i.e., those bound to be victorious] seek confrontation in combat only after they have already triumphed; whereas vanquished troops [i.e., those bound to be defeated] seek to win only when the battle commences.”<sup>138</sup> As implied in the idea of only acting on context, ancient Chinese warfare philosophy was not simply battlefield psychology- despite unapologetic anthropocentrism. Winning was contingent upon many factors that situated humans- even if, “There is nothing between Heaven and Earth more exalted than man. Warfare...man is not the

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<sup>137</sup> Ames uses the term “*ars contextualis*” that he defines with a question: “how do we correlate these unique particulars to achieve their most productive continuities?” In, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Locations 644.

<sup>138</sup> I have cited this in full also because Jullien highlight this irony that I discuss in the previous paragraph to show the contrast between ironic face value and the higher order reflection. See, Jullien, Francois, and Janet Lloyd. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1999. p. 26

sole factor. You must have the heavenly, earthly and human advantage: that is, weather conditions, terrain and harmonious troops.”<sup>139</sup>

All of the factors in a battlefield, human and non-human, are bound up in a time schema that is not narrative or linear, but instead, I think that they are simultaneous as in a reflection. This particular use of irony is leveraged to say least two things at the same time. Not only is the author saying two things at once, but he is also describing actions that fold onto themselves in time. The one who triumphs is the one who is epideictic, rather than political. Recall that epideictic is a form of rhetoric that informs the present. When we speak of a person with a vision, we imply that someone can see into the future, over the horizon. By comparison, a person with “vision” here is someone whose eyes have dilated enough to see all that is already there. This distinction is important: the victory is immanent not imminent. It seems that this is how the ancient Chinese interpret what we call futurity. The present is informed by its reflections upon the scene. The wiser of the two already conceives triumph as a foregone conclusion *before* he seeks confrontation. And by implication, does not seek confrontation at all if his reflections inform the present of failure. The “vanquished” are the ones who unreflectively do their best. For them the scene is a known unknown that they pursue transitively by *trying*. In reflection, known unknowns evolve into known knowns and at least some inevitabilities will surface even without riding the arrow of time.

“Disposition” is an important concept for the Chinese particularly in warfare because the stakes are high, and survival is highly sensitive to contextual conditions. The only way to apprehend disposition is to reflect *from* the point of view of the thing in question. This intransitive sort of apprehension is a very *intentional* way to engage a scene of reflection. This is

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<sup>139</sup> Lau, D.C. and Roger T. Ames, *Sun Pin The Art of Warfare*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. p. 153.

the environmental counterpart to Thompson's view of subjectivity: that we have to know how parts of the body are working to *know* it. That is, where my body has parts that act independently and reflect the environment without my conscious awareness, we also have to recognize that the environment also has parts acting independently. My consciousness is somewhere between all of these independent things (some inside, some outside) and thin[g]king is immanent to them. Ames writes, "The constantly shifting 'disposition' of any thing or event is constituted in tension with enviroing others, where their dispositions condition one's own. The enemy is always implicated in one's own shifting position. The 'skin' that defines one's 'inner/outer' circle and separates one from the enemy also conjoins him, making any change mutual and pervasive. If he moves, one is thereby moved."<sup>140</sup>

Daoism is born in contradiction as the *Daodejing* opens with the impossibility of its task: "Way-making (*dao*) that can be put into words is not really way-making, And naming (*ming*) that can assign fixed reference to things is not really naming...These two-the nameless and the named- emerge from the same source yet are referred to differently."<sup>141</sup> Anyone familiar with structuralism is going to recognize this ancient problem of reference and referent. The binary reading of signifier and signified that emphasizes their *difference* is liable to interpret Daoism's symbol with the same emphasis. In this way, it is vulnerable to the ancient Western real/ideal interpretation that is completely misleading. Namelessness is not Platonic formality. It is more like an Hegelian *understanding* that exhausted representational perspectives. That is, perspectives are reflections that always suspend *namable* poles, but reflecting *on these*

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<sup>140</sup> Ames, Roger T. *Sun-Tzu: The Art of Warfare*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. p. 76

<sup>141</sup> Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. Location 1475

reflections exhausts language. Like trying to explain some activity we understand too well for words, we can only list a number of points of view and hope the listener can get an idea. An ineffable understanding is reflected in a name and this name reflects an ineffable surplus of object perceptions.

The Daoist aesthetic preference for the intransitive is most ironic (for Westerners) in the sublimation of blandness. But it would not be philosophy if Daoists themselves did not arrive at this aesthetic through reflection. Daoist blandness is the mirror image of the desire that Hegel depicts: “In contrast to such superficial stimuli, the bland invites us to trace it back to the ‘inexhaustible’ source of that which constantly unfolds without ever allowing itself to be reduced to a concrete manifestation or completely apprehended by the senses: that which transcends all particular actualizations and remains rich in virtuality.”<sup>142</sup> Daoist minimalism is a sort of intensive materialism because the leverage of the thin[g]k is on the side of subjectivity.

When I closed the discussion of phenomenology and reflection, I pointed toward thin[g]king for the sake of feeling. In Chinese these are already two aspects of the same thing, so a cause-effect relationship is not really an appropriate way to conceive blandness.<sup>143</sup> But what blandness does confront is the contradiction of subjectivity that holds opposite short and long-term desires. The virtue of blandness is that it is cause for reflection where consumption dissolves consciousness into the art-of-fact. That is, blandness is a deliberate choice to span the self from the other, something that collapses in consumption. What is interesting about it is that it actually is not negation, deprivation or austerity for some moral code. It is that possibility is more interesting in the absence of some resolution, and likewise, the detachment that suspends

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<sup>142</sup> Jullien, Francois, and Paula M. Versano. *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. New York: Zone Books, 2004 p. 42

<sup>143</sup> For an extended discussion of the heart-mind translation see, Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. Location 545-586

the reflection causes it to swell in “virtuality.” It leaves a person more open to *gathering reflection* of the present because she isn’t possessed by any one thing. It is the opposite of hedonism, even in plain terms. The indulgence of materialism is that simple things proliferate object-reflections.

Because conspicuous absence is a structural component of ethics as *what to do?*, I want to draw two more examples from Jullien’s study on this topic. He explains of the poet Tao Yuanming, “His zither was left rough, unadorned, and above all, without strings. The poet did not have to ‘trouble himself’ to produce individually each note ‘from above the strings’. The body of the instrument contains, within itself and at the same time, all possible sounds (the very image, of course, of the Dao).”<sup>144</sup> This is absurd, but I think at the same time, if we laugh, the irony is that perhaps we are supposed to find this ridiculous. Listening to a stringless zither is both absurd and thought-provoking. It would not be lost on such a *musician* that a person disposed to consumption would find this stupid. But so too it is not lost on the musician that actual sounds would collapse span of reflection.

Finally, and more schematically, blandness is “rich” because it is neutral. This irony turns again on material vs. objective. That is, blandness is not *very much* any one thing, but in being neutral it can be *virtually* anything. “Salty and sour, both are part of what we enjoy; But the center harbors the supreme flavor, one that never fades away.” Blandness is literally flavor here, but it is resonant with all other themes of *centrality* in Chinese thought.<sup>145</sup> Flavor, as with speaking, acting and desiring takes thought down a corridor that it cannot back out of. Heidegger writes, “What withdraws from us draws us along by its very withdrawal. Once we are drawn into

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<sup>144</sup> Jullien, Francois, and Paula M. Versano. *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. New York: Zone Books, 2004. P. 77

<sup>145</sup> These are lines from the poet Su Dongpo. Jullien elaborates on centrality after this passage as well. Cited from, *Ibid*, 118

the withdrawal, we are...caught in the draft of what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal...our essential being already bears the stamp of that 'draft'."<sup>146</sup> Chinese thought provides a way to schematize centrality without being a *centrism*. Being disposed to things, or being a consumer, is being self-less in a bad sense of the word. Eating pungent food makes thin[g]king anything else difficult. The same goes with committing to any other particular art-of-fact. The political implications for any of these observations are quite inconsequential, but all of these attachments matter a great deal for the freedom that is so often pursued through political agency. In this last section, I turn to Confucian epistemology of home.

## CHINESE THIN[G]KING AND EDIFICATION

The Chinese counterpart to geometry is the family. Among all dispensable presuppositions, it is a mistake to deny this epistemological foundation the gravity of its implications. That is, because these beginnings are so foundational to the entire edifice of knowledge, *everything* subsequent to them can be apprehended in their reflections. So far as my argument about geometry, sameness and Economics holds, *The Analects* forecasts radically different ways of thin[g]king and ethics. It conceives contingency and difference as reflected in ordinary life- not as a problem to solve, but as a matter of fact. Unlike Sophists, it is not random; unlike Platonists it is not tethered to codes. "It is family reverence (*xiao*),' said the Master, 'that is the root of all excellence, and whence education (*jiao*) itself is born."<sup>147</sup>

It may be hard to conceive this as radical politics when it brushes too closely to the nauseating governmentalities the West is too familiar with. If the family is a *metaphor* for

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<sup>146</sup> Heidegger, Martin, David Farrell Krell, and Taylor Carman. *Basic Writings from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*. London: Harper Perennial, 2008. p. 374

<sup>147</sup> Rosemont, Henry Jr., and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 2009. p. 105



political structure, then it would appear parallel to a Neoplatonism, maybe. And *as a metaphor*, it was as alluring to the Chinese as it was for Christians (or countless other civilizations) to leverage the figure or concept of *father* for the sake of accumulating power. The radicality of Confucianism, is that it is not a metaphor, ideal or a code. This is duly ironic for a culture so epistemologically saturated in geometry that it even assumes codes where they are not conspicuously there. Nonetheless, universality is still reflected in an epistemology of the family, but the face that each subjectivity thin[g]ks and reflects upon when hearing familial pronouns is an actual face. The way that this epistemological foundation wends its way through the entire edifice of knowledge is that family will *swell* consciousness because these faces are intended to be constituent aspects of every reflection throughout a person's life. "Your physical person with its hair and skin are received from your parents. Vigilance in not allowing anything to do injury to your person is where family reverence begins."<sup>148</sup>

As far as reflection can be a phenomenal existentialism, Chinese philosophy takes for granted that *the other* is literally entangled with the self. That first chapter of the *Xiaojing* spans the self from itself. *Self-preservation* is not conceived in terms of utilitarian pleasure and pain, where the self *self-identifies* with its body. Self-preservation is conceived as an immediate reflection upon the thrownness of life and the parents that cannot be omitted from this reflection.<sup>149</sup> The function of ancestor worship is to swell the present by folding their perspectives into the scene of reflection. This is an utterly different kind of prerequisite than is found in contemporary education because it is not a stepping stone. Its relationship to time is not

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>149</sup> In their translation of this term "reverence" Rosemont and Ames are holding it in distinction from "piety." I want to note that in their introduction, they consider other translations to "family reverence" that include "family responsibility," "family deference," and the one that I think is most important to edification, "family feeling." See *Ibid*, p. 1

progress. This is a beginning that is supposed to saturate consciousness always. This first chapter closes with a quote from the *Book of Songs*: “how can you not remember your ancestor, King Wen? You must cultivate yourself and extend his excellence.”<sup>150</sup>

This kind of reflection is also present in the philosophy of warfare. To be a good general is to have gathered reflection to a moment of clarity. The disposition of many different things has to be reflected upon in pieces that inform the present. Each piece has to be held in reflection to inform other aspects in the scene of reflection. In reflection, a general considers how all of these different pieces are interacting so that known unknowns start to materialize into known knowns. At some point this will subjectively materialize as a “triumph.” These kinds of reflections cannot be captured in linear time, but instead are more comparable to sitting in a dark room when the sun is rising. The scene of reflection becomes clearer in the duration of the present moment. This is completely intransitive listening in which any *doing* will disrupt the reflection in question. This is where the bad general “seeks to win as soon as the battle commences.” The latter has an ill-formed grasp of the scene of reflection and runs blind into contingency.

The pedagogical similarity between family reverence or family feeling and warfare is this cumulative present. Self-preservation and the implication for parents is not a lesson learned, but it is the first among things that is to be suspended in all reflections. Confucian thought is pedagogically-oriented to invest all education into the present. There is a famous, and amusingly vivid, line from Mencius who describes his 浩然之氣, his “flood-like qi...[which] Restated in the language of focus (yi 義) and field (dao 道), Mencius is saying that his ‘flood-like qi’ has the greatest ‘extensive’ and ‘intensive’ magnitudes...[where] one nourishes one’s qi most

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*

successfully by making oneself the most integral focus of the most extensive field of qi.”<sup>151</sup> If the idea of qi is not too distracting, I think it is fair to refer to it provisionally as corresponding to our own confused term *consciousness*. With respect to reflection, thin[g]king and pedagogy it is something that dilates. While ancestor worship and familial reverence are maybe out of touch for contemporary homemaking, a swollen consciousness seems pedagogically critical to edification. This is a way that I cautiously invoke Chinese philosophy for homemaking *qua* anti-politics. *What to do?* is more ethical when the body and the art-of-facts it is suspended in reflection with are folded into thin[g]king. In these terms, answering the question *what to do?* in the home has a nearly impossible threshold to cross. It is pretty bold to think one can answer this for another.

I approached phenomenology, as a discipline, progressing through phenomena to the point where objects and materials are indistinguishable in the body. The body and its many parts are constantly reflecting the environment. One can reflect on any one of the body’s aspects to consider how *it* (not subjectivity) is reflecting some other art-of-fact in the scene of reflection. The heart *reflects* independently of what causes my eyes to blink. The throat swallows independent of an itch. The whole body is abuzz in sympathetic resonance with art-of-facts in the room. If subjective apprehension of the body has no higher acuity than self-identification with it, then (like defeated soldiers) it is blind to the contingency that is otherwise art-of-factually open to reflection. There are signs in both the body and the scene of reflection that are conditions of possibility to convert known unknowns into known knowns.

Because Confucian pedagogy is intensively cumulative, rather than extensively progressive, whatever *measure* of progress there can be, it is not a matter of grinding

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<sup>151</sup> Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001. p. 24

asymptotically closer to the code. This is a different, non-geometric way of life. For Confucians, being is not a point that moves along line. Being does not move, it swells.<sup>152</sup> What else is there to measure but the self against its own reflections? This is an irony in Confucianism in that the *Way, path* or *dao* is not linear, but intransitive.<sup>153</sup> The general is making *way* by reflecting on the battlefield scene, not by moving about it. And similarly, the poet enjoys the instrument without strings because a louder noise would presumably draw him away from himself. “Flood-like *qi*” is understandably obscure, but it is less so if taken back to the pedagogical family because it explains how the reflection swells. Confucian terms of measurement have to be reinvented subjectively for every human being. The measurement is not narrative, but more subtly looks around and asks: *what is this thin[g]k?* If there is no subject asking, the measurement is corrupted- and so is everything else.<sup>154</sup> In a way that echoes Husserl, subjectivity can be found nowhere else than in this measure of conscious reflection, definitely not an immaterial world that is realer than real.

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<sup>152</sup> This is owed some explanation because 道 (*dao*) is such a fundamental term to Chinese philosophy. The details are too much to go into in detail. To paraphrase Ames, this word has a few semantic registers that are more felicitous with my description. Among the key meanings is “momentum,” initiation and opportunity. For a more thorough gloss on this term, see Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. Location 1135

<sup>153</sup> “Following the proper way, I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients...To quietly persevere in storing up what is learned, to continue studying without respite, to instruct others without growing weary—is this not me?” In, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Locations 2071-2072

<sup>154</sup> “There is no bond more important than the father and mother giving life to their progeny, and there is no generosity more profound than the care and concern this progeny receives from their ruler and parents. It is for this reason that to love others while not loving one’s parents is depravity, and to respect others while not respecting one’s parents is sacrilege. To base the norms to be followed upon such perversity would leave the people without any standards.” Rosemont, Henry Jr., and Roger T. Ames. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. 2009. p. 110

## CHAPTER 2: WALLS

*There are several things that I am going to develop in this chapter. I want to show that walls, as an obstacle to reflection, are no less opaque as objectivities than they are as materialities. That is to say, once we can recognize, after the fact, that thinking was hindered by something, we can see that we overdetermined some art-of-fact as 'material' or 'objective'. Under this more general aim, I will pursue obstacles to learning with a special emphasis on standard vs. subjective modes of measurement. Then, I turn to discussion of the role of schema in the process of making a concept palpable to the mind. In this discussion I explore a medieval concept of the Liberal Arts and follow up with some thoughts on mnemonics. Finally, by way of mnemonics, I explore "normality" as a wall. I consider an exceptional case of psychiatric practice, and in turn, relate this back to an epistemology of home.*

### TRANSITIONING FROM MERE THIN[G]KING TO ITS STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

In Chapter One I use the experience of reflection to clarify the phenomenological insight that thinking is coextensive with thought. Importantly the idea of consciousness and thinking, just like reflection, must include the whole span or the poles of these things or they could be mistaken as independent or self-sufficient. At least for homemaking, absolute truth is not a helpful reality. In reflection, like gravity, every apparently independent art-of-fact is demonstrably entangled with every other in its orbit of affect. The apparent sameness to some previous apprehension can be manifest *or* disrupted through reflecting upon it. This is volatile because qualitative contrasts mutate from one moment to the next. Whether *this* fact is made clear in consciousness lay in the effort of subjective thin[g]king. I draw from phenomenology

that during moments of sense certainty (where subjective thinking is not evolving some art-of-fact), the art-of-fact has leverage over human subjectivity. While this is unavoidable with respect to *parts* of the body, it is the quorum of consciousness that matters for ethics, edification and subjectivity.

I draw from Chinese philosophy to give phenomenology an alternate pedagogical schema that swells by collecting reflections. By contrast, Western pedagogy implicitly promotes unreflective, short-termism to preserve resources for specific lines of progress. Whether short-termism is problematized in terms of quarterly profits reports, the use of disposable plastic or getting *lost* into some hedonism, none of these perennially scorned symptoms of capitalism make sense upon the least amount of subjective reflection. They only *make sense* in terms of a very narrow code that is culturally abetted in its narrowness (geo-politics and geo-economics). In this way, historically acquired certainties (whether of blueness or the meaning of capitalism) are walled off from being problematized. Logical positivism makes a virtue of such settled dilemmas. This is why making sense *outside* of this narrow code would be more prosocial than *caring about society*, disrupting its formula or even thin[g]king about better policies. But this is only incidental to the argument of edification, *not its point*. It *cannot* be its point without undermining home management because politics and edification are not complementary but antagonistic modes of being.

I tried to show that where a thing is unaffected by human thin[g]king, the human is a *reflection* of this art-of fact.<sup>155</sup> Because of the violence and ignorance made possible by known knows, my critique of geo-politics and geo-economics is pedagogical. These two offspring of

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<sup>155</sup> This situation is informed by Foucault's term "historical *a priori*" that I interpret as an attempt to expose the complexity of potential reflections as a function of historical transmission of thin[g]king. Foucault, Michel, and A.M. Sheridan Smith. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Random House, 2010. p. 126-131.

geometry are fundamentally linear and positivist in their reflections. Because of the structural lack of backward reflectiveness in an arrow pointing forward, I turn to Chinese familial pedagogy and ancestral worship because their logics are not linearly extensive. Instead, Chinese philosophy proliferates contradictions as each apparent contradiction reveals simultaneous and palpable logics. The Chinese did not seek purified elegance, but instead a more mixed and swollen harmony of difference. There is no code for this, so thinking cannot hitch a ride formulae or a proper form of being.

Foucault contextualizes the stakes this way: “It will be remembered that the theory of the *verb* explained how language could overflow its own boundaries and affirm being...a foundation provided by the verb *to be*; the analysis of *finitude* explains in the same way how man’s being finds itself determined by positivities which are exterior to it and which link it to the density of things...”<sup>156</sup> To me, these “exteriorities” and these “links” converge on the model of the corridor. With our backs to the entrance, what is most affective are the choices most readily reflected in the scene. Chapter one takes the scene as given, but this chapter on Walls is an attempt to fold this geo-graphic *a priori* into the ethical field of *what to do?* Where I critiqued geometry by way of Chinese thought, I now want to begin to inform Chinese thought with structural theory of the edifice.

To chart this chapter’s point of departure from the previous chapter, it may help to provisionally simplify its concept to say that subjectivity can either reflect upon things or *be reflected in them*. To take this one step further, *to be reflected in something is to risk being taken down its corridor*. For instance, I could reflect upon heroin at a distance, I could be reflected in it such that I am a product of its think[g]king (an experience) and I could be taken in altogether

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<sup>156</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994. p. 336

such that I cannot escape the walls that it edifies me with- and subsequently organizes my life (a hedonist addiction). When I reflect upon heroin, I can detect all kinds of propensities inherent in it. If I take heroin, I risk being taken down a corridor where *its* logic has all of the leverage of thin[g]king.

Recall that this is an attempt to theorize *edification* at the intersection of dwellings and souls. So for the sake of conceptual division of labor, it may further help to consider *reflecting upon things* as the immediate reflection of the soul or ego; to reflect upon the walls and how they structure the edifice is to *mediate* the conditions of possible thin[g]king. This demands enough perspective to distance subjectivity from the body because it recognizes that a lot of the body reflects the environment without the active participation of consciousness. This is consciousness's way of mediating unconscious behavior. As with other sections, this distinction is drawn by a phenomenal experience that is liable to be upset by the very schema that theorizes it, but is helpful in the meantime.

Upon *reflection* it can be shown that everything in a scene, as with gravity, is somehow reflected in everything else. This *technical/theoretical* view of gravity and reflection structure known unknowns. As with gravity, our experience of reflection is not very nuanced. Obstacles to reflection, however, are a great deal more complicated than the obstacles to the human perception of gravitational pulls between massive objects. *Unlike* gravity, reflection is not attributable to one primary obstacle, namely, the disparity in the scale of mass. To reflection, the number of obstacles is greater, so as I tried to demonstrate the *general* phenomena of reflection with mirrors, here, I turn to walls as the empirical heuristic to work through obstacles to reflections.



Moving past thin[g]king as merely thrown, I want to stand over the immediacy of reflection to consider dwellings themselves. They are important because they are at once the very anchoring of things, and again, amenable to infinite alteration. If one has the wherewithal to disidentify with the body and feeling, the next question is *why are these the things available to reflect upon in the first place?* Reflection appears to explain how everything in a scene is reflected in one another, but it does not answer the question: what am I doing here? Why am I dwelling in *this* dwelling? Not all scenes are given. Nor are all scenes equal. Nor are any of them immune to change.

These structural conditions of thin[g]king are prior to reflection. What I mean is, being where we are is more often than not *not* a conscious decision, but an unreflective habit. People do not choose to go to work each day or *choose* to go home. Even more complicated things like driving *throw* us into places with scarcely any demands for reflection. *And these* places structure the choices that tend to propel us further along, take us down unexpected corridors where unknown unknowns quickly vanish over the horizon presenting us with unanticipated choices. With the least of reflection, ordinary life can propel us down corridors that lead in any direction except for reverse. So where ethics is bound up in the thin[g]king between two bodies suspended in reflection, the *scene* is prior to the reflection. All possible thin[g]ks are predicated on the initial conditions of possible/probable thoughts.

Before moving on, I want to say a few things about the phenomena of the wall. A wall is kind of mirror and a mirror is a kind of wall. That is, the difference of this selfsame art-of-fact is a function of the way we apprehend it. Consider looking out of a window. During the day, the window is transparent such that a person can be suspended in reflection with the things on the

other side- say, trees, streets or weather. The window itself is camouflaged from conscious reflection, but its windowness nonetheless is reflected in the way I look through it. Caught in such a reflection of the weather, the window's presence is out of mind, it is nothing to me despite the role it plays in conditioning my apprehension of the elements outside- like the way it silences it and separates me from air molecules. At night, on the other hand, the window is opaque, casting my reflection back at me as outdoor darkness and indoor lighting conspire to turn that self same art-of-factual sheet of glass into a mirror. In each moment that the window is behaving as a mirror, it is simultaneously acting as a wall- in this case, obscuring our sounds, smells and feelings of being outdoors. At dusk, there are points of indistinction where we see *through* and reflect *back* at the same time. The window at dusk provides an empirical scenario where *wallness* is problematized. In this experience, the subtle ways that we dilate our eyes makes all of the difference between consciousness being conscious of the inside, the outside or potentially, both. This chapter extends this phenomena into the problem of edification.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Walls, or obstructions to reflection, are illustrated well over the course of an education and the way that they operate is a sort of egological historical *a priori*. Historical *a priori* is the term that Foucault uses to describe the specific archival items that demonstrate the “regularity” for discourse.<sup>157</sup> Like discursive preconditions, getting exposure to knowledge is the thin[g]king precondition. These are something like raw materials for “epistemologization,” which in turn

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<sup>157</sup> He writes that he is less concerned about actual inventions than he is about the conventions. For subjectivity, however, the relationship between possible reflection and obstructions is going to be more decisive. See, Foucault, Michel, and A.M. Sheridan Smith. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. New York: Random House, 2010. p.143-145

structure a sort of subjective schema for legitimacy.<sup>158</sup> School is not the only place this occurs, but because school is geometric in its approach to this exposure, it is a significant, intensive and simple to scene to analyze in components. In this way, it clearly distinguishes education from edification.

Foucault's work is sociological, and I will draw from it as such with respect to Utilities in the third chapter, but here I apply his terms more narrowly in terms of edification and education. Foucault's work is *for us* sociological and it is widely cited for political arguments. But he approached research in terms of edification. He replies in an interview, interestingly, "Each of my works is part of my own biography."<sup>159</sup> I say *interesting* because he did not refer to his work as *autobiographical*. That is, he wasn't writing his own story *for others* to read, he was researching *who he was* through a number of reflections on the structural conditions of his life. While it is true that nobody will see what Michel Foucault sees in the mirror, it is nonetheless the case that many who have emulated his work may have failed to even infer his intentions: it was self-reflection, not social critique. So in this "critique" of education, I am more interested in how geometry works through it than I am condemning its normativity. I then turn to the possibility that the classical Liberal Arts subjectivizes this geometry and that it informs *analectical reasoning*.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> For a succinct schema of orders of discourse from epistemology, to science to formalization into an edifice of knowledge, see *Ibid*, 186-189

<sup>159</sup> Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the Self : a Seminar with Michel Foucault." Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988. p. 11

<sup>160</sup> In regarding Foucault's work as edifying, I want to draw a parallel between his "archaeology" and Confucian "transmission." Like Foucault, Confucius was interested in carefully exhuming particular artifacts from history in order to inform the present. He writes, "The more History attempts to transcend its own rootedness in historicity, and the greater the efforts it makes to attain, beyond historical relativity of its origins and choices, the sphere of universality, the more clearly it bears the marks of its historical birth, and the more evidently there appears through it the history of which it is itself a part...inversely, the more it accepts its relativity, and the more deeply it sinks into the movement it shares with what it is recounting, then the more it tends to the slenderness of narrative, and all the positive content it obtained for itself through the human sciences is dissipated." In, Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994. p. 371

The case of education illuminates a range of wall effects that I will analyze in further detail, so a brief consideration of it will help orient the rest of the chapter. Education, especially contemporary, is the most tangible illustration of what is at stake in a decision that truly *cuts off* entire scenes of possibility. Despite these cutoffs, upon reflection, it becomes clear how all of these decisions are constitutive of the present. In the ignorance of this reflection, not only is the present unedified by the contingency that *brings me here-now*, its awareness is also liable to camouflage countless unknown unknowns that are hiding in plain sight.

Here I want to begin by depicting the scenario of contemporary education as a geometric construct. Specifically, I will discuss age walls, disciplinary corridors and *progress* floors as they relate to an edifice of knowledge. Any wall that is figured into *what to do?* could unravel into countless reflections. This fact will have to bear some of the burden of this scenario. For instance, the fact that geography makes such a substantial difference in every subsequent choice presented to subjectivity has to be informed by way of implication. It is obvious that geography is reflected in language, culture and everything that composes a life. So, I will try to keep to non-obvious walls so that more conventional “demographic” destinies are informed indirectly. I first want to discuss age walls and education.

## AGE WALLS

Conventionally, children, on average, will be surrounded by others who are within about six months of their own age- for probably more than half of the waking day. If our memories even arc back far enough, we will know that we were thrown into this sameness. For most, entering school is not an ethical negotiation.<sup>161</sup> Yet, such precise age segregation is unique to

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<sup>161</sup> In some politics, school is taken as an explicit mode of coercion. For instance, early 20th century education reforms targeted religious, nationalist or classist political problems. As I understand this problem today, education is

school and it is sustained for at least 13 years- the *formative ones*. Where Rancière argues that politics “is that activity which turns on equality as its principle,” in school, we are baptised in geo-politics.<sup>162</sup> Parents will know that this is ‘normal’ to the point of natural or *proper*. And if unreflective, this practice will not even seem strange. Though, age segregation often begins soon after birth and potentially extends into higher education. At this point, when age symmetry begins to dissolve in college it is unlikely to be encountered in the rest of life- at least with such precision. There will never be another time in one’s life when this particular, narrow and arbitrary factor will determine day-to-day, face-to-face interactions. Yet, it is amidst this bio-developmental laboratory that the preponderance of an edifice is constructed. That is, these conditions will be reflected somewhere in our behaviors until we die.

In order to isolate precisely the things that are desired to be measured, science and proper thinking will systematically purify contrasts. The integrity of a measurement depends on same things being the same. In education, age is a natural enough *sameness* from which to draw other measurements, but the judgement of sameness simultaneously exercises power by declaring a difference that makes no difference. And because policy is nothing if not an attempt at unethical efficiency, it is unsurprising that education would attempt to synchronize its measurement to biological development. By structurally eliminating the variability of the biological/developmental aspect of teaching, we might suppose that a *fairer* assessment of intelligence and diligence can be measured. By eliminating the question of a biological edifice,

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problematic mostly in terms of pedagogy, not its content or propaganda. Anarchists used education as an expression of protest, and ironically, politicized education all the more by pursuing *social* reform through edification. I think that this ulterior motive corrupted their best intentions. For an interesting history of education and anarchy, see, Avrich, Paul. *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States*. Oakland: AK Press, 2006

<sup>162</sup> His subsequent definition of disagreement is also apposite to schoolroom politics. It is situation: “one in which one of the interlocutors at once understand and does not understand what the other is saying.” It is when people say the *same thing* but understand it differently. See, Rancière, Jacques, and Julie Rose. *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. p ix, x

the soul can be measured. All of this makes sense geo-politically, but if geometry is a human phenomenon, children will take their own measurements as well, but importantly *within* the walls of synthetic uniformity.

All teachers face an ethical dilemma to treat students *fairly*, which means according to a code. Western objections to Confucian teaching in the *Analects* reflect this expectation of consistency from a teacher.<sup>163</sup> Individual educators aside, it is clear that *school*, not the world, structurally conditions teachers to try to “enframe” children this way.<sup>164</sup> Children like adults, however, see unique thin[g]ks in the mirror. Children do not go blind on account of age symmetry; that is to say, this indistinction *imposed on them* does not nullify contrast. Children do not see *the same thing* when they look left or right. An edifice of political uniformity is going to be in tension with subjectivity. Because of this tension, the kinds of contrasts that children will register amongst themselves are going to be different than those registered from the perspective of a code and administration. The differences they conceive will be more nuanced than test scores and conduct reports because these are not their terms of measurement. This milieu of constructed uniformity will amplify contrasts just like a scientist’s ability to detect subtle aberrations in a controlled environment. The passage from middle to high school, for instance, is not a year, it is an epoch. Small things like hairs, drops of blood, eye glasses, braces, voice changes, cigarettes, and countless things that would otherwise be moments amidst a group of

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<sup>163</sup> Confucius notoriously tailored his comments to specific persons. For instance, in an oft cited passage he advocated assertiveness to a student he understood as shy and advocated restraint to a student who may have been overzealous. If this seems obvious, it should be noted that the same question of a code was at issue and Confucius was rejecting it. See, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Location 2611

<sup>164</sup> Heidegger writes, “But enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into the kind of revealing that is ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of enframing.” His critique of technology is reflected in way geometry influences education. See, Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. p. 332

mixed age students morph into powerful and violent demographics in school.<sup>165</sup> One form of equality bursts open onto a new constellation of inequalities.

In any other company (e.g. friends, family, hobbies etc), age would be one of the most conspicuous differences among singular people assembled for some particular purpose. It is not just in Confucian societies that the grammar of social interaction is conditioned by age relativity. We unreflectively change the pitches of our voices, our postures, diction, and in many cultures, even the grammar changes. This nonetheless imparts a particular kind of reflectiveness. In more variegated encounters with other people, the age aspect of a person is a significant thin[g]k structuring minor expressions. And constructed sameness among students tears down this affective structure of social interaction. This obliterates a significant way that the ego gets out-of-body enough to ask itself *what to do?* or how to behave. There is nothing holy about respecting elders, but it remains that age-orienting is unique and peculiar in school.

As with any demographic, the diversity among the ostensible sameness is potentially greater than *across* demographics, so inside these walls can exist a radical economy of segregation. The geometric world of education is so stratified that encounters between school children in different grades scarcely occurs without that difference being a *major* factor suspended in reflection. Older is better; younger worse. Mixed ages diffuse this factor, but purified difference amplifies it. Many things people are helpless to change become subject to intensified scrutiny because this biopolitical “normal” is purified of one of humanity’s richest forms of diversity. What matters inside age walls intensifies here-now. One embarrassing

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<sup>165</sup> I am using *moments* the way that Foucault speaks of documents, “The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked...history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*.” In Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994. P.7

moment could doom a person for the eternity of high school or leave permanent psychological scars.

Contrasts completely out of a child's control are cause for some of humanity's most malicious behaviors- kids kill themselves because of bullying.<sup>166</sup> Even if age symmetry is not the *cause*, it is hard to imagine *school* bullying without it. This is because school society thrives on contrast that is under a magnifying glass. Small differences are perceived as bigger when the context is purified of noise. The estrangement works both ways. Ephemeral phases cannot be taken as such when the contrasts are so stark. The first 13-year-old boy lucky enough to grow a mustache will not go unnoticed; he may be unwittingly fated for coolness for one year with untold repercussions. Outside of these monuments, the *real world* is camouflaged as everything outside of the drama of school. It is bracketed for some pre-reflective time in the future. Thrown like this, students are walled off from reflecting upon how much this drama of *small contrasts made big* is artificially and arbitrarily constructed by centuries' old pedagogical theory.

Human-to-human interaction is already highly contingent, but school brackets face-to-face encounters within a violence that is qualitatively different, but no less intense than any other political demographic. Human development is already highly contingent, but school amplifies both the contingency and the intensity of otherwise inconsequential events- that might be taken in stride amidst age diversity. In the genealogy of the edifice, doubtless, self-images are irreparably formed by second-grade incontinence, fifth-grade motion sickness on a bus or puberty that comes a few months too early or too late. Rather than see these things like trees

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<sup>166</sup> For example, this article talks about the devastation of an 8 year-old after the Fukushima tragedy in Japan. "Why Bullying in Japanese Schools Is Especially Traumatic." *The Economist*, *The Economist Newspaper*, 12 Apr. 2017, [www.economist.com/news/asia/21720643-evacuees-fukushima-are-latest-suffer-torment-class-why-bullying-japanese-schools](http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21720643-evacuees-fukushima-are-latest-suffer-torment-class-why-bullying-japanese-schools).



through a window on a sunny day, age symmetry throws up a wall where a lurid intensity is reflected back and potentially reverberates in subjective apprehension.

## **DISCIPLINARY WALLS**

“The adult mind is so familiar with the notion of logically ordered facts that it does not recognize--it cannot realize-- the amount of separating and reformulating which the facts of direct experience have to undergo before they can appear as a “study,” or branch of learning.”<sup>167</sup> At least since Dewey, there has been widespread (if minor) recognition that school naively imposes adult apprehension on childhood learning. As reflection shows with age symmetry, diversity amid sameness can be greater than across categories. After many generations of geometric education, this epiphany tends to come late in scholarship in Western pedagogy--where a jocular maturity takes hold as one realizes late in her or his career that other perspectives matter. That fact that “inter-disciplinary” comes as epiphanic at all is evidence of the grip that the artificial imposition of discipline walls has on *edification*- as if somehow disciplines and geometry were prior to humans, the world and experience.

The general violence that disciplinary walls inflict on edification, I suspect, goes without saying. So I point to this as a cause for reflection, however, I want to consider this in a more particular way to highlight how choices present material and objective corridors to a subject. I consider higher education because its geometry is exaggerated, but the same applies to all education. In any case, unlike age segregation, courses are presented as choices and these choices are very hierarchical. First, *what do I want to be when I grow up?* Secondly, to pursue

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<sup>167</sup> Dewey, John, Larry A. Hickman, and Thomas M. Alexander. “The Child and the Curriculum,” *The Essential Dewey Volume 1: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998. p. 237

this, a student must complete a range of disciplinary training (major, minor, ‘geneds’, etc.). And thirdly, one selects specific courses within these categories.

*Immediately*, learning is presented in terms of this choice: *which ones?* But this choice is *clear*. That is to say, I see the objects of this choice as unmediated, as *given* in the way that I apprehend tree through a window on sunny day. And just as a window unnoticeably enframes the outdoor scene and filters out sounds and weather, so too this *choice* camouflages what it obscures. When a person makes herself available to this kind of choice, the magnitude of known unknown becomes obscure. *I only know that I know very little and I presume that if I enter a particular corridor that it will be able to edify me.* The discipline has a reality that I decide to materialize by entrusting myself to those who are able to perceive its truth. This kind of choice is, phenomenally, the most acute event at the intersection of walls and reflections.<sup>168</sup>

In terms of thin[g]king, these choices are problematized. A general, for instance, will dwell on the battlefield and fold in reflections until a quorum of inevitabilities makes *what to do* obvious and immanent. But this is a theory of thin[g]king is not ordinary thinking. So now consider a choice that obscures untold unknown unknowns, yet is presented in a rarefied number, like course and section. From a course catalogue, these are all more or less same. The exigencies of education are reflected in this presentation; a course catalog is designed to help students make

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<sup>168</sup> Heidegger distinguishes between thematic *being-in* and moments of *being-in-the-world* and “mood” is one way that he develops them that is appropriate here. That is, where thin[g]king is about moments, walls are about their structure. He writes, “In bad moods, Dasein becomes blind to itself, the surrounding world of heedfulness is veiled, the circumspection of taking care is led astray. Attunement is so far from being reflected upon that, in the unreflected devotion to and giving in to the “world” of its heedfulness, it assails Dasein. Mood assails. It comes neither from ‘without’ nor from ‘within’, but rises from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being.” He continues in italics, “*Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something.*” That is, the mood of uncertainty means that attunement to contents of the choice hide a person from herself. See, Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010. P. 388 and/or Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. Malden: Blackwell, 2013. p. 133

everything *fit*, like a puzzle, into short and long term plans. A week is shaped like a rectangle and a degree is a table. When it is complete, so is the education. It is aesthetically elegant.

Course numbers that were presented as *sames*, however, take on a life of their own. The wall of obscurity that is camouflaged by the number quickly turns into a window into known unknowns. The corridor with a non-descript door opens onto unfamiliar faces and spaces. Choosing a number obscures countless contingencies. The number takes a person down a particular corridor and into a room with particular chairs that will mold the body into a shape for hours. The number inheres walls with particular color and decorations that affect mood. The conditions of possible *consciousness of* are all camouflaged by the number that suggests the answer. In the next few moments, that number materializes into a course load that will lock a person into a particular sector of reflection for countless hours. All of this is contingent upon a professor or TA's personal idea of, say, "300-level Political Science." Specific topics and readings in the syllabus will be completely unexpected. The course catalogue world collides with tables and chairs, disciplining walls and reflections.

Another way that disciplinary walls function is through the sheer number of disciplines. The problem of Hegelian understanding is frustrated by the articulation and formalization of so many different disciplines. Where perspectives evolve over time through thin[g]king, formalizing innumerable perspectives creates a social milieu where every perspective can be fitted into a properly thought discipline. One can assume that there is already an -ology for every subjectively immanent thought. This is an obstacle to reflection because one can scarcely utter a thought without another truncating it into *the same* as what has already been argued by some other. This is all geo-politics because nobody has the same thought. Disciplinary walls attune academics to purify thoughts into the categories that they are accustomed to do their

measurements with. One already knows what he is looking for because disciplinary walls become half of the sensory endowment: one sees with lawyer's eyes, feels with a doctor's touch or hears with a ornithologist's ears. This brings me to the third kind of wall in education. Where knowledge has a proper province of thinking, apprehending a concept already has the proper path to follow.

### **PROGRESS FLOORS**

The "reality" or epistemology of geometric learning is palpably modular in that it conceives of learning in pieces and wholes so that it can be finished, stacked and sorted. And a breakthrough, one that extends the edifice of knowledge, stands on the shoulders of giants. From a geometric perspective *walls* are obstacles to a completed understanding. They are all of the steps clamoring to the top of wisest giant. Within disciplinary walls, students go up from one level to the next.

Agency can be conceived in various ways and it seems that education puts the burden of agency on points of decision, to commit to a corridor and leave the rest up to effort and promise fulfillment. The commitments bear the stamp of geometry because they are ultimately ego effacing. The intention is to conform subjectivity to a topical category. This is *becoming* engineer, teacher, doctor, hairdresser for the sake of *being* such categories. This is political because education and the choices we make, are the democratic way to change one's demographic. As equal citizens of a meritocracy, education features prominently among sources of mobility. Mobility itself becomes a form or coercion where these categories, choices and commitments are not problematized- only the effort within them. This does not make education wrong or evil, but it does distinguish it from edification in the particularity of its schema. From

the choice of *what you want to be when you grow*, all of these choices will be reflected somewhere in the body throughout the learning process, but it is less likely that *the choice* will be reflected in consciousness throughout because it is already complete. That is, value judgements aside, choices present walls in this way.

Where disciplinary walls are *segregated* (say horizontally), they pick up continuity in the linear progression (vertical separation). The edifice of education grows tall and narrow. Thomas Kuhn was among the first to call attention to the *humanity* of scientific history. He showed how humans naively impose their *notion* of elegance on a world that always issues the correction. But if geometry is biologically human, it is exacerbated by culture- only to be corrected by nature.<sup>169</sup> What is manifest in a “paradigm change,” in retrospect, is the over-commitment to known knowns. Paradigm changes enter like disco balls reflecting how their presence had been reflected in everything all along. A whole edifice of sense certainty dissolves in an instant as the same things now become known more truly. This is uncanny because before this new schema, we may have had no suspicion that we were *wrong* in the first place. Those facts were *established*. And where they are, they are commitment corridors. In many cases, commitment corridors are overcome by simply asking *what am I doing?* prior to deciding *what to do*.

This leads to the somewhat ironic conclusion that progress *walls in* more than it can *break through*. It is a wall for two reasons. Firstly, because of disciplinary segregation, *infinity* is given directionality. Whether we are in a room with a mirror or in the middle of the street, we can know that reflection is ultimately without limit. Undisciplined reflection, as such, does not make *progress* nor is it trying to move forward. Analectical reason is hesitant by design because

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<sup>169</sup> He writes, “They [authority] address themselves to an already articulated body of problems, data, and theory, most often to the particular set of paradigms to which the scientific community is committed at the time they are written.” In, Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition. P. 136

more reflection generally means greater awareness and fewer missteps. Science does not purify for the sake of awareness; it purifies to predict cause and effect. And failure is something of a virtue. In order for progress to thrive, contrasts have to be controlled. Progress attempts to purify thin[g]king of irrelevant considerations as a trade off for advancing the ones that are consonant with the science that defines it. Progress narrows the scope of what is properly thought. It makes a virtue of it. Again, it is not a “bad” way to do things, but it is a specific orientation to the world that is aligned with geometry, geo-politics, geo-economics and potentially geo-subjectivity.

The second way that progress conceives walls is that it advances in a single line that knows no shorter path between two points. This is not a single wall but infinite walls because progress advances one point at a time. Obstacles to reflection are calculated in advance and removed systematically as one progresses through a course of study. The only way to get to where you are going in the ballistics of education is to follow the same path that your teachers did- to break through the same walls they did and in the same order. When point is passed it is *past*. The historicity of disciplinary segregation sorts out what was *right* and what was *wrong* so that proper thinking can double down on the difference that makes a difference. In all matters of progress, the terms of measurement are already built into the education. What is suspended in reflection is where we are going because where we came from is obsolete. The edifice is already built and the soul moves in. All lines are directed to the vanishing point. A familial epistemology could not be more different.

In chapter 3 it will become clearer why I avoid the politics of education. For now, I want to reinforce that it is the problematization of choice that matters for *edification*. That is, even while in some corridor, the affective properties of the walls can themselves be cause for reflection. As with all walls it remains open to *choose to choose* some particular corridor. This is

in fact, what we learn from Kuhn's study: "normal science" systematically walls off anomalies to preserve the schema that so much relies on.<sup>170</sup> It is usually in crisis that these anomalies attract more attention, but science *as a whole* almost systematically refutes geometric dogma. The whole *life* of science is a geometric edifice that must cannibalize its foundations to stay alive. The same is probably true for subjectivity, which is why the *problem* of education is edifying.

## LIBERAL ARTS OF THIN[G]KING

The phrase, Liberal Arts is used very casually, but one may be surprised to learn of its more technical origins. In a book called *The Trivium* written by Sister Miriam Joseph, it is explained that the Liberal Arts is a medieval tradition that has its origins in Aristotle.<sup>171</sup> It comprises the Trivium and the Quadrivium; logic, grammar and rhetoric; astronomy, arithmetic, geometry and music, respectively. In light of my argument of geometry, these may seem like inauspicious precursors to geo-politics, but interestingly, *the code* is not the operative ideal. Geometry fails to hegemonize the others. Rather, all of these subjects subtend one another in this pedagogical schema. The centuries old curriculum was designed to teach people to "develop, enlighten and perfect" the mind.<sup>172</sup> I like this usage very much because it (quite accurately, I think) conceives of the mind as independent of subjectivity, something distant like a tool at the disposal of it. It is not a subjectivity-mind that gets fortified or filled up with knowledge. Rather, subjectivity has a mind to be used as a tool for edification. It conceives of space between the

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<sup>170</sup> He writes of crises, "...the solution to each of them had been at least partially anticipated during a period when there was no crisis in the corresponding science; and in the absence of crisis those anticipations had been ignored." Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition. P. 75

<sup>171</sup> Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlinn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 4

<sup>172</sup> Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlinn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 7

mind and subjectivity so that they could act and influence one another. With this space, mind and subjectivity can be reflected in one another without being self-same. In each instance, she writes of the mind as if it were a bicep, tool or some other material thing that gets exercised or worked on. At the same time, “the action begins and ends in the agent, who is perfected by the action.”<sup>173</sup> This is a very subtle thing that is easy to take for granted, but it is critical to edification so I will try to clarify my interpretation of it.

The way that I understand *The Trivium's* recounting of the Liberal Arts is that it operates at the level of material/object indistinction. “Education is the highest of the arts in the sense that it imposes forms (ideas and ideals) not on matter, as other arts (for instance carpentry or sculpture), but on mind.”<sup>174</sup> The concept of materiality is, for the Liberal Arts, phenomenologically important. It is the concept for a human’s mediation of the world even on thin[g]ks that are decidedly not art-of-factual, i.e. not available for others to sensually reflect upon. In fact, a mind is an art-of-fact only momentarily even for the subjectivity that leverages a palpable concept of it. And this provisional art-of-factual existence is what enables a person to use a mind like different kinds of tools- like a logic tool, a grammar tool or a rhetoric tool. The subtlety that I am after is that somewhere in the non-localizable space of the mind, subjectivity uses its mind *for logic, grammar or rhetoric*. Subjectivity is not self-identifying with *being logical, being grammatical or being rhetorical*.

Sister Miriam Joseph preempts the presupposition that concepts, or “forms,” are imposed by the mind exclusively on matter. Where an object/matter distinction is evident in a designer’s vision, I think that the Liberal Arts was already leveraging schemata to shape the mind. Perhaps its undoing is that it calcified into such a strict regimen, however, even the seven arts seem

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, P. 4

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, P. 6



phenomenologically wiser than, say, the mind as a computer- as is often analogized today. They are wiser because logic *materializes* thinking, grammar *materializes* symbols, and rhetoric *materializes* communication.<sup>175</sup> Each of these manipulate immaterial things with immaterial tools with very material consequences. Here, the material/object distinction unravels with respect to the outside of the body just like I argued in chapter one that it unravels inside the body. To apply logic to a situation cannot but lead to different material consequences than simply intuiting one's way through something. The same goes with the way I symbolize or communicate. These are *tools* that also unravel the idea of the mind being *inside* the body. In this way, I read *The Trivium* as a curriculum for *materializing objects* and aiding the question *what to do?* with palpable thin[g]ks.

Consider how even though I cannot see my own lungs or see the earth orbiting the sun, I can apprehend my lungs doing their physical thing. I can apprehend that the sun is not “rising” in spite of an experience that suggests otherwise. How could I conceive any of this without interpreting it through material experience? *What could pure objectivity be?* And contrariwise, how could I apprehend any material art-of-fact independent of immaterial schema? *What would pure materiality be?* These questions underscore their mutual implication and undercut any strict distinction between them. We insist through inferences that our organs and orbits are *real things* but what is a flow or an orbit without materialities? Is a materiality conceived in matter *realer* or less real than a palpable thin[g]k in the mind? How could either be purified of all inference? An orbit is no thing without matter (or materialized objects) in circulation. And matter is no thing if

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<sup>175</sup> While *materializes* is my word, it is merely substituting what her definitions as “arts of...” Recall that I use the word art-of-fact precisely for this reason. Art, as in artifice and artifact, connotes a sort of making or materializing. See, Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlinn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 3

not implicated in the being of other things conceptually. I conceive *objects* as if they were materialities for me.<sup>176</sup> The orbit has palpability for me because of materialized objects suspended in it; and an art-of-fact *makes sense* when I know how it is notionally related to other things. Materiality and objectivity are just poles in a palpable reflection. And the Liberal Arts uses the mind as a tool that is capable of materializing objects and incorporating them into *objective* schema, so that they can become palpable. Importantly, we do not need absolutes to recognize these phenomena of human understanding. To claim that one has an ontological priority over the other would be to distort how both are constituent of one reflection. It cannot be that a mirror or body holds priority over the other in the constitution of a reflection.

The way the Sister Miriam Joseph explains “reality” and the trivium’s relationship to it is interesting. “Logic is concerned with the thing-as-it-is-known; Grammar is concerned with the thing-as-it-is-symbolized; Rhetoric is concerned with the thing-as-it-is-communicated.”<sup>177</sup> Volatility is most pronounced in the basic assumptions and *reality* is an attempt to smooth this over. She concludes, “Rhetoric is the master art of the trivium, for it presupposes and makes use of grammar and logic; it is the art of communicating through symbols ideas about reality.”<sup>178</sup> We can finally talk about reality as a construct rather than a statement of ontology. Reality is predicated on what is known (logic), but instead it is suspended in communication. Even accounting for any of its faults, one has to admire that edifice that Liberal Arts constructed to build up the soul. By contrast, the old science/religion antinomy is revealed to *be same* with

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<sup>176</sup>In terms of Liberal Arts, the art called *geometry* is the study of space and astronomy is the application of the study of space. Arithmetic is the study of quantity and music is its application. These applications struck me as strange, but it seems that they are only strange on account of how they have become purified of one another over time. The strangeness underscores the fluidity between theory and application. The Liberal Arts, I think, thrived on the ambiguity of the material and objective and these alignments are evidence of this for me. Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlinn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 3

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, P. 8

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 8

respect to dogmatic hedonism because they both forego the finesse of grammar and rhetoric to dig their heels in on the logic of their epistemologies. They are hedonists when they rail *against* the volatility of logic rather than embrace it with grammar and rhetoric. Because reflection permits of infinite logic, what may be the biggest wall, the biggest obstacle to reflection is a pedagogical schema that conceives one-to-one correspondences when in a very palpable sense, every photon, atom and graviton is a disco ball of mutual entanglement.

Consider if a knife were my only tool, perhaps I would study cooking, knife throwing, sculpture, vivisection and masonry in order to familiarize myself with a range of applications. In a Liberal Arts of the Knife, none of these specific activities are undertaken for their own sake. That would be vocational training. Rather, they are all studied to teach the versatility of the tool. Each practice will subtend and inform all of the others. In studying each in isolation, I cumulatively learn in such a way that informs apparently unrelated tasks. Vivisection and masonry can be reflected in cooking technique. Disciplinary purity would wall off these knowledges where the *tool* is not held in mind. A knife cannot simply be a known-known, but it is a tool or means of access to a wide variety actions. The tool becomes imbued with an aesthetic overlap of schemata. What if this tool were applied more narrowly and *properly*? How much aesthetic *and practical* knowledge is walled off? Further, it is not as if these are the only ways to learn the tool. Experimenting with other applications of the tool cannot help but to edify one's familiarity with it. There is a structural aesthetics to the edification of minds and knives.

Contemporary pedagogy completely mutates this. In the classroom today, a teacher does not *persuade* her or his students that the course material is logical and that the symbology is sound. And with debate as the notable exception, the trivium is largely alien to education because teachers do not teach students *how to persuade* others that their logic and representation

is sound through rhetoric. The assumption is that what is a known-known simply *is*: nothing more nor less. There are only proper ways to use knives and minds. In this way, pedagogical practice has probably not advanced (perhaps declined) since *The Trivium*.<sup>179</sup> The most banal forms of religious and logical positivist dogma are merely geometries that anchor their points to different *data*. They take geometry too seriously, so seriously that their *points* (or foundations) necessitate absolute lines (narrative rationality) and subsequently *plane* (wall) off entire perspectives. Geo-politics conceives of infinite dimensions held together only by unquestioned known-knowns, singular logics “concerned with the thing-as-it-is-known.”

For me the virtue of Chinese thinking is not ancestor worship or loving and respecting parents. It is the span of reflection that this epistemology achieves through this that I think is edifying. Holding familial perspectives close to mind disidentifies the self with its feelings or opinions. Similarly, I am not particularly hung up on the particular modes of thought formalized into the Liberal Arts, but I admire the attempt to schematize a range and capability of the mind. I think that it too sought to *swell* awareness so that it wasn't walled off to available art-of-facts. The Liberal Arts coalesced around the trivium and the quadrivium, apparently, because these basic disciplines informed subjectivity of its own capacities for perspective. It seems to me that mastering a discipline *qua proper thinking* reveals a different attitude toward learning. *Learning to use the mind* is not ends-oriented. If geometry is hedonistically purifying, Chinese thought is characteristically hybridizing.<sup>180</sup> If the minimal structure of *analectical* thinking seems an over-

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<sup>179</sup> She writes, “The accumulation of facts is mere information and is not worthy to be called education since it burdens the mind and stultifies it instead of developing, enlightening, and perfecting it.” Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlenn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 7

<sup>180</sup> Latour writes, “It is clear that I was not so far off base earlier when I distinguished in the modern Constitution what I called procedures of “hybridization” (below) and of “purification” (above). The terms were too simplistic, but the diagnosis was accurate: at the core of the Moderns there is a source of foundational irrationality, since they must never be able to draw the consequence between on the one hand the search for substance and the search for a God not made by human hands, a search that they have made the origin of all virtue, and on the other the practice that

reaction to geometric ontology, the Liberal Arts demonstrates that the field of structures of thought can be experimental and edifying without being absolute and dogmatic.

In contemporary Liberal Arts the mind is conspicuous in its absence. We tend to be more inclined to ask *what* people think than *how* people think. The absence of this question appears to be the biggest obstacle to thin[g]kling and reflection. The mind's proper use as a receptacle is implied where the epistemology of geometry redacted art from the sciences. Liberal Arts appears to have succumbed to many of the walls that obscure reflection in ordinary education. Where the mind is taken as a receptacle it fails to problematize the use of its own tool. And where education fills receptacles it makes of minds what Heidegger calls standing reserve: "Everywhere everything is ordered to standby, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. We call it standing reserve." He continues, "The word 'standing reserve' assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that which is wrought upon by the revealing that challenges. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as an object."<sup>181</sup> That is, it is no longer a singular object of reflection; it is its category- nothing more or less. The violence of modernity is the violence of geometry to measure. Not only has education become complicit in geo-metering humans, but the Liberal Arts fails to liberate. The mind is obscured and experimental applications for the mind have given way to filling up a receptacle. When subjectivity measures its own mind against geo-political constructions, it is a

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obliges them not to take that project into account. The source of their formidable energy has indeed been localized: how many powers they are going to be able to launch, since they will never have to follow the consequences of their acts and harmonize theory with practice!" See, Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. p. 175

<sup>181</sup> Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. p. 322

reflection of them. To build a dwelling and a soul, the measurements must be “intransitive...starting and ending within the agent.”<sup>182</sup>

## **EDIFICATION AND MEASUREMENT**

The Liberal Arts raises the question of the structure of thought. I think it makes the case that “immaterial” thought can, in fact *needs*, to be palpable to think. Where thought materializes in the mind and becomes palpable it seems wasteful- even stupid- to ignore the structure of its operation. I think that it is fair to say *stupid* because where subjectivity can experience the palpability of sense certainty, to ignore palpable structures and the varying inter-objective entanglements (i.e. perspectives) within them is, literally, ignorant and close-minded. It fails to hook the tape measure on the ledge of its own subjectivity to apprehend art-of-facts. It obscures the self in its sense certainty and in this obscurity is unaware that “its” opinions and feelings are not its own productions. This subjectivity has edified itself with pre-fab walls and mistakes its thrown uniqueness of their subjective reflections for freedom.

Expertise is also vulnerable to stupidity where it tracks the narrowest corridors in the attempt to think properly. We know today that the Manhattan Project was flush with the smartest idiots the world has ever seen. Subatomic particles were somehow more palpable than the Doomsday Machine- the glaring inevitability of such massive power to destroy. The obtuseness of the *virtue* of weapons of mass destruction is the limit case of the much more ordinary form of stupidity. The structure of this kind of thinking has material effects and can be understood palpably: the conditions of possible thin[g]king are predicated on the way walls are formed in the edifice of subjectivity. This is what makes education the “highest art” for Sister Miriam Joseph:

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 4

theoretically, walls of ignorance can be removed at will. The “intransitive” nature of thin[g]king where the “action begins and ends in the agent” means that subjectivity is self-sufficient to build its own dwelling. This problem also presents ignorance as choice for unfreedom because palpable thin[g]ks, whose schema are immanent in reflection, surround subjectivity and offer to it an apprehension of the world that can better mitigate contingency.

Palpability, not atoms or logic, conditions our access to both materials and objects. Palpability is what the mind uses for leverage to thin[g]k and figure out *what to do*. The human mode of palpability is irreducible human. In this we can see that the vexing ineffability of metaphysics is not predicated on the existence of divine code-reality to which we struggle to get access. It is ineffable because metaphysics has always been mistaken for meta-anthropocentrism. Humans will never jump over their own shadows nor will they ever reflect upon without being reflected-in. The meta-anthropocentrism quest is no less absurd than an *ultimate reality*. This is precisely why the words “right” and “wrong” should be much more caustic than “smart” or “stupid,” yet, geo-politics renders the language of absolute truth invisibly ubiquitous. For human beings, without a theological instrument of measurement, *smart* and *stupid* come to occupy contrary positions to *right* and *wrong*. What is “right” in geo-politics is going to be elegant, but obtuse- which means *stupid* in terms of edification. What is *smart* in edification is a recognition of inelegance- an apprehension of overlapping perspectives and aesthetic complexity.

Ironically for us, reality is stabilized by destabilizing sense certainty through reflection and thin[g]king.<sup>183</sup> Anthropocentrically, “reality” is open to limitless reflection- which is why

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<sup>183</sup> Sister Miriam Joeseph writes, “The three arts of language provide discipline of mind inasmuch as mind finds expression in language. The four arts of quantity provide means for the study of matter inasmuch as quantity—more precisely, extension—is the outstanding characteristic of matter. (Extension is a characteristic of matter only, whereas number is a characteristic of both matter and spirit.) The function of the trivium is the training of the mind for the study of matter and spirit, which together constitute the sum of reality. The fruit of education is culture, which Matthew Arnold defined as “the knowledge of ourselves [mind] and the world [matter].” In the “sweetness and light” of Christian culture, which adds to the knowledge of the world and ourselves the knowledge of God and

“reality” is not a very helpful concept outside of geo-politics. Known-knowns are always but *one* fragile construct that is liable to fracture under reflection, so just one further perspective is already far more stable than one. But because things are palpable and mutable without limit, it is all too human to, instead, conceive the world *around singular fetishized known-knowns* and ultimate realities. This is like a hedonistically maintaining that a knife has only one singular, proper use.

This narrowness is a structural attitude that can be easily contrasted with one that is more disposed to alternative palpabilities of singular art-of-facts. And it is edifying where this is contrasted. The differences between training and edification are held in this distinction. I understand education as a political problem because of the intractable issue of sameness. Mass production of “learning” like the mass production of anything is going to incur sameness as a prominent feature of its structure. As a social problem, education could *politically* be better or worse, however, this *social* structure of learning remains entirely independent from edification. I might amuse myself with the notion that classical Liberal Arts might be a better social schema because it would furnish students with a minimum number of ways to use the mind. The word “trivial” comes to us from the word through the Latin *belonging to the trivium* because grammar, logic and rhetoric were so ordinary that they were banal- and this banality would probably be an improvement on some of our own pedagogical problems. But what an absurd proposal? With the least bit of reflection, I can see that my social cause is self-defeating, literally. Causes are commitment corridors; reflections just swell.

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of other spirits, we are enabled truly to “see life steadily and see it whole.” Joseph, Miriam, and Marguerite McGlinn. *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric Understanding the Nature and Function of Language*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 7-8



Classical Liberal Arts seems to have struck a fragile balance between structure and volatility. Known-knowns are just starting points that suffer one degree of fallibility at the hand of grammar (symbology) and another when these words are thrown into rhetorical circulation. The trivium present three schema for intransitive materialization. These schema, in sum, are rigorous without being reductionist and ethical without being moral. Such would be a good description of Confucian thought. This is why analectical thinking is potentially smarter than geometric thinking. Analectical thinking also schematizes the economy of knowledge in non-euclidean terms. A person's edifice is not beholden to spatial constraints as if learning to throw a knife is an opportunity cost to further vivisection expertise. Learning is not zero sum; it swells through layers of schema. These layers of schema change the dimensions of think[g]king so that it is not constrained to a corridor. Liberal Arts informs *analectical* reasoning by being explicit and experimental with schema. It proliferates palpable instruments to measure art-of-facts against subjective experience. While brute exposure to many things will surely cause people to thin[g]k unique thoughts, this is similar to a subject apprehending itself as free simply because its experience is unique. The freedom is not proven by unique actions and thoughts; rather, the freedom is in being able to edify the self, change one's mind and be exercise agency of consciousness.

## **SCHEMA HOME AND THE CYBERNETICS OF SUBJECTIVITY**

Home is completely entangled with the body. It is the only place with enough sovereignty to control the entire process where changing environments and changing minds unfold into negative feedback loops. Within the home it is possible to both ask after and respond to a subjective history of the present. What in the home is a corridor? What is habitually a cause for

reflection? Forays into memory and interior design are not frivolous because little art-of-facts can presence particular perspectives like shrines to ancestors. Problematizing these little things is honest about the limits of geometric reason and the limits of being reflected in the image of the pythagorean theorem. Like a thermostat subjectivity has to try to balance the inhibit/inhabit commitment if it is going to build its dwelling-soul.

The word cybernetics comes to us (with some controversy) from Norbert Weiner. He arrives at this term from Greek roots *kubernetes* which mean “steersman.” These are the same Greek roots that give us the word *government*, or more conspicuously in Spanish *gobierno*.<sup>184</sup> In any case, this notion of *steering* is largely obscure to vernacular usage of cybernetics and government, and it is worth recovering in the context of edification because it is largely lost to political theory and completely lost in politics and demography. For *oikos nomos*, like a person at a helm, agency is defined by negotiating (not controlling) hyperobjects. A “steersman” has to tack a ship to hold a course. It also has to steer a ship to negotiate waves. To keep a ship on course requires that the results of some course of action (steering in one direction) become the inputs for a subsequent course of action (steering in the opposite direction). This negative feedback loop as a process of homeostasis is the critical concept of cybernetics. The classic example of cybernetics is the ordinary thermostat. Like tacking a ship, when the outside temperature cools a home past a threshold, a thermostat will turn the heat on. When the internal temperature heats up past a threshold, this result is fed back to the thermostat that will shut the heat off. Because weather systems are too big to control, humans negotiate them through averages not one-to-one correspondence. The average is managed within walls.

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<sup>184</sup> Norbert Weiner explains how he needed a term to capture the field of human-machine interaction and he settled on cybernetics, but he later discovered that Ampère had already been using it in the context of political science. See, Weiner, Norbert, and Steve J. Heims. *Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*. London: Free Association Books, 1989. p. 15

Cybernetics is a helpful way to conceive of walls and mirrors because, owed to science, it informs purified systems of feedback. It enables us to conceive of a helmsman negotiating two feedback systems (course and list) even though the control is limited to one mechanism, the rudder. The intuition of the steersman may obscure how the body is differentially reflecting upon and negotiating these two different problems. So far with things, we have discussed battlefields and disco balls that have to be apprehended aesthetically, or immanent to complex reflection. But these aesthetic determinations still manifest in reflection by layering schema.

Where “disposition” is an important concept in Chinese philosophy, cybernetics would conceive of “propensity” as an art-of-fact’s attempt to reach homeostasis. A general can conceive of how a complex array of intensities will settle down. And “family-feeling” or dao (道) is something of an emotional oikos nomos thermostat. Weiner writes, “It is the pattern maintained by this homeostasis, which is the touchstone of our personal identity. Our tissues change as we live: the food we eat and the air we breathe become flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, and the momentary elements of our flesh and bone pass out of our body every day with our excreta. We are but whirlpools in a river of ever-flowing water. We are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves.”<sup>185</sup>

As a human phenomena, ordinary experience proves that it is easy to lose one’s thread as one wends her way through corridors of days, weeks and years.<sup>186</sup> Corridors tend to impose a *feeling* of necessity and immutability that obscure subjectivity’s leverage over their conditions.

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 96

<sup>186</sup> Bachelard, in his *Poetics of Space* makes a recurring theme of this entanglement between orientation and the palpability of our measurements. He writes, “However paradoxical this may seem, it is often this inner immensity that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world. To take a precise example, we might make a detailed examination of what is meant by the immensity of the forest. For this "immensity" originates in a body of impressions which, in reality, have little connection with geographical information. We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of "going deeper and deeper" into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are.” In, Bachelard, Gaston, and Maria Jolas. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. p. 185

In a corridor, subjectivity is lost and the body becomes mere input to another art-of-fact's feedback loop, i.e. our body becomes input for a pattern that perpetuates *it*. This is uncanny, but uncanny can only be a start. Blunt emotional terms like happy or sad are blunt instruments that probably cannot apprehend the minor feedbacks that manifest as some aesthetic like this.<sup>187</sup> Being a sage or good general may be fortuitous and effortless as a function of unique, subjective historical *a priori*, but this endowment is no more mysterious than the bluntness of the instruments to measure their ethics, to assess their response to *what to do?*

Firstly, *what to do?* has already taken for granted that *it is here*. In addition to this physical phenomena, intentionality can *wall off* entire epochs of experience. In a geometric sense it is simple to observe that being oriented toward the future will obscure how the past is reflected in the present. That is, if our only goal is to steer a ship *-forward-* this will probably occupy most of my attention. If a sailor is in a storm, this is probably a good thing, but at home this same disposition is blinding. Thrown geography and intentionality are two ways that measuring and orienting the self can dissolve the material/objective distinction.<sup>188</sup> The question *what to do?* is entangled with the question *where am I?* And where I am conditions my intentionality. If the

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<sup>187</sup> "Where emotions and the autonomic nervous system are concerned, four significant meta-analyses have been conducted in the last two decades, the largest of which covered more than 220 physiology studies and nearly 22,000 test subjects. None of these four meta-analyses found consistent and specific emotion fingerprints in the body. Instead, the body's orchestra of internal organs can play many different symphonies during happiness, fear, and the rest." Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition. P. 14

<sup>188</sup> Yi-fu Tuan tells a great anecdote about Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg visiting a castle. Citing from his book, "Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. The stones, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings in the church, constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a quite different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness in the human soul, we hear Hamlet's "To be or not to be." Yet all we really know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove that he really lived, let alone that he lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depth he was made to reveal, and so he, too, had to be found a place on earth, here in Kronberg. And once we know that, Kronberg becomes quite a different castle for us." In Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001. p. 4

body reflects the environment, and this is an inevitability, our expression is predicated on countless things that are affecting us. This is why the home as a system is a cybernetic exoskeleton: its arrangement is completely enmeshed with subjective homeostasis and any alteration of the home will be reflected somewhere in subjectivity. This means that our expression has complex origins that belie an ‘individual’s’ singular expression of emotion. Because this environment is always prior to my expression, the question of *what to do?* is firstly a question of environmental factors. My feelings, attentions and intentions are singularities of context, so whatever they *are*, they are necessarily different than they would have been in a different place. Consciousness and thin[g]king are epiphenomena of the environment. And the environment is epiphenomenal to habits because people habitually inhabit certain places- home most of all.

This *is* circular reasoning, but thin[g]king is the intervention that shifts the inertia of these things that reflect one another. Quite simply, if I want to change my behavior, I have to know how the environment is conditioning it, and secondly, I need to change the environment so that my behavior can be limited in a way that I chose ahead of time. Brian Massumi uses the term “enabling constraint” or “positive constraint” to illustrate that theoretical absolute freedom is in no way more desirable than one with constraints. As he says, “if anything goes, nothing will come.”<sup>189</sup> An absolute lack of constraint might look like zero-gravity, but this state of being might soon yearn for something to hold it down. It is important to have concepts like smart and stupid because certain corridors are unedifying in the way that they constrain subjectivity. Walling off some art-of-facts because of their corridor tendencies becomes a critical factor in the

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<sup>189</sup> Massumi, Brian. *Politics of Affect*. Malden: Polity Press, 2015. p. 175

economy of attention, in the *oikos nomos* of intentions. The wall/mirror distinction of art-of-facts is manifest in an inhibit/inhabit threshold of subjectivity.

Ordinarily the home is striated with corridors of pre-reflective habits. Every object in a home could be a corridor or a disco ball, but most are corridors that camouflage their own agency over human experience: they camouflage the homeostasis that is served by the effect it has on the subject's body. Sitting to quickly check email on a computer could turn to hours of wending through corridors. This is preventable, one way or another, by walling off a computer and reflecting upon our complicity in its logic.<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, it is entirely possible to make a disco ball of some art-of-fact that is more edifyingly left to habitude. In the absence of habit, keys can turn into a mirror of a day's history in an attempt to figure out where they might be located. Maybe even in consideration of attentional opportunity costs, it is desirable to lose the keys so that one can reflect upon a day's events. Or perhaps one would wall off some other distraction precisely to preserve some time to get lost in a web browser. What is more important than the value judgement of any habit is that the pre-reflectiveness itself is problematized. The home-human entanglement is an aesthetic, compound reflection amenable to a breakdown of many (infinite) cybernetic systems.

## THE MULTIPLICITY OF SELF AS FUNCTION OF WALLS

In chapter one, I note that short-term desires and long-term desires belong to different subjectivities- or more precisely, short-term desire is the effacement of it. Hedonism like

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<sup>190</sup> I am using walls as an empirical device to apprehend the physical conditions that condition habitude. Where art-of-facts *immediately* elicit behaviors, the materiality is immediately reflected in the mind's objectivity, to a point of indistinction. Nonetheless, human experience still apprehends a distinction. Dewey writes extensively about habits and calls the neglect of physical conditions a belief in magic. See, Dewey, John, Larry A. Hickman, and Thomas M. Alexander. "The Place of Habit in Conduct," *The Essential Dewey Volume 2: Ethics, Logic, Psychology*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.

addiction is uncanny because it is a mode of bad faith, of lying to the self.<sup>191</sup> It is an effacement of the self and a denial of the subjectivity that “does the harder thing,” the less stimulating thing, in the interest of equanimity or long-term desire.<sup>192</sup> The fact is that reflection takes time and effort. Because the brain-body will reflect the environment independently and more immediately than an ego can arrive on the scene to intervene with reflection, subjectivity is already at a disadvantage to apply the mind and its schema to the scene. Unreflectively, the brain-body could just operate in a utilitarian cybernetics of pain and pleasure walls. For moments of hedonism, subjectivity is lost and the body becomes the adornment of the reflection that possesses it. If subjectivity is lost to an object of hedonism, it is *lost*. The split subjectivity of humans rests on the possibility “to do the harder thing,” to have a higher-order thermostat whose walls constrain an average more subdued than the extremes of pleasure and pain.

From the ancient and medieval Liberal Arts, Descartes is probably responsible for the return to a (bolder) Pythagoreanism as a geo-ontology. Husserl writes, “For him a role similar to that of geometrical axioms in geometry is played in an all-embracing science by the axioms of the ego’s absolute certainty of himself, along with the axiomatic principles innate in the ego—only this axiomatic foundation lies even deeper than that of geometry and is called on to

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<sup>191</sup> Sartre’s concept of bad faith, I think, tracks short-termism as overcoming long-termism. He writes, “A man does not lie about what he is ignorant of; he does not lie when he spreads an error of which he himself is the dupe; he does not lie when he is mistaken.” See especially Chapter 2 for his analysis of bad faith. In, Sartre, Jean-Paul, and Hazel E. Barnes. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992 p. 48

<sup>192</sup> In chapter 4, I will be focusing a lot on this concept of “doing the harder thing.” This is how he describes delayed gratification with respect to neurobiology. He writes, “In a task where one chooses between an immediate and a (larger) delayed reward, contemplating the immediate reward activates limbic targets of dopamine (i.e., the mesolimbic pathway), whereas contemplating the delayed reward activates frontocortical targets (i.e., the mesocortical pathway). The greater the activation of the latter, the more likely there’ll be gratification postponement.” Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. P. 74

participate in even the ultimate grounding of geometrical knowledge.”<sup>193</sup> He most memorably and succinctly distinguished between materials and objects and he put subjectivity, thought and ontology to one unitary *point*: “I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason.”<sup>194</sup> By taking this position, he denies any truth to schema of self-perception.<sup>195</sup> Ever since, phenomenology, psychology and now neuroscience have been clawing their way back from I-think ontology. And *I think* that as far as this geometry of self persists in culture it remains the biggest obstacle to edification. It lies about egological duplicity because it cannot apprehend a multiplicity of self. Interestingly, *this* proves to be a hegemonic schema of self that is more pernicious than geo-economics because where a self resists its own duplicity, capitalism, society or politics can exploit it.

Short and long-term desires are just a simplistic way to reveal the *uncertainty* of self and being. It presents a stark contrast between two poles of being with infinite selves in between. The problem with Descartes’ geometry is that he thought he could be deceived. A belief in the possibility of false thoughts is why he had enough faith to look for true ones. He believed that sameness had ontological priority over perception.<sup>196</sup> Descartes’ position with respect to geometry is clear and these presuppositions about points, lines and planes are lurking in the

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<sup>193</sup> Interestingly, it is mentioned in a footnote that this passage was marked for deletion by Husserl. See, Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982. p. 7,8

<sup>194</sup> In, Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition. P. 19

<sup>195</sup> Descartes writes, “Most certainly, in the strict sense the knowledge of this “I” does not depend upon things of whose existence I do not yet have knowledge. Therefore it is not dependent upon any of those things that I simulate in my imagination. But this word “simulate” warns me of my error. For I would indeed be simulating were I to “imagine” that I was something...” *Ibid*

<sup>196</sup> He writes, “Surely it is the same piece of wax that I see, touch, and imagine; in short it is the same piece of wax I took it to be from the very beginning. But I need to realize that the perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone. This inspection can be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct, as it is now, depending on how closely I pay attention to the things in which the piece of wax consists.” Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett Classics) (p. 22). Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition.



whole text.<sup>197</sup> This is the schema that he presupposed and accepted *a priori*. The problem is that this schema, this *code*, has no ontological standing outside of reflection. His absolute fact does nothing to inform how he *knows thyself* because it presumes his reflection has independent poles. It is, if one wishes, *one* wall against which an ego can average itself between. But even Descartes, against the best of intentions cannot escape reflection or a negative feedback loop. Step-by-step he tries to purify his thoughts: he walls himself into solitude, he walls off his senses and (apparently) erases the objects in his mind that correspond to material things. He still cannot reduce himself to pure thinking: he still talks to himself.<sup>198</sup> Ironically, he is demonstrating to himself how critical the structural conditions of thinking are. Descartes' attempt at truth and reality founded modern philosophy in a project of meta-anthropocentrism that resonates deep into Western civilization. It established "absolutely" what human beings have in common, the way in which they are same.<sup>199</sup> But this sameness, ironically, is a reflection of the schema that humans impose on the earth to measure it.

## PERIMETER WALLS OF MEMORY

What I think we learn from Descartes is the hedonism of geometric thinking to take palpability to its limit, to become so attached to the elegance of a truth that it hedonistically rejects indeterminacy. In Euclidean geometry, there are very clean walls between entities.

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<sup>197</sup> For instance, "...the arguments I use here do, in my opinion, equal or even surpass those of geometry in certitude and obviousness..." Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition. P. 3

<sup>198</sup> He writes, "I will now shut my eyes, stop up my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will also blot out from my thoughts all images of corporeal things, or rather, since the latter is hardly possible, I will regard these images as empty, false and worthless. And as I converse with myself alone and look more deeply into myself, I will attempt to render myself gradually better known and more familiar to myself." Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition. P. 24

<sup>199</sup> "For the truth itself will easily cause other men of intelligence and learning to subscribe to your judgment." Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.. Kindle Edition. P. 4

Wholes are absolute. Wholes, however, only have such distinct walls in this sort of geometry- which is why it cannot be a model for all thinking. For instance, in a famous article Benoit Mandelbrot argued with his fractal geometry that the coast of England is infinitely long: the finer the method for measurement the longer the coastline becomes.<sup>200</sup> This logic of an infinite perimeter, *a whole without limit*, does nothing to diminish how England can be reflected upon as a singular thin[g]k. This may be contradictory, but it is not a paradox because there is no absolute reality to diminish the truth of either one. There is no need to choose which whole is the real one because overlapping schema is what distinguishes edification from geo-politics. In fact, each of these perspectives are applicable to different logics, and together, they inform one another.

Choosing one perspective is to wall off one, and at the same time, entrench the ego in the corridor of the other. Singular perspectives as absolute truths can only be sustained for so long before the world forces a person to adopt another or lie to himself. Geometry is a perfectly good perspective, but as a model for all others, it walls off reflection. Geometry is alluring because so many things, when mapped according to its schema, are made elegant in the process. But this comes at a cost. What we learn from infinite perimeters that *make sense* is that making sense is an art in that it *makes* it. And where geometry helps to make sense of many things, it is an obstruction to other phenomena because it conditions a mode of proper thinking and proper thinking cannot accommodate many things that seem to work. Mnemonics is a good example of the prejudice that geometric pedagogy imposes on the “art of memory.” Memories are made in weird ways that geometry would not predict because the more planes of thought clash, the likelier it is that a person will form a memory.

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<sup>200</sup> See, Mandelbrot, Benoit B. *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*. New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1983. p. 26

If for instance, I ask *what is the 10th letter of the alphabet?* you are likely to reach out your hand and poke your fingers out to the tune of a nursery rhyme. The English alphabet is inextricably laminated to every English speaker's mind by way of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. This is unforgettable nonsense, yet, for better or worse, Twinkle Twinkle is the edifice of my alphabet. In Great Britain there are several mnemonic verses put to the tune of Good King Wenceslas that once (but rarely today) helped school children memorize the sequence of monarchs in the country. And for contracts, there was once a practice called "beating the bounds" where a property transaction would be sealed by physically striking a child hard enough to be unforgettable. This is weird and mean, but it worked because memory is aesthetic, oblique and indirect. Memory is aided by nonsense rather than inhibited by it. Such methods have scarcely persisted eras of ubiquitous access to text, seemingly as if what is on the text *should* be mirrored in the mind as it is *as text*. The few mnemonics that remain are indelible: *Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally; Never Eat Shredded Wheat; Every Good Boy Does Fine, etc.* The price for this obsession for elegance is the pain of rote memorization. Despite the fact that mnemonic devices still work, text largely rendered mnemonics obsolete as if like points, lines and planes a code is better than actual experience. Text walls off an entire aesthetics of thought that seemed to have a more human grip on the human brain-body.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Walter Ong wrote a lovely book on oral communication. I think it is some of the best evidence that thinking itself suffers from the prejudices of geometric normativity. He writes, for instance, "Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper', and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems." See, Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 2002 p. 34

With mnemonics it is easier to admit that what comes to mind cannot be exactly the same for me as it is for you. But more importantly, despite the fact that I do not have an Aunt Sally, something (what, I cannot say) palpable or whole come to mind despite the indeterminacy of perimeter walls. I cannot even picture her face, yet her intervention made it easier for me to recall that Addition and Subtraction followed Parentheses and Exponents. This does not make sense against a geometric background. I should simply grasp and retain the logic of order of operations because of its elegance, but I am not a recording device. Text and numbers are not supposed to have textures, smells or sounds. Text and numbers are supposed to be hyper-efficient windows to the signified that they signify- like trees out the window on a sunny day. But to a much higher degree than a window, the text *filters out* and *walls subjectivity off* all but the most abstracted experience. And to say *filtered* is a gross understatement because a reader needs to *translate* the art-of-factual code, somehow, into a palpable concept. This process of translation that is presupposed to be a window, is actually a wall. This presupposition, more than computer chips and mind-reading technology, is what has been at work to structure humans in the image of a machine.

This abstracted experience is the foundation for school learning. Age walls, classroom walls and progress walls are now met with walls of text and numbers. This all makes sense in the meta-anthropocentrism of geometric ontology, but it is nonetheless difficult for humans who cannot jump their shadow to comprehend. I think it cannot be understated how *formative* this post-human pedagogy is in building a subjective edifice. This is the edifice that people are thrown into.

Weirdly, it seems that mnemonics is embraced primarily by performers plying their trade to decks of cards and the endless corridor of pi. But the *art of memory* is truly a Liberal Art

because they are an attempt to “perfect the mind” by working with it, as it is given. It is the most honest and *human* art because it, more than any other kind of learning, discloses the historical *a priori* of unique experience rather than walling them off. I believe that if mnemonics strikes us as idiosyncratic, this is evidence of the grip that geometric thinking has on us. Mnemonics are only as weird as human minds and human experience. They are the most anthropocentric Liberal Art. They are only weird in contrast to the machinic elegance of geometry, the kind of elegance with which we try to flatter ourselves when we reflect upon the Pythagorean theorem.

Mnemonics merits the attention of edification because they bring geo-politics into the subjective space of recollection and thin[g]king. They shift the leverage of reflection by calling on subjectivity to draw from its own resources to reflect upon some art-of-fact as given. That is, subjectivity encodes the code rather than the text encoding the student. Mnemonics front-loads a process that we often do in reverse, when we search our souls for something we know *we know*. We experience recall as spontaneous because somewhere in our bodies all of the things in our environment are reflected- most beneath threshold of consciousness. I cannot even keep track of how the temperatures, colors, paintings, smells and muzak in the room are causing my brain to reflect, but they are. All of this contextualizes everything new that I apprehend. This is why if I know that I know something but I cannot recall it, I start to triangulate it by first recalling aspects of it. *Where was I?...it starts with the letter A...it has something to do with...rhymes with...it was snowing when I encountered it...* At some point, I might hit a critical mass of context clues that elicit a eureka event of recall.

The soul-dwelling overlap of edification is explicit in one of the most common mnemonic systems that maps more abstract information to objects and places in the home. It is

commonly taught in public speaking, but it is old. Cicero endorses it in his book on rhetoric.<sup>202</sup> It works precisely for the reasons that recall operates so obliquely. Symbolic things are made more palpable by associating them with familiar objects. Importantly, the associations do not need to make geometric sense. Just like Shredded Wheat has nothing to do with the cardinal directions, but helps us remember them, peculiarities in my home can help me more easily memorize an historical timeline of events, for instance. A list of presidents becomes more palpable if translated through a routine I am familiar with, using the objects I use. If I thin[g]k Washington using my toothbrush or Lincoln watching TV on the sofa, they will be more palpable. These thin[g]ks are easier to use and work with than a list. The irony is that treating ourselves like machines is not only more painful, but it is not even very effective by comparison.

This has its own elegance to it, albeit, radically different from the geometric clarity of perimeter walls. What is true of any mnemonic is all the more true of this “loci” technique because it draws from the multiplicity of familiar art-of-facts to envelope otherwise exclusive bits of information. It overwhelms new things with ready-made context rather subjugating subjectivity to the context that is over the horizon. What I find elegant about it is that it cements the uniqueness of apprehension of even the most codified and rarefied thin[g]ks. It carries the phenomenon of the mirror into ordinary art-of-facts; it leverages a consciousness swollen with *home* and reflects it upon them. In contrast, proper thinking obstructs *this* reflection in order to be *reflected in* the normal one.

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<sup>202</sup> “I do not altogether dislike the use as well, as some are accustomed to it, of that system of associating commonplaces with symbols, which is taught in the profession.” I am guessing that this tepid endorsement might have something to do with a prejudice against oral techniques among lettered people in his time. See, Cicero, and E.W Sutton. *Cicero in Twenty-eight Volumes: III De Oratore*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967. p. 107-8

## NORMAL FAMILY

Mnemonics would have an uphill battle in geo-politics. If someone makes a palpable connection like the first president brushing his wooden teeth with my toothbrush because it is the first thing I do in the morning, or the sixteenth president watching tv on my sofa because it is what I do at 1600, these are seeing things that are not “real.” In fact the more palpable this becomes, the closer we come to diagnosing such hallucinations as schizophrenic. It is more socially acceptable to just know these facts *without knowing how we know them*- as if this process were like making sausage. Mnemonics makes a virtue of *crazy*. But the nonsense of mnemonics calls into the question whatever virtue there may be in normality, which is what I turn to now.

With respect to psychiatry, Foucault refers to a “technology of abnormality” where “Everywhere, all the time, in the simplest, most common, and most everyday conduct, in its most familiar object, psychiatry will deal with something that is an irregularity in relation to a norm and that must be at the same time a pathological dysfunction in relation to the normal.”<sup>203</sup> Foucault’s entire corpus reveals how nonsensical the social edifice is, how “collective wisdom” shapes individual subjectivities in demonstrably violent ways. Here, he discloses that *crazy* is just a value judgement, an ontological claim, about how the mind should behave. And as such it is political technology. Psychiatry can be abused to take a magnifying glass to a person’s thoughts to ostracise them. This is a formalization of the phenomena of age-segregated *Lord of the Flies*. Anthropologists theorize a similar phenomenon of “pseudo-kinship” where “you

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<sup>203</sup> Foucault, Michel, and Graham Burchell. *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*. New York: Picador, 2003. p. 162-163.

cooperate with (i.e. act related to) individuals who share conspicuous traits with you.”<sup>204</sup> The mirror image of which, is, to put it mildly, non-cooperation.

What is insidious about the “technology of abnormality” is the way that this constructed sameness can relegate such a huge diversity of thin[g]kers into one category and treat them similarly by virtue of this abnormality. If there were not such a social aversion to using mnemonics, perhaps it would be clearer how radically different every thinker is. That is, it may become more obvious that every person apprehends art-of-facts differently. Not only is this difference manifest between people, but also through time in a singular individual person. Everythin[g]k is a novel, subjective production every time. All art-of-facts undergo some process of translation in becoming palpable. Even if this cannot be “proven” (against reality?), I think that its efficacy is more philosophically demonstrable than any theory of sameness. If this can be shown, that neither you nor I can see the same thing when we look in the mirror, what does this hold for abnormality? I think it shows that an abnormal person, too, also sees something different. This much, we all have in common.

The illusion (as *stupid* view) that sameness is a feature of the world, holds because the perimeter walls of perception and inference are flexible enough to permit it. It remains that it can be more challenging to infer sameness with some people more than others. Ethically, this poses a challenge, however, not an ontological difference. The most innovative and fascinating psychiatric experiment confronted this obstacle to reflection by systematically knocking down hierarchical walls in the hospital. A clinic called the Château de la Borde, or La Borde, about an hour south of Paris began experimenting with “Institutional Psychotherapy” in the early 1950’s. The basic concept behind the hospital was to first eliminate the barriers between the medical

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<sup>204</sup> Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. P. 341



professionals and the building staff. Doctors were doing dishes and dishwashers were dispensing medicine until there was no “rift between the presumably ‘noble’ tasks of the medical staff and the thankless, material tasks of the service personnel.”<sup>205</sup> But its knocking down of walls did not stop there. Guattari explains that there was a lot of friction and that, “Again and again, each problem had to be taken-up and reargued without ever losing sight of the basic orientation that consisted in gradually desegregating the doctor-patient relationship as much as that between the medical staff and service personnel.”<sup>206</sup>

At this hospital, patients would actually assume responsibility for administering medicine to other patients. Isn’t this *insane*? Guattari writes, “Before meeting Jean Oury, I, too, thought madness embodies a sort of inversion of the world- strange, disquieting, and fascinating. In the communal style of life at La Borde in those years, the patients appeared to me in a completely different aspect: familiar, friendly, human.”<sup>207</sup> Institutional Psychotherapy, despite the sterile name, should draw our attention to the politics of treating difference. That is, in treating people like humans they start to look like them. The sick irony of abnormality is that the diagnosis of difference has long led to treatments that exacerbate an inferential disparity. That is, the treatment will actually re-affirm, embolden and justify the means taken to handle the unethically perceived difference. Who would not act *crazy* if they were confined to padded walls? I think that one of the most poignant expressions of the success of La Borde was in a documentary about the hospital called, “Every Little Thing.” In an interview, a patient said that he felt like he was floating, “But I’m at La Borde, so I’ll be all right.” The interviewer then asked if he felt

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<sup>205</sup> Guattari, Félix, and Sylvère Lotringer. *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. p.178

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 179

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 177

protected there and the patient says, “Not exactly mothered, no, but we’re protected from the outside world... We’re here among ourselves...and you’re here among us too now.”<sup>208</sup>

What I find so poignant about this man’s response is that, presumably, his own family rejected him. For “abnormal” people, it is perfectly, socially acceptable to seek a political solution to a family experiencing dysfunction. But what is the source of this dysfunction? What are the perimeter walls of inference that legitimate ejecting somebody from the home? Or more importantly, how, why and by whom are these walls defined? Subjectively? Or politically? This is not to say that an inferential disparity is never the cause for extreme answers to *what to do?* Faced with a person incapable of sharing with me an inferential value in our neighborly existence, for instance, may be occasion for fight or flight. But I think that this is exceedingly rare, even among our abnormals. It is certainly the case for this particular man, who by no fault of his own, was rejected by geo-economics, the home that manages all homes like any other.

La Borde, as I understand it, is not a hospital, an orphanage or a prison, but it is a surrogate home that is swollen with conscientiousness. Its success actually underscores that pathology of ordinary politics to hedonistically hallucinate sameness where it is not and to order these categories into violent hierarchies. Sameness and hierarchy are just schema among infinite others. La Borde simply operates on another schema of reciprocity and structurally creating the conditions of empathy. These are different home making strategies and these schema are inferable from both populations and individual homes alike. They create different kinds of subjectivities. “Not only did they familiarize themselves with the world of madness (as the Labordian system revealed it to be), not only did they learn new techniques, but their whole way

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<sup>208</sup> *Every Little Thing*. Directed by Nicolas Philibert. France, 1996. Accessed November 15, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKJp9JLqTkY>.

of seeing and living was modified. More specifically, they shed that protective armor with which so many nurses, educators and social workers guard themselves against the alterity that unsettles them.”<sup>209</sup>

That the concept of La Borde is *insane* shows that its burden of proof placed upon it came from “outside world” that was otherwise impervious to abnormality. To the extent that it still seems insane to run a psychiatric hospital this way, I think shows how distant geo-politics is from an epistemology of home. What is La Borde if not the concept that home and the walls that enclose us do more to produce subjectivity than genes and objective reality?

La Borde probably would not have come into being if Western culture were not so obtuse, violent and geometric. The same is true of phenomenology. And perhaps the inanity of this obtuseness could open onto a more honest way of using the mind as a tool to learn. Geo-politics, as violent and evil as it is, is very edifying for all the ways it inspires these institutions *not to be*. Now, it is not a penchant for exoticism that keep drawing Confucius into the question of politics and home management. A burden of proof is still a burden and any one of these eclectic institutions would be *at home* in an epistemology of family. Or to put it a different way, the burden that geometric elegance places on subjectivity to defend its weird humanity is lifted under a schema that acknowledges, and thrives on the fact, that all humans are thrown and different. That is, a burden of proof is a wall that apparently filters out a lot of people.

In Chinese thought, shared-difference is not a contradiction, but it is a description of the human predicament that demands to be apprehended through reflection. Upon reflection, it is obvious that what is common among us is that we see things differently. *Sameness* is just what we call the inference whose perimeter is infinitely long. It is useful so that we can communicate

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<sup>209</sup> Guattari, Félix, and Sylvère Lotringer. *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009. p.180

about England, even if this communication has no ontological standing. As with the Liberal Arts, in rhetoric, we *communicate* about reality, we do not learn it.

It was not lost on Confucius that family is *not* inherently good; his emphasis is on how important it is to make good of it.<sup>210</sup> Home, whatever it is, is an inescapable aspect of the human condition. A *code of conduct* reading of *The Analects*, I think, misses his priority that *home* needs to happen somehow. *Splitting up* is one way to resolve a dysfunctional home, but obviously this incurs a lot of pain. The threat of this pain is probably responsible for a lot of longer and less intense, yet all the more pernicious, “disharmony.” For better or worse, Confucius starts from the inevitability: we cannot choose our parents; we can only choose our friends. It is for him an edifying and “enabling constraint.” Sure, however, this is why friendship figures so prominently the *Analects*: they edify with more agency than family.<sup>211</sup> But home is the one you have; it is an exoskeleton.

There are crazy people in every family and doubtless, some of us *are* the crazy ones. This is hard to manage, and surely some families have jerks in them that *should* be abandoned. Largely, however, thresholds of tolerance would have to improve if there is no choice but to live alongside crazy people. And as La Borde shows, and Confucius would agree, the thresholds of tolerance will rise when we are structurally made to endure the roles and perspectives of other

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<sup>210</sup> In 13.18 of *The Analects* there is a notorious passage about a son who “covers for his father” to protect him from the law after he stole a sheep. While one argument goes that you should subject *even your family* to the authorities when they do something as morally suspect as stealing, Confucius argued that “being true” resides in taking care of your family above all else- even if they are jerks. See, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Location 2902

<sup>211</sup> The most disruptive passage for a reading of Confucius as codifying the family is his *contradictory* behavior that followed the death of his favorite student Yan Hui. He said, “I grieve with abandon? If I don’t grieve with abandon for him, then for whom?” *Ibid*, 2564

people.<sup>212</sup> Both of these arguments are against social hierarchy and dwell on geographic inevitability rather than the code.

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<sup>212</sup> One of the ways that Ames interprets Confucian sociology is in terms of “beneficiaries and benefactors.” That is, in one moment someone is in a role of benefitting from some other’s care, in the next, they are caring for another. See, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Location 544

### CHAPTER 3: UTILITIES

*In this chapter, I will apply reflection beyond discussions of subjective consciousness to work toward more of the art-of-facts that consciousness will be conscious of. To do this, I gradually pull away from the ego end of a reflection by engaging structuralism and poststructuralism. I will discuss how their disciplines are related to thin[g]king. I build up to a discussion of social structure to then work my way back from utilities. From these fossils of politics, I then return to the complexity of the home.*

#### **STRUCTURALISM AND EDIFICATION: SIMILARITIES AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

There is probably no philosophy that weaponizes the stupidity of culture more than Cynicism. There is *this* resonance that edification shares with Cynicism: it is anti-politics. But it is a philosophy of *absolute* anti-politics. Peter Sloterdijk writes of Diogenes of Sinope, “His spectacular poverty is the price of freedom; that must be understood. If he could be well-off without sacrificing his freedom, he would not have objected at all.”<sup>213</sup> The cynic, as is well-known, takes its name from the word *dog* or canine. And this was the cynic ideal: to be as needless and happy as the naked animal. “To call him an ascetic would be incorrect because of the false undertones the word asceticism has assumed through a thousand-year-long masochistic misunderstanding...A dogmatism of poverty does not come into question; it is rather a matter of discarding false weights, which hinder one’s freedom of movement.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> In, Sloterdijk, Peter, and Michael Eldred. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. p.158

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*

Diogenes, despite the resonance, is a limit, polar and binary case of reflection. He is said to have claimed of his hometown, "I am a citizen of the world"- and from the world in a jar that he lives in, "The kynic thus sacrifices his social identity and foregoes the psychic comfort of unquestioned membership to join in the collective irrationality of one's society, there, the kynic's refusal has Utopian significance."<sup>215</sup> In other words the cynic's rejection derives meaning from *no place*. So despite the admirable calling into question the civilized norms of eating, defecating and having sex, I think that Diogenes is a geometric hedonist. The formula for Diogenes is a reflex to do precisely the opposite of what he observes in the stupidity of *civilized* people. In this way, he is geometric but in the mirror image of statecraft: *just like it*, but opposite. He represents both an antipode to political existence and an opposite to edification- despite the non-coincidence of the latter two. To flesh out what is between all of these, I turn to structuralism because it is so adept at diagramming between vast differences.

Edification is intimately tied to the structuralist fields of inquiry- such as linguistics, anthropology, psychology and sociology. Like edification, these all attempt to put big and small scales into one conversation. They all observe and thrive on the difference between the code and the concept. They observe a distinction between synchrony and diachrony. All of these similarities are amenable to a reading through the phenomena of reflection. Because of all of these similarities, it will be more illustrative to dwell on the points of departure and leave the similarities to implications. The following are a few of them.

Broadly, edification takes emphatic positions with respect to *building one's soul* in spite of social improvement. It is technically cynical in this way. Edification has no interest in improving society. Or more accurately, edification has a *negative* or *anti-interest* in society

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<sup>215</sup> Sloterdijk, Peter, and Michael Eldred. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 164

because social coherence is *unedifying*. It needs to be in negative tension with society so that its thin[g]king is not merely *what it is conscious of*, but by indirection, also what it is not. Like history, conspicuous omission is a presence. Where each mode of structuralism has a particular tension (sign-signifier, species-environment, individual-society etc.), homemaking is specifically in tension with geometry at a theoretical level. At the political level it is in tension with the code, normality, or the ordinary. These differences are enough to mean that edification is not a species of structuralism, despite the resonances. Structuralism tends to identify common denominators to inform code-knowledge (as any science does), but edification takes its own departure from codes to family-ar knowledge.

Also, where all structuralisms drive toward a particular *point* or foundation, edification is theoretically opposed to this kind of geometry. In the end, edification is structurally inside out because for it, politics is the difference that makes no difference. Politics is the business of sameness and edification is anti-sameness. The idea that *all politics is same* is the ironic and tautologically productive tensor that casts edification as the mirror image of politics. Edification approaches all wills to sameness (in their plurality) as one singular kind of sameness: a geometric epistemology. Sameness, as a phenomenon of consciousness, is implied wherever consciousness is not thin[g]king. In this way, an epistemology of familiarity is a structuralism ethically oriented to uncloaking sameness in its own edifice.

## **STRUCTURALISM AND EDIFICATION: TIME**

An important point of departure with structuralism is the way that familiarity is oriented toward time. Structuralism's knowledge has predictive value. Rhetorically, it is political because it is future oriented. Its *what to do?*, even if implicit, speaks to society's future and its



hypothetical agents. It is geometry for geometric time. Edification, by contrast, is a technology of self. It adheres to subjective time that is not synchronized to clocks or oriented in singular historical narratives. It is not even linear, it swells. All notions of time (historical, future, cause-effect etc.) are fundamentally epideictic because they inform the present simultaneously. Past and future have *no being* outside of their effect on the present.<sup>216</sup> Edification reconfigures the entire temporal scene of *what to do?* to the mediated future. Subjective time only registers moments that attain some art-of-factual existence. “Objective” time is completely synthetic- not only in our time pieces, but also in the chronologies of history books and weather predictions. They are notions for the present. Insofar as edification is a structuralism, past, present, future always have to recenter on subjective experience because there is nothing outside of reflection.

Time is epiphenomenal to thin[g]king— not a structure that structures it. That is, the objective structure is an after-thought. For subjective experience and discourse, there are only moments *qua* artifacts, so the entire time structure of edification is suspended in the self same reflection that contains the art-of-fact and consciousness. That is, if one reflects on *how one apprehended* something, it would reveal a schema that could be exchanged for another. Where consciousness apprehends contrast, diachrony and synchrony are in fact in a dialectical relationship. At grander schematic scales, this is too complex for structuralism because an analysis needs to choose between synchronic and diachronic temporalities. Structure has this much in common with our narrative reason, but not with our conscious experience. Our

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<sup>216</sup> Bergson’s concept of time is particularly helpful to understand a Confucian sense of, what I have been calling, “swollen” consciousness. He depicts time as an upside down cone where the point is touching a plane (forgive the recourse to such a geometric image). This is his way of describing how consciousness draws memory out of the body. He writes, “So on the one hand, the memory of the past offers to the sensori-motor mechanisms all the recollections capable of guiding them in their task and of giving to the motor reaction the direction suggested by the lessons of experience...But, on the other hand, the sensori-motor apparatus furnish to ineffective, that is unconscious, memories, the means of taking on a body, of materializing themselves, in short of becoming present.” Bergson, Henri and N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer. *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone Books, 2016. P. 152-153

discourse and behavior will be apprehended by us linearly and narratively. Thin[g]king changes art-of-facts through time; what is not thought will be experienced as same.<sup>217</sup> Thinking pivots through time this way- not according to clocks, but corridors. Outside of conscious reflection, then, the ego too is *same*.<sup>218</sup> It can be left behind in the corridor while consciousness is being *reflected in* some particular object of attention. And where it reflects on future-oriented projects, it occupies a gap in discontinuous history and future- the temporality of fantasy.

## **STRUCTURALISM AND EDIFICATION: MALLEABILITY OF POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

The second point of departure from structuralism is that structure has effects, but its code is not real *qua* determinate or necessary. The ways that my life is structured by utilities are more mediate, existential and affective than any political-social contingency. Where art-of-factual contingency *is the structuring feature* of subjectivity, *life* is lost to those causes that are grounded in geometric “reality.” Obviously these temporality phenomena exist on a continuum of degrees (maybe measured in moments where self-is in the reflection). But only the self-same

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<sup>217</sup> Merleau-Ponty points out that when we apprehend an object we have implicit expectations for the faces of the object that we cannot see. One may recall uncanny cases where a person’s face has two different profiles. His point is important for showing how “objectivity” is a subjective construction. He writes, “When I see the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not merely the qualities that are visible from my location, but also those that the fireplace, the walls, and the table can ‘see’...I can see an object insofar as objects form a system or a world, and insofar as each of them arranges the others around itself like spectators of its hidden aspects and the guarantee of their permanence. Each act of seeing that I perform is instantly reiterated among all the objects of the world that are grasped as coexistent because each object just is all that the others ‘see’ of it.” In, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012. p.71

<sup>218</sup> In another scenario, Merleau-Ponty describes how his apprehension of dice presupposes that his body *could* give him access to all sides of it. As far as his concept of self presupposes this ability, it effaces the particular experience of apprehending something. He writes, “Reflective analysis releases us from a first dogmatism, which consists in taking for granted that the objects exists in itself or absolutely, without wondering what the object is. But there is another dogmatism, which consists in taking for granted the presumptive signification of the object without wondering how it enters into our experience.” I read this to say that these presuppositions, like all presuppositions, reveal how a schema can stand in for the ego with respect to the body. That is, the body does not need the ego to apprehend the object anew when it has an historical apprehension (habitual) of it. *Ibid*, p. 211

consciousness can gauge this *fall*. Political theory likes to call out the signs for *lost souls* or chained people, but this is political rhetoric: nobody can see what another sees in the mirror. And as a structural feature of reflection: the closer I come to seeing what you see when looking in the mirror (putting my eyes where your's are) the more comprehensively I cover your reflection (face) with that of my own. Your perspective becomes meaningless when I try to replicate it. That is, the more I try to absolutize an inference, the more I am reflected *in* a contradiction.

It is political and violent to apprise someone else of his/her loss of life. This is how “consciousness raising” can be so insidious even with the best of intentions. It makes enemies and victims all in one manifesto. It materializes an object of scorn at the same time that it materializes victimhood so conceived by an agitator. Doubtless, some social schema are stupid and should be avoided even at extreme costs. This is an issue for edification, however, not for politics. If I cause another to see a victim in the mirror, if I cause her or him to see a particular reflection when looking in the mirror, I have inflicted this person with a particular self-sameness. This is fundamentally unethical because I am conditioning *what to do?* for him or her- whether this self-image I offer leads to “freedom” or not.

Politics leans on a stable structure of reality to take its measurements for justice and other concepts because the words *right and wrong* carry an ontological force that is absent in the claims to *smart or stupid*. But as politics itself proves, reality is as volatile as the interest leveraging it.<sup>219</sup> While absolutely no art-of-fact is the same for any two people, political ideologies strive to make them *same* through these shared sense certainties. This is why a theory

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<sup>219</sup> Stephen Jay Gould shows how measurement leans on a version of reality (usually using the legitimacy credentials of “science”) to entrench power where it can. He says, that he come to “understand the power of treating generalities by particulars.” This is a neat way of describing the politics of demographics- as if one aspect of a human explained a generality. See, Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996. p. 20

of knowledge based on familiarity is more candid about its social potential. It permits of neighbors because being unfamiliar is fine; it is given that familiarity is not the sort of thing that gets completed- it just has a threshold of efficacy.

What has to be checked is the geometric impulse to mistake familiarity for code knowledge, and worse, to proliferate the elegance of one perception. This impulse is strong such that an ostensible foundation of political tolerance is no less susceptible to dogmatism. Tolerance of intolerance involutes; and intolerance of tolerance can threaten the entire utopian project. Failures in dogmas of tolerance show that *sameness* (even one that extols difference as a virtue) is fundamentally political when it attempts to impose tolerance geometrically. There are always limits to tolerance (is that not what the word means?) and these cannot be circumscribed in something as vast as society. Tolerance struggles even in small polities, not least of all, in homes. It is still more possible in such places because it is more possible to wall off stupidities that a subjectivity, home or small group does not want reflected in it.

An epistemology of home fundamentally cannot be a model or design for society because familiarity cannot be exchanged like a currency. Familiarity can only be measured by a tape hooked on the self. So even when we discuss structure, utilities and social phenomenon it always has to put subjectivity in question. Harry Kelly, anarchist and school advocate, wrote, “We make no claim to saving the world, we are but trying to save our own ‘souls’.”<sup>220</sup> Whatever implications these reflections have for society (good or bad) need to remain *implications*, or this conversation abruptly turns down a political corridor. Similar to how Mandelbrot demonstrated

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<sup>220</sup> The case of anarchist schools is particularly instructive because they so often involved very bold personalities, who were, ironically, adamant about not being co opted by order. The irony is that avoiding this so often led to problems of moral purity and dogmatism that undercut their original reasons for forming their pedagogical utopias. See the conclusion of, Avrich, Paul. *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism in the United States*. Oakland: AK Press 2006. p. 386.

England's infinite perimeter, all concepts are necessarily fuzzy around the edges lest they become hard objects of policy.

## REFLECTION AS A TETHER FOR POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Structuralism was conceived in admiration of the sciences and sought its own *points*. As it evolved, it was correct in its impulse to cannibalize its foundations- to reinvent itself by appropriating its old self.<sup>221</sup> But in doing this, structuralism was not yet cognizant of the fact that this would ultimately provide the insight that beneath structure, there is no foundation. So where structuralists sought their own durable scientific laws, it ended up in the same place that advanced science always does: philosophy.

As with any time that we discover that our old structures were sited on poor foundations, there is the potential for sophism to extend this uncertainty into the present so that nothing (rather than something) runs all the way up and down. An epistemology of home, then, is closer to post-structuralism as far as it rejects absolutism at the same time that it recognizes that structure still *structures* even if its foundation is in question. *Reflection* is my response to a foundation for post-structure because it holds structure to some rhetorical (*communication of reality*) account unlike sophism, nihilism and the worst excesses of postmodernism.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> In his *History of Structuralism*, Dosse explains how the ambitions of science were tempered gradually. Social structure was first sought, then it was admitted that there was no single constant to be found. Attention turned to other structures only to discover more. This played out in language, psychology and anthropology. In each case where some stable structure appeared, its influence on other structures pointed toward complexity rather than elegance. Nothing is binary, hence, a speaker changes the object it speaks of, the analyst and the patient change each other, and the ethnographer alters the culture that he/she thinks attempts to capture in its purity. These realizations, of course, come only after a *structure* tries to find its datum point, its fundamental building block only to find again and again that context matters. See esp., Dosse, Francois, and Deborah Glassman. *History of Structuralism: Volume I* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 p. 13-17

<sup>222</sup> For me, Baudrillard is the postmodern archetype of the sophist. In my reading, he shows what is at stake in phenomenology by performing an ontological taxonomy of the real via simulacra and simulation. He writes, "Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. Such would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the *absence* of a

Edification evades the question of reality to put ethics into a confrontation with empirical reflections. It puts the question of *what to do?* in confrontation with freedom instead of ideals. Not only do structures *structure* behaviors, they are also part of the cybernetics of subjectivity that stabilize free behavior between constraints.

Edification does not take the rejection of geometry into metaphysics. A theory of homemaking does not reject reality so forcefully that it is cornered into a reality of *no reality*-going this far would be hedonistic. Edification just regards the question of reality to be irrelevant to a more existential force of familiarity. Somewhat awkwardly for the hierarchy of philosophy, reflection seems to make sense of Being (ontology is a branch *of* metaphysics) without doing meta-anthropocentrism. Reflection demonstrates the multiplicity of singular art-of-facts empirically and without a demanding a rhetorical case for the *logic* of relations or the *logic* of substances. Reflection allows contradiction without paradox. A thin[g]k is what it is *as it is* in consciousness. In terms of reflection, a thin[g]k also is *what it is not* because it has gone past or into corridors. The less it is the same (political) the more it is edified- unless this anti-sameness takes on a consistency of its own.<sup>223</sup>

Because we can only *be* what we are in reflection, the edifice of subjectivity has an historical and path-dependent (corridor-conditioned) structure. Because consciousness is somewhere between the brain's faster frame rate and my dull (or cultural) awareness of geological time, when I am at home, the things I do to change my environment will alter my

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profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum." In short, my critique of Baudrillard is in his ontological category of real as distinct from fake. See, Baudrillard, Jean, and Sheila Faria Glaser. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010. p. 6

<sup>223</sup> Stavrakakis writes a book about how Lacan helps us to ground the post-structuralist subject. He writes, "As with most Lacanian concepts it is easier to approach the concept of the subject in Lacan by pointing out what it is not, that is to say through a certain *via negativa*." See, Stavrakakis, Yannis. *Lacan & the Political*. New York: Routledge, 1999. p. 17

future behaviors.<sup>224</sup> That is, home is the nexus of significance for all thin[g]king despite ontological claims derived from high-acuity science or the hegemonic claims of cosmogony. These behaviors make virtually no difference in the wider world, but domestically, they are differences that make all the difference. These behaviors have political implications, but only by indirection. They do not *engage* in political sameness but are nonetheless political for evading it, that is, liminally defined by the sameness that they *have not* fallen prey to.<sup>225</sup> This Confucian-eque epistemology of the home rounds out the theory of edification. It also distinguishes edification from structuralism's yearning to be a royal science.<sup>226</sup> At the same time, I think that this gives poststructuralism, phenomenology and other continental philosophies like new materialism a more forceful application than adding to society's bank of knowledge for critiquing social institutions.

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<sup>224</sup> The notion of a brain's frame rate is at one helpful and unhelpful. Experiments try to figure this out by showing evaluatees a sequence of lights at different speeds. At a certain speeds two lights flashing will be apprehended as simultaneous. At another speed, they will appear as in motion (the phenomenon the motion pictures exploit). They find that events falling within 100 milliseconds will be perceived as simultaneous. What I learn from this is that the brain has limits even where it trained on some focal point. By implication, we also know that concentration on this will cost awareness of other areas. I am less interested in what can be accomplished with knowledge of the 'speed of thought' than I am in simply having some demonstration that consciousness is constrained with respect to what it can ascertain from the environment. For a in interesting discussion of this, see, Thompson, Evan. *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. p. 40-45

<sup>225</sup> In the *Art of Not Being Governed* James Scott lends geographic clarity to this where the people of "Zomia" is a state effect. That is, the land that they call home is defined by evading state-making projects in all of the surrounding lands. They are the mirror images of the states that tried to capture them. See, Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. p.142-144

<sup>226</sup> "Royal science" is the term that Deleuze and Guattari use, I think, to indicate the politics and power of measurement. In their "War Machines" chapter they say they "...reduces as much as possible the possible range of the 'problem element' and subordinates it to the 'theorem element'." As with the point about questions in the chapter on *walls*, a presupposition (theorem) can wall off perspectives (problems). See, Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011. p. 362.

## STRUCTURALISM AND ITS DISCIPLINES

Before turning to political fossils which are unmistakably born of geometric thin[g]king turned into political structures, I first want to address structuralism's inquiry into (and creation of) several disciplines. In the shadow of science, structuralism was initially attempting a kind of geomancy- to divine the rules governing human existence. Where it was listening, however, it was listening for the pythagorean theorem.<sup>227</sup> Its interest was not in listening for its own sake; it wanted abstract points to hang its tape measure onto. We infer that before social projects were the dominant force of the "nature" in which we were thrown, humans led a more animal existence conditioned by a non-synthetic environment. We still call this "nature" to distinguish it from ruins, fossils and politics that the World Economy manages today. At the species level, structuralism promised a more elegant understanding of human behavior and its meaning. At the social level, structuralism was helping us to know ourselves by taking science to the questions of human exceptionalism that were still largely relegated to either theology, or, the confidence that established disciplines would figure it out in their own good time. Importantly, structuralism was all about a *social organism* reflecting on itself *for the sake of social progress*. The implications for existential human consciousness were pointed to abstractly, generally and universally. As with other sciences, the climax of this story is when it fails spectacularly. But *this is a* spectacular fall that could not have happened without a legion of intelligent people exhausting a line of thought.

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<sup>227</sup> Dosse writes of "...a desire to dissociate the two levels of analysis so that the structure could be conceived as separate from what it structures, and therefore to force it to a purely formal level: 'only through typology does linguistics rise to quite general points of view and become a science.'" He also refers to the drives toward understanding the "code" of language, the "ontologization of subtending structures" and "a possible mathematization of the whole of the sciences" that was in the ethos of early structuralism. In, Dosse, Francois, and Deborah Glassman. *History of Structuralism: Volume 1* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 p. 69



I want to briefly describe this fall in a few of its aspects. In each of these aspects, the falls all direct us to the fact that there is nothing outside of reflection. They all point to the fundamental error in ontologizing geometry, its code or its reality. We can appreciate the stakes of structuralism's venture very clearly in the case of language. All that we have to talk about, which is every thin[g]k, is made of language. Language is both the edifice of thought and its limit. "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home."<sup>228</sup> The perimeter walls of home are infinite. The way languages comes to be used changes both the limits and the structure of the edifice. What could be bigger than this? Who are we without language? Are we human? Do we exist at all?<sup>229</sup> What is a *thought* without language? And conversely, what is language without thinking?<sup>230</sup> Can *homo sapiens sapiens* be entitled to even the 1st power of wisdom without it? Are these special gifts of speech and writing more than communication? What are the implications for subjectivity (internal dialogue)? Society? Is the *Other* a precondition for language, and *is this language* a precondition for contemplation? If answers to these questions are intractable, the questions themselves are edifying, or constructive. All of these are enormous

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<sup>228</sup> These are some of the opening remarks in Heidegger's anthropocentric (I mean that nicely) "Letter on Humanism," In, Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. p. 217

<sup>229</sup> I am not raising this question with respect to "reality" but strictly in the sense the "existence" is a human word, utterance or concept and *it* does not exist without humans. That is, we are reflected in one another. This is among the sentiments that Heidegger enumerates for writing *Being and Time*. He writes, "We do not even *know* what 'being' means. But already when we ask, 'what *is* 'being'' we stand in an understanding of the 'is' without being able to determine conceptually what the 'is' means. In, Heidegger, Martin, Dennis J. Schmidt and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010. P. 4

<sup>230</sup> Terrence Deacon's work is some of the most persuasive with respect to the mutual entanglement of various schema when it comes to language and thought. He captures this in a comparison between animal communication and humans. For instance, in laughter, which is often involuntary we might seem similar to animals who involuntarily call out some signal when provoked by something in the environment. On the other hand, the whole reason that a joke works is because the punchline lurks just beneath the surface of the misleading schema. That is a joke seems to run into a dead end, but the punchline makes us laugh at how stupid we were for missing such an obvious conclusion. I understand this as an example of human intelligence being able to handle multiple and contradictory schema. Somebody *who doesn't get the joke* is seemingly *stupid* in their obtuseness to see the same thing in two ways. See, Deacon, Terrence. *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain*. New York: Norton, 1998. p. 56-59

questions for the human condition, yet, language itself has mostly been taken for granted. Before the end of the nineteenth century, language was largely understood *as its content*. Structuralism uncovered this gargantuan presupposition. So when it started to be considered that language was arbitrary and that the objects it referred to did not establish one-to-one correspondences, the search for one-to-one correspondences opened onto an entirely new frontier(s).<sup>231</sup> Arbitrary is not random. So where one-to-one correspondence explodes between signifier and signified, our system of signification all of sudden becomes a primary suspect in answering all of these monumental questions. Phonologists were tracing physiological features to figure out the limits of possible sounds. Human migration patterns offer hopes of explaining how words were spread and mutated. Just the fact people use different languages to point at things and refer to them, all of sudden, is far more interesting. The object of reference is no longer simply what the signifier called it. Its objectivity is now understood as contextualized.<sup>232</sup> The object is only meaningful with respect to its role in a grander edifice of signification. At the other end, the signifier that is ascribed to it is also meaningless without reference to its role in a structure of expression. One must grasp the edifice of enunciation in order to express something apprehendable to other speakers. Is this the new *point*? Blowing open the presupposition, at the very least, teaches us that the relationship between words and things floats like the value of a currency. But as pieces

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<sup>231</sup> Speaking of de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Dosse writes, "The heart of his demonstration is to establish the arbitrariness of the sign, showing that language is a system of values established neither by content nor by experience, but by pure difference...Saussure established linguistics as a new discipline that claimed autonomy from the other human sciences...[that] was to rally all the other disciplines by virtue of its rigor and high degree of formalization, and make them adopt its program and methods." In, Dosse, Francois, and Deborah Glassman. *History of Structuralism: Volume 1*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. p. 44

<sup>232</sup> What de Saussure did to illuminate language was show how one thing was always irreducibly implicated in another. The ways the de Saussure applied *reflection* probably deserves an entire essay of its own. In short, he conceives of language in a circuit that required two people. He also showed that the "psychological" and "physiological" aspects of language were not bound, but related. See, "Place of Language in the Facts of Speech," In, Saussure, Ferdinand de, Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Wade Baskin. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966. p.11-15

of these varying puzzles start to fall into place, many of these features seemed to be converging on points. But different questions about phonology, culture and evolution are converging on *different* points that are becoming hard to reconcile. This is not a linear story, but instead, structuralism was the shock to geometry by complicating it exponentially.

What Saussure crystallized with language was what Pythagoras did to measuring the earth. They articulated a difference between codes and phenomena. With the theorem, the top of a stick was the same as the top of a pyramid. They were just *points* that marked the height of a right triangle. The code could be universally applied. One could literally measure the earth.<sup>233</sup> Both demonstrated how abstract orders can transcend sensual experience. These abstract orders quickly make the leap to inscribing everything in a new way- quite literally when geo-metry leapt into geo-graphy. And this was very much the case, too, with linguistics that went headlong for inscribing the humanities in the image of its newfound codes. What becomes all the more exciting in the field of linguistics is the fact that language is a code made by culture. Numbers were, by contrast, far less controversial because they were already just a purified magnitude-separated from value.<sup>234</sup> Philosophers can argue all day about the meaning of being human, but they will less problematically (or unreflectively) agree on how many are in a room. With structuralism, however, each person in the room is now at the intersection many more values

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<sup>233</sup> Here I am referring both to the word geo-metry and its actual success. Despite their instruments, geometers like Eratosthenes came very close to measuring the circumference of the earth by taking two simultaneous measurements of sun's shadow striking sticks of the same length and then calculating the Earth's circumference with this data. Despite the problems with their schema, their schema was powerful, if not smarter than most. As an indication of the grip this has, Bertrand Russell notes, "It is curious to observe that there is a reversion to the geometrical point of view in Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, from which the conception of force, in the Newtonian sense, has been banished. See, Russell, Bertrand. *The History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005. p. 216-217

<sup>234</sup> At least Hegel characterizes numbers this way. He writes, "The evident character of this defective cognition of which mathematics is proud, and on which it plumes itself before philosophy, rests solely on the poverty of its purpose and the defectiveness of its stuff, and is therefore of a kind that philo-sophy must spurn. Its purpose or Notion is magnitude. It is just this relationship that is unessential, lacking the Notion." See, Hegel, G.W.G., A.V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 p. 25

than was once conceived. They are no longer *characters*, they are entire texts. Structuralism clued us into the fact that the words we unreflectively utter are saying something as well.<sup>235</sup> When I speak, my words *say* something about where I am from, the thickness of my vocal cords, my level of education, and even, potentially, my unwitting philosophical orientation. The content, we learn, is the least of it. The content is just a starting point, a disco ball that illuminates a constellation of the person in question. Whence these values are revealed from their camouflage in the ordinary, they can be contrasted. New magnitudes can be assigned to these values. The weight of our words could never be heavier. Now, like the pre-Socratic geometers who were able wrap their minds around the world, to measure it and bring their tape measures to bear on the inscription of its surface, a whole new expertise was coming on the scene with ambitions to perform the same maneuver on the most complex space in the known universe: the psyche.

## **STRUCTURALISM AND THE MIND**

A new kind of dialectic is born. Where Socrates was the affable gadfly in search of the truth, psychiatry made no pretensions about being ignorant. The psychiatrist, in this role, does not walk *up* hills or seek a place to sit and bathe in the light of truth. The psychologist has a role in which they make themselves available for others who are in search of it. *I will show you an inkblot, you tell me what you see, and I will divine your soul in this reflection.* A voluntary

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<sup>235</sup> This is disclosure has enormous implications for research methods. Foucault talks about this in his essay, "What is an Author?" He shows that the name of the author is different from an ordinary word and even an ordinary proper noun. The name of the author sweeps up all kinds of particularities that are misleadingly taken as generalities. But people are not points. They, like England, have infinite perimeters that are susceptible to infinite boundaries. He writes, "We can conclude that, unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of texts- separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence." See Foucault, Michel, and Donald F. Bouchard. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. p. 123

patient wishes to see his or her reflection, not in a mirror, but against the edifice of a professional trained in reflection. The specialist of the soul, by virtue of his special knowledge of edifice-building, presents the patient with the conditions of possibility to wall off self-reflection. That is, because the mirror can also be a wall, it could be a wall obscuring known unknowns. One can look in the mirror and not know what he sees. This is not a scene of conspicuous coercion and inconspicuous, nuanced freedoms. It occurs as if it were edifying. Stoically subverting one's psychologist precludes the value of the treatment. If on some level the patient has doubts about the validity of a talking cure, they must cultivate an affectability. The efficacy of a treatment is a function of the patient's confidence in it no less than the contents of a conversation.<sup>236</sup> The psychiatrist says, *talk to me and tell me what you know so that I can help you be who you are.*

This is a peculiar development in the disciplines that engender expertise because the entire premise is that the patient knows *merely* the content of its words- which is the least of meanings. I *am* unconscious of the constellation of meaning contained in the words that I unreflectively utter.<sup>237</sup> That is, the reality of me is codified in my subconscious that require expert analysis. The social space that accommodates these experts doubtless installs this same reflection in potential patients who forego their authority to self-reflect, as say, I described Foucault's "biographical" work in the last chapter. This scenario creates the possibility that I will choose the treatment as an alternative to learning this constellation myself. This will be a critical

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<sup>236</sup> Lacan in particular seemed keen on defending the efficacy of psychoanalysis with his patients in the form of payments, but also in the social sphere. In short sessions, "he could earn a maximum amount of money in a minimal amount of time." But also, "Analysis became more lucrative than being a company president, which was one way among others of legitimating the profession socially and making it possible for analysts to earn a fortune." See, Dosse, Francois, and Deborah Glassman. *History of Structuralism: Volume 1*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 p. 96

<sup>237</sup> "The unconscious was at the center of the structuralist paradigm, but not only because of the spread of psychoanalytic therapy. It was present in Lévi-Strauss's anthropology as well as Saussure's distinction between language and speech. *Ibid*, 91.

choice in terms of edification because the ego is shopping for answers rather than building an edifice of understanding.

Of course, not all patients arrive of their own accord. And this choice made on another's behalf presents a further obstacle to reflection. Either way, the scene has already cracked open the presupposition that an expression's content is what it is. This new schema is *in the world* so to speak. The patient already knows that the words have a life of their own, or at least comply with the knowledge that others grasp this high-order life of language. The *code* variety of this knowledge of the unconscious, by virtue of its presence in discourse, means that an expert in psyche can know you better than you can *know thyself*. What remains is how this edifice of knowledge, an undeniable presence, alters this scene of reflection.

There are no illusions in this scenario. The edifice of knowledge belongs to the psychologist. This is a peculiar engagement, because unlike school, this knowledge is withheld. Not only is it withheld by the psychologist, but the knowledge is resisted, even walled off by the patient.<sup>238</sup> Maybe the patient presumes that it lacks the time or wherewithal to edify itself. Or perhaps the insistence to be or feel *normal* is too exigent to tarry in the details of *abnormal subjectivity*. In any case, this edifice of knowledge is camouflaged as *extra-ordinary*, expert or somehow inappropriate to the edifice in society that the patient inhabits. It *should be* delegated. This makes it fundamentally different from some other learning environments because it reinforces the gap between the subject and the structure that contains it. When the patient becomes alert to the scene, it opens itself up to measurement by tools that are not within his or

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<sup>238</sup> Lacan is at pains to describe how the labor of psychoanalysis is a labor like another service. But further, he characterizes the scenario as somewhat onerous, seemingly so that it is less of a luxury than a necessity. "Let us say that in the capital outlay involved in the common enterprise, the patient is not alone in finding it difficult to pay his share...can anyone forget that he must pay for becoming enmeshed in an action that goes right to the core of his being...with what is essential in his most intimate judgement..." In, Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Écrits*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 490

her grasp. The patient's takes a "first step" in acknowledging that his tools are not sufficient to find his self. The patient knows that it reflects some generic *samenesses* that will be evident to the psychologist who is not prey to the camouflage of ordinariness. While structuralism is not itself dependent upon on this asymmetrical relationship, this is one way that its ambivalence as a technology tipped toward power in applied structuralism. The codes of developmental stages, trauma, stress and biology engender particular contrasts are revealed through specialized vocabularies that cannot help but contribute and mutate the palpability of particular conditions. The psychologist becomes a seer of subtle contrasts in the other like a sommelier, aided with her terms, detects essences in wine. *This* structuralist dialectic is a dialectic of power, but unique to a strategy of tracing constellations from multiplicity points.

## **SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

One third way to consider how structuralism exploded as model of understanding is in terms of the human macro-organism. What are its points of enunciation? What are the origins of behavior? Why do crowds behave differently than individuals? How can a crowd have a different psychology than individuals? Is the crowd more intelligent than an individual?<sup>239</sup> And what are the relationships? Or, more radically is there any meaningful distinction? Psychology would for a time ground its epistemology (in a very different way than Confucius) in the fact that we are all born. It would define its limits to apparently universal conditions of human development. Just like language cannot extricate itself from the psyche (and vice versa), the psychological search

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<sup>239</sup> In the sublime optimism of the information age, crowd wisdom was seen to have finally been presented with its opportunity to manifest a more perfect union of citizens. This belief often cited an anecdote where Francis Galton observed at a fair that the average of everyone's guesses about the weight of a sow was closer than any individual's guess. This phenomenon has been repeated many times, but ignores the far more complex schema at play in collective agency. In any case, this anecdote opens this essay: See, Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Random House, New York: Random House, 2004.

for universal conditions cannot help but to bleed into a more synthetic thrownness. How can knowledge of childhood development phases not change the cultural milieu in which children are raised? As universal conditions of human development become narrower and narrower, cultural factors emerge at every turn. What was otherwise just “natural,” can be *disillusioned* from camouflage. Whence disillusioned, the camouflage that structured “ordinary” *changes* the ordinary. Understanding this relationship empowered sociologists to move past psychological reductions to factor in culture as synchronic with stages of development. This insight opened onto all of the other synthetic conditions that conspire to build the home for the subject thrown into it. But even if the question of culture appeared to open onto countless differences, the question of universal foundations for culture was an alluring prospect.

Geometry would predict this third trajectory of structuralism. What are the universalities of human culture?<sup>240</sup> What does this do to inform the category in which *we all belong* and the species of which we are all the same? In the study of anthropology, structuralism comes full circle to language. It comes full circle not in a linear, narrative way. All of these structuralisms were developing together. Rather it comes full circle like ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail. Our thoughts are structured by culture and our culture structured by thoughts. We cannot even *talk* about culture without creating it. Euclidean geometry loathes such forms, but it would take much time before points, lines and planes were abandoned philosophically. Meanwhile, fossils of geometric structuralism continue to impose their paths on virtually every political institution. Vestiges of strange theories like phrenology still resonate and inform pockets of thinking.

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<sup>240</sup> The archetype of this schema is Freud’s incest taboo where he draws out similarities among “primitive” Australian aborigines and his contemporaries. He opens *Totem and Taboo*, “Primitive man is known to us by the stages of development through which he has passed...in a certain sense he is still our contemporary: there are people whom we still consider more closely related to primitive man than to ourselves, in who we therefore recognize the direct descendants and representatives of earlier man.” See, Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. Art & Poetry Publishing, 2011. p. 2



Because ideas (designs for nuclear weapons or the oedipus complex) cannot go back to where they came from, they leave open corridors to amble down. This is not to say that these are “wrong,” but it is decidedly ignorant to entrench oneself in one of these corridors and wall off oneself from the reflections that account for their logics *and then some*.

The snake eating its tail is the inevitable fate for attempting to geo-meter phenomena as complex as humans or human society. In time, the law of diminishing returns extinguishes itself with its own expenditure. The wall that separates the edifice of knowledge from the object of attention is less insulated than in the highly ritualized practice of psychology (which involves *not reflecting* on the structure of this ritual). Where psychotherapy *functions* through many tacit agreements and understandings, participant observation in anthropology enacts the greatest folly of geometry. It fundamentally cannot be a science when there are no controls other than the *notion* of objectivity that lives in the imagination of the researcher. There is nothing outside of reflection. When an alien descends on a foreign culture to measure it, like particles in an atom, it cannot measure these points, lines and planes without completely altering the art-of-fact. The measuring becomes reflected in the measurement. The researcher must hold to the belief that it *is as it was* when in fact, they are hooking their tapes to the end of helium balloons.<sup>241</sup> There is only participant participation. Anthropology is the self reflection of the superorganism because the researcher’s ideal is to efface the self in order to discern the pure contours of cultural taxonomy. The ethics of this situation are intractable because *arrogance* is a structural component of the interaction. Subjecting oneself to another’s terms of measurement is always

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<sup>241</sup> One of the most outlandish anthropological studies that reflects this inability to objectively observe is the now famous study by Liz Dalby. Her presence was such a spectacle among the Geishas that she studied that her attempt at participant observer was literally as participant actor. See, Bardsley, Jan. "Liza Dalby's Geisha: The View Twenty-five Years Later." *Southeast Review Of Asian Studies* 31, (November 2009): 309-323. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2018).

committing (albeit sometimes unwitting) violence to the self. It makes oneself palpable to the other in a predictable way so that subjectivity can be *demographed*. What is “consensual” in this arrangement? How does it differ from any other sort of contact (whether trade or colonization) aside from the geometric imaginary in the edifice of the researcher? Because there is nothing outside of reflection, it matters that geometry inhabits the mind of the researcher because measuring is inherently a demonstration of power. To measure and *make same* cannot but lead to function, code-knowledge and utility.

This oversight in anthropology has continued unchecked. For many decades, structuralism was finding truths that were already anticipated by the geometric epistemology that structured structuralism. In many ways, it steered this once hopeful angle of perception into engine of modernism as it started to be applied. Foucault was the most adept at appreciating structure for what it does rather than rejecting it in total for the ideology it had become. He used and reflected upon structure to identify what this angle had in common with the all of the disciplines that unfolded from it: structures incur power.<sup>242</sup> Structures erect walls between the experience of subjectivity and its concept of self.

The reason that I have to discuss social structures is because in excluding them from self-reflection, I cannot apprehend what causes me to say what I do aside from the most conspicuous and banal of abstractions. *I was just answering your question? I was going on gut feeling?* Absent of reflection, one cannot apprehend the cause of spontaneous flashbacks. Memories are not as random as we experience them to be. Without a close examination of my edifice, I may

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<sup>242</sup> In an interview called “Truth and Power,” Foucault explains that his research was guided by questions pertaining to knowledges (or what I have been labeling schema) and how they are leveraged for the sake of power within social structures. In each case (psychiatry, economics, politics, medicine, etc.) these are very complex structures that are “enmeshed in social structures.” As a whole, Foucault shows how their powers are manifest, not exclusively, but amidst other complications. For the interview see, Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Vintage, 1980. P. 109

not question the *weirdness* of the foods I eat or the tools that I use in my daily routine. All of the things that I experience as *mine* can be diagrammed or revealed to be more or less fated by some relation of forces that contain me. Their powers are so *powerful* because they have no conspicuous agents. I would have to reflect to find their traces. Usually, within the structure, I apprehend myself as the agent- even when I say *the thought just came to me*. It is still mine. Unreflectively, when I am feeling powerful I unwittingly ascribe this to some force of my character rather than a structure of privilege that largely structured this feeling. When I feel abused it is because of the personality of the person who offended me. I am sense certain of this.

Structuralism edifies the ordinary to reveal that whether I am experiencing pain or pleasure, this is only the final cry at the end of a complex play of forces. Learning linguistics, psychology and anthropology could have the effect of disabusing their respective specialists of their own spontaneity. But more often than not, it is a tool to apply other humans beings according to a tradecraft. Structuralism holds politics and edification in a fragile balance. It could be oriented toward the future. It could also change the way we experience the present. Having traced path dependencies built into the structure, the specialist already knows the path that others will take. Foucault pointed at the tremendous power that was contained in these kinds of knowledges and the overarching structure that all but guaranteed that this knowledge would be put to political purposes.

Foucault's interests were turning to technologies of the self at the end of his career.

Foucault was in the midst of making his use of structuralism more explicit.<sup>243</sup> He revealed its

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<sup>243</sup> Foucault lists a series of guiding questions for his research: "How had the subject been compelled to decipher himself in regard to what is forbidden?" And he credits Max Weber with the following questions that brought him to the "hermeneutics of the self." He writes, "If one wants to behave rationally and regulate one's action according to true principles, what part of one's self should one renounce?...to what kind of asceticism should one submit.' I posed the opposite question: How have certain kinds of interdictions required the price of certain kinds of knowledge about oneself? What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce everything?" In, Foucault, Michel,

leverage of power and curtailed its optimism to solve all of these huge questions about the meaning of being human. Foucault articulated a project where all points lead to the self. I think that his legacy is an unraveled conundrum: how do I do research about the self that is and is not exclusively *my* self? How do I write about the self that is not the universal experience of self? How does one use a medium of (infinitely replicable) text to initiate a project of reproduction at another's subjective experience? How can research be done that sidesteps the arrogance of the *seer* to in-form its readers, patients and subjects? What is the structure of a non-localizable reflection? Can a reflective surface be diagrammed so that it is meaningful to the next person who stands in front of that mirror? What I think he shows is that the macro-organism of society is reflected in all kinds of *ordinary*. In the end of his career he shows signs of taking this fight, not to *society* but to the self's relationship to it, to change how one is reflected in society by reflecting upon it.

## **ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MIRROR**

Taking the diagram to the mirror, the phenomenon of reflection immediately reveals how complex structure is. How could you depict a reflection without making choices, taking paths, or writing narratives that leave more out than they can articulate? Reflection also shows how plastic thin[g]king is because starting from any art-of-fact, and dwelling on how it is reflected in the other things with which it is suspended in reflection unfolds onto countless singularities of concatenated reflections. There is no way out of this fact. Perceptions are choices even if the person doesn't realize that s/he is choosing.<sup>244</sup> Diagramming the *obvious* protagonists in a scene

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Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. p. 17

<sup>244</sup> Sartre writes, "If subjectivity can be revealed to me, it is due to a difference between what the situation usually demands and the response I make to it...if we regard the situation as a test, of whatever kind, it requires something of

of reflection means that *life history made the choice*. That is all that can be meant by “obvious.” We know to the frustration of structuralism that there is no single hierarchy of structure.

Every apparent cause-effect scene overlooks a diffusive mess of interrelationships that will eventually tarnish the elegance of any narrative. Reflection always disrupts a narrative because cause-effect narratives are truth statements and truth statements are *logical* statements of “reality”- which is just a narrative. The snake eats its tail. Reflection falls back on a circle of life, but regimes of truth form pyramid schemes. Truths are particular to humans; they are anthropomorphisms of geometry. A more reflective narrative will come back around to the same point as a mirror image- the same but opposite. The diagram of reflection starts at *apparent* points and comes back at them transversally. Retracing this *same* narrative is impossible because it will be familiar the second go-around. And some things will have changed a little in the moments that have passed. Because structures do not decay as quickly as they come into being, history (not just human/written) accumulates structures that overlay and interweave with one another.<sup>245</sup> Everything complex is owed to this phenomenon.<sup>246</sup> Because everything is complex, reflection is without limit: it can swell, or, it can get carried down corridors.

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the subject.” See, Sartre, Jean-Paul, David Broder, Trista Selous, Michel Kail, Raoul Kirchmayr and Frederic Jameson. *What is Subjectivity?* New York: Verso, 2016. Kindle Edition. Location. 523

<sup>245</sup> I think that Deleuze and Guattari capture the social/subjective stakes in their distinction between smooth and striated. The former belongs to the nomad and the latter to the sedentary. I read the nomad as a metaphor for the thin[g]king subject and the sedentary as having been edified by their edifice. In any case, they write, “The striated is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organizes horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes. The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of; it is the fusion of harmony and melody in favor of the production of properly rhythmic values, the pure act of the drawing of a diagonal across the vertical and the horizontal.” See, Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. p. 478

<sup>246</sup> In their book, *Order out of Chaos*, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, more than any geometric theory of politics will admit, outline how the stochastic processes occur when a “choice of the branch” occurs. They are mainly theorizing the physical sciences, but I find this all the more the case in subjective reflections. “They [physical sciences] are moving from deterministic, reversible processes to stochastic and irreversible ones.” We might say that policy is attempting to confront chaos with a similar attitude only to increase the complexity. The contingency is too much to manage with collective agency. I think that this contingency can only be managed subjectively where patterns are more manageable because the ledge of the tape is hooked, at least, on subjectivity.

Where this is liable to come off gratuitously profound, I still want to continue making the argument that complexity is closer to experience and observation than geometric simplifications and rationalities. This emerges even where analysis holds to diachronic (ignoring horizontal interactions) structuring. For instance, there are hierarchies that establish degrees of separation between humans and their basic needs. So many things rest on a few utilities that they are no longer merely *useful*: they are vital. One way to remind ourselves of this is that every cell was its own living organism fully exposed to watery elements. Were we to take life as *authentically* aquatic, it would certainly be the case that our technologies of staying wet constitute an exteriorization, or appendage to a “natural” way of being.<sup>247</sup> But this is not reversible because humans cannot survive in water despite their genetic heritage. Evolution has enabled cells to become engulfed in ever deeper structures. Each structure insulates a nested structure from a particular kind of exposure (never mind *within* those strata for now). The apparatuses that life devised to enable aqueous beings *to be* out of water is just one highly-fragile structure that life depends on. There is definitely a wall on *this* and *that* side of *aqueous*. We cannot make it more than a few days without supplying all of our cells with an aquatic environment. In our time, this depends on our *socialized* access to water adding a whole new valence of fragility.

The more nested any particular cell is, the more vulnerable it is. This is because it shares in every scale of vulnerability that precedes its own. My kidney cells have their own things to worry about and they are defenseless to convince my flesh to get out of the sun that is

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See, Prigogine, Ilya and Isabelle Stengers. *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984. p. 177

<sup>247</sup> Interesting in terms of our complex apparatuses to keep ourselves wet, David Christian reminds us that life is fundamentally aquatic. He writes, “For multi celled organisms, colonizing the land was like settling another planet. Above all, the process required special protective equipment to prevent the organism from drying out and collapsing. The wet insides had to be protected by an insulating layer of some kind; indeed, all land animals still carry small surrogate seas within themselves, and it is there that their young are fertilized and begin to grow.” In, Christian, David. *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. Kindle Edition. Location 3063

dehydrating me. Their fate is imbricated into structures that do not operate on the same schema-like how much water I bring to hike across a desert. Most of these basic units of life no longer see the light of day and they die when those conditions are not met by intervening structures that have their own vulnerabilities to worry about. Like ordinary experience, these units of life are ensconced in their immediate surroundings. They are at home in them. They have come to rely on structures that are so intricate, complex and remote that their dependence is removed by several magnitudes of sense ability. This biological phenomenon has continued, even accelerated, into social phenomenon that complicates our notions of evolutions, and the being of *beings*.<sup>248</sup> The meaning of being human evades all reductions.

Politics has created all kinds of concepts that leverage this phenomena to claim that society is alienated (from each other, from their labor, nature etc.), or disciplined, or disenchanted or controlled etc. Genealogies could demonstrate this estrangement *ad infinitum*, but taking all of this estrangement as a singular phenomenon, the most durable *point* from which to hang a tape measure becomes the self. This is the reflection that Foucault has been behind. Through the hermeneutics of the clinic, the prison, the church, language, economy, science etc, a sufficient threshold had been reached to demonstrate that the self *is what it is* at the collision of an inexhaustible sum of geometric diagrams *that have no point*. The geometry gets messy very fast, but there is structure everywhere.

Being self-reflective, self-responsible or edifying *is* inelegant. In fact, after Foucault, the most edifying lesson is that one should be wary of normality (and more family-ar with

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<sup>248</sup> Foucault writes, “Thus, behind the history of the positivities, there appears another, more radical history, that of man himself- a history that now concerns man’s very being, since he now realizes that he only ‘has history’ all around him, but is himself, in his own historicity, that by means of which a history of human life, a history of economics, and a history of languages are given their form.” In Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Random House, 1994. P. 370

inelegance) because with enough reflection, behaviors will doubtless reveal themselves to be uncanny. There are inertias, propensities and apparent inevitabilities all suspended and notionally colliding in the scene of reflection. In Foucault's work, subjectivity is to society as the Chinese general is to the scene of his reflection. Just as every one of these trajectories abides its own contextual logic, nested in some grander structure, they also refract one another. This much is practical, demonstrable. The only *what to do?*, the only difference that makes a difference, then, must fold the self into the scene of reflection- which is precisely the *point* that is expressly edited out of respectable academic work so that it can be more generally and geometrically applicable.

Reflection is a viable way to interpret subjectivity with respect to politics just like it can interpret thinking with respect to the experience of looking a mirror. Still, being practical without being prescriptive is a very narrow path out of a diagrammatic mess. Writing edification needs to diagram vaguely enough to *self-insert* and particular enough to develop a common art-of-fact. In cycling through some concatenated reflections, we can see how rigidly geometry is reflected in ordinary life. It quickly becomes apparent how trying to apprehend even just a few of these in synchrony becomes a mess. And just when it becomes inelegant, the diagram has already crossed a threshold that underscores the necessity of self-reflection. It is little wonder that geometric hedonism is such an alluring mode of thought even if one is aware that one loses oneself in subscribing to some ideological angle. There is a whole package of ready-made reflectiveness to absorb the responsibility of *being*. But when the structures of ready-mades begin to decay, some of their aspects fade out while others remain as vestiges. These continue to exert a force on the world, but out of their original context. Vestiges that no longer function in an old system may still obstruct or steer the path of new structures. As some material-object's efficacy waxes, wanes



and gets folded into new functions, this efficacy is without archimedean points to measure its authenticity. Efficacy is relative to the reflection at hand.

Vestigial complexities are observable in every corner of the universe. One of the best examples is in early life studies. Sidney Fox demonstrated how the structure of hot, dried clay, which breaks up in regular patterns, can serve as a lattice-structure and catalyst from which other inorganic matter can get organized.<sup>249</sup> From these two inorganic substances (fractured clay and “primordial soup”), he created small polymers of amino acids in a laboratory. It is plausible that crystalline behaviors of clay are the meta-helix of DNA, the originary structure of life. Life is made of inconceivably many structures that obey their own logics at the same time that their efficacy is reflected in other processes.

The ability to reflect this way upon structures is a recent possibility in human history. In the history of history we can see how relatively new non-human history is. That is, for all but a sliver of humanity, the Earth was scarcely more ancient than human’s recollections of civilization, *for real*. It took a little longer to ask after what lay beneath some of the most ordinary features of human existence- like language, thought and culture. The very fact that structuralism itself arrived as a perspective just over a century ago is one clue to how difficult it can be to reflect comprehensively. It took yet another half century to nearly exhaust this line of thinking to arrive at the understanding that structure is pervasive. And where geometry is a reflection of human thinking, human behavior is now a reflection *of this thinking* being reflected in every corner of society. Here, I will consider just a couple of utilities that structure the ordinary.

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<sup>249</sup> See, Nowicki, Stephen. “More on the Origin of Life.” Duke University, Durham, NC. Lecture. *Biology: The Science of Life*. Great Courses, 2004.

## **POLITICAL FOSSILS AND THE HOME: WATER**

Consider the five inches or so from a bathroom faucet to its drain. Water starts at the faucet when I turn the knob. It automatically ends at the drain just inches below. This start and endpoint is probably the beginning and ending of most ordinary observations of daily use of water. Yet, this 5-inches of travel between faucet and drain obscures a worldwide, transhistorical journey. All of this is obscured by the need to make some toothpaste or face soap *go away*. Quite literally this little beam of water made of zillions of molecules has cumulatively passed through zillions of living creatures and craggy crevices and ocean bottoms. It has gone from the lowest surfaces of the Earth all the way back up to clouds in the mesosphere. Such facts are perhaps a bit too grandiose and out of touch. At the human scale, the geometry starts getting more familiar, angular and regular. But this is geometry's first point of contact cannot help but to interface with the grandiose.

Somewhere there is geological feature that accumulates water- a river, a basin, aquifer, etc. Humans will make their first negotiation with works of God at this stage. For instance, a concrete structure will dam up a river in a spot that demands the least amount of engineering. Geomancing concludes shortly thereafter. Perhaps it is dammed or irrigated, but some very unsubtle engineering will start to take hold of this resource. On the city's side of this wall is an elaborate system of structure and control. On the other side of the wall is the hope and expectation that *nature will run its course* in the way that has been so helpful before. Back to the city-side, the wall will interface with dinosaur-sized tubes to transport the water to a purification site. From here, the water will be transported up a hill or into a tower so that it can force its way into the synthetic arteries and capillaries of the city. When a tap is turned on, the slightest bit of that potential energy is relaxed. Water that is packed against every faucet, shower head, fire

hydrant and water fountain will hold fast. The entire city holds a pressure somewhere between 20 and 80 pounds per square inch. When a faucet is turned on, this tiny opening in a single house lets a bit of water travel through open air for about one second, but we experience this as undifferentiated water. Running water is one *thing* to ordinary experience. In the camouflage of the ordinary, *it is the same river* that we go back to every time. It is only one thing with a four modes: on, off, hot and cold. But as zillions of molecules, they go back into another pipe and it takes some soap or grease with it into some more pipes. These pipes will lead either directly back into a river like it originally came from, or it will have some intermediate treatment before being handed back off to the wilds.

In water, one can point to all of these different stages of the process. But this brief gloss on city water does not account for all of the ways that parts of water are becoming more or less permanently tainted by certain manufacturing processes or consumer plastics. It doesn't account for fossil water that is brought back into circulation. The totality of water is certainly not a negative feedback loop at human scale, but one can be forgiven for taking it for one because it has sustained itself in that image for so long. To consider this cycle, even for only a moment in the camouflage of the ordinary day, is a significant reflection. It cannot help but to inform the question of *what to do?* To be narcissistic for a moment, it has come all this way *for me*. If I recall this for a momentary ethics, this reflection asks of me: *what to do?* In the absence of reflection, it is water *as it is and as it was*- which is politics. It is same. Water waste is a social problem that is independent and transcends the ordinary experience of water- that is, if water *is experienced* in the first place. Whatever the brief moment of reflection does to change what is to be done or not to be done, this effect can be seen to reverberate and amplify. Because ethics is the question *what to do?*, not the moral prescription of what one ought to do, it doesn't matter

what a person chooses to do. For ethics all that matters is choosing to choose- even if that means conscientiously doing something generally perceived as wasteful or harmful. For an epistemology of the home, the only blasphemous thing is for subjectivity to abandon its own homemaking- to be walled off from one's own affect on the world.

In that water's history of the present, it *will have* experienced *me* in a profound way. I am more likely than other creatures to have left an indelible mark on it. Dwelling on it further, after the water is shut off, I could see my reflection in the water and its reflection in an endless number of processes. Where are those molecules 10 seconds later? Still under my house? One minute? Under some other building in the city? One hour? Back to the river? It is quite possible that I eventually seal its fate for the next 1000 years with plastic debris in the middle of the Pacific. This is a far greater political power than any other that I have- to existentially and permanently alter something. Most humans wield this power by default, not privilege. Because this is a default, it is experienced as an entitlement rather than a marvel of historical structure- a gift that history brought to me and structures my life. No matter how much action one takes, there is no agency in the absence of reflection because the structure already guaranteed the outcome. The expression is merely the exit of a corridor.

To become angry about these structural outcomes is yet another (synchronic) structural diagram of the political hedonism that is democracy. Reflection engenders a pragmatic agency in the future anterior one moment to the next- which is the only place that freedom *could* be located. Freedom is forestalled un-reflectiveness. Freedom is precluding *being reflected in structure*.<sup>250</sup> Geometry is hostile to such narcissism because a narcissist takes his bearings from

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<sup>250</sup> William James writes, "The appetite for immediate consistency at any cost...will, if made the exclusive law of the mind, end by blighting the development of the intellect itself quite as much as that of the feelings or the will. The scientific conception of the world as an army of molecules gratifies this appetite after its fashion most exquisitely. But if the religion of exclusive scientificism should ever succeed in suffocating all other appetites out of a nation's

his own self rather than objectivity. Narcissists inhabit a scandalous blueprint that is perceived as anti-social. This diagram on the mirror, or the face in the pool of water, is enough to dwell on until death while the world busies itself unreflective of the world flowing through a span of five inches. Or where hedonists do reflect on water resources, they mostly have Herculean rhetoric for how society should clean up the mess.

### **POLITICAL FOSSILS AND THE HOME: ELECTRICITY**

The other standard utility, electricity, is more straightforwardly a *positive* feedback mechanism. Even “renewables” are not a loop within the scope of human existence. Instead, art-of-facts undergo several transformations. Hydroelectric power transforms, not water, but its *flow* into mechanical energy. This energy does not directly feed back into hydrodynamic forces in the earth- like streams, sublimation, clouds, rain and more streams. The energy dissipates back into a field. Burned coal does not re-precipitate into briquettes. The making of coal and oil occurs over atomic/molecular changes too great and too grandiose to consider within human existence. We can only speculate how such molecules will *come around*. At the human scale, when we reflect on the cycle, the molecules we start and end with can only with a lot of strain be conceived as *same*. Burned coal generates heat that is subsequently turned into mechanical energy. Its antecedents are not recombined simply, but complexly with other elements. The mechanical side of the wall turns mechanical energy into heat and electromagnetic energy. Then, electricity flows into arteries and capillaries but without any re-uptake mechanism. The electron stream gets exhausted depositing its energies in too many different places to account for. The way this *comes*

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mind, and imbuing a whole race with the persuasion that simplicity and consistency demand a *tabula rasa* to be made of every notion that does not form part of the *soi-distant* scientific synthesis, that nation that race, will just as surely go to ruin...” In James, William. “The Will to Believe.” *The Collected Works of William James*. Kindle Edition. Location. 1960

*around* is too complex for human time scales. This much is the *same* regardless of any one of the complex ways that structure our expectations for lights to come on when we flip a switch.

One expects scores of electrical devices to obey our command to turn on or off and this superficial expectation structures much of ordinary experience. Bruno Latour calls this phenomena “double click” as a reference to the digital mouse whose quick moment of action makes one signifier manifest a signified as if there were no mediation between the two. He writes, “If we are astonished that Moderns have not maintained more carefully, through very elaborate institutions, a crossing that seems so essential to their sustainability, it is because it would take almost nothing to make the crossing vanish, owing to its very success.”<sup>251</sup> That is, history shows we are satisfied to simply and unreflectively have things meet our expectations. But even this God-like power to *make* light, or power on a computer, is rarely taken as some awesome power. It is only conspicuous in its absence. When the lights go out, we can see that this invisible power becomes a conspicuous dependency because, for a time, one really doesn’t know what to do. When the power goes out, its absence is a disco ball that reflects how much was reflected in it. It becomes obvious in the absence of electricity that “I” am not the one who is organizing my day. Rather, it becomes very clear very quickly that electricity structures most every waking moment of my day. There is scarcely a single action that I can perform *the same* without electricity. “I” am not the person I am without it- this reflection is absent when the lights are on, however. Life is radically altered by power outages- but this makeshift existence is tolerable because we know that a powerless society is intolerable. *They* will fix it. Even without it, I scavenge for ways to find stored energy. If not in a battery-powered flashlight or a generator, then I have to go back to what seems on par with a stone-age. I light a candle and it seems so

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<sup>251</sup> See, Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. P. 93

uncanny to make light without the intervention of an enormous infrastructural apparatus between us.

The ways that we narrate our relationship to synthetic energy holds between two scales- each of which is political. Both of which are amenable to a narrative cycle- a cycle that all but excludes the individual's relationship to, and experience of, energy. Firstly, the political question of power is an infrastructural issue. This is a matter of insulating individuals from the question of supplying their own power. This implies and ensures that the expectations inherent to flipping switches is integral to the human experience in the world. It keeps the question political rather than ethical. This non-negotiable structure keeps the cycle in question from dissipating into unaccountable particularities.

At another scale, infrastructural use of energy is recognized as an issue that is forcing humans to confront geological time frames.<sup>252</sup> We know that our collective use of energy points to collective collapse and the only thing that keeps this cycle from spinning out of control turns on changing utility-scale use of energy. Only collective agency can "fix it," so that actually *every little bit* does not help anything at all. This scale effaces the individual because we can only inhabit this scale of human-geology mutual affectability when we ourselves assume subjective experience as a macro-organism.

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<sup>252</sup> This is most conspicuously the case in the use of the now ubiquitous term Anthropocene. In his book, *Against the Grain*, James C. Scott defends his use of starting the clock on human-geological era at the first uses of fire against others who start the clock with the first nuclear tests or the Industrial Revolution. In any case, energy is the common denominator of all human terraforming histories. See, Scott, James C. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

## COMPLEXITY IS NOT CONFUSION AND SIMPLICITY IS NOT A SOLUTION

In terms of reflection, the fantasy of collective agency is unedifying. It is a positive feedback loop because there can be no *subjective* thermostat, no *steering* between populations and the planet. The only thermostat that will reconcile the poles of humanity and Earth necessarily transcend any singular ego. Make no mistake, there is one, but it is out of subjective leverage. These reflections never come back around because I am talking to a wall. “I” am too many degrees removed from this structure. Like a single cell that happens to be in a body that happens to be in a desert, its fate is wrapped in more basic structures. There is no doubt that energy spells an impending crisis for humanity. It is an emergency with life or death consequences. This much is worthy of reflection. In the face of *what to do?*, however, subjective, geometric theory of knowledge supplies elegant solutions that are impervious to “crowd wisdom,” democracy and greater good. If reasoning is not enough to demonstrate this, then experience and history should be.

Inhabiting a geometric epistemology is worse than useless because it disarmingly attempts to transcend the immediate surroundings that a person dwells in. Not only is this socially hedonistic, but it cannot help but to amp up anxiety over an inevitability. And by inevitability, I am referring to the macro-organism’s action, not the *certainty* of apocalypse. Ethics and homemaking necessarily turn the question of *what to do?* to a sort of narcissism that sees *its own* self reflected in its own actions and the things that are touched by them. It necessarily turns inward because ethics is incompatible with geometry. Polluting water and wasting energy are not *wrong*, but they are *stupid*. That is to say, there are many logics according to which not wasting or polluting water make sense. And it seems that only by the crudest, basest of short-term logics that there could be any virtue in it. While I cannot state with authority that



any of these logics are “right,” I can swell my awareness with a sum of schemata that overwhelming steer *what to do* away from being reflected in conspicuous stupidity. Questioning a behavior in the first place presents a greater difficulty than precipitating what is smart or stupid of some habit.

Recall that geometry and political rhetoric are both about the future. The former triangulates alternative futures and the latter communicates their reality. Recall also the epideictic rhetoric is the rhetoric that shapes the meaning of the moment. Is it not the case that a political reflection can inform the epideictic mood in a way that informs the present, but the inverse disarms it? That is, if “reality” is in the future, does this not inform *here-now* that *what to do?* is predicated on collective agency and a geometric solution? Isn’t this unedifying in the sense that it un-builds the dwelling and the soul from reflection? The *politics* of energy necessarily has a life immanent to its scale- a life that transcends subjective agency. But because energy shapes almost every one of our mundane acts, making home within it both exposes the way it structures the day and how one’s day is reflected back into the world.

The thin[g]kng involved here is very fragile because *it would be* prosocial if *everyone* were to be more mindful of resource usage. I *could* apprehend my little contribution as having a social impact in the example that I lead. My virtue might rub off on others so that my *little bit* actually *helps*. The fragility lies in the scarcely discernible line where intentionality tips toward politics or home management. Outwardly, the same behavior could be apprehended as subjectively edifying or hedonistically political. But my argument is that this subtle trespassing into knowledge of how others should manage their homes is already unedifying and unethical. This knowledge codifies a known known as something very simple and geometric when say, energy, is decidedly complex and indeterminate. The example that I lead conforms to a code and

the misplaced narcissism where I try to have this code reflected in my self only serves to efface it. This is evident in the term, leading by example. At the level of subjectivity, the distinction between politics and edification is actually quite sharp.

This sharp distinction discloses radically different moods and their corresponding epistemological intentionalities. Geometry tries to kill the necessity of thin[g]king where reflection *always* discloses other art-of-facts and schema. Crystallized clay was not “primordial soup’s” answer to life, but *life* is the reflection suspended between the two. And this reflection suspends infinite contingency, not one-to-one correspondence. The same is true with power. All power, all life, all substance and everything can be narrated back to gravity according to our logics of the universe. We can grasp concepts like gravity walls by which some things lie in or out, but even these grow extraordinarily complex because their perimeter walls are an infinite field. Gravity is technically infinite, but there are whole orders of physical forces that are within, but virtually unmoved by, this weakest of fundamental forces. We are beholden to the sun, but the moon is more beholden to us. Just these two gravity walls are reflected in virtually every process on Earth.

Gravity alone is complex, but gravity also eventually creates pressure walls where things inside can stand up or collapse. Pressure creates heat walls. Things inside these walls either resist entropy or disintegrate. Then there are heat walls and other orders of complexity that conspire to nest fragile beings. Each time that a wall forms, the surviving contents are closer to their thrown *home*. That is, home is always more complex than what lies outside of it. We are walled into the sun’s orbit. But this home, too, is inconceivably large. The sun’s mass is quite nearly 100 percent of our solar system, 99.8 to be precise. Its being, which is almost all of the solar system is far simpler than all of the complexities nested within it. Its mass holds together the planets whose

own gravity holds their own respective molecules together. The Milky Way holds the sun in place and the sun holds us in place- in the perfect place. The wet and energetic world we live in, at any given moment, is receiving about only one billionth of the sun's energy. That one billionth that strikes the earth doubtless does more than all of the rest combined- because Earth is very complex. It stores energy and spends energy on its own terms.

The Earth's expression of energy has its own rhythms owed to its own structural/historical features. The solar system is complex, but tiny Earth is infinitely more so. The *planet* earth is complex but an ecosystem is even more complex. How do we know that these things are becoming more complex? One answer is that the number of schema demanded to explain them increases with complexity, or that the rate of information passing through a thing, relative to its mass, grows with complexity.<sup>253</sup> A fruit fly does more with energy than a boulder. It *is* stupid to explain away these nested complexities with simple formulas. As nested complexities, they are, by definition small *and* at the intersection of many many simpler schema. The scale of expenditure that washes over the fragile structures that support our lives is too much to apprehend. One can only become more or less family-ar with them.

How many complex structures and how much time was required to go from the big bang to the apple on my desk, for instance? How much energy from the big bang simply washed over that astronomically narrow corridor that led to a particular life? How many fragile structures support this possibility? The answer is actually infinite. Even when presented with calculations, they are still incomprehensible. That a person can eat an apple and do what a person does with

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<sup>253</sup> Eric Chaisson attempted to measure complexity in his book *Cosmic Evolution*. He does this to try to thread together, what he identifies as seven major phases of the universe that range from particles to biological. In his attempt to stand over and above complexity, he finds that the most complex things are inconceivably rare. These "islands" of complexity are complex "as a measure of the information needed to describe a system's structure and function, or as a measure of the rate of energy flowing through a system of a given mass." See, Chaisson, Eric J., *Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. P. 12, 13

*this* energy marks the most sophisticated structure known to human understanding. The calories that are transformed by the body and eventually emerge as a thought are the most fragile, luxurious joules in the known universe. The amount of sun energy that eludes this net is humbling. The amount of initial energy to be wasted on such a thought, for a start, includes the reciprocal of one billionth of the sun's energy- that is doing nothing to sustain any life form much less a single thought. Complexity is fragile luxury camouflaged in the ordinary, because the ordinary has little cause (or ability) to reflect on the astronomical investment in this completely inconsequential "pale blue dot" floating in a space too big for us to even fantasize.

Water and electricity interface with the grandiose, yet filter down to ordinary experience in centimeter thick streams of water or amps of electrons (which is still an unwieldy sum of electrons) as faint echoes of the big bang. Any notion of freedom owes some moments of reflection to the astronomical. It is the shortest path to establishing the absurdity of the question of reality and the precariousness of the structures that order human society. The grandiose reproduces the conditions to consider being at home in the world. No matter how orderly water faucets and electric outlets are, we do not know why there is water and electricity instead of nothing?<sup>254</sup> If we weren't "civilized" we would could trace our way from the ordinary to metaphysics differently, but as sedentary geometers (whose world comes to us), it falls on individuals to choose to ask because civilized life is so insulated from unmediated subsistence.

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<sup>254</sup> In Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, the refrain is: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing." Despite the fact that we *could* say that our lives are more complex than our predecessors, this same question edifies all the same. He writes, "The question 'why are there beings instead of nothing?' is first in rank for us as the broadest, as the deepest, and finally as the most originary question." In, Heidegger, Martin, Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. p. 2

## THE ASTROLOGY OF HOME MANAGEMENT

Geometry and edification conceive history in fundamentally different ways that are cleared up in the distinction between *progress* and *complexity*. Where progress is an overcoming of problems, complexity emphasizes the making of problems themselves. Not for the sake of society or truth, but for the sake of subjectivity, a mood tuned into the complexity of things is smarter because geometric optimism is liable to be devastated every time the ballistic arc of progress is torn a degree off course by intervening weather. Subjectively, faith in progress is an unedifying corridor. Insulated by a promise of social progress, one would draw from a filtered array of art-of-facts to reflect upon. The ballast for the absurdity of determinacy and one-to-one correspondence would be structurally filtered out of reflection. The complexity of our time means that every subsequent child is born into far more known knowns than each one born before. We have long-since reached a point where one needs to be an expert just to know what is humanity's limit of known unknowns for any one discipline. Professionally and academically, there are only domains.

For us, power outages and draughts demand that we turn no further than the authorities that manage our universe of known unknowns. The complexity of our time, however, does not change the human ethics at stake between geometry and edification. Being thrown into a world of fewer overlapping schema does not promise that a person can easily make a home in it. Attachments are ancient. Ancient peoples simply had fewer layers to get through.<sup>255</sup> Perhaps their reward was smaller as well. But of course, only a self can make such a measurement.

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<sup>255</sup> Buddhists present one of the best examples of home making being a structural difficulty no less than the soul. Part of Buddhist asceticism is to leave the home. Then, the architecture is not a matter of thrownness, but instead, it becomes completely entwined with the mind. For a great study on this topic, see Ashraf, Kazi K. *The Hermit's Hut: Architecture and Asceticism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013.

Today, we cannot know where we are without passing through water and electricity. And we cannot *be* who we are if we *are not where we are*.

For us moderns, one has to reflect several times to get back to the big bang. Geometry is reflected in humans, but contemporary humans are already born into a “nature” that reflects geometry. We see the grid when we fly in airplanes. Geometry and everything orderly that followed continues to sustain the free-floating value of legitimacy, so getting beyond “legitimate” knowledge demands enough reflection to capture the shadow of orderliness and all of its inherent indeterminacy. In any living person’s memory, it is Lahaina Noon all day every day. That is, the sun has been directly overhead and we cannot see the misshapen shadow of our humanity. Art-of-facts born of astronomy are a reminder of the futility and superficiality of any other geometric point other than the big bang- an explosion that is the center of the universe that *it* created. And *where* that bang occurred is solved with nothing other than circular reasoning: it occurred in the center of the universe. It is the first reflection. This absurdity is our foundation, so every subsequent truth claim conspicuously fails to fold this art-of-fact into its reflections. All truths are baptized in this non-sense. It would be edifying to worship this ancestor from time to time.

There is no getting beyond the basic superstition that we are *lucky* to be alive. We are astronomically luckier yet to have a consciousness that can ask after the meaning of this. This is an astronomical understatement, but getting any more formal than *luck* is being dishonest with oneself about its knowledge of knowledge. But luck is a term with a great deal of leverage over epideictic rhetoric. *Feeling lucky* changes the meaning of the moment, the significance of being at home, and the *what to do?* about it. The fact of a feeling is given because we know that

feelings don't go away, they merely change.<sup>256</sup> And where they change, they also change what is apprehended in a scene of reflection. Because the grandiose plies a great force on feelings, it has to be ranked among edifying technologies of self.<sup>257</sup>

In the economy of attention, the grandiose cannot occupy too much time because the schema that conceives consciousness against a cosmic background is asymptotically meaningless. This can be a geometric dogma if its own. Reflecting too much upon cosmic justice is self-effacing because those "wise" enough to appreciate their insignificance could just as easily write their home out of significance. Bigger is not necessarily better. Such limit cases are important because of the hold that martyrdom and selflessness has on cultural ideals. Martyrs edify themselves to death because they offer their bodies to political geometries that short-circuit at the exhibition of selflessness. But selflessness is precisely what asceticism is. They give their life to politically edify the stupidity of others. There are many noble ways to justify this authenticity-to-the-death, however, it cannot be for home's sake because it has a predictable finality. Rather, for home's sake, the grandiose is a release valve for taking politics too seriously- which is a much greater risk at scales closer to home. Family-arity and complexity are not correct, but just more edifying than progress because they permit of calibrating the thermostat of subjectivity through shifting schematic thresholds rather than absolutes.

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<sup>256</sup> Again, I draw from Heidegger because he is both articulate and rigorous about the role of mood in consciousness. First, he says, "The fact that moods can be spoiled and change only means that Da-sein is already in a mood. The often persistent, smooth and pallid lack of mood, which must not be confused with a bad mood, is far from being nothing. Rather, in this Da-sein becomes tired of itself. Being has become manifest as a burden...Furthermore, an elevated mood can alleviate the manifest burden of being...In this 'how one is' being in a mood brings being to its 'there'." In, Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. Malden: Blackwell, 2013. p.127

<sup>257</sup> Heidegger introduction to metaphysics. He says, "What we know about how such questioning happens is all too little and too crude. In this questioning, we seem to belong completely to ourselves. Yet it is *this* questioning that pushes us into the open, provided that it itself, as a questioning, transforms itself (as does every genuine questioning), and casts a new space over and through everything." Heidegger, Martin, Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. p. 32

Returning closer to home probably means a house. I need to mention that houses are only a reluctant choice for analysis. States presuppose that citizens live in households and I know for a fact that my small audience of readers lives in houses as well. I need to qualify this because in analyzing houses, I risk being interpreted for making the unreflective presupposition that home *is the same as* house. Some further reluctance is owed to the fact that I think that house-living would be richly informed by the logics of home making without houses. The pragmatic politics of this scenario is that such ways of life are an endangered species. James C. Scott has long been interested in non-statified peoples and underscores the hegemony of geometry: “Zomia is the largest remaining region of the world whose people have not been fully incorporated into nation-states. Its days are numbered. Not so very long ago, however, such self-governing peoples were the great majority of humankind.”<sup>258</sup> It is not long before all people are thrown into the points, lines, and planes of political maps.

Sedentarism is still fascinating because its *normality* it is quite strange. It is strange how much the human invention of geometry has created humans in its image. The first thing that utilities inform us about the house is that it is at the intersection of many schema. Geometry would predict this.<sup>259</sup> Prior to the houses we know was the *grid*. And the grid was ideally arranged around the *square*. Stuart Elden explains an appeal by Descartes that even where the physically shaping geography *geometrically* is an obstacle, “we can do so with our own mind.”<sup>260</sup> We cannot help but to be citizens in our time and we would not be citizens if not for

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<sup>258</sup> Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. p. ix

<sup>259</sup> Stuart Elden in *Birth of Territory* shows how geometry insinuated itself both into the geography and the minds of citizens. He writes, “The problem with democracy, for Aristotle, is that it works on a crude type of equality (arithmetic equality), in which all are treated equally, instead of a more relational or proportionate (*analogian*) type of equality (geometric equality), in which only equals are treated equally.” Elden, Stuart. *The Birth of Territory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. P. 47

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 291



the *city*. That the city marks *progress* is one of the most taken-for-granted aspects of contemporary life.<sup>261</sup> A geometric prejudice takes for granted that a neatly geometric city is a good city. Even if the human race reconsiders its relationship to technology, it largely takes for granted that large populations, and efficient systems of managing them, are somehow preferable. All of this geometry is presupposed in the way we address global crises. In the recent history of complexity, according to one theory, life is fundamentally about getting control of information.<sup>262</sup> Life, it seems, consistently packages complexities into outwardly simpler and easier to handle packages- whether organelles or bureaucracy. But forms of life, despite the schemata that *can* reveal them to be simple, are always complexly ambivalent. What is simple for a state can just as easily be *simple* or *coercion* at the scale of home.

The question that I have been posing is: *for whom?* Archeological evidence is showing physical signs of disability at the individual level in the places where a transition from non-citizen to citizen can be traced. For instance, hunter gatherer populations living alongside city dwellers appear to have been a healthier, smarter and more leisured than their city-dwelling counterparts.<sup>263</sup> So nearly complete are the phenomena of civilizing that hedonistically fighting them misunderstands their inevitability. An anarchist conservatism is informative, but as a

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<sup>261</sup> James C. Scott, again, makes the clearest case that a belief in progress has sustained the subjectivity of the state at the expense of singular people. He writes, "Once the basic assumption of the superiority and attraction of fixed-field farming over all previous forms of subsistence is question, it becomes clear that this assumption itself rests on a deeper and more embedded assumption that is virtually never questioned. And that assumption is that sedentary life itself is superior to and more attractive than mobile forms of subsistence." See, Scott, James C. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. Kindle Edition. P. 7

<sup>262</sup> James Beniger wrote a very interesting book where he analyzes how certain events or technologies cause normality to get out of control, and *order* emerges out of the means of crisis management. Interestingly, he shows how mass production gave rise to advertising because all of sudden, industrial techniques were over-producing. It was the overproduction that led to novel ways to clear out inventories of mass-produced items. He extends this theory to life and technology as well. See, Beniger, James R., *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. p. 264-278

<sup>263</sup> Scott, James, C. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017. P. 60 "...there is a strong case to be made that life outside the state-- life as a 'barbarian'-- may often have been materially easier, freer, and healthier than life at least for non-elites inside civilization."

blueprint for life, unedifying. Asking these *why* questions can alter the meaning of home even if it remains in the same house. Why sedentarism in the first place? Even if this is not a choice for most of us, the question is still full of meaning. Where politics is so caustic, why do people insist on living so close and being involved with one another? At this point, who could even have an awareness that this freedom is lost? Most of us thrown into houses are not thrown into an open-ended question, or an option. Houses *are nature*. And in a wider, more historical valence, houses are utterly dependent on the hypothetical collective agency of the state. This too is a grandiose thought, but it is closer to home. As with the cosmos, it is a scale of subjectivity that transcends our experience. If a freedom were lost here, it was not ours to lose. It was society's loss- which has nothing to do with subjective experience except for how it epideictic-ly shapes the feeling of the present. Home is a fundamentally different form of life than a state because it includes, but is not limited to, the latter's schema.

Utilities are quite impressive, but houses that are built within their structures foreclose what is arguably the most significant ideal of freedom that there is: movement. The geometric mode of being necessitates fixed points in space to orchestrate its complex schema of statecraft. This was a diagrammatic technology to conceive of stability as an ideal. In many places, infrastructural schemes delimited the conditions of habitability centuries ago. These schemes are to us as monolithic and unchangeable as the mountains and rivers that constrained social engineers of the past. These more tightly circumscribed spaces are vastly more complex. As we know by the effort it takes to describe them and by the comparisons we draw between one "normal family" and another. From the shape and location of the walls to the fact that a house plugs into the electric grid, infrastructure is reflected everywhere in the home. To be sedentary is

to be suspended in reflection almost exclusively with ‘synthetic’ objects, which, for better or worse, walls off many possibilities for non-synthetic reasoning.

When I am in a house, it is impossible for me to not be reflected in my surroundings and vice versa. To make some art-of-fact *reflect my will* is both a question that cannot be satisfied, and in the meantime, comes at a huge expense of energy. Alongside these art-of-facts, I am (we are) the same reflection. The art-of-fact of the reflection that contains my consciousness is one *and the same*. At times I am reflected in the kitchen’s thin[g]ks, at other times, I am reflected in the rhythms of a living room. All of the things in my house are reflected in me to a degree. Even where the perimeter walls of individual items are indistinct, anonymous *clutter* registers in stress levels.<sup>264</sup> This is among the ways that we cannot hold to the same geometric formula prescribed in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*: “growing the household” is demonstrably unsettling. On one level many of the items that make their way into the home on account of infrastructure now confront the constellation of logics that uphold consumer culture. Where there is little choice in being in the grid, asking after the way that things are affecting subjectivity is within the constraints of the thermostat of *feeling at home*.

Could anything be more totalitarian than managing one home as another? Homes are the most complex social space because each would demand its own, laborious description. Certainly they have more diversity amongst themselves than sameness held in common. But *this* sovereignty is not a guarantee. We know from biopolitics and control society that Descartes was

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<sup>264</sup> This is some evidence that nothing in the home is innocuous. “Researchers found families’ homes to be overflowing with possessions, a clutter crisis so pressing that more than 75% of families in the study used their garages exclusively for extra storage. Families also frequently reported a desire to remodel and repair their homes, and many families felt their homes were unfinished in their current state. Because they so often surfaced as families’ chief concerns about their homes, our stressful home variable includes home tour words describing clutter and the need for repair or renovation.” See, Saxbe, Darby E, and Rena Repetti. "No Place Like Home: Home Tours Correlate With Daily Patterns of Mood and Cortisol." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (2010): 71-81.

right about the geometry with respect to geography: we can conceive sameness in the mind even where we cannot inscribe it upon the earth. In a cybernetic sense, who is doing the steering, adjusting the thermostat or *governing*? My restlessness is a guarantee of my subjectivity. At any time, I can try to *do nothing* to demonstrate this impossibility. The best an ego can do is negotiate a body with its environment. And while it may be hard for an ego to admit, the arrangement of the home promises a better check on behavior than a stoic ego can leverage directly over the body. Subjectivity can measure itself against its surroundings. Contrariwise, it can *fit into* a demographic.

Knowing that just water and electricity are credited with a large degree of my sedentarism, my immobility at one scale opens onto another where a greater degree of mutual affectability is a moment-to-moment question of sovereignty. Conformity or nonconformity within this space is the most significant border in all of politics because changes that I make on the structure I live in will change who I am and how I behave. The things I own and the media I consume bring me closer to being the same as something else. Replication of art-of-facts has never been so precise. And this apparent sameness brings me closer to political existence and takes me further away from making my own edifice. *Weighing in* on political issues at the level of policy only accelerates the fall from feeling at home in the world.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> In one of Heidegger's more impassioned, political passages, I think he foresees the attention economy where just by the disposition of what we are suspended in reflection with, we converge. "When the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered technologically and can be exploited economically: when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like; when you can simultaneously "experience" an assassination attempt against a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo; when time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all peoples; when a boxer counts as the great man of a people; when the tallies of millions at mass meetings are a triumph; then yes then, there still looms like a specter over all this uproar the question: what for?- where to? and what then?" This is noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First because he raises the philosophical problem of ubiquity, but also because he sours it with his own value judgements. Heidegger, Martin, Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. p. 40

Geometry and capitalism are both conspiring to manage homes for all under the presupposition that its metaphysics of stillness and stability is ideal. Geometry is ancient and is reflected in capitalism, but now capitalism exceeds all of our living memories. Being anti-capitalist is like being anti-gravity. It is an entirely different matter to cynically wall it off as stupid. If capitalism is stupid, it is better reflected upon than being reflected in. Regardless, it is a presence that has to be *worked within*, but not upon. The agency of capitalism and geometry does not reduce to a demographic of greedy men or technocrats. Because it is reflected in everything, it reduces to individual acts of being reflected in or upon. Demographics are epiphenomenal to some human tendencies and tendencies of judgment. And what lends itself to predictability lends itself to another's opportunity, an opportunity for a lifeform to get control by outwardly simplifying something. Geometry has crystallized incredibly complex and fragile structures whose precariousness eludes our human-scale attention spans. The stillness in my home appears stable- and it is relatively so at the level of my experience. It is edifying to consider the fragility of infrastructure, its vulnerability to resource depletion, cyber attack, political dysfunction etc., but walls are what they are. They largely contain a complexity nested within things absolutely out of their control, that operate on a schema that transcends their agency. No edifice is *concrete* but the walls of a home are harder and more persistent than the plastic subjectivities they contain.

*All* of this has to be taken for granted before we can even consider common furniture, appliances, decorations, clothes and any other thing that depends on a house. All of these things are playing some supporting role in creating a feeling of home, yet, so many of these things that make a home are actually scarcely present to subjectivity. A bookshelf, for instance, traces different ages of aspirations. Unread volumes of pages point to other times when a person had different learning interests or different learning styles. In their un-familiarity, they become

apparently invisible but still affective even if only as clutter. Many books envelope hopeful fantasies of speaking foreign languages, learning photography or understanding wine- and as such are only reminders of unfulfilled promises. As a houseguest, a bookshelf is often an all-too-intimate revelation about your host's phases- and all the more so when the spines look new. The untapped spine is all the more revealing because we know that the host did not purchase the book, but instead, something demographic wended its way through this person and caused him or her to desire to be the same as some particular cultural form. But it was a desire too weak to experiment down its corridor so its presence as a wall is all the more foreboding. This social edification is on garish display in the stereotypical dorm room where brands and posters mosaic the complex constellation of samenesses that *add up to* a unique individual.

Finally, what most conspicuously relies on utilities is media. In terms of complexity, both the physical machines and the content that they express, nothing comparably modulates the rhythms of the human brain. Increasingly, all of the above do not make their way into the home without some initial introduction from the internet, television or the post. Each of these media enact a geometric convergence of space that put the replicated things within reach of a widely distributed population.<sup>266</sup> No media is particular; all seek a common denominator. We have not seen the limits of codifying of populations, bodies and desires, but the limit is inessential to the reflection on its geometry. It has grown far more complex than the days where every owner of television or radio was subjected to the same two or three programs and sponsors. It is more complex because demographic taxonomies have evolved far past gender and race, but into habits

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<sup>266</sup> In Innis' terms, such media emphasize space with a very short memory. "The heavy materials are suited to the development of architecture and sculpture. Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character, such as papyrus and paper. The latter are suited to wide areas in administration and trade." See Innis, Harold. *Empire and Communications*. Toronto: Press Porcépic, 1986. P.5.

and desires. The points become more fixed this way. How can subjectivity know what it *likes* when the ego's thin[g]king amounts to choices?

## CYNICISM AND ANALECTICAL REASONING

I opened this chapter with cynicism, and this presents its limit for edification and a turn to *analectical* reasoning. Cynicism and its offspring presuppose that the egological pole of a reflection, by pure will, can alter its “impressions.”<sup>267</sup> Or in the case of Diogenes, the structure of his legendary home, *a jar*, is symbolic of the fact that a subjective thermostat was not calibrated within humanity, but only reflected upon society against a sort of cosmic geometry. He wasn't wrong: cultural habits are often unreflective, even stupid. But Diogenes wasn't managing a home, just an ego-like other Stoics and Cynics. These ways of being are more deflective than reflective in that they reduce the self to an agent over its impressions. Their case is edifying as far as circumscribing the perimeter of agency, and questioning *normality*, but they presuppose that a quorum of agency can be summoned at will. That is, they overdo the illusion or *unreality* of the environment and lose the phenomena of reflection along with it.<sup>268</sup>

Cynicism is interesting because it renders politics not only stupid, but even laughable. The allure of this ethical strategy is enchanting. On the other hand, this laughability is reflected in the way of life that is predicated on evading the corridors of politics without managing a home

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<sup>267</sup> In the *Handbook* of Epictetus, this is most clear. The most startling example being, “If you kiss your child or your wife, say to yourself that it is a human being that you're kissing; and then, if one of them should die, you won't be upset. Epictetus, and Robin Hard. *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Kindle Edition. Location. 5861

<sup>268</sup> In making the case that blandness is a unifying factor between Daoists and Confucians, François Jullien writes, “Confucians, after all, are no more anxious than Daoists to oppose appearance, or to separate the rational from the empirical. No metaphysical preoccupations here (at least not until the arrival of Buddhism), for this philosophy does not engage in ontology. Indeed, it seems to me that we must proceed from this very point if we are to gain an understanding of ancient Chinese (as opposed to Greek) thought. In Jullien, Francois, and Paula M. Versano. *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. New York: Zone Books, 2004 p. 47-8

within it. It is comedy to be intentionally abnormal. Chinese philosophy has an honest contribution to make to the seemingly inescapable geometry of Western thought. If reflection can thread the needle through all of these minor traditions, Confucian thought is perhaps the most tuned into *human being* because it makes no attempt to be meta-anthropocentric, nor does it try to transcend subjectivity. It occupies a unique place in philosophy in a way that is still evident to us today when we read it and ask *where is code? what is the point? or how does he get away with these contradictions?* From Confucius one can glean a fact that is so often lost in one-to-one correspondence where the word is presupposed to be a transparent window into some object: contradictions are not paradoxes. Words are reflections of perceptions and perceptions are without limit.

As I mentioned before, both structuralism and Confucianism conceived epistemologies of birth, but Confucius was already anti-Oedipus before post-structuralism unleashed its pent up impatience with *the point*. Instead of conceiving subjectivity in spite of limits, however, Confucius was more interested in the anthropocentric limits of subjective multiplicity. So where reflection is my response to post-structuralism, it also informs my reading of Chinese philosophy. And Chinese philosophy informs the scale of human reflection. A reflection emphasizes the open-endedness of relationships where they may be misunderstood as binary. And further, where a reflection is neither a substance nor a process, it evades classical categories for concepts of Being, yet, reflections *are*.<sup>269</sup>

Philosophy aside, how do we read Chinese thought in the contemporary condition? I can scarcely move around my home without touching the entire known world. The water that I use

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<sup>269</sup> Indicative of the awkwardness of fitting Chinese thought into ‘ontology’ or ‘metaphysics’ neither of which are explicit concepts in the tradition, Ames calls Confucian thought “entails an ontology of events, not substances.” Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. *Thinking Through Confucius*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. p. 15



can touch the furthest reaches of the planet and the atmosphere. The same is true of the energy I consume. The food that I eat makes similar journeys across the globe. I cannot buy anything without this singular mindless act, in some way, touching innumerable people, creatures and places. When I email a friend one mile away, the message is liable to travel hundreds or thousands. Today, home is an involution of the known universe.

I think the question and the reflections *are* the Chinese reading. That is to say, *analectical* reasoning is an attempt at familiarity, not a formula. In any other context, it is hard to imagine resources, labor or communications *not* getting folded into the politics, geometry and normative injunctions. Chinese thought alerts me to the weirdness of talking about what “we” should do. This *line* of thought leaves a thermostat with nothing to bounce off of. *What we should do* has nothing to do with ethics because a singular subjectivity cannot respond to this question.

It can be hard to see anything through the window-words of Chinese prose *than* exoticism. Nonetheless, I’ll risk another to close.

From the *Daodejing*, “Venture not beyond your doors to know the world; Peer not outside your window to know the way-making (dao) of *tian*. The farther one goes. The less one knows. It is for this reason that sages know without going anywhere out of the ordinary, Understand clearly without seeing anything out of the ordinary. And get things done without doing anything out of the ordinary.”<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Ames, Roger; Hall, David. *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation* (Kindle Locations 3012-3019). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

## CHAPTER 4: PEOPLE

*In this chapter, I discuss the internal limit that is the complement of social complexity: biological complexity. First, I will highlight the general importance of reflecting upon the human body. Next, I analyze how the heart and the brain are integral to human biological complexity. I will argue that despite the fact that such complexities cannot be measured, even a minimal understanding of these complex systems is far more edifying than engaging in the political. Finally, I will close with my final comments on why home is the upper social bound for a philosophy of difference.*

### UTILITIES TO PEOPLE

Utilities give us a way to reflect on how politics shapes ordinary experience. Whether it is infrastructure or media, it is clear that such things are actively edifying ordinary experience and populations alike. But as I have been insistent to say, considering these structural, ‘external’ art-of-facts as being *really* external as opposed to notionally external, is a mistake. There is no clear line between the inside and outside. Following this lack of *real* definition, I want to continue with the ego’s endoskeleton following the last chapter of social exoskeleton. Here, I want to pull away from infrastructural factors of edification (whether fossilized or mediatized) for a more subtle look at self-reflection. It is clear that politics largely structures the ordinary, but it is not total.

A conventional distinction is to oppose individuals and society, but as has been the implicit refrain of this project, a person is not a point. A person may be a singularity, but a person is not an *individual*. Quite the opposite, a person is infinitely divisible and infinitely reflected in its environment. As these permutations clash with historical subjectivity, *being* is a

singularity every moment.<sup>271</sup> Humans are far more like ecosystems than atoms. The most fleeting of all *parts* of the apocryphal “individual” is the ego that is so scarcely present in the scene of reflection- the very thing we refer to in moments of self-identification.

Merleau-Ponty showed that phenomena related to the body, and its comportment to the environment, tells us a lot more about experience than unreflective recounting of perceptions. He was good at disclosing what we did not know our physiology was implying.<sup>272</sup> Phenomenology succeeds at deliberately inserting the missing ego into the scene of reflection. This is why it is such an apt model for the diagram on the mirror. The ego is so quick to exit the scene that its presencing has to be habituated. So in writing edification, one can only try to outline scenes where an ego may be able to triangulate itself with respect to art-of-factual contexts that are likely to be encountered by others. Without this habit, the ego is otherwise an unexpected guest- usually occasioned by something out of the ordinary or some physical pain. In any case, if the ego is what the “individual” is referring to in opposition to society, we know that such a thing is just as liable to be a fluid extension of society as it is to assert a distinction. Because this tension shifts one moment to the next, freedom has always been the most slippery concept of interest to the human condition. This much is my the wager up to this point.

Now I want to discuss the other agents that share the body with the “I.” They are far more numerous and *material* than the epiphenomenal ego. They play a much bigger role in edifying

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<sup>271</sup> In his essay on *control* Deleuze writes how people are increasingly taken *as* component parts and that these component parts mean different things to different sectors of society. His point is that singular persons are “*dividual*” because aspects of them can condition the way that they are apprehended by society. I interpret this as a further perversion of geometry because it has atomized the components of the “whole individual” as if *moments* of being *added up to a whole*. By contrast, this mode of apprehension does not lead to a limit, but it can go on without limit. See, Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” October 59 (1992): 3-7.

<sup>272</sup> For instance, “From my body’s point of view, I never see the six faces of a cube as equal, even if it is made of glass, and yet the word “cube” has a sense: the cube itself, the real cube above and beyond its sensible appearances has its six equal faces.” He goes on to explain that we discourse the cube as the objective thing, even though we can never apprehend its six “simultaneous faces.” See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012. p. 209,10.

me than the “I” does. These are, broadly speaking, biological art-of-facts. They are what people call their “insides” in an ordinary way- whether blood and guts or thoughts and feelings. But it will not be enough to talk about egological insides, because these “insides” are reflections of external art-of-facts, most immersively, other human beings.

In any case, there are three ways that I want to talk about life. First, the singularity *qua* ecosystem is a complex assemblage of functors that follow relatively straightforward paths. While their functions are straightforward, they interact with others functors creating highly complex conditions for expression. Acting on some of these simple actors can drastically turn down the volume on particular feelings and the way they are expressed. This is very subtle and quickly bleeds into my second topic of life. These actors (like hormones and the nervous system) interface external phenomena with the inside of the body. For instance, I could be angry. My anger could be an expression/reflection of some activity in my amygdala. But my amygdala did not spontaneously give rise to anger. Rather its activity could be a reflection of any number of things. It could be physically poked by a doctor operating on me, it could be activated because I was slapped in the face or it could be news on the television recounting soaring gun sales after the most recent mass shooting.<sup>273</sup> From the perspective of the amygdala, it matters not if the provocation is a direct physical encounter, an indirect physical encounter (as in the body that envelopes this brain region), a noise, image, memory or facial gesture etc.<sup>274</sup> What matters to the ego is that sensory organs have translated some art-of-fact into the language of mood chemistry.

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<sup>273</sup> Sapolsky writes that “The amygdala is particularly sensitive to unsettling circumstances that are social.” But he also shows how this “social” reduction is arrived at by physical pathways that are learned. See, Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017 P. 34

<sup>274</sup> It is critical to note here that this example risks perpetuating the myth of “brain centers” with is decidedly not the case. Demasio most famously destroys the one-to-one correspondence theories of the brain. Ultimately brain plasticity will prove a far more powerful phenomenon than specialization. He writes, “Emotion and feeling, along with the covert physiological machinery underlying them, assist us with the daunting task of predicting an uncertain future and planning our actions accordingly... I propose that human reason depends on several brain systems, working in concert across many levels of neuronal organization, rather than on a single brain center. Both ‘high

The way I *feel* does not discern legitimate causes of emotion. Legitimacy, or adequacy of explanation, is something that becomes *saber*-known after the fact. Nor does the way we feel distinguish between real and fake. PTSD episodes, for instance, do not arise from *fake* stimuli. The way we feel *is what it is* in the most focused way we have discussed so far. And this brings me to the third consideration of life: *other lives*. Utilities and structures do many things to shape thoughts and feelings, however, nothing so closely mirrors one person's insides quite like another human. No amount of mood lighting and bossa nova can clear the uncanny feeling brought into a room by a person with terrible news. A single person's mood can shift the atmosphere of an auditorium. Laughter is contagious. Awkward comments, lewd remarks and bad news can put an opaque barrier between experience and all the utilities around. This is because the expression of a human emotion is going to resonate, not just with the eyes, the ears, dopamine, or adrenaline. A human emotion is liable to take possession of a quorum of the functors in a person's body. How an intense emotion in a person comes to be expressed has a lot to do with the state of the body, not just logic and content. Of course, what primes this body state is going to involve all of the things in the scene of reflection.

These three topics of life are not isolated things; they are all context that will be suspended in any scene. Each deserves its own moment of reflection, however, because the epistemology of home is not contemporary. It benefits from a lot of the rigor that has not been directed at the science and philosophy of mood. While mood is irreducibly aesthetic, phenomenology, biology and neuroscience drastically improved the resolution of this picture. Invoking Western science to this cause does nothing to diminish the open-endedness of being at

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level' and 'low level' brain regions, from the prefrontal cortices to the hypothalamus and brain stem, cooperate in the making of reason." In Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. P. xvi

home in the world. Nor will it point to an ethical code even if some plainly edifying guidelines present themselves. It does, however, diminish reliance on ordinary *beliefs* about moods, their origins and their implications. The complexity of human *being* promises that there are no simple answers; however, reflecting first on how some basic actors in the body operate informs how a pre-reflective consciousness will apprehend particular art-of-facts.<sup>275</sup> Empiricism has a role in this, but edification is only meaningful as a subjectively-empirical science of mood-making and being-at-home. The meaning in question would be a freedom that is defunct in the political sphere. We can change, enable, or potentiate outcomes, but we cannot control for them as other sciences appear to achieve.

A state of anxiety that subtends a person's emotional expression is more aesthetic and circumstantial than it is reducible and causative. Anxiety does not promise an appropriate, rational or beneficial outlet. There are no bodily structures that prohibit an ego from unloading its anger or anxiety on the wrong suspect. Domestic abuse, substance abuse and suicide for instance, increase in economic downturns. This makes sense at the biological level because, among all of its options for release, stress seldom finds outlets that have any long-term benefits. As with so many things, *short-term* and *long-term* desires tend to prescribe contradictory behaviors. Where subjectivity is at the confluence of mostly short-term interests of politics, culture and commerce, these are thankless outlets to vent anxieties. A pedagogical ethos steered toward the improvement of these organs of public life has its place, however, given how intensively these things saturate society, their improvement would be a luxury for an edified

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<sup>275</sup> Interestingly, "The newer pathways for involuntary facial expressions don't overlap those used for voluntary ones, and this makes the pattern and timing of facial muscle contractions for involuntary and voluntary differ. The smiling muscles illustrate these effects. . . . An involuntary smile will typically involve not only upturned corners of the mouth but also smiling eyes. . . . People who are trying to force a smile, on the other hand, often forget to scrunch their eyes in the corner and end up with a smile that looks painted on. . . ." In, Wegner, Daniel M. *The Illusion of Conscious Will*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002. P. 34

subject- if such a subject exists. But where once material subsistence was a threshold to citizenry, today, a different mode of *caring for the self* appears more apt. Feelings are complex, but they are not entirely mysterious. They are singular, but not individual. They are negotiable, but not controllable. Emotional expression does not dead end at the spiritual kernel of individuality. Emotional expression is immanent in many complex, but traceable systems inside the body. Without an understanding of how emotional expression comes to take part in a scene of reflection, one is liable to assume that the edifice of their subjectivity is given rather than built. One is liable to justify behavior rather than explore its origins. Even the best social policies cannot compensate for this understanding at this scale of life. On the contrary, social life is liable to aggravate these things. Again, the Chinese scale of home management is fitting because its notion of caring for the self regards the scene of reflection as part of that self. It is fitting because the Chinese scale *is* manageable, yet it stands to gain much from a look at functors laced inside the human endoskeleton.

## EMOTIONAL PRECISION

Responding to the question *how do you feel?* is severely limited by the words we use to convey feelings. In light of contemporary understanding, responses like *I feel good* are little more nuanced than saying that lunch is made of food. Ordinarily, the question is posed with an emphasis on *you*- which corresponds to the ordinary self-identification with emotion. Rather, when the emphasis is placed on *how*, the *you* becomes distanced from the factors influencing feeling. This is similar to tasting things like wine. Without jargon, we can merely express our feeling about it in terms of like or dislike. With jargon, we can distance ourselves from the feeling and *observe* taste from some altitude. All reflection demands some distance. Fleeting

egos need a sub-identity lexicon to draw from in order to understand their emotions as immanent to more than individuality: emotion is immanent to an entire scene of reflection.

There is a subtlety to thin[g]king-feeling that is most meaningfully grasped by the self-same person who experiences. Just as we can see more colors and taste more flavors with gestalt markers of colors or flavors, our grasp of feelings is improved by distinguishing its palette of elements. In the end, we find that feelings come full circle back to the fact that we are what we are thin[g]king. Thoughts and feelings are reflected in one another. They are aspects of the same reflection because a person cannot think in isolation from feelings, and feelings cannot be isolated from thoughts. Nonetheless, this phenomenon is greatly clarified even with a minimum of reflection on brain structure, the nervous system more generally, and hormones. The brain remains among the least comprehensively understood objects of scientific inquiry, but politics and homemaking are so far behind this frontier of knowledge that starting with established facts makes an outsized impact on edification. Starting with some human phenomena will help to target some questions about feelings with respect to homemaking.

The phenomenology of human experience is inexhaustible. I can feel it when I am being stared at. I have been woken from sleep because of a stare. I can smell a lie and I pass out at the sight of another person's insides. I can finish my friends' sentences. And I can communicate volumes of information with a curled lip or a glance out of the corner of my eye. In terms of reflection, I don't know this look on my face as well as my friends do. I am ordinarily unreflectively *reflecting* a scene. I am no more aware of my expression than a mirror is aware of the image on its surface. I express something with a pattern of muscle contractions that I would be at a loss to describe, but my friends see something concrete- something that contextualizes this particular here-now. A subtle facial gesture can throw a shared familiarity into the scene of



reflection. We could be listening to a third person speaking and all the while a silent understanding puts the two of us on the *inside* of some barrier- and the third person on the *other* side of a wall. An inside joke or cultural allusion can accomplish this. Similarly, I could be experiencing *a scene* in some setting with only strangers, but I make eye contact with some other witness. I sense something of myself reflected in the other. We may share a moment of disgust, shock or amusement with nothing more than a brief moment of eye contact. In an otherwise uncanny scene, these strange human phenomena can create a sense of familiarity or home in the weirdest of circumstances.

These phenomena are tremendously complicated. Many, like *feeling a gaze*, elude controlled, empirical reproduction.<sup>276</sup> On the other hand, easily reproduced experiences like contagious yawning elude conclusive explanations.<sup>277</sup> We know it is subjectively real because even reading the word *yaaaawwn* could elicit an involuntary sympathetic response. In these above cases, the self remains the best ledge for a measuring tape because these phenomena are particular expressions of an aesthetic assemblage of things acting in our bodies. I mention these phenomena only to make the point that concrete expressions of the body have their origins in complex biological factors.

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<sup>276</sup> I think that this case is best made by a person, a believer in the phenomenon, who most desperately wants to prove this phenomenon. His evidence is mostly anecdotal and the experiments with positive results are not all that impressive. I would suggest that the experience of the phenomenon is so subtle that we struggle to isolate its "cause." Rather, I think that this *feeling* would probably be as subjective as self-reporting pain- another phenomenon that has evaded standard measure. See, Sheldrake, Rupert. "The Sense of Being Stared At -- Part 1: Is It Real or Illusory?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12, no. 6 (2005): 10-31.

<sup>277</sup> For the phenomenon of yawning, for instance, where it is empirically obvious, researchers has even extended the phenomenon to include canine empathy. See, Silva, Karine, Joana Bessa, and Liliana De Sousa. "Auditory Contagious Yawning in Domestic Dogs (*Canis Familiaris*): First Evidence for Social Modulation." *Animal Cognition* 15, no. 4 (2012): 721-4.

## MOODS, OTHER PEOPLE AND POLITICS

Human-to-human phenomena are trickier to parse than human-to-material phenomena like Merleau-Ponty's upside down goggles<sup>278</sup> or Heidegger's broken hammer.<sup>279</sup> This is because non-living items *hold still* enough for us to measure a critical mass of affective properties. But I cannot even see what you see in the mirror. Geo-metering another human, another life, or even the *self* is almost hopelessly complex. Measuring against another human is more like trying to measure a reflection in a mirror; it is too entangled to produce an 'objective' result.<sup>280</sup> In considering humans in homemaking, the context in question is not "outside" as we might consider utilities to be. The contextual walls contain biological factors that are beneath conscious expression of egos. Despite the problems in isolating these phenomena, there is already a very functional (if largely impractical) means of not falling prey to each one of these phenomena: avoid humans.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Merleau-Ponty recounts several experiments where test subjects are presented with visually distorting lenses or mirrors that force the subjects' to recalibrate to the new perception. Goggles the caused subjects to see upside down were actually overcome in short amount of time. See, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012. P. 253-265

<sup>279</sup> Heidegger famously shows how a hammer, whence broken, reveals precisely how much we had taken for granted. Graham Harman takes this as a sort of cornerstone of his object-oriented ontology. I recommend his essay "Phenomenology and the Theory of Equipment," In, Harman, Graham. *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures*. Washington: Zero Books, 2010.

<sup>280</sup> Experience is largely predicated on the very geometric behavior of the brain to categorize experiences. This process is irreducibly subjective, but it also explains why humans are more complex than material objects. The contingencies involved in categorization are far more complex. Damasio writes, "The prefrontal cortices themselves represent categorizations of the situations in which the organism has been involved, classifications of the contingencies of our real-life experience...This is where the notion of contingency applies: it is your own thing, related to your own experience, relative to events that vary with the individual. The experience that you, your neighbor, and I have had with doorknobs or broomsticks might be less contingent, since by and large the structure and operation of that category of entities are consistent and predictable." In, Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2005. Kindle Edition. Location 181-182

<sup>281</sup> Where it is obvious that solitary confinement is cruel and unusual, it is also clear that the physical environment matters. Robinson Crusoe, for instance, was based on an actual human figure who made clear his longing for being alone on a desert island. This should not be surprising in light of how exhausting the complexity of other humans can be for subjective consciousness. Where negotiating the elements on a desert island is complex, with other humans there are expectations that they conform to certain standards. See, Evers, Marco. "Trapped on a Pacific Island: Scientists Research the Real Robinson Crusoe - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International." SPIEGEL ONLINE. February 06, 2009. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/trapped-on-a-pacific-island-scientists-research-the-real-robinson-crusoe-a-605963.html>.

While none of these innocuous phenomena (probably) warrant going into hermitage, it is initially important to point to some involuntary behaviors of our own bodies that are precipitated by other human beings. This calls attention to the fact that human beings are the most complex art-of-facts that are likely to be part of home. It also points to the volatile position that the ego is suspended in. In the stillness of my home, there is a sort of Newtonian physics of behavior control. If I want to correct my posture, I can sit in a chair that encourages this rather than some sprawling sofa. If I am trying to curb an addiction, I can physically wall myself off from the context that provokes it. Other humans abide different laws of physics that more closely resemble quantum effects.

How does a mood change? If a mood is the corridor that steers people down specific corridors, then moods are structural. While there is no reducible *point* or foundation of moodiness, there are many ways to trace influences. Tracing them back can go back much further than self-identifying, *I-am* adjectives like happy, sad, nostalgic or melancholy. Moods have been and still are a philosophical problem, yet there is a lot of empirical research to clarify concepts of them. Neurological research is showing with ever more specificity how intensively our bodies are reflecting the environment beneath the register of conscious awareness. Far from disenchanting the experience of life, the contemporary understanding of the ecosystem of a singular human increases the granularity with which an ego can apprehend itself. There are fewer excuses for attributing experience to a pith of personality. There are even fewer rationales for crudely defining moods *as what they are*, identifying with them or worse, identifying others with them. This is because it is clear now that mood *expression* is a spontaneous paroxysm of a more complex body state.

In the introduction, I called politics a bad mood. It is a bad mood because to make policy requires a blunt taxonomy of individuals and their tendencies at the same time that it walls off all of the ways that singular persons comprise veritable ecosystems of minor actors.<sup>282</sup> When obscuring this complexity of human beings, people are liable to be reified as elite, poor, educated, ignorant, criminals and angels. These stable labels deny both the ephemerality of intentions and the normative criteria that solicit these demographic signatures. These low-resolution labels are the points, lines and planes of politics. Engaging in politics starts and ends with these emotive labels. And this is why politics *is engaging*.

The political mood is a mood like any other. When this mood is expressed it is also being reflected. Getting out of the reflection where something is expressed, or to be unaffected by it, is phenomenally rare. It demands things like leaving rooms, shutting off TVs or otherwise putting up a barrier more impactful than *choosing to not care*.<sup>283</sup> Present to me an argument for trickle-down economics and I am liable to respond with the importance of low disparities between rich and poor. Will this change a mind? Or has my argument reinforced the other's position? A mood is a lot more robust than expression, so it is hard to reverse another's initial apprehension of some topic. People are not merely logical; they rehearse and replay roles. Present to me an argument for prison reform, and I am liable to agree with supporting evidence of disadvantaged

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<sup>282</sup> Rejecting Freud's reduction that all roads point to "daddy," Deleuze and Guattari write, "Thus it does not suffice to attribute molar multiplicities and mass machines to the preconscious, reserving another kind of machine or multiplicity for the unconscious. For it is the assemblage of both of these that is the province of unconscious, the way in which the former condition the latter, and the latter prepare the way for the former, or elude them or return to them: the libido suffuses everything." For them, the assemblage is the operative concept. (And this is how Chinese epistemology, weirdly enough, corresponds to post-structuralism in its reduction to multiplicity- if that can be said. In, Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari, and Brian Massumi. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011. P. 35

<sup>283</sup> This is willful barrier is characteristic of Stoics. Epictetus has in his handbook, "Disease is an impediment to the body, but not to choice, unless choice wills it to be so. Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to choice. And tell yourself the same with regard to everything that happens to you; for you'll find that it acts as an impediment to something else, but not to yourself." In Epictetus, and Robin Hard. *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. P. 289

demographics. If anything, my argument is likely to only intensify your mood because it will corroborate it. Nonetheless, my arguments are nearly autonomic responses like a mallet to my kneecap. My offense or sympathy are involuntary reflexes that I have cultivated over a much thicker duration than the immediate conversation. In the conversation, I may content myself with my (subjective) moral higher ground, but I have nonetheless fallen prey to discoursing in types of moodless people whose typologies ostensibly scale up and down according to the value of  $x$ - which is absurd, of course.

Humans are a critical component to edification because while a mood is composed of diverse functors in a body reflecting a diverse scene of reflections, other humans mirror this complexity. Humans compound this complexity in a way that a lifeless hammer does not. Hammers are statistically more predictable than humans, not least among all reasons, because they are inanimate. As with all reflections, humans are both symmetrical and oppositional. There are no causes and effects, only amplifications and rearrangements of intensity. These hold for both humans and hammers, but humans comprise trillions of components each more unpredictable than a single hammer. In trying to inform the question *what to do?*, I hope to be able to show how some components inside the body can conspire to efface the self when engaging in politics. Many of the things that philosophy has had to approach with mystic abandon actually have empirical counterparts in contemporary biology. Ethics at the biological level provides a clearer picture for philosophy to take more nuanced points of departure.

## **BIOPOLITICS IS THE MIRROR IMAGE OF EDIFICATION**

For the sake of orientation, I would like to distinguish the biology in question from Foucault's biopolitics. Foucault's biopolitics called attention to a mode of governmentality that

got beneath demography, truth and identity. Statistical bureaucracy and the sciences ushered in new technologies of discipline at the same time that they superficially satisfied enlightenment ideals of health and welfare. Politics shifted from a sphere of rational persuasion to managing populations.<sup>284</sup> For my purposes, this shift from discourse to management underscores the futility of investing society with our subjective care. One's effect on *society* has long since slipped out of the paygrade of ordinary lives- if it were really ever there. Utilities are very good examples of how the political sphere occupies itself with the apparently benign and salutary aspects of social life. But each of these infrastructural organs wall singular humans into corridors where possibilities are closed off. This is a subtle form of discipline because on the face of it, it is positively good. The *negative* or absence of utilities is *not* having power and *not* having running water, which is bad. This is the kind of choice, however, that takes the question for granted. In my reading of biopolitics, this is the most deft technology of home-wrecking. It frames the question such that *any answer* and any response has already ensnared a subject. *Of course I want to be healthy instead of unhealthy, of course I want to be secure instead of unsafe, of course I want to be affluent instead of poor.* In every response there is tacit acceptance of the distinction and many of the notions that subtend its expression. This repeats the same logic of all politics (whether arguments, policy, or demographics): once a person engages in them, they come to inhabit a scale of being that is abstracted and symbolized out of proximal experience. Every moment of being political is a rejection of the material conditions of reflection.

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<sup>284</sup> Foucault articulates the transformation this way, "...discipline tries to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used...the new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production illness, and so on." In, Foucault, Michel, and François Ewald. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. London: Penguin, 2008. P. 242-243

Biopolitics is a sorting technology rather than an engine of persuasion, compromise or contest. This distinction, however, also presents a false dilemma between one and the other. For all their differences, they are both expressions of geometry. Population biology is radically different from the biology of experience. Here, I want point to this general concept by sampling two very sprawling categories of biology that are familiar to politics and philosophy: hearts and minds. The complexity of this blood pump and grey matter so conspicuously unfolds without limit that at a certain point it will go without saying. But even where it goes without saying, it leaves much to consider. My humbler goal at this point is to affix a couple of waypoints to the mirror. Our hearts and minds are the treasured prize of all things political. As such, they are vulnerable to the geometry that preys on them as legitimate political contributions.

### **HEARTS AND MINDS: BRAINS**

It was mostly for parallelism and convention that I spoke of the mind, because before we can discuss the mind (which includes what it is acting on), we first need to approach the brain. I want to discuss the brain first because it, in combination with all of the body's nerves, more conspicuously gives rise to the experience of one-to-one correspondence among thoughts, feelings and responses. The heart, by contrast, involves all kinds of chemicals whose effects are more latent, slower to affect parts of the body and slower to dissipate. Of course, the interactions between the heart and mind turn, whatever provisional hierarchy aids their explanation, into a tangled rhizome of mutual affection. But this is a fact that I want to build up to rather than dwell on.

Observing the brain quickly reveals how there is nothing innocuous in one's surroundings. It also calls attention to aspects camouflaged in ordinariness that are liable to be

involuntarily reflected in particular components of the body's assemblage of expression. From the perspective of the brain, the 'external' environment is not one thing that an individual acts in/on as politics conceives it. From the perspective of the brain the environment is an ecosystem that presents a wide array of stimuli that the body's senses apprehend through their own arrays of receptors. The ego, if it arrives to the scene at all, is already late to the scene of reflection because the body doesn't need the ego. It does not need the ego to protect itself or make "executive decisions" in the far more dynamic world that the body is inhabiting. This is obvious in the beating of the heart. Somewhat more *decisive* is conscious attention on the breath.<sup>285</sup> But even as you are reading this, your body's nociceptors (the sensory neurons that detect pain) are causing you to shift around in your seat while your conscious attention is (presumably) reading these words. In the somatosensory system alone, there are different pathways detecting pain, temperature, touch (as in fine touch) and proprioception (what informs you of where your body parts are).<sup>286</sup>

Taking only the somatosensory nerves, there are at least these four ways to consider how the body is constantly reflecting its environment. These senses are always *sensing* whether we are conscious or not. In fact, it takes a significant amount of stimulation for any of these to even hit a critical mass of intensity to demand conscious attention. It usually takes more than autonomic shiftlessness in the chair to call for a conscious response, for instance. From the perspective of the body, what we call pain is not a thing or an event. Pain is a medium. And

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<sup>285</sup> Easily manifest attitudes, as between calm and excited, are switched on and off with every breath. "Whenever you inhale, you turn on the sympathetic nervous system slightly, minutely speeding up your heart. And when you exhale, the parasympathetic half turns on, activating your vagus nerve in order to slow things down (this is why forms of meditation are built around extended exhalations). Therefore, the length of time between heartbeats tends to be shorter when you're inhaling than exhaling." In Sapolsky, Robert M. *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004. Kindle Edition. P. 48

<sup>286</sup> See, Norden, Jeanette. "The Somatosensory System." Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Lecture. *Understanding the Brain*. Great Courses, 2007



within this medium there are only intensities because the sensors are always sensing. The singularities that are experienced as moments or memories belong to the fleeting ego alone.

At the level of the body, different kinds of receptors are meshed together, yet, are singularly alert to very particular stimuli in the environment. Despite this specialization, by the time their messages reach the brain, the information that they carry has already been meshed with that of billions of other sensory neurons. This astronomically complex sensation is what assures us of a uniquely subjective apprehension of feeling- just like how what my eyes see in the mirror is unique to me. There are low resolution functions of the brain that elicit more or less automatic awareness to painful stimuli. These experiences may be more or less common. However, any percept or emotional awareness (like suffering) of pain depends on the evolutionarily-advanced cortex.<sup>287</sup>

As with much of our understanding of the brain, we know this from extraordinary cases. In the case of trigeminal neuralgia, “People afflicted complain of the sensation of knives’ stabbing their flesh, of pins sticking in their skin and bone. Their whole lives may become focused on the pain; they can do or think of nothing else while the jabbing lasts, and the jabbing may come frequently. They bodies close in a tight defensive coil.” Because of the severity of this disease some doctors would remove part of the prefrontal cortex. The interesting result, however, was not an elimination of the pain. The patients reported that the pain was still there, but the suffering was gone.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> One of the basic arguments of Lisa Barrett’s book is that the singular word for an emotion belies a multiplicity of bodily action that does not reduce as neatly as the emotional names imply. She argues that emotional titles are good enough for discoursing about things, but the apparent one-to-one correspondence of emotion to feeling should not be taken as a *real* connection. For an interesting discussion of how we evolve emotions socially see “How the Brain Makes Emotions,” In, Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017.

<sup>288</sup> Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. P. 264-266

Ordinarily, however, the emotional and “objective” registers of pain are not going to be so explicit to conscious experience. At the level of experience, *pain* is a singular (if enduring) experience (expressed: *ouch*) that masks the paths followed to the parts of the brain that register percepts (prefrontal cortex) or parts of the brain that treat the stimuli “as if” it were a repetition of an historical pattern of experience.<sup>289</sup> While the latter case may involve an experience, it also may not. This is one such contingency that bears on edification because the part of the brain that handles sensory experiences can act symbolically beneath the register of conscious attention. “It hurts,” is more than a one-to-one correspondence between pain receptors and the vocal cords.

Everything is a singularity, but the brain overwhelming registers phenomena *as same as* similar experiences. This is obvious of our habituated behaviors, and this obviousness opens up the interpretation of pain. Why do we express pain in response to certain phenomena, but not others? This has more to do with schema than physical contact. This in one illustration of geometry as a humanism, not a metaphysical proof. We can perform tasks without thin[g]king about them, pre-consciously interpreting them in *as-structure*, i.e. *as same as* some other experience. And when this happens one is unlikely to even experience a moment at all. When this is the case, “I” do not own this particular labor. This work is contingent upon how different functors in the body-brain communicate with one another. All of these communications demonstrate different ways that the *sense* is reflected about the body. These reflections and their geometric tendencies distinguish very advanced brains where, “Decision-making strategies

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<sup>289</sup> Damasio’s chapter, “*The Somatic-Marker Hypothesis*,” as I read it, is a scientific study of Heidegger’s *as-structure*. He writes, “You may think of it as a system for automated qualification of predictions, which acts, whether you want it or not, to evaluate the extremely diverse scenarios of the anticipated future before you. Think of it as a biasing device.” The temporal schema of this is very strange because subtle cues in the environment are colluding with the body’s historical experience, *its theories*, with its immediate future. The system does a lot of the work of deciding for us. Similar to Heidegger, the body is priming the body to accept something as something. See, Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005., P. 174

began depending in part on ‘symbols’ of somatic states. To what extent we depend on such ‘as if’ symbols rather than on the real thing is an important empirical question.”<sup>290</sup> We will return to this later.

Another part of brain biology that is important for our interactions and interpretations of stimuli is the amygdala. The amygdala presents us with an object to reflect upon to interpret fear and anxiety with more accuracy. For the purposes of making oneself at home in the world, this part of the limbic system is a figure of the uncanny, not being home in the world (even if its role is not limited to this, as we will see). Because this structure is so closely linked to uncanny feelings, it is more or less detectable indirectly through reflecting on subjective experiences of fear, anxiety and aggression. If one can decouple the feelings from identity, these emotions point to a brain region, that in turn, point to the body’s manner of apprehending ‘external’ stimuli. To some, a madeleine is more than a cookie, a gun is more than metal, or a crucifix more than t-shaped sticks. The way that each of these objects make us feel tells us something about *how* we are affected by them. Where one can establish a connection between some art-of-fact and anxiety, one can infer that the amygdala is active. A minimum of knowledge about the amygdala may help to transform self-identity with this emotion into a more distanced reflection upon the body. This is subtle, but it does mark a threshold of freedom.

Again, we owe much of our understanding of the specificity of the amygdala to people with debilitating conditions. The case of amygdalotomy occupies particularly hazardous ethical ground because the procedure specifically intends to alter behavior in individuals (often whom have contracted diseases in which “intractable aggression” is a symptom). Owing to the controversy, the times and technology, these procedures were highly variable, yet despite (and

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<sup>290</sup> Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. P. 184

accounting for) this variability the results of the procedure did demonstrate a link between the amygdala and aggression.<sup>291</sup> That is, it kind of worked. Patients who did suffer from extreme episodes of rage were overwhelmingly calmed. But language has a rocky relationship to body parts because where the difference among fear, aggression and caution is semantically significant, for instance, it proves quite similar at the biological level. What is a difference of *kind* semantically is more of a difference of degrees for functors in the body.<sup>292</sup> Becoming aware that these semantic thresholds correspond to parts of the body changes the way that we apprehend them because when, “we study conceptions of the body, we are examining not just constructions in the body, but also in the senses.”<sup>293</sup> Where fear or caution are perceived as immanent in the body *generally*, a lot of nuance and intervention is lost in light of a far more detailed picture that illustrates how *parts* of the body coordinate to give rise to such feelings.

More benign methods of establishing the link between aggression and fear have actually been more successful in identifying it. Using fMRI, researchers observed brain activity while test subjects were first exposed to shocks at fixed voltage and fixed intervals. This was followed by a second phase where they had to choose between an intense shock after a few seconds or a lower shock after 27 seconds. Most opted for the higher intensity *sooner* rather than the lower intensity *later*. Some even asked for even higher voltages to avoid *any* delay. This particular study was

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<sup>291</sup> See, Lee, G., Bechara, A., Adolphs, R., Arena, J., Meador, K., Loring, D., & Smith, J. (1998). Clinical and physiological effects of stereotaxic bilateral amygdalotomy for intractable aggression. *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 10(4), 413-20.

<sup>292</sup> The amygdala is part of the negotiation of “innate and learned fear.” Some fears are cultivated and these learned fears are more cortex oriented. I think that *caution* is something of a balance between fear (amygdala) and planning (cortex). Caution is more reflective, but nonetheless involves the physiology precipitated by the limbic region, specifically the basolateral amygdala (BLA)- which “learns fear.” See Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. P. 35

<sup>293</sup> This quote comes from a comparative study of Chinese and Greek medicine. Kuriyama argues that superficial observation of pulse checking belies a fundamentally different haptic experience. In his analysis, he shows that the difference of interpretation of the body give rise to fundamentally different experiences of inspection. The Chinese did not conceive of the circulatory system as being composed of pipes and fluid, but *flows* more generally. See Kuriyama, Shigehisa. *The Expressiveness of the Body: and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*. New York: Zone Books. 1999. p. 60.

trying to find the physiology of dread and the amygdala was the most consistent indicator of this kind of anxiety.<sup>294</sup> In a statement that more pointedly articulates the agency of this region, “...the human amygdala preferentially responds to fear-evoking stimuli, even stimuli so fleeting as to be below conscious detection.”<sup>295</sup> While we cannot *feel* the amygdala in a material sense, we can *feel* it in the conceptual sense because a state of anxiety alerts us to it. Where this feeling of anxiety is registered, so too is amygdala activity that engenders this uncomfortable feeling. Simplistic as it might be, this anxiety also points to a failure to engage the more *reflective* cortex. It is not magic or stoic discipline that alters this feeling. Rather, to thin[g]k the stimulus differently, to make it a subjectively *real* alternative artifice, will *really* change the feeling. This is probably what talk therapy accomplishes at the neurological level.

If there is a solipsistic aspect of this, the amygdala is also very near to politics and society as well. Fear, anxiety and aggression prove to be helpful terms in grasping the amygdala because these terms are broad enough to anticipate a fair range of its reflections. These emotions are not limited to anticipated physical pain, but include other uncanny scenes where conformity is presented as choice. Again using fMRI, an experiment was conducted where individuals were presented with material objects to examine. They were then asked to decide if they were the same or different. When they were then presented with the “wrong” answers by hypothetical peers, their brains were imaged to figure out how this was being experienced at the neurological level.

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<sup>294</sup> In, Mobbs, D, Petrovic, P, Marchant, JL, Hassabis, D, Weiskopf, N, Seymour, B, . . . Frith, CD. (2007). When fear is near: Threat imminence elicits prefrontal-periaqueductal gray shifts in humans. *Science (New York, N.Y.)*, 317(5841), 1079-1083.

<sup>295</sup> In, Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. P. 34

The experiment was novel because it was testing a phenomenon familiar to social scientists who were largely speculating in the absence of empirical science. Among these speculations was that conformity was a rational decision.<sup>296</sup> Through the brain imaging experiment, researchers were able to test whether this “choice” was activating areas associated with executive function (frontal cortex) or if this tendency toward conformity activated other regions. The experiment found that amygdala activation was the clearest indicator of the “pain of independence.”<sup>297</sup> The experiment calls into question the ordinary social dispositions toward fear and anxiety. Independence is a prized attribute that would not normally be presented alongside unchecked aggression or fear of pain, but all of these things are reflected similarly in amygdala expression. That is, where social norms draw distinct ethical lines, these are artificial or superficial to this part of the brain that registers all of the scenarios (from criminal to ideal) with similar degrees of existential discomfort. We could speculate as to the large-scale evolutionary narratives that support conformity, but what is of interest here is that it seems most people find it more difficult to trust their own (apodictic?) knowledge than to comply with consensus. This social anxiety has a brain signature that correlates to preoccupations over physical security. At the very least, these findings present us with a way to put social anxiety in tension with more philosophically cherished attributes like freedom and authenticity.

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<sup>296</sup> See, Berns, Chappelow, Zink, Pagnoni, Martin-Skurski, & Richards. (2005). Neurobiological Correlates of Social Conformity and Independence During Mental Rotation. *Biological Psychiatry*, 58(3), 245-253.

<sup>297</sup> “...if the movement of the soul is not of its essence, movement of the soul must be contrary to its nature. It must also be painful for the soul to be inextricably bound up with the body; nay more, if, as is frequently said and widely accepted, it is better for mind not to be embodied, the union must be for it undesirable.” Aristotle, and Richard McKeon. “De Anima.” In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. 407b

## HEARTS AND MINDS: CORONARY COMPLEXITY

The heart is the object of much romanticization, but in effect, it is mostly a pretty dumb pump. It does not feel much and it certainly does not recognize anything. Nonetheless, the heart is *central*. It is critical and while it is not a very discriminating or contemplative organ, torrents of emotions are made possible on account of its pushing and pulling microscopic materials all over the body. The heart is also what delivers fuel to the muscles so that we can be carried along from one particular corridor down another. As far as that is concerned, I want to move on from such exoskeletal sorts of conditions to consider the heart's endoskeletal features.

As with motility and all other aspects of homemaking, the heart does not affect anything directly, it only affects context. So while it is a mistake to credit the heart as an emotional center, it most certainly is an emotional relay sending hormones all throughout the body. Rather than romanticize this piece of meat, it is much more edifying to appreciate the strange fact that egos assert an indivisible agency from the fog of coronary complexity. In terms of the ecosystem of the body, the heart is the engine of local weather. Sunny and stormy dispositions present corridors every bit as formidable as the political-Chinese-finger-traps questions mentioned in the Biopolitics section above. Whence certain hormones start coursing through the veins, certain behaviors become all but inevitable while others become all but impossible. One of the most telling cases of this, for instance, is when male elephants go into heat. During musth (being in heat) testosterone levels increase up to 60 times their normal levels; they become hyper aggressive until these testosterone levels come down. In one case orphans in musth went on a rampage raping and killing over 40 white rhinos in Pilanesberg, South Africa.<sup>298</sup> The testosterone

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<sup>298</sup> See, Rob Slotow, Gus Van Dyk, Joyce Poole, Bruce Page, & Andre Klocke. (2000). Older bull elephants control young males. *Nature*, 408(6811), 425-6.

does not cause anything; it amplifies particular potentialities and the way the scene transpires. In the case of bulls, this amplification is nearly saturation.

So one way to characterize the difference between hearts and brains is in terms of the two broad categories of chemicals that relate to each. This is some cause for confusion because some of these chemicals can play both roles. But here the *role* is more clear-cut. Neurotransmitters work more or less directly, in chains affecting one neuron after another. When a neuron releases some chemical and it affects another cell in direct contact with it, that chemical is considered a neurotransmitter. On the other hand if a neuron or some gland in the body releases a chemical and this chemical makes it into the bloodstream, it is a hormone.<sup>299</sup> These differences give rise to two qualitatively different kinds of complexity. The brain is complex because there are so many synchronized firings that occur too fast to apprehend in total. The heart, meanwhile is complex because it just keeps pushing things through the bloodstream. It is complex because all of these mood altering substances are sloshing around together and wait for the river of blood to deliver them to the place in the body where receptors can pick them off from the flow of blood. The heart is not *terribly* slow; it only takes about one minute for blood to make a full cycle. However, different glands release different quantities with different delays. Some glands are reacting more directly to brain stimulation. Some glands are reacting to other stimuli *and other glands* very indirectly. Sometimes, as in the case with a raging elephant, testosterone levels remain extraordinarily high for days, weeks or months depending on the age of the bull. In zoos, these males have to be constrained to wait out the storm.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Sapolsky, Robert M. *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004. P. 23 or Sapolsky, Robert M. "The Regulation of Hormones by the Brain." Stanford University. Lecture. *Biology and Human Behavior: The Neurological Origins of Individuality, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Great Courses, 2005.

<sup>300</sup> See, Rajaram, A. (2006). Musth in elephants. *Resonance*, 11(10), 18-27.



The point is not that testosterone causes this storm, rather, it is a significant enabling factor for aggression. The musth bull is a limit case because its hormone levels border on *cause*. Their body state is so poised for aggression that nearly any stimulus can result in aggressive expression. Of course with humans, it is going to be more nuanced, but the limit case demonstrates the possibility for hormone walls that are difficult to break through. Testosterone, like many hormones, is a part (in this case a major part) of the ecosystem of the human body that plays a major role in how it thin[g]ks and apprehends the world. At one level the heart is very simple because it is a *center of emotion* insofar as nearly all mood-inducing stuff passes through it. But this is also its source of complexity because, the heart is not one thing to appeal to- reflecting on it alone is not very edifying. We will see that there are things present in environments that will anticipate particular hormone secretions, which in turn, anticipate general patterns of behavior.

Especially with stress hormones like testosterone, oxytocin, cortisol etc., the heart can barely be isolated from the “mind” and the signals that the brain receives and interprets. Its function is still worth holding in some schematic isolation because the way one acts on the context *that the heart shapes* is different than the way a person is able to act on the context *that the mind is responsible for*. While hearts and minds are *all context*, there are intensive differences between the two. For instance, aggression will also rely on the way the brain symbolically apprehends phenomena in the outside world- not internal chemistry alone. On the other hand, being alert to signs that you or someone else are awash with testosterone changes the conditions of probability for things occurring.

To take a less-conspicuously (at least initially) cerebral example, we can consider the heart in terms of its energy distribution. Glucose transported by the blood is the body’s primary

source of energy and its excesses and depravations have all kinds of effects on mood. In fact, just blood sugar could open up an entire epistemology of reflection. So many things can be interpreted just based on the body's attempt to maintain homeostatic (or the now preferred *allostatic*) levels of energy. Bracketing cerebral interaction for the moment, low blood sugar is closely tied to aggression, impulsivity, and emotional stability. I should point out that "normal" tends to point to the *absence* of some more intensive drive. In other words, "normal" points to the lack of a particular intensity *not* a particular state.

As with weather, 'normal' does not mean that nothing significant is occurring. Nonetheless, in terms of blood sugar, *normal* is a more favorable condition for reflection than *low* or *high*. Some research draws a link drawn between blood glucose levels and "ego depletion."<sup>301</sup> This "ego depletion" is also subject to forms of environmental stress (like exams, disturbing videos etc.), but here blood glucose, which is ultimately derived from food, is also seen to be large factor. Obviously being hungry can be an occasion for stress, but these are not simple correspondences between hunger, food and energy. Instead, these are separated by metabolic and hormonal feedback loops. Our sense of hunger, for instance, becomes conscious to us when blood sugar is low. Before we are *aware*, this observation is made by the hypothalamus, the part of the brain that is most intimately tied to the pituitary gland- which is, in turn once called the "master gland" because it does so much to regulate endocrine function.<sup>302</sup> So when the hypothalamus makes this observation of low blood sugar, it communicates this message to the

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<sup>301</sup> Supporting my argument that the body is complex and that the ego is immanent to a reflection, this research shows that low blood sugar presents an obstacle to presenting the ego. See, Valentin, & Mihaela. (2015). The Relationship between Blood Glucose Levels and Performance at Cognitive Processing and Motor Coordination Tasks. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 187, 777-782.

<sup>302</sup> The pituitary gland as "master gland" has long since been disproven. Sapolsky shows that the brain is the master gland if there is one because the pituitary receives its messaging via hormones secreted by the brain and transported through a very small circulatory system. See Sapolsky, Robert M. *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004. P. 23-28

pituitary gland which informs the pancreas to start producing insulin. Insulin is what prepares the body to store this oncoming energy in fat cells. For a person who has regular eating habits, insulin production will start before eating begins. This is a pattern the body comes to know. Functioning properly, it would help regulate the effects of overly high blood sugar. On the other hand, just eating randomly will leave the body less prepared to handle all of this sugar. Moods become less stable. Sugar highs and crashes do all kinds of things to moods that should be familiar to everyone. The more food we toss into this tempest, the more difficult it becomes to isolate the major factors affecting mood. This is especially challenging in cultures that are driven by consumption- where food is more important in terms of pleasure and entertainment than it is for biological subsistence.

To go into any more details fractures this already tenuous notion that hearts and minds are two different things. But this level of detail is hopefully sufficient to set up this next section where hearts and minds more explicitly confront the outside world.

## **TO THE EDIFICE, BODY WALLS ARE TRANSPARENT**

To begin this second way of discussing life, I want to reframe some of the insights of thing-agency theories with respect to biology. On their own terms, these theories attempt a geometric isomorphism. I think that they are more sound in terms of reflection. Geometric arguments are important for their context, namely, in putting humans and the world on equal agentic footing. However, pushing against these arguments is more *realistic* subjectively. By this, I mean that humans do not have agency, nor do things. It is better to think of the apparent agency as mere spontaneous alignment of aspects in a scene of reflection, rather than isomorphically powerful “causers.”

Jane Bennett's potato chip example is a good one. She shows that they virtually command us to come and eat them.<sup>303</sup> Her motive is to turn down the volume on human agency. This very political attempt to recalibrate the self-asserted primacy of the human as master of the universe is a good one as far as political motives go. Isomorphism is a helpful step to dirempting a singularity in reflection. In this case, however, I would argue that junk food agency is not *individual*. Biology shows how this same scenario can be *dividuated* into many complications. If potato chips are a potential mood agent, they cannot be so until I am a receptor of whatever it is they express. If, say, junk food is a particular weakness of mine, this weakness is subject to stress, the time of day, weird things like brand loyalty, and context triggers like empty-handed television watching. Among the trillions of things that could capture attention while sitting in the living room, something triggers the memory that there is a bag of chips in the house. But even before this, my body is torn between tides of hormone secretions that are already sending me down a corridor to make this memory recall a possibility.

On the other hand, I might not even "like" potato chips and am altogether unaffected by them. The whole human body is like one giant metamorphosing hormone receptor and the world is like a giant hormone. On each side of this reflection is just potential. The potentials in each aspect, whether the torrents of dispositions wrought by hormones and neurotransmitters on the inside, *or* the shiftless world (made all more shiftless because our brain's turret is always spinning and moving about), need a *moment*. Objective reality was a bogus question because there is no such thing as infinitely extensive and intensive omniscience. This is precisely the demand on the ego to be the receptor that it wills. At its limit, absolute free will is a formal

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<sup>303</sup> She writes, "In the case of some foods, say potato chips, it seems appropriate to regard the hand's actions as only quasi- or semiintentional, for the chips themselves seem to call forth, or provoke and stoke, the manual labor. To eat chips is to enter into an assemblage in which the I is not necessarily the most decisive operator." In, Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. P. 40

denial of receptivity and its context. Subjective reality (and advertising), however, admits this contingency. It can only know a freedom relative to other contingencies.

In our time, the biology that I sampled is increasingly difficult to discuss as mechanistic. In the past this was the assumption based on presupposition that the body's geometry would ultimately be comprehensively understood. Today, biology and experience cannot be recounted but in scenarios that, in their specificity, underscore the plurality of conditions. Staying within the walls of academic disciplines is increasingly harder to feign- even where this ideal of expertise still reigns. Taking just these brief glosses on hearts and minds, shows the futility of disciplinary provincialism for homemaking- even where it thrives in Economics. Feelings one moment are not connected to the next moment rationally, but instead, sporadically and intensively, so disciplinary-genre narratives quickly collapse.

Returning to pain receptors, for instance, we know that they will detect pressures and temperatures that risk wellbeing. These individual cells are relatively simple actors in the experience of pain. Thinking abstractly, they may be compared to any kind of sensor, such as a thermometer. At this level, external stimulation will be apprehended more or less similarly. But the nerve endings that give rise to blunt diagnosis to something like "it hurts" are meshed with various modalities of pain like pressure, temperature, chemical and even inertial, all overlapping.<sup>304</sup> So at this level we can ask, what hurts? Is it an exact temperature or pressure? It is obvious that *it depends*, so we need to clarify *on what?*

To take one example, in any given soccer match one can see players fall to the ground or bash soccer balls off their foreheads. This much is usually taken in stride. It is different, though, when one player slide tackles another. Consider if the players' injurious points of contact are in

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<sup>304</sup> See, Norden, Jeanette. "The Somatosensory System." Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN. Lecture. *Understanding the Brain*. Great Courses, 2007

the same place. Which player will feel the pain? You only need to see one soccer match to know that the player trying to score will end up writhing in pain while the player playing defense will be shrugging nonplussed at the dramatic show the opponent puts on. Important to hold in mind is that “pain” which is famously subjective has some objective ledge for the ego. At the level of pain receptors, the stimulus provokes something that could be subjectively empirical- if such a phrase can be said. The amount of pain, *objectively speaking*, should be the same. This turns out to be a lot to reflect upon precisely because pain is such a complicated phenomenon. *What hurts?* depends on a contextualized schema more than it does joules or degrees.

This is complicated because the prefrontal cortex (the one associated with executive function, reflection, rationality etc.) is not only a point of convergence for all sensory systems, but it also translates these signals as either something new or something that we have seen before.<sup>305</sup> There are no one-to-one correspondences between stimuli and reactions because the prefrontal cortex is going to take in these more-or-less raw signals while it is also in the middle of some other operations. These thoughts could be anything- historical, abstract, desirous, etc. The prefrontal cortex is a short-term contextual environment for these sensory signals. As mentioned before, life events have signatures, categories and types that enable mammals to function without taking every experience as brand new. This saves us a lot of energy but it is also the source of a lot of things that we may call irrational, habitual or even addictive. Nonetheless, the prefrontal cortex is also the opportunity for changing categories. As one author puts it, this is the brain region where “doing the harder thing” is held in balance.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. P. 173

<sup>306</sup> “What does the frontal cortex do? Its list of expertise includes working memory, executive function (organizing knowledge strategically, and then initiating an action based on an executive decision), gratification postponement, long-term planning, regulation of emotions and reining in impulsivity... will group these varied functions under a single definition....*the frontal cortex makes you do the harder thing when it's the right thing to do.*” In, Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. P. 44

## AGENCY AND THE EDIFICE

Beneath conscious awareness, a scene can take at least two different paths. If I intentionally engage my body to assume some particular state, that is, if I intentionally adopt some sort of body disposition, whether to sit straighter in my chair or slide tackle someone, the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala are activated in adopting this position projected in my mind.<sup>307</sup> My somatosensory cortex, will in turn, receive signals from my body to coordinate this. The cortex always receives signals from the body, however, the frontal cortex can dismiss itself from this *feedback loop* and hand the task off to more machinic, non-thin[g]king amygdala. Once some activity is initiated, the prefrontal cortex stands only to interfere with an *as-it-was*, habituated process. In this feedback system, from one moment to the next, conscious awareness (in the form of frontal cortex engagement) is held in the balance. This could occur for a relatively long chains of moments, like when I carry a very full cup of coffee across the room. This is exceptional, however. Once some activity has inertia in the right direction, we tend to disengage. The somatosensory cortex will then continue “to organize itself in the explicit activity pattern that it would have assumed had the body been placed in the desired state.”<sup>308</sup> This state is closer to something like “being in the zone,” or for my purposes *in a corridor*, where even complex patterns of behavior will unfold according to learned experiences.

This is not categorically bad, as may seem implied by my general argument; what is bad is the overextended cultural bias toward this kind of *perfected* behavior. As good as being

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<sup>307</sup> Just to be clear, none of these brain regions have one-to-one correspondence. Recall the discussion with Damasio’s somatosensory marker theory. The amygdala is also activated in the as-if bias in the way we project outcomes based on habituate “theories” of “markers” in the environment. The amygdala, in my terms, *nearly reflects* stimuli and in these fast moments, condition a cascade of bodily responses. Fear is a fairly organized response to stimuli. The fact that people don’t like to feel fear is occasion to summons the frontal cortex to anticipate or evade it. This is how *feeling* emotions can quickly unfold into higher cognitive function. See, Damasio, Anthony. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. P. 130-138

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, P. 184

reflective is for homemaking, it is not the most useful humanism when we are performing some critical task that we know very well- like driving down a snowy mountain pass or landing a jet on an aircraft carrier- where it is bound to cause trouble. In many ways, this humanism of geometric sameness is something to strive for, but it should not be *the* idealized behavior because the only agency that exists in it is at the choice-threshold where one binds himself or herself to be entrained. This geometric humanism also shows how one-to-one correspondence is a phenomenon particular to humans, not “reality.” Humans conceive sameness; they don’t discover it.

This scenario ties into what Merleau-Ponty calls an “intentional arc.”<sup>309</sup> He shows problems with Cartesian mind-body schema using scenarios, like the one above, where consciousness, sensibility, motility, perception and action are playing off one another so intimately that their isolation has no legitimacy except for explaining and understanding phenomena. Take for instance, Merleau-Ponty’s example of two hands touching. He writes, “...the two hands are never simultaneously both touched and touching. So when I press my two hands together, it is not a question of two sensations that I feel together...but rather of an ambiguous organization where the two hands can alternate between the functions of ‘touching’ and ‘touched’.”<sup>310</sup> In this instance, there is a theoretical equivalence among the two arrays of pain receptors that register pressure. This works best if we *try* (despite the obviousness of this *fact*) to apply equal pressure to each hand. If our intentionality is directed at this scene of reflection, that is, if it is not treated *as it was*, then the body will be engaged in the full feedback

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<sup>309</sup> The intentional arc “...projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects. It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which ‘goes limp’ in illness.” In, Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Colin Smith. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge Classics, 2006. P. 157

<sup>310</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Donald A. Landes. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge, 2012. P. 95



loop. So at that moment, while my sensory motor cortex is instructing my body to shift in my seat beneath my conscious awareness, it will simultaneously be receiving *what-it-is* signals from the *prefrontal* cortex as well as direct my intention to my hands. Somatic markers are subtle. The prefrontal cortex, so long as it dwells here, is liable to receive very nuanced signals from pain receptors. The more nuanced the signals become the more indistinguishable they become from the projections the mind directs toward them.<sup>311</sup>

If this is the subtlety of this loop, this is also exceptional. Blinking, shifting, twitching and the countless other ways that our body's *being-in-the-world* is *reflecting the world* occupies most of the brain's activity- which should not be surprising at this point. To autonomic, innate behaviors, we can add habits and so many other things that *are what they were*. This is where the body/mind distinction explains less than a body-brain/soul distinction. *As it was* signaling from the frontal cortex and the amygdala to the somatosensory cortex ignores reflection or feedback.

Pre-reflective behaviors are reflected as somatic markers that are scarcely any more noteworthy to the soul than is breathing. In order to become a conscious activity, there has to be occasion for the prefrontal cortex to make something new out of the situation rather than to relay a symbol. If one is not reflecting upon something, then one is merely a body that feels but without a soul: it is a direct reflection of the stimulus. As far as *reflecting upon* can be habit, it is qualitatively different from all other kinds, because it calls explicitly on the frontal cortex to delay.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> What is interesting about this is that it does not diminish the efficacy of connection. Especially with the pulse, Western science has long since abandoned all nuance and opted for the most conspicuous, mathematizable sign. Meanwhile, in the East, a whole vocabulary flourishes *at least* 14 discernible 'textures' of pulse, a canonical 24, and an upper bound of 32. Perhaps comparable to effects of the DSM 5, vocabulary and bodily phenomena are in a very mutually affective relationship. See, "Expressiveness of Words." In Kuriyama, Shigehisa. *The Expressiveness of the Body: and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*. New York: Zone Books. 1999. (especially page 70-71).

<sup>312</sup> Evan Thompson's work attempts to bridge Buddhist practices and neuroscience. In it, the challenges presented by geometric legitimacy are evident, but I think his effort is admirable. The bridging difficulty is clear in his attempt to rename "pure compassion meditation" as "objectless awareness meditation." I think that both of these terms reflect,

Symbolic activity is the reason why only the offensive player gets hurt in a slide tackle. The players contextual-symbolic apprehension of the scene is one of being attacked, a martyr or a victim. This is pre-reflective. In slow motion, we can often see the symptoms of pain arriving before an incident even occurs because the response is coded for drama rather than pressure or temperature. On the other side, athletes that are on the attack are experiencing completely different somatic markers. By the time the relatively empirical pain encounters the respective brains, any hope for objectivity is completely lost. There is no ontological point in common in the collision. The context that favors a Hegelian sort of *understanding* is one in which a person is set up to change his/her 'obvious' disadvantage- by distancing one's identification with subjugation and affirming freedom in spite of this.

This raises an important point about symbols. The brain is not simply reactive, but instead, it is constantly modeling. The vast majority of the brain's function is dedicated to projecting the environment symbolically *as it was*. It is almost as if all the functors in the body were constantly trying to handle things at the lowest level lest they have to knock on the door of *executive* function for guidance- despite a do not disturb sign. Activities monitored under fMRI suggest that the brain's *intentional* activity registers an overall change of the brain state by about 5%.<sup>313</sup> The rest of brain activity is reflecting the environment in ways that affect, but do not determine, conscious experience. We might again compare this situation to looking in a mirror: how much is *seen* vs. how much is *examined*? Nobody would deny that the lighting *seen* in a scene of reflection is a constitutive factor of the object that is *examined* in the mirror. Nor would

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what I have tried (with equally specious legitimacy), the Confucian idea of swollen consciousness. In any case, the difference between listening and hearing is the phenomenal experience that I want to hold out as a model for *not reacting*. See, Thompson, Evan. *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. P. 70-77

<sup>313</sup> Raichle, Marcus E. "Two views of brain function." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2010): 180-90. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2010.01.008.

anyone deny that it is impossible to take in *every* detail of the scene with the same accuracy as one could *particular* details. While putting a percentage value on the amount of a scene that can be examined is a non-starter, the comparison helps put the limits of consciousness into perspective. The brain is constantly projecting past experience into the present so that the body does not need executive decision for every movement. The *examination* of what we are examining is already conditioned by how the vast majority of the body is ignoring the perceivable aspects of the scene.

Phenomenologists use phrases like *always already ahead of myself* and empirical research supports this.<sup>314</sup> As an ecosystem of humming sensors delivering signals, the brain is making billions of projections and decisions that far outweigh the fleeting moments of conscious ego. The ego is always catching up to this. In this way, the outside world is the body's context and its *immediate* scene of reflection. In this way, this scene is always the ego's future.<sup>315</sup> Ironically, future-oriented fantasies that seem utterly detached from the contextual environment are going to be all the more *historical* because they are more *purely* gathered thoughts from older times. "The balance between prediction and prediction error...determines how much of your

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<sup>314</sup> Many phenomenologists refer to this condition of the body being ahead of our ego. Heidegger writes, for example, "Being free *for* its ownmost potentiality-for-being, and thus for the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity, shows itself in a primordial, elemental concretion in anxiety. But ontologically, being toward one's ownmost potentiality-for-being means that Dasein is always already *ahead* of itself in its being. Dasein is always already "beyond itself," not as a way of behaving toward beings which it is *not*, but as being toward the potentiality-for-being which itself is." In, Heidegger, Martin, and Joan Stambaugh. *Being and Time*. Albany: State of New York Press, 2010. P. 185.

<sup>315</sup> Lisa Barrett writes, "Brain regions participate in prediction loops with other regions. Your multitudes of prediction loops run in a massive parallel processes that continues nonstop for your whole life... Suppose you are playing baseball. Someone throws the ball in your direction, and you reach out and catch it. Most likely, you experience this as two events... If your brain reacted like this, however, baseball could not exist as a sport. Your brain has about half a second to prepare to catch a baseball in a typical game. This isn't enough time to process the visual input, calculate where the ball will land, make the decision to move, coordinate all the muscle movements, and send the motor commands to move into position for the catch... Prediction makes the game possible... your brain simulates the sights, sounds, and other sensations that the predictions represent, as well as the actions you will take to catch the ball... the prediction is correct, and the sensory input proceeds no further into your brain. Your body is not prepared to catch the ball, and your movement is based on your prediction. Finally, you consciously see the ball, and you catch it." In, Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. P. 63-64.

experience is rooted in the outside world versus inside your head...Once your predictions are correct enough, they not only create your perception and action but also explain the meaning of your sensations.”<sup>316</sup>

The ability to thin[g]k is truly a luxury, not a default setting. Biologically, human bodies are geared for *good enough to survive*. But for the ego, which is caught between the body and the environment, the inside of the body is just a bias of context. We are biased to identify with body states rather than environmental conditions. This bias is so strong that much of philosophy through the ages has been directed at giving the ego just a bit of distance from the body. This sensual bias to apprehend a reality is an unreflective ego’s default *feeling* of agency. In our time, ego is caught between a body that is biologically tuned for mediocrity and an ‘outside’ world that is driving toward uniform symbols, values and epistemologies. This is why one would have to learn to build or apply the ego to create novelty in the margins of biology and culture that are both geometrically biased.

The human body has tendencies, proclivities and functions, but all of these are predicated on what is available to these actors in the body. The symbols and somatic markers that are constantly projected in the brain are reiterations of lived experience. Returning to the example of electric shocks and the amygdala, the experiments mentioned are revealing because the context is so controlled and narrowed. What kind of a choice is: *do you want an intense shock now or a lesser shock later?* What is there for the mind to project other than *shock*? By the time the participant has signed up for the experiment and has electrodes attached to the feet, what other choices are there? Now we can frame the question in terms of billions of projections and doubtless more of them than usual will be projecting something very unpleasant. It is almost

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<sup>316</sup> Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. P. 65

divine when someone is detached enough to not dwell on such things- like Socrates getting some sleep before his execution. It is remarkable because this stimulus being shaped, categorized or otherwise symbolized by the cortex (which was already conditioned by an historical choice) is decidedly bad. And it is precisely the kind of thing that amygdala “preferentially responds to.” It was said above that the prefrontal cortex is activated in “doing the harder thing.” What the experiment shows more than a preference for intense pain is that *the harder thing* is to thin[g]k something else when the context is so tightly narrowing the options for the body. This is where geometric tendencies of human *being* are going to exacerbate the *uncanny* rather than resolve it.

But this entire scenario becomes more complicated when the heart is involved. In completely different research it is pointed out that judges’ decisions correlate to the time of the day. Social science research calls this decision fatigue, but in neurological research it has been referred to as “ego depletion” in homage to Freud.<sup>317</sup> The time of the day is not just an environmental factor; it is reflected in glucose levels that are present in the bloodstream, which among other things, are feeding its most demanding client, the frontal cortex. These blood sugars are the fuel of the brain, but as with all other things, there is no one to one correspondence. It is not as simple as taking glucose from food to put it in the brain in a pay-as-you-go sort of arrangement. Glucose levels spike after eating, but *hunger* initiates a response to start releasing insulin from the pancreas so that glucose can be stored in the body’s cells for energy reserves. This is one complex heart function that is manifest in the brain, cortex function, and hence, decision making.

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<sup>317</sup> Valentin, & Mihaela. (2015). The Relationship between Blood Glucose Levels and Performance at Cognitive Processing and Motor Coordination Tasks. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 187, 777-782.

## SHADES OF AGENCY

The factor of time, however, pulls in an undiscussed factor: sleep. If there were one to one correspondence between decision making and glucose, then it should seem simple enough: just eat some sugar and the ego more easily returns to strengthen executive decision. But because the brain, unlike other parts of the body, depends exclusively on one energy reserve, its energy reserves are a bit more complicated. The only energy reserve that the brain has for glucose comes in the form of glycogen- which is mostly stored in glial cells of the brain.<sup>318</sup> These are important because different parts of the brain will burn glucose at different rates and depend differentially on the reserve supplies to supply transform the glycogen into glucose to support this region of the brain. During wakefulness, when we are taxing certain parts of the brain more than others, it will have to tap into glycogen at times. So during wakefulness, these areas get messy because they have to think, transform glycogen into glucose and when time permits, restore its reserves while this part is still active. This biological need is one of the major theories behind the function of sleep- which remains one of the most puzzling parts of the brain's activity. The brain needs a constant supply of energy and like anything else, it chooses the best forms of energy first and the slower, less efficient forms of energy later. When it runs short, it has to synthesize this on the spot from glycogen in glial cells. Sleep may restore this whole mechanism after parts of the brain have been selectively and excessively drawing from

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<sup>318</sup> In a lecture on brain energy, Heller discusses brain energy reserves. He explains that brain is less flexible than tissues like muscle, so when its reserves are drawn it is less flexible to adapt. The picture he paints of the brain is informative for apprehending "mental feelings" resulting from energy depletions and lags. Overtaxed parts of the brain, which will probably manifest to an ego as some sort of 'topic' or activity, do indeed get disproportionately exhausted. Paraphrasing in my words, the theory of sleep that he supports is that this resting period allows the brain to restore its energy reserves in the absence of wakeful demanding stimuli that impose themselves on the body and the brain. Heller, H. Craig. "Functions of Sleep- Fueling the Brain." Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Lecture. *The Science of Sleep*. Great Courses, 2013.

reserves.<sup>319</sup> Muscles select from among a variety of energy storage forms depending a variety of factors like oxygen intake. Marathon runners are alert to these resource transitions occurring in their muscles because they can feel their symptoms. With the brain, it is subtler. It is one thing to be certain that a person feels bad, but qualitatively different to have a perception or an understanding of this bad feeling. This is subtle because just feeling bad is already a pretty large obstacle to reflection- which means that these are feelings that we are liable to identify with (rather than reflect upon) when we experience them. Fear, anxiety, confidence, hunger, tiredness and all of these other moods all hinder access to the prefrontal cortex.

Our behaviors are not controlled by our moods, rather moods amplify and contextualize patterns of behavior. Naturally many scientists have tried to show that things like testosterone are causes of aggression, for instance, but it usually just proves to exacerbate, amplify or intensify previous patterns of behavior.<sup>320</sup> Similarly, we cannot say that the time of day, lack of sleep, or level of glucose is the cause of poor judgement (most severely when a judge fairly consistently denies parole at the end of a shift), but more importantly we can say that the *judge* didn't cause this either. His or her ego is scarcely shining through a fog of degraded body state. Doing “the harder thing” is much harder at 4 pm. At times, the harder thing is walled off. It is much easier to allow patterns of behavior to steer the body rather than to try to push through this wall. Echoing the brain's reluctance to call on executive function, one article explains that the status quo

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<sup>319</sup> Not only does glycogen restore, but the brain also appears to be repeating some symbolic signatures during sleep (i.e. reinforcing memory). Also, it appears that the brain exercises other parts of the brain that were less active during the day. The hypothesis is that dream activity tries to engage the less taxed parts of the brain to give them a work out of sorts. Heller, H. Craig. “Sleep in the Future and the Future of Sleep.” Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Lecture. *The Science of Sleep*. Great Courses, 2013.

<sup>320</sup> In biology, it is especially important to get away from one-to-one correspondence language, i.e. cause and effect. Here, Sapolsky is sure to point out the tendencies associated, exacerbated and amplified by particular biological states at the same time that he shows that the situation is not reducible. He explains, for instance, that testosterone does not really cause anything, but that the conditions for aggressive behavior are biologically primed in its presence. Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. P. 100

decision always demands the least energy.<sup>321</sup> Not only is this the safer strategy for a tired judge (*what if I let him out and he kills someone vs. what's another 5 years?*), but it was also the case of the “pain of independence,” the experiment where participants were liable to conform to a wrong answer when they held onto a self-certain truth. It is also Hegel’s sense certainty that dominates ordinary existence. As the only way to occasion the ego, reflection is also the only path down which *the harder thing* is presented as ethical possibility, *what to do?*

Any of these parts, fluids or systems that I have mentioned are parts of narratives that could be told in infinite ways. Any one of these things in the body could furnish a narrative about any emotion from their own perspective, like relatives regarding some family drama. Any emotion will be reflected not only in every cell of the body, but also in every atom in the environment that is implicated in its stimulation. All of these biological terms that I have mentioned are both arbitrary and critical at the same time. Any one of them is a veritable epistemology of emotion. We could recount dozens of different interpretations of aggression through testosterone, the amygdala, glucocorticoids--or eyes. As with any story, some perspectives are more valuable than others. Such perspectives are critical for being-in-the-world, yet, they are also arbitrary because to tell these stories of emotions, we are leaning on details that are subject to revision- in fact, they are fated to revision. So too are the edifices of knowledge on which they are built. They are arbitrary, then, but not random and not *nothing*. They are quite *something* if the ego takes it as so.

We tend to regard the placebo effect as an illusion, but as I have said before, an illusion presupposes that there is a “correct” view. There could be no better display of this than “mood

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<sup>321</sup> Tierney, John. "Do You Suffer From Decision Fatigue?" The New York Times. August 17, 2011. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html>.



drugs” that are increasingly engaged in peculiar battles with a placebo.<sup>322</sup> The problem is that the placebo is not just a pill, a placebo is an entire constellation of context: *How hyped up is the drug? Is the drug firm’s stock price rising? How supportive are the families? What times were the drugs administered? What kind of accent does the administrator of the drug have?* As this list grows more specific, we realize that the placebo and feelings (such as confidence) cannot be a control in an experiment. This means that all of these trials are fundamentally compromised. Beating a sugar pill is a pretty low bar to pass for all of the money, research and effort that goes into a drug. And it is a pathetically low bar for a research outcome of otherwise painstaking science.

The brain has incredible intrinsic capacity to upend the most expensive scientific efforts. We have already seen that the cortex is projecting into the present the only reality that is defensible: a subjective one. If I believe that the pill I am about to swallow is the best chance at curing my illness, this projection from my cortex is going to set a whole weather system in motion that will predispose my body to this projection. Just like one successful accomplishment floods a person with testosterone and gives that person a delusional sense of confidence; or, when a person anticipating a shock will *loop* a projection of a bad thing and becomes saturated in fear and anxiety: these projections have a tendency to realize themselves. The placebo teaches us that schema rival pharmacological attempts to alter moods. This fact also shows that reflecting, changing and creating new schema promise an edifying approach to the study of life. A doctor of philosophy could be a meaningful title because confidence seems to be more effective than the substances we ingest to change our body states. The arbitrariness of schema and their inevitable revisions point all the more to the importance of technologies of the self because they force a

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<sup>322</sup> Staff, Wired. "Placebos Are Getting More Effective. Drugmakers Are Desperate to Know Why." *Wired*. June 04, 2017. Accessed February 27, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/2009/08/ff-placebo-effect/>.

cure to confront a depth of reflection much deeper than mere trust in the appurtenances of medical authority.

From the above amateurish sample of biological schema, and the issue that I hope is supported by their implications, the issue that I consider to be the most significant, is that these actors have names. These names point to subtleties in behaviors and the whole schema implies points of leverage to alter the context that structures behavior. Naturally there are thresholds and material limits to the brain's projections. I am unlikely to cure cancer with schema, but in many cases, pharmaceutical, molecular, chemical solutions are quite feeble when facing the body's complex allostatic system. To this end, I think it matters little if the schema is biology, chakra or meridian. No matter the system, most of us would hope to never intimately know these parts of our bodies, hence, they exist to us as symbols alone. It is absurd that scientists still look for evidence *that the Chinese had it all figured out*, or that the kundalini system was true. This is because what matters is how an ego comports itself to the environment, how it schematizes its body and how it symbolically apprehends the things that are affecting it (or the body when it is offline). It is the schema and its apprehension that works, not the substance.<sup>323</sup> The schema is something, almost everything- even if it is nothing, or even "wrong." I speculate that veracity will matter less than confidence. Whether confidence comes from knowledge or belief is a philosophical question that probably does not matter to the body so long as the schema is *real* subjectively.

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<sup>323</sup> Several examples like the one cited here show that even when a person is immobilized for extended periods of time, they can maintain most of their muscle strength through visualization exercises. See, Clark, B., Mahato, N., Nakazawa, M., Law, T., & Thomas, J. (2014). The power of the mind: The cortex as a critical determinant of muscle strength/weakness. *Journal of Neurophysiology*, 112(12), 3219-26.

## REFLECTING ON BODY SCHEMATA

Many traditions across history and culture have come up with plausible/functional schema that have effectively treated the body. And what they will do well is improve familiarity with the body. They call attention to how *not* innocuous environmental factors are. What could be more uncanny than delegating the knowledge of this schema to a professional? How uncanny to ask a person in scrubs, *am I going to be alright?* How does a breakdown in the confidence of health care affect treatment? What is the ego's role in the life of the body? And when it identifies with its sensations? At the level of the body, everything is a drug- and our time is soaking in them. Not only antibiotics in groundwater, but also shock-news, shock-comments, orgiastic gadget releases, and subtle advertising techniques.<sup>324</sup> Accounting for how these drugs interpellate the body finds some outlet in academic research, but they appear to have little register in ordinary daily life. It seems that almost all of the body's issues are delegated to experts while we discourse about the thyroid, liver or heart as if they were ghosts. We want to be on their good side, but we are ultimately unsure of their caprices. Aristotle did just fine believing that the heart was the seat of the mind.<sup>325</sup> That said, there is a case to be made for the schema of contemporary biology. It is the most extensive and plausible schema for knowing *and* caring for thyself that there is or ever has been. It is perhaps to our benefit that a canonized biology did not make it into the trivium or the quadrivium, but surely biology must be a critical area of study for edification, or a contemporary liberal arts.

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<sup>324</sup> Daniel Lord Smail makes a good argument that it is naïve to disregard the cognitive and mood effects that cultural products have on subjectivity. "*Psychotropic* is a strong word but not wholly inapt, for these mechanisms have neurochemical effects that are not all that dissimilar from those produced by the drugs normally called psychotropic or psychoactive." Smail, Daniel Lord. *On Deep History and the Brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. P. 161-2

<sup>325</sup> He believed that it was something of a radiator for the body. See, Gross, C. (1995). Aristotle on the Brain. *The Neuroscientist*, 1(4), 245-250.

Levinas' proposition that the face of the other is an infinite responsibility is an empirical fact at the level of biology.<sup>326</sup> His is the most lucid statement of the non-geometry of being. In a very material sense, *who is the other?* is subject to questions of blood sugar, sleep quality or environmental stimuli. The face of the other is a moment-to-moment expression of infinite physiological (including cerebral) operations that are invisible to its ego and its interlocutor alike. These incur an infinity of variations, narratives, and singularities that are not restricted to another: all of these things make that question *who is "I"?* no less open to infinite responses. Geometry is limitlessly scalable. By this I mean that there is no limit on the size of a triangle: it will always be the form of a triangle. In contrast, limitlessness of the face is closer to a quantum sort- where measuring magnitude actually enacts a novel thing rather than pinning a previous one down.<sup>327</sup> All forms change in the process of reflection. This *process* is limitless, and I think, a better foundation for apprehending human phenomena- the last way I want to discuss life studies and edification.

Self-reflection on a body state immediately alters that body state because it inserts the ego between the body (and the somatic marker it automatically registers) and the art-of-fact that gives rise to the feeling. It is one thing to feel an emotion, but the moment I try to measure it, account for it or examine it, it will feel different. By the time environmental sensory information

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<sup>326</sup> Compare the idea of the infinity of the face to the infinite border of England. He writes, "The analysis of the idea of Infinity, to which we access only starting from an I, will be terminated with the surpassing of the subjective." In, Levinas, Emmanuel, and Alphonso Lingis. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2015. P. 51

<sup>327</sup> Karan Barad's writings are helpful to frame quantum physics into the context of philosophy. What she writes about measurement and Niels Bohr is especially relevant to the present argument. "Bohr called into question two fundamental assumptions that support the notion of measurement transparency in Newtonian physics: (1) that the world is composed of individual objects with individually determinate boundaries and properties whose well-defined values can be represented by abstract universal concepts that have determinate meanings independent of the specifics of the experimental practice; and (2) that measurements involve continuous determinable interactions such that the values of the properties obtained can be properly assigned to the premeasurement properties of objects as separate from the agencies of observations." That is, there is no measurement that evades its own shadow *as a measurement*. Or, there is no code. In, Barad, Karen, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. P. 107

reaches the frontal cortex, this complex assemblage of feeling has already been dissolved into utter unknowability. No ego can perfectly and completely know its own body state despite the 'reality' that is only *its own* to know. The last implied that the ego's manner of apprehending art-of-facts lay beneath its own conscious understanding. And what it does grasp is grasped one aspect (somatic signature) at time. Meanwhile the whole context of the body state is shifting, and much of this shift is owed to the reflection that is held in mind. Human beings were due their own chapter because infinite responsibility presents itself anew each moment with much more significant effects than any of the other three. Others present immersive scenes of reflection.

To an ego or a soul, the difficulties of self-reflection are the demonstration of our own limits to understand the other. If it is impossible to pin down our own body state, the difficulty in apprehending the other is not a matter of degree, but a different kind altogether. I cannot feel the body state of another as we both look in a mirror together. I absolutely cannot see what the other sees; but I also see aspects of the other that s/he cannot see: not more or less, but different aspects. In ways, it is perfectly reasonable that another will understand aspects of me better than I can assess on my own because I am too immersed in myself to have certain perspectives. My self-identification with my *feeling* could be a wall to *any* perspective, in fact. Any self-knowledge is infinitely incomplete because I cannot know what the other knows about me without being-with them to infer it. And there is no possible *totality* of perspectives. Even hypothetically accounting for all of the perspectives of all living beings immediately runs into the impossible diachronic aspects of this hypothetical omniscience. Others clarify self-reflection with mosaic pieces that I absolutely cannot place by myself and that neither of us together can complete. I cannot even see my own eyes, those fabled windows into my soul. This is a truth I cannot know even as I give it to you.

Biology clues us into the sensitivity of implanting some symbolic signature into the brain of the other. *What to do?* is infinitely complex because unintended facial expressions, pheromones, postures, etc. are all part of the expression that will be possessed by the other. Subtleties of subjective feeling can translate into very clear signals for another. All of these things that are invisible to me are art-of-facts to the other whose manner of apprehension is outside of my reach. This is why identity makes no sense: subjectively, identity will always be closer to nothingness than completeness. In between, there is only vaguely something that withstands little scrutiny. It is always more subject to radical revision than fine-tuning. What is it to be *vegan, black, woman, athlete, intellectual...*? Put a label on anyone and they are liable to show how s/he is *not that*- perhaps even the opposite. The labels are much more functional for unreflective others. To an unreflective other, I *am* my expression. And to a friend, my expression is more nuanced. Today's Ptolemaic arithmetic to save identity with a plurality of scalable, *intersecting* geometric forms should be a red flag to historians that the identity paradigm is unraveling.

## **REALITY AND EDIFICATION**

So much for geometrical foundations of ontology. Ontology (by way of philosophy, science or art) always settles into a processual solipsism that can only *be* when its predictability is interrupted. Solipsism is connoted pejoratively by geometric realists because it is vulnerable to nihilism and sophistry. But solipsism doesn't preclude subjective meaning, in fact, it invests it with all the more importance. Freedom to make *something* subjectively real is the only existential freedom there is. Any claim that something is or should be real or true *for you* is a pretty clear indication that the claim is a sophistical one that apprehends non-geometric reality as

its grounds for *nothing matters*, or a political one where the sophists have succeeded in evangelizing a quorum of others of its instrumentalized *reality*. Sophistry succeeds where one fails to reflect on her own subjective and narcissistic reality. Any other “reality” is a notionally objective one that an “individual” decides to participate in.

All of politics and ethics hinges on this intangible moment, this reflection, between human beings. And if one is self-reflective, s/he finds that holding to an “objective” perspective is unedifying because *anything* could or will take its place. The worst is to accept it in confidence of another’s persuasion. Guarding this solipsistic reality was closer to mind in the classical liberal arts when the political milieu was more likely (if still unlikely) to reflect a singular human’s political contribution. This is why liberal arts and education, if it cares to teach one how to perfect the mind, would have to find a new scale of social agency. Caring for a society that turns on an axis outside of our affective valence destroys the mind rather than perfects it.

In contemporary education, every discipline plays a supporting role in a utopia in which they are instruments of a more perfect society. This future-oriented mirage is a dangerous distraction because, as with classical liberal arts, a well-functioning society is meaningless in the absence of subjective meaning. In my understanding this means putting a lot of distance and nuance in the scene of reflection that suspends the ego between a body and the world.<sup>328</sup> Being predisposed to the perfection of society collapses this scene of reflection so that the body and its feelings are one and the same. Collapsed this way, the ego *is feelings* and hence cannot act on

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<sup>328</sup> “For we must note also that, if the soul moves itself, it must be the mover itself that is moved, so that it follows that if movement is in every case a displacement of that which is in movement, in that respect in which it is said to be moved, the movement of the soul must be a departure from its essential nature, at least if its movement is essential to it, not incidental.” In Aristotle, and Richard McKeon. “De Anima.” In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. 406b. Kindle Loc 133309. I read this taking that the ego can be altered by the body’s register of sensation. But (following this passage) if an incorporeal soul is “moved” by itself (reflecting) this means that it has to put some distance between itself and its edifice. In dwelling, this is what is occurring because we render something familiar uncanny and move to distance the soul from mere sensation when sensation is diminished in a still moment of reflection.

them because there is not enough difference to pry them apart. One cannot see the reflection of a hand that is touching the mirror. It is perfectly democratic, increasingly so in fact, that our feelings *are our political/social contribution*. But Daniel Lord Smail is justified to call the mood-altering art-of-facts of the consumer economy *psychotropic* because, as with other substances that diminish accountability *under their influence*, such items are not “outside.”<sup>329</sup> They are reflected inside. In this way, consumption is the mirror image of dwelling. Consumption *is* uncanny because it creates the perception of transitive agency where precisely the opposite is the case: a person is under the spell of some biological factor like hunger, thirst or sleep. Or, more socially implicated spells like substance, gambling, shopping or political hedonisms. But where this becomes most uncanny of all is how consuming one thing obscures the passageway into which it has just delivered subjectivity. When the *choice* is obliterated, what was once outside as a stimulus is now inside in a way that changes the biological substrate of reflection. It makes the body state inseparable from the stimulus that dissolved into the bloodstream- whether triple 7’s, a bag of chips or news radio provocateurs. At the biological level, *feelings* are liable to become unstable, more complex and less manageable for an ego that is shunted aside by them. Where reflection puts subjectivity in a reflective ego, consumption will draw subjectivity into the body- pushing the ego out of the scene. All hedonisms do this- all the while embodying sense certainty. That is, the more we consume, the more obstacles we throw in front of the frontal cortex to do any reflecting. Some blandness is probably good for the soul.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> He disabuses the exclusivity of chemicals to alter moods. We probably make this assumption because they appear to *directly* alter moods. In fact mood is not a *thing*; it is a context and all things directly affect this context. See chapter, “Civilization and Psychotropy” in Smail, Daniel Lord. *Deep History and the Brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

<sup>330</sup> In a way that comports with the empirical evidence that I have been drawing from, Francois Jullien makes an argument for blandness and subtlety. In the words that I have been using, he argues that stimulating things take people down corridors. Jullien, Francois, and Paula M. Versano. *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*. New York: Zone Books, 2004



For whatever cultural reasons, geometric thinking tends not to reflect upon what is being broken down and altered by and inside the body. With the least reflection, low-resolution things like needing coffee, being drunk or being sick all point to *substantial* leverage over geological agency. But what is becoming increasingly appreciated in biology is that *immaterial* consumption shrinks the ego from the body all the same. In fact, the brain's apprehension of immaterial objects, like advertising, is often the determining factor of *material* efficacy- as in a placebo. To consume culture is the opposite of dwelling upon it because of the illusion of transitive agency, but like foods, its consumption takes a person down corridors that reflection otherwise holds at a distance. Dwelling makes distance. It even makes something uncanny but only at the expense of sense certainty and to the benefit of perception and understanding. It "reauthorizes" it; it resolves the uncanny into familiarity.<sup>331</sup> By putting time or distance between feelings, the scene will inevitably *dirempt*- it will evolve a perception. As a function of time, a schema of corridors opens to an ego that is otherwise immersed in feelings with only prescribed outlets, e.g. joy, revulsion, indifference etc. This schema is limited only by the conceptual lexicon it has to draw from.

Confucianism and other ancient Chinese thought more plainly express this relationship between solipsism and geometry. Chinese thought uses the geometry of the family tree to shape the experience of what *is*. The ethics of feelings and moods is the ethics of ethics. Unknowability and un-namability preclude ontological points, lines and planes. At the same time, structure, schema and habits are all critical aspects of mood-shaping and the feeling-management that

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<sup>331</sup> "Reauthorize" is a word that Ames often uses to describe the manner in which Confucius speaks. It can be read as an ironic play on words because Confucius did not actually write anything. He insisted that he wasn't creating anything new; he just *made present* the aspects of the past that he valued. Book 7.1 can be read this way: "Following the proper way, I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients." Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition. Location 2069. See Loc 174 for Hall and Ames' use of "reauthorize."

attempts to narrow *what to do?* to salutary acts. This sort of geometry is precisely what is pressed against the phenomena of entropic threats to society (e.g. warring states), language (unrectified words), behavior (cultural collapse) and family (indifference). Confucian geometry is a tool for anticipating propensities, standardizing somatic markers, establishing a baseline of ritual for neighbors and sketching a tree of interdependence. Order is approached aesthetically in terms of effects not dogmatically in terms of logic.

Names matter for humans, not for the universe. The tedious Chinese elaboration of family names, that employs nearly as many family tree pronouns as a person has proper nouns to match, is on the order of specialized jargons for wine tasting, music, or color. All of these scenes have aspects that are inaccessible to reflection without somatic markers, names, or concepts. The name gives a symbolic, declarative register to a brain schema that may treat all such things *as they were*, camouflaged to the frontal cortex as things better handled by procedural memory, i.e. more or less automatic. The name is cause for reflection and the schema that subtends the name makes it a *something*. Like Escher's hands that are drawing one another, these aspects make each other at the same time that they make a gestalt. The name does not have one-to-one correspondence: it is a reflection of the world from one particular sign. It is a point from which lines and planes are drawn. But rather than all names converging on a single point, whatever plane is activated by the brain in any such name, it traverses all of the other aspects that are suspended in its aesthetic field. "Neurons that fire together wire together," as the aphorism of network theory of memory suggests.<sup>332</sup> Some of these point-name planes will be shared with others, but many will be particular to me- promising that every moment of life is unique.

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<sup>332</sup> Donald Hebb is the neuroscientist most associated with the idea that neurons are strengthened by use rather than created. See, Sapolsky, Robert M. "Learning and Synaptic Plasticity." Stanford University. Lecture. Biology and Human Behavior: The Neurological Origins of Individuality, 2nd Edition. Great Courses, 2005.

Poststructuralism and phenomenology help to frame schema in terms of the effects that are so often washed up in the functional ontology of Economics. This informs Chinese thought by being rigorously empirical about a philosophy that cultivated an ethos that was disposed toward and embraced uncertainty. But where it informs a Confucian epistemology of family-feeling, it does not correct it or finish it. It only improves the resolution of the schema. Subtler details are left to uncertainty.

Confucian ancestor worship and familial terminology are a detailed array of behavioral guidelines that emerged out of an epistemology of family. The palette of Western concepts, on the other hand, dismisses subjectivity as inferior to a truth that is ostensibly marching toward a theory of everything with cumulative omniscience parsed out in disciplinary expertise. This mutative promise of science is not reflected in a classical notion of liberal arts, but in many ways, the liberal arts are increasingly (hegemonically?) reflective of utilitarian and pleasurable arts. Where do people pay for an education with the express purpose of learning how to use and perfect the mind? This must be exceedingly rare because the cost of education would already weed out people who were not pursuing utilitarian ends. The cost of contemporary education is so great that it guarantees a utilitarian approach to the diploma. Especially today, the cost is in the credential because there are countless resources to edify oneself for free- yet the social structure is still such that the best educators are insulated by administration and accreditation. Edification is far less expensive than *training* from Gorgias. Nonetheless, *reflection* could only be a *minor* cultural practice because as I have been speculating, we are neither biologically predisposed toward reflection, nor is contemporary, mainstream culture. Work and play seem to have pushed self-knowledge into even more specious corners like “self-improvement” *qua* protestant work ethic. Reflective self-knowledge appears to be struggling to recover from the

decline of small, experimental schools of thought like the West once knew, and the Confucian families have esteemed it as an ideal. Hegemonic knowledges are so ordinary that the absence of schools of thought that define their own normality is not even noticed, much less missed.

Learning for its own sake is taboo in contemporary neoliberal education.

Now that education is strictly for Economic ends- as opposed to the end of home management or politics- it has emerged out from its classical context. It is no longer a bridge between singular persons and geographic management. Citizenship belongs to residents of countries, continents and hemispheres rather than crowds in the hundreds or thousands. The time and space schemata are utterly incompatible with any terrestrial answer to the question *what to do?* If modern times make anything clear, a soul that is well-attended to is the least likely to realize itself in the public sphere. What has been accumulating relevance beneath the register of the unrectified name of liberal arts are the micro *oikos nomos* that is intrapersonal assemblages of mind. The super-organism that is society is utterly unmanageable if by this idea of government, some agent is supposed to be at the helm. Experiences of world wars, ecological collapse and civil unrest, all of the classic political problems, are no less quiescent as a function of democratic technologies. Economic collapses have done little to forestall their repetition- if anything their knowledges have only given a false sense of security while each of these social forces exacerbate the future's recurrence. Should any of these knowledges be folded into a 'good life' it is necessarily a solipsistic one, not a macro-organismic one. That is, the Economics with a capital E is a poor foundation to build a home on. Yet, the social sciences have proliferated names and concepts that afford a life's work of reflection if these concepts were suspended in a scene that includes a corresponding schema of self. None of these knowledges are *wrong* they

are just directed to a reality that does not materialize. In reconceiving the liberal arts, the study of life needs a prominent place- probably alongside philosophy and geometry.

Every human *is* the measure of all things. It follows that there is no more *real* thing to take our own measure than from another solipsistic reality- one found in another human. But this is the fragile fact that animates *parrhesia* at the same time that it exacerbates sophism. Politics is this very fight (and it is a violent fight) between self and society. Where the liberal arts once had faith in the idea that self-knowledge would engender the best politics, it has shifted such that the most powerful politics engenders its own most, self-serving metaphysics. Politics, like an ego, creates its own reality. Now that the ego can no longer be tasked with edifying the self for the service of the polity, it is in a situation that needs protection from it. That *each* human is the measure of all things means that nobody is *really* wrong in the absolute sense. All opinions are really true because solipsism promises us this miserable non-starter of a polity. Large scale polity cannot afford to look after its neighbors with respect for their solipsistic reality, so it is reduced to categories.

## **ANTHROPOCENTRISM IS AN ETHICAL REALITY**

The endo-structure of the body makes the empirical case (as opposed to an emotional appeal, or moral precept) that the face of the other is the most sensitive of encounters that any soul will come into contact with. The strides made against anthropocentrism should not sweep this fact up in its long-overdue critique of human entitlement. Humans are still special to humans. The face of the other is owed special consideration because it mirrors the self- like when a person's lip quivers when feeding a baby. The self's micro-movements, the ones beneath its own conscious awareness, are made manifest in the other because we react immediately to the

other. Beneath conscious awareness the premotor cortex is “mirroring” the behaviors of others.<sup>333</sup> Humans reach for their drinks at the same time, they shift in their seats at the other’s cue and they apparently do not have to wait for a full sentence to be uttered before they have already established their responses. The quantum mechanics of *being-with* human bodies presents a monolithic, species-specific obstacle to the notion of individuality. The other is always an aspect of the self. Indifference toward human bodies is a rarer disposition alongside love and hate, which are far more ordinary.<sup>334</sup> Nonetheless, from Eichmann to widely-circulated videos of China’s moral crisis (e.g. people indifferently stepping over car accident victims), indifference is geometric. It is evident even in thought that indifference comes with statistical diminution of faces and the commensurate decline in responsibility to them.<sup>335</sup> To care about masses of people is a cultural achievement, not a biological mechanism. An ego has to awaken to listen; the self otherwise gets along much faster without reflecting. Everyone is alone in a crowd because crowds usually are *what they were* especially in a social milieu where increasingly, nothing's shocking.

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<sup>333</sup> Literally, at least as far as the term *mirror neuron* is concerned, pathways in the brain activate *as if* we were performing actions that we witness in others. These neurons were discovered accidentally in a lab in Italy. Working with macaques, neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese reached for something and when he did, the corresponding area of the brain in the monkey activated. “The monkey was just sitting quietly, not intending to grasp anything, yet this neuron affiliated with the grasping action had fired nonetheless.” This discovery from 30 years ago opened onto a whole new research area. See, Iacoboni, Marco. *Mirroring people the science of empathy and how we connect with others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. P. 10

<sup>334</sup> Sapolsky frequently quotes Elie Wiesel observation that, “the opposite of love is not hate; its opposite is indifference.” He cites this to make the point that what we perceive to be opposite emotions actually have more to do with context than biology. As I have said elsewhere, the difference between “care” and “control” is a matter of perspective. Cited in, Sapolsky, Robert M. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*. New York: Penguin Press, 2017. P. 18

<sup>335</sup> The idea of a moral crisis in China has been gaining attention- especially in anecdotal form, but increasingly in scholarship as well. Andrew B. Kipnis, "Modernity and the Chinese Moral Crisis," *The China Journal*, no. 75 (January 2016): 121-127.

Listening is an effort; it is not doing nothing. It exerts a force on context by default. By contrast, very little changes or occurs during chatting.<sup>336</sup> Opinions are not helpfully regarded as special or more expressive than other behaviors because they still follow patterns. Our opinions can still elude conscious reflection of them. Their content, however, is more sensitive and can escalate moods in a scene unintentionally. In such cases *listening* is more disruptive behavior. There is a lot at stake in an encounter between two people and I think quite ordinary and socially acceptable to drown out the conditions that empathy depends on. This is no more or less the case with strangers than with people who share the same house. But doing demography on those people with whom one is habitually and mutually reflecting immediately violates the other's subjective sense of singularity. These perceptions stay in the room; they change the mood. The stakes are so high because one can unreflectively or accidentally affect the other's behavior. This can occur without even engaging critical parts of the brain that are the necessary but insufficient conditions of manifesting the ego, soul or consciousness. In other words, two bodies in their historical and architectural habitude can engage one another without a soul present. Two people, identifying with their feelings rather than their reflections are liable to remain unedified by an encounter, or worse, crystallize patterns of behavior. Their home is automatic, predictable and formulaic.

An edifying encounter would have to listen, but listen for what? I think a start is to listen for signs that explicate one's own mood-altering factors- especially the sort that tend to cause the body to identify with feelings rather than to hold them at a distance. Because when the body does identify with feelings, it is machinically repeating its "imago" in an encounter with an other

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<sup>336</sup> Foucault has a memorable anecdote about spending a whole day with a new friend in which they said barely anything. He points to it as the beginning of long friendship. See *The Minimalist Self* in Foucault, Michel, Lawrence D. Kritzman, and Alan Sheridan. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. New York: Routledge, 1990. P. 3

*taken as it was.*<sup>337</sup> In the “mirror stage” or as with “theory of mind” the self apprehends that the other has analogous experiences to its own subjectivity. I have been arguing throughout that this image of self is not independent of our cerebral, cultural or physiological influences on this image, so if this image is fundamentally unstable, so too is the ability to empathize with the other. A symbolic understanding of how another is, is only functional knowledge. *I know how you feel*, is a pretty low threshold for empathy because it will reference abstract emotional terms to establish a shared reality. In expressing this, the ego is, for a moment, only this recollection- which is not as edifying as listening.

The stakes are high in identifying the other with the signs of emotions that are manifest in an exchange. *Knowing* how an other feels is of little help if this knowledge is derived in the manner of *saber*-knowledge. I can *know* how someone might feel threatened if the second amendment is in jeopardy. It could be construed as a slippery slope to a complete erosion of constitutional rights, a collapse of national identity and the obliteration of reality altogether. I also *know*, however, that those feelings were arrived at in ignorance, stupidity or in a cultural milieu that perpetuates those fears. Nobody is edified in repeating such categorical identities. But as I feel my blood pressure rise, notice that cortisol is leaking into my blood, become aware of automatic arguments emerging from my impatient voice and *know* every word that is about to

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<sup>337</sup> The encounter between two people is enigmatic when held against Lacan’s “mirror stage” because as he explains, self image does more to shape the self than the image itself is shape by the body. This, I think, is the most intense scene in which there is nothing outside of reflection. He writes, “For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. Through these two aspects of its appearance, this gestalt--whose power should be considered linked to the species, though its motor style is as yet unrecognizable- symbolizes the *I*’s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination. This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation.” See, Lacan, Jacques, and Bruce Fink. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007. P. 76-77



come out of my friend's mouth, I could, with a more nuanced theory of mind, understand that my behaviors are liable to precipitate those same *feelings* in the other. I could know that the way I feel is almost inevitably reflected in my friend's body state. These feelings take the body down a corridor where a narrow range of choices present themselves and a much broader range of topics (weather, sports or pop culture) are closed off from plausible discourse. We depart with the same *saber* knowledges and only diminish whatever familiarity bound us. This is easier to grasp when we disinterestedly watch others argue. When I watch two people talk, I can see their postures, voices, gestures, volumes and faces mirror one another. I can intuit some of the physiological operations going on in their scene of reflection, where they are immersed in one another and nearly walled off from all other affects. The scene is immersive because most of the brain's activity is devoted to projecting- and another human offers so much for the brain to anticipate. The face of a lion can be dismissed as a blunt threat to life. An inanimate object that can be overlooked in its given certainty. Another human has an infinitely complex face, endlessly expressive eyes, clothing that symbolizes, gestures that speak and a body that is almost a mirror image. A singular other is utterly immersive- both in silence and in conversation.

For politics the immersiveness of another human cannot be understated. This is because, ironically, the more people there are in the room, the less immersive human-reflection becomes. The somatic markers become more statistical and abstract. Samenesses play increasingly significant roles in encountering others.<sup>338</sup> Where an individual can be apprehended as a singularity with many supporting assemblages, a gestalt shift necessarily occurs when a *body of*

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<sup>338</sup> Georg Simmel's analysis of politics with respect to quantity, I think, is sufficient for demonstrating the tension between politics and ethics. He writes, "Typically all of them [bureaucratic organs] develop fully and purely only in large groups. They are the abstract form of group cohesion whose concrete form can no longer exist after the group has reached a certain size. Their utility, which ramifies into a thousand social characteristics, ultimately depends on numerical premises." In, Simmel, Georg, and Kurt H. Wolff. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950. P. 96

*people* is assembled. This phenomenon points to a human being's capacity for complexity. In grasping the subjectivity of an organization, one has to *gestalt* the agent. I simply cannot become immersed in all of the singularities inside of it for very obvious and pragmatic reasons. Yet, the politics of this tension is manifest everywhere. Bureaucrats are torn between their own hardened function in an organization and their humanity coming face-to-face with endless lines of extenuating circumstances. Or, on the other side, how customers rarely encounter human beings, but instead, the *face* of some monolithic organization. The face is important because empathy deteriorates rapidly over the phone and even more in text. But as testimony shows, a macro-organism of an institution is just as rapidly shaken down by an immersive recounting of events by a singular human being. A lot of an organization can be reflected through a singular testimony. Importantly, the subjectivity of the institution is liable to reflect a completely different face. This is because from a singular testimony, the institution's complicity in treating singularities as their roles is made clear. The immersiveness of this cannot be overstated because while there is seemingly universal revulsion toward being treated demographically, or expected to embody the full range of stereotypical baggage of a category, this is the essence of politics.

This case is easily grasped when a human being is in the uniform of an institution. But in ordinary life, people drift into and out of political/empathic reflections. At the scale of politics, the sheer quantity of persons involved forecloses being-at-home with populations one singularity at a time. But while empathizing with a sea of singularities is impossible at one scale, the inverse is not the case. That is, it is entirely possible, even ordinary, to treat singularities politically- whether in enforcing rules at an institution or more culturally defined tasks like taking out garbage. Culture conditions all kinds of demographics in small-scale, intimate encounters- some of which are too ordinary for even a reflective insider to recognize. Historically, we can see how

children were treated as children, wives as *wives*, husbands, grandparents, in-laws of varying races, religions etc. We often regard older cultural norms with dismay while being completely unreflective about contemporary standards- as if momentarily contented with our social progress. Whatever accomplishment has been achieved, it is still ensconced in a demographic shift that maintains the vestigial structure of the oppression that predicated its future justice.

Demographics are not even averages among populations, they are lowest common denominators in which the diversity within them is liable to be greater than the diversity between them.<sup>339</sup> A racial demographic will reveal a full range of socioeconomic statuses. A gender demographic will exhibit a gambit of tendencies that often militate against the rule rather than bend to it. Demographics run the risk of reinforcing, if mutating, vestigial politics even under the best of circumstances. This is not to say that this crude tool has not been the vehicle for improvement in many lives. It is *too crude*, however, in light of better understandings of differences that make bigger differences. Race has no biological legitimacy and its cultural fact still bends to the fossils of political value judgements. Gender is also maligned because it obscures genuine biological sexual differences in a haze of cultural vestiges- vestiges that have placed value judgments on those differences rather than conceiving them to some positive effect. Trying to remedy these through equality *qua* sameness is destructive even where well intentioned. Biological sexual and cultural historical differences cannot help but to manifest in the world; it is the fossils of politics that need attention not the absence of androgyny. The latter is just a barrier to a meaningful grasp of the faces we see. When categorical samenesses guide

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<sup>339</sup> In fact, if we want to draw from biology again, intra-species variation is precisely what allows a species to thrive and evolve in a changing environment. This internal variation equips this collective existence with more weapons to defend itself. See, Smail, Daniel Lord. *Deep History and the Brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 P. 124-5

the reflections of singularities, *what to do?* has already been answered by a political mode of thought.

Small-scale humanity demands a schema that is radically different from politics because no singularity *is* the lowest common denominator face-to-face. That is, where demographics are at the fore of *what to do?*, they will serve to obscure more edifying schema for reflection. Demographics belong to the systematic (if implicit) philosophy of what Foucault called governmentality. All schema cohere to a basic philosophy even where it is not explicit. As a defensive schema against a world of warring states, the Confucian schema was clear to attenuate social phenomena and emphasize the boundaries of a care structure. There are two comments that Confucius makes that are relevant to this context. “Do not plan the policies of an office you do not hold.”<sup>340</sup> This rules out reflecting on the social “causes” of home-manifest problems from the subjectivity of society. Income disparity as major factor of drug abuse is not helpfully reflected upon from the subjectivity of the social macroorganism. This is because it is an office that no person actually holds. The same phenomena, however, can be reflected upon to domestic ends. Reflecting this way calls attention to how social factors may be steering behaviors into unhealthy outlets. The simple awareness that social, economic stress is being *vented* diminishes the ascription of total responsibility to the human being expressing it. It changes the way one can respond to this political hangover into the home. Contrariwise, it is disarming and hopeless to relegate the totality of responsibility to a world over which one has no leverage. Blaming singularities *or* society as zero-sum are both helpless situations.<sup>341</sup> Blurring agency between

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<sup>340</sup> Book 14:26 in, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition.

<sup>341</sup> Félix Guattari raises many very Confucian points. He asks, “Can a group be the subject of its own enunciation? If so, would this be by virtue of consciousness or the unconscious? To whom does the group speak?...must we give up in sheer despair, and live a politics where we resign ourselves to the worst possible outcome, and make social revolution the absolute precondition for any intervention in the local running of institutions by its ‘users’?” Also, in answering these questions Guattari suggests that the group unconscious (similar to what I have been calling

these two poles is the pragmatic reflection that draws attention to context rather than causation. Recognizing that societal factors are the contextual walls conditioning an other's mood that is being expressed in a bad way is what illuminates an architecture of shaping moods and perhaps shaping them to look more like home. This puts distance between a person's outlet of expression and the *dividual*, or aspect of its singularity, that gave rise to this. Reflecting this way also calls to mind infinite responsibility to the face whose expression may be owed more listening than reaction. Now, one might listen for the functors in the body that are instrumental to fear, compassion, aggression or being-at-home.

The second Confucian comment that is relevant is, "Do not have as a friend anyone who is not as good as you are."<sup>342</sup> Family is a given. Being thrown into that network of relationships, these are the most important to make good so far as it is inevitable. Friends, then, are the human walls that separate politics from home. From the subjectivity of the state, it makes sense that all are siblings under its patriarchy or comrades (etymologically *roommate*) in community, but for all of their differences, capitalism and communism are both hedonistically geometric about making the body politic homogenous and congenial to itself. Such are the more positively connoted concepts of *compliance*. Universal bonhomie is completely out of touch with lived experience: most people do not like *most* people. *The masses* are always the background by which we flatter ourselves of our singularity. Universal love is a noble cause that is better expressed in tolerance and allowing others to *be* than it is in "caring" for them. There is a chasm between care and control, but subjectively, the latter is often collapsed into the former. Children

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camouflage) in all of its invisible predictability, is precisely what makes its *visibility* or disruption a resource for subtler changes in the institution. See Guattari, Félix, Gilles Deleuze, and Ames Hodges. 'The Transference' in *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955-1971*. South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015. p. 76-7

<sup>342</sup> Book 1:8 in, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition.

catch on quickly that *for your own good* is discipline only thinly veiled as altruism. My concern for victims of gun violence, for instance, has probably less to do with my concern for the well-being of others than it does with my intolerance for the stupidity of this aspect of United States' society. It is only under the circumstances of their victimhood that my compassion arises. In the absence of their victimhood, I am unaware of them much less concerned. I *cannot* care about them because they are not suspended in any scene of my reflection. The *potential* victim is merely part of the masses. To this end, I think the Confucian statement is a good one insofar as I am not friends, by definition, with either those whom I wish to control or those whom are victims of others I wish to control. The existential and subjective experience of the limits of caring are enough to show that social *care* can only be a *saber*-knowledge, an algorithm of peace that has no relevance to ordinary experience aside from hedonism.

Not caring about others should not be a source of guilt or anxiety because allowing them to *be* is actually more reflective, altruistic and kind than caring in the mode of *for their own good*- which is pure political hedonism. It is a mistake to impose *ideal* connotations on the Confucian *good* because it is never reducible, but always straddles the whole reflection.<sup>343</sup> Good friends are those with whom reflection enables a quorum of functors in the endoskeleton to express a family feeling. My reflections upon victims reflect anger toward their assailants. In sum, this doesn't balance out in calm equanimity, it puts me in a bad mood. The people with whom we should not be in a scene of reflection with are precisely those who possess the body in a *bad* way. This is why hedonism is such a challenging factor of homemaking because in its

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<sup>343</sup> Confucius made a virtue of tailoring advice to particular people. Being asked about whether or not one should "act upon learning something," he justified having two answers: "Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, and so I sought to rein him in." Book 11.22 in, Ames, Roger T., and Henry Rosemont, Jr. *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998. Kindle Edition.

immediacy it can be mistaken for a good feeling. It is only upon reflection that hedonism can be identified as a long-term obstacle to being at home. Hedonism, like consumption, is a short-term desire that an ego identifies with in one moment and is haunted by the next. Increasingly, this particular variety of desire is driving contemporary media in a way that forces us to ask after the nature of our attraction to the shock, outrage and controversy that drives contemporary “news” and social media. Anger and stupidity have direct channels to our most primitive brain regions. These brain regions, in kind, tend to bypass our more evolved, reflective regions and cause us to react in kind, reflecting these same emotions. This much is far harder to manage than the friends we choose in the first place. Hearts and minds are not abstract objects, they are thin[g]ks.

At the outset of this project, I suggested that the ancient Chinese would more appropriately ground a renaissance of the liberal arts. As a rebirth, the liberal arts are in need of shedding much of the baggage that comes with a millennia of commentary on their own insulated origins. The Western corpus of philosophy and science is immense, wide ranging and highly nuanced in all of the corridors that it has wended through. There is a good argument that these facts diminish the need to look outside of this tradition because whatever can be found in any other tradition has been, in some way or another, addressed in the West. This argument, however, is too reductionist and fails to grasp the importance to the human *being* of a rational narrative. Since before the enlightenment, the dominant narratives of social existence feature optimistic notions of progress, mastery over nature, social justice, and the pursuit of happiness. These centuries’ old narratives are increasingly out of touch with the same sciences that ushered in their optimisms. The enlightenment ethos occupies a minor role in the commanding heights of the Economy that have mobilized desire and consumption as the operative force that turns the

human world. While this narrative impasse is crystal clear to reflective persons, the academic weapons of resisting these facts of science and world are still beholden to the narrative that delivered us to this sad fate in the first place. Learning is overwhelmingly subjugated to desire, consumption and large-scale family under monolithic patriarchies. My hypothesis is that using these weapons reinforces and exacerbates this conflicted narrative that cannot change itself from the inside.

I don't think that Confucius solves the world's problems, nor do I think that there is any solution- not only to our problems, but *any* problem. What ancient Chinese philosophy does for the minor traditions of the West surveyed in this project is to ground them in the affirmative rather than the defensive. Western science is too often embarrassed and apologetic to take Eastern philosophy as anything but a sideshow. When these oldest of philosophies are taken as the starting point, however, we are compelled to reflect differently upon every human being that has informed the Western canon. In turn, starting in the East informs the West in ways that it cannot see in its own self-reflection. Here, the longstanding prejudice against Eastern thought is the greatest gift to the present time because it so clearly cuts a transversal line through the stone edifice of Western knowledge. It reveals the non-geometry aspects in all from Socrates to Deleuze. Starting with the Chinese, the Western corpus fleshes out a very different narrative- one that I believe radically alters some of the basic questions of philosophy. By and large, the most pertinent contribution Chinese thought makes to our own time is its anti-political orientation. To this end, Chinese thought which is not systematic, geometric or goal oriented is an exercise in thinking itself. It takes thinking, being and dwelling as all there is. The liberal arts were once a tradition of learning to use the mind *for the sake of* learning to use the mind. But even this "intransitive" activity was long in the shadow of Aristotle who, in many moments, believed that



self-cultivation was *for the greater good*. Today, there is evidence that being for the sake of the future is hedonistic, anti-social and desirously consumptive. Being for the greater good, ironically, comes at the expense of the life that is lived in closest proximity. Ancient Chinese philosophy reminds us that the greater good does not exist subjectively, it is only a code.<sup>344</sup> But a renaissance liberal arts would best turn to the technologies of self that flesh out and *edify* against the singularly ideal face of contemporary geopolitics.

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<sup>344</sup> In the *Daodejing*, “With the most excellent rulers, their subjects only know that they are there, The next best are the rulers they love and praise, Next are the rulers they hold in awe, And the worst are the rulers they disparage. Where there is a lack of credibility, there is a lack of trust. Vigilant, they are careful of what they say. With all things accomplished and the work complete, The common people say, ‘We are spontaneously like this’.” Hall and Ames comment, “The expectation that social order emerges from the bottom up is a strong theme in this traditionally agrarian culture in which most adjustments are in informal business of extended family.” I think that this is poignant commentary on the state of contemporary democracy where all citizens have a duty to conceive the code for a more perfect union. The irony is that this civic duty all but guarantees that politics will loom large over an increasing array of private details, not least of all thinking. See, Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. *Daodejing: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Random House. Kindle loc. 1988

## CONCLUSION

It is not without some irony that here I try to *sum up* or answer the question: *what is the point?* And of course, it is tempting to say that the point is that *there is no point*. But left alone, this contradiction is hardly a productive one. It is in fact, the elegance of this formula that I think has left skepticism, solipsism and poststructuralism (among other professional doubters) vulnerable to Sophism, nihilism and bad moods. *This* elegance is what makes them superficially opposite to idealism, but from the standpoint of geometry, no less dogmatic about the ontology of codes. To take a hard stance *against* the truth (which is a human invention) is a politically motivated ontological claim about what is unknowable in the first instance, namely, what other minds are thin[g]king. My doubts reduce to, and stem from, this singular fact: I absolutely cannot see what you see in the mirror. And what I conclude from this is that the concept of sameness is demonstrably ephemeral and human, but also structural to lived experience. The ethical stakes of sameness are made clear to me when I contrast analytical thinking to *Analectical* thinking and the ways that each apprehend reflections. So my first *point* is a point of departure from geometrical thought.

It is not as if difference without limit is the death knell of community or the end of reason. I think that the implausibility of sameness illuminates the limits of its scalability. If you and I were to face a mirror together, there is only inferred similarity between us. Here, the violence of demographics becomes clear. If we cannot see the same thing, how could one aspect of me make me *same* as others? This second leap is of a magnitude monumentally greater than the first. This huge leap reveals that the benefit of horizontal sameness falls disproportionately to those who manage and measure populations. Whether in fantasy or with policy, the violence of this *thought* is not mitigated by the lack of agency over the direction of society. Among my

*points* is that this attitude is fundamentally anti-social despite the cover provided by a spirit of democracy, care or altruism. I have tried to make the soundest and most demonstrable philosophical argument that demographic thinking is inimical to community. My argument is that it is at the level of conscious thought that *care* can tip over into a hedonistic desire for control. Any thought that manifests as policy is already very far down a hedonistic corridor.

Reflection also helps disrupt the vertical scalability of sameness. The ulterior motive behind equating kings and fathers, or nations and homes, is more pronounced when apprehended in terms of *what is reflected in it*. Not only do your father and mine have less in common than they do in difference, but to scale this up only exacerbates the violence of this power structure. This vertical scale of sameness is what conceives citizens as brothers and sisters, or at the very least *comrades* (literally *roommates*), all under the same roof. The vertical hierarchies conceive of scales of sameness and *same* agency. But when I try to conceive something palpable about society, I do not see a sea of family-ar faces. I see a web of complexity that exceeds my resources for familiarization. I see such a multiplicity of exotic ways of living that the most conspicuous fact I draw from this reflection is that I could scarcely come to understand a single other one. In the face of this cognitive limit, how could I possibly know how others should manage their homes because I know how to manage one? How could it possibly be more prosocial to believe I do rather than abandon this project that is structured by *decisive* ignorance. Americans are my neighbors, not my family. I have tried to make the point that the scope of managing one's own home is more than enough to exhaust one's resources. Further, where resources are not dedicated to home management, we are liable to cause more damage than our greatest political activism could compensate. Now more than ever, ordinary domestic behavior

touches lives and ecosystems the world over. Policy fantasies are worse than nothing if they abet involvement in things that betray our better judgement.

Sameness is so conspicuously unprovable that its role in the edifice of reality and reason demands scrutiny. Sameness structures our presuppositions and our predictions alike. Sameness makes policy and interchangeable parts possible. Sameness is the operative logic behind machine-human singularity. Sameness is what makes it possible for education to be mass(ively) produced. Where sameness manifests so many things, it most certainly exists. To say that it is unprovable (like god) does nothing to diminish its force in the world. But where god is neither provable nor unprovable, in *reflection*, I have demonstrated to myself that when I share a *similar* apprehension of some art-of-fact with another, the perimeter of this inferential projection is without limit. And secondarily, in sustained reflection, I demonstrate to myself that my thoughts and apprehension evolve from one moment to the next. For me, this fact of infinite difference becomes palpable when I try to grasp sameness in any form. Sameness is fleeting and momentary. The more concretely I try to grasp sameness, the more quickly it slips through my fingers.

Because you cannot see what I see, my thoughts about sameness are not amenable to a peer's re-view. My thought-turned-art-of-fact is always a multiplicity that cannot be viewed-again. I don't have a proof of its in-existence, merely an argument. I cannot establish meta-anthropocentrically that sameness does not exist, but it is another point of mine that nothing can be. All measurement is human, but few disciplines are willing to put this fact ahead of geometric elegance. The edifice of knowledge itself is beholden to code thinking and it is precisely this point that brings politics and education into subtle turns of mind. When I reflect, I disclose to myself that perceiving sameness incurs more violence than anything else. We could probably

demonstrate in a lab that my apprehension of a picture of a spider does relatively little to my pulse, perspiration or fMRI reading. And if the “same” picture were shown to an arachnophobic person, these *measures* would be radically different. Such things are philosophically obvious: the picture is a multiplicity. It is not ‘independent’ of any apprehension, but instead, it is always suspended in reflection with other humans and art-of-facts. If we are disposed to sameness, however, where does this “proof” of multiplicity lead? Can we resist the power and leverage that new metric knowledge presents to us? Are we tempted to bracket out some of the multiplicity’s *multiples* to gain greater leverage over some of these art-of-facts? Do we subject the “same” sample of humans to different pictures? Do we subject different humans to the “same” picture? What is the pattern? What is the code? But more critically *what to do with it?*

Being code-disposed stages a particular kind of ethos oriented toward things over-the-horizon and behind the curtain. It is an attitude of knowing something without familiarity. Code-thinking is dismissive of phenomenal and subjective efficacy because its knowledge is useless if not universally applicable. Thinking about codes and patterns does not *cause* anti-social behavior. The irony is that expert knowledge generally congratulates itself for its pro-social contribution. Medicine, law, finance and every other Economic sector have special techniques of measurement by which experts flatter themselves with their esoteric contribution to social progress. But if the power of medicine, law or education is inherent to the ability to measure, ethics and politics teeter on fragile turns of mind. Is the metric knowledge to be *reflected in the other?* Or is this metric knowledge something for *subjectivity to reflect upon*, for the sake of edifying itself?

My argument for edification is not to claim that it is the correct direction to ply ones resources, or that being prosocial is stupid or wrong. Rather, I want to theorize an ethical power

that is defined by its tension with political power. I want to theorize a threshold whereby social art-of-facts are, or are not, matters for home management. Without this threshold, it seems that democracy sets this threshold so low that *thinking politically* is reflexively natural. It is uncanny to me that demographic thinking is more natural than actively managing subjectivity in the only sovereign space that it dwells. Framed this way, this “fragile turn of mind” is a difference that makes all the difference. Why subject, or subjugate oneself to the expertise of objective measurement under any but the most emergency situations? What could be less free than asking a doctor, *will I be ok?* Asking the psychiatrist what *should* I see? Or the lender *what can I afford?* Are these knowledges really exchangeable? And is it not uncanny that in return I should supply my contribution to the management of *their homes*. Knowledges are less mysterious than the possessors of such expertise will lead us to believe. It is after all, a source of power for them. It is the means by which they *grow the household*- the geometric way of life.

There is no pure ethical life, but the ethics are going to be in tension differently for every time and place. Taking a signal from the genre of capitalism critique, I think that we are thrown into a world so saturated in Economics that getting outside of this system is a contemporary asceticism. In other words, the rejection of the Economic way of world is scarcely edifying because the measures taken to accomplish this are so extreme that they cannot help but lead to the uncanny. I concede that the presupposition that freedom needs to be defined within this thrownness structures the entire perspective of edification. But if this constraint is taken as given, if reform or revolution are bracketed realities, it seems to me that self measurement is an open field of sovereignty over which little ground has been broken. How is knowledge of neuroscience anything but liberating? Who could be a better psychologist than the ego? How dangerous to be ignorant of how marketing works? How self-effacing to live in a “model home”

as if a professional could possibly know how to build a home? These are *political* questions because these are ways that the political measures insinuate themselves into subjectivity. It is not laws or lack of them that are unedifying, but instead, it is the entire dependence on a system that *ought* to protect us from guns, predatory lending, fraud or terrorism. The danger is that this dependence is exchanged for the right to tell society how it should be- which accomplishes little in the way of sovereignty. If the freedom of speech were designed to discharge the angst of other forms of coercion, it would have been ingenious and successful beyond the most sinister expectations. Free speech and political activism are dangerous because of the cover they give for more debilitating threats to sovereignty. Biopolitics manages to get beneath the skin while good citizens have the duty to get in each other's faces to show how much they care.

Where the directionality of education is a critical point of edification, the apparatus of education itself presents an obstacle to reflection. It is a political fossil in the image of industrialization. The formula of *Oeconomicus* is just as absurd when applied to education: as a teacher, if I know how one person apprehends art-of-facts, do I know how others do as well? The *cliché* that everyone learns differently obscures the radical difference between one person's recollection and another. The phobia is just one indication of a unique apprehension, but this singularity is not a sickness. Phobias reflect a more general phenomenon that the belief in geometry ontologizes as *abnormal*. A bias that our representation of information is how it is apprehended and recalled by subjectivity is *misguided* by geometry to the extreme. Yet we still teach *as if* knowledge had a one-to-one correspondence to "objective" stuff. Text is not a window; it is a singular reflection of a multiplicity. So long as the question *how did I know this?* is walled from reflection, subjectivity is liable to be politically oriented to the self- to measure itself according to a social standard of expertise.

Again, politically, it is obvious that education needs reform, even a revolution. This obviousness, however, is the biggest indication of the futility of directing one's efforts to the politics of education. The inanity of a system where it is acceptable and even expected to dump a whole subject after an exam is so obvious that we have to be suspect of further stating the obvious. It is more edifying to call into question the entire cultural apparatus of learning- to establish some tension with its same-making. Today, it is obvious that the *point* of education is statistical, and its utility is the statistic itself. I suppose that *recall* has not been the *point* of education in any living memory. This is why the system is a fossil in which most of us must work within, not upon. In my nearly 30 years of education, I have never attended a class where a teacher said, *let's establish a strategy for you to recall this for the rest of your life*. I don't know what could be edifying about "learning" anything without an intention for it to be recalled or to somehow structure one's edifice of subjectivity. This too, is a wide open field over which scarcely any ground is broken.

Finally, the point that I want to draw out from Chinese philosophy is that, unlike nihilism, *meaning* is made in the freedom of pointlessness. The closest thing that approximates a *point* of individuality is the event of birth. But the birth of a human being is like any art-of-fact. It only is what it is for each of the things in which it is suspended in reflection. This event means that it is thrown into a world in which it is reflected in and reflects upon a unique assemblage of things. But not even multiplicity-experience remains a stable fact of individuality. With every subtle movement this orbit of art-of-facts and center of gravity makes a world of difference. Genes and fingerprints are not codes of individuality, they are just among the limitless conditions of mutual reflection. These reflections are infinite and the way subjectivity dwells on them is the difference of all meaning.



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