Personography

Lost & Found in the Selfie City

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The following offers a historical critique of the emergence of the Self in the West as co-constitutive with the normalization of colonial-capitalist exploitation. Particularly, the focus here is on the psychology and epistemology of foregrounding the Self as the principal marker of identity (as opposed to religious, national, or familial identity). The impact of this transition from Descartes and Locke through Freud and Instagram has substantially reshaped global forms. I zoom in on the impacts of this development on urban living, including the emergence of private property, policing, and social media aesthetics. I conclude by offering the novel concept Personography as a manner of neutralizing the Self and promoting a more embodied appreciation for one's positionality and identity within an urban community. Personography is a means cartographically materializing a modern Self which has become abstracted from space and time. This attempt at rematerialization is intended to reattach the Self to the world, so that it can longer be subjected to endless exploitation.

Introduction

In the 1890s psychotherapy emerged as a method of pursuing individual emotional and mental well-being. By the 1940s this method had been exploited by advertisers to commercialize individual anxieties. In 1987 Margaret Thatcher declared, "there's no such thing as society." In 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court determined that corporations could legally be considered individuals. Each of these moments are symptomatic of the veneration of the Self over the society. The century surrounding these events was defined by near perpetual genocide and ecocide. We cannot survive another century of the Self.

In the 2002 documentary about the use of Freudian psychoanalysis in marketing and politics, Adam Curtis declared the twentieth century, *The Century of the Self*. If the twenty-first century continues to be as "self-centered" and "selfish" as the previous, there won't be much of a twenty-second century. That century of the self, with its rapacious drive for economic accumulation and unshakeable faith in colonial extractive logic, was the bloodiest and most environmentally catastrophic hundred years that humans have yet endured. Growing out of an increased veneration of the human mind in the Renaissance, through the Cartesian *cogito* and Lockean liberalism, and culminating in Freud's subconscious, the Self has gained increasing eminence. Today's world is largely built by and for the Self. But *what*, *who*, and most importantly for this article, *where* is the Self?

Within, I examine the relationship between the idea of a Self and the normalized ex-

ploitation (of humans and environments) that has emerged since Descartes threshed the mind from the body. I suggest that this epistemology of the Self legitimizes extractive relationships, and what's worse, the Self cannot be held accountable. Selves are ephemeral shadows of the physical bodies that occupy this planet. For subscribers to mind-body dualism, the Self can be detached and live outside the fleshbag that hosts it. "This self is an intangible entity that is spoken of as if it were an extra internal organ."[1] This facilitates the dream of various transhumanist life-extending fetishists hoping to upload their minds into eternal silicon clouds or cryogenic sanctuaries.

In an effort to neutralize the Self, this article introduces a method of visualizing and embodying identity referred to as personography. This concept, a somewhat tongue-in-cheek counter to *self*-help psychologies, is presented as a novel therapeutic modality for rematerializing individual identity. The Self is a lost wandering phantom that needs to be located cartographically. As a case study, I offer a map of spaces in New York City where I have induced severe emotional ruptures through poor Self management—a map of emotional pain. The goal is to manifest a less psychoanalytic idea of the individual (i.e., the Self) and a more ethnographic and geographic idea of the individual (i.e., the Person). In this effort, discussions are offered of urban policing and aesthetics.

The prerogative for personography is well-articulated by anthropologist Leith Mullings in her ethnography of mental health in Ghana:

> "The dominant forms of Western psychotherapy perpetuate and rationalize an individual social order. Under the guise of rationality, they often obscure basic problems by drawing attention away from the macrosocial relations that produce individual conflicts to the micro expression of them, from the overhauling of society to the increased coping capacity of the individual."[2]

Psychogenealogy

As Freudian ideas were employed throughout the twentieth century by the marketing industry to manipulate desires and anxieties, feelings of distrust, paranoia, and insecurity have come to encompass much of public discourse. Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), unknown when *The Century of the Self* was produced, have only further foregrounded the ego. However, this trend, which has rendered so many isolated and afraid inside individualized bubbles of content, has a history that long predates Freud's unlocking of the subconscious.

The rise of the Self was built atop a veneration of human reason that paralleled a decentering of God in European thought following the Renaissance. Privileged European thinkers transferred faith in God to a faith in their own minds.[3] As Sylvia Wynter puts it, "the projection of Maximal Man over…the Maximal God."[4] This "Man" was an individual. Prior to the construction of Man in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, people were referred to as Christians, Peasants, Nobles—collective nouns, not individuated.

Reformation ideologies contributed to the centering of the Self as well. Martin Luther and John Calvin preached that salvation is attained from within, individually. The Church is a corrosive mediating embellishment that stands between the Self and salvation. "Individualism in religion led…to an individualist morality, and an individualist morality to a disparagement of the significance of the social fabric as compared with personal character."[5]

Descartes' articulation of *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) in the seventeenth century has left an indelible mark on Eurowestern perceptions of Self. Alongside Shakespeare's Hamlet (of "to be, or not to be" fame), this anchor of Western philosophy is often considered the starting point of modern self-reflection. Descartes' idiom has been challenged as exceedingly egocentric. Fellow seventeenth century French phi-

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1   Ligotti 2010, p. 85.
2   Mullings 1984, p. 202.
3   Cassirer 2020.
4   Wynter 1984, p. 29.
5   Tawney 1954, p. 211.

losopher Pierre Gassendi accused Descartes of unnecessarily assuming the "I" in his formulation, suggesting it be amended to "thinking is occurring."

Contrasting Descartes' dualism, Spinoza proposed a monism—an "us" as opposed to a multitude of disconnected "I"s. Nietzsche later pointed out that thinking, personhood, and language are all *social* constructions that do not emerge from isolated minds. That is, the very words Descartes' used should have proved to him that he is more than just a mind; he's a member of a society. But Descartes didn't seem to notice. Instead, his work is full of self-centered egoisms, such as "everything that is in me I got from God, and he gave me no faculty for making mistakes, it seems I am incapable of ever erring."[6]

The genealogy of individualization also descends from the sentiments of classical liberalism (notably the ideas of John Locke). The individual as the primary causal force, as the primary bearer of responsibility, is the underlying assertion of this liberalism. "The…Self now came to function as the Final/Formal cause which determined behavior."[7] Liberalism promoted the sanctity of private property and laissez faire economics. This ideology developed to disparage and dismantle forms of social organization centered on commonly held resources, refuting open access and sharing. Indeed, in response to overwhelming resistance to private property in England, Oliver Cromwell remarked "You have no way to deal with these men, but to break them to pieces."[8] That is, the way to subdue an exploited and marginalized populace is to individualize it.

Liberal ideology propelled the Enclosure movement that forced communities off their land in Britain increasingly from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Communities that lived outside the wage-labor system were dissolved as "tragedy of the commons" rhetoric was propagated by landholders. As anthropologists know well, the tragedy of the commons hypothesis (that resources held in common will be overexploited, so private ownership is more sustainable) completely contradicts all ethnographic evidence. The hypothesis is a complete inversion of the observed reality—privately held land is over-exploited and commons systems are sustained for thousands of years.

It is difficult to imagine that a Freudian psychotherapy would have developed without the normalization of private ownership. Freud had a deeply entrenched Hobbesian outlook, thinking all humans are "oriented toward pursuing simple pleasures with ruthless abandon."[9]—an idea that became naturalized during colonialism. Concepts, like the subconscious, that are born within selfish, competitive, greedy, and amoral societies tend to exacerbate and reify these attributes.

Given this, Mullings' critique of Western psychotherapy resonates:

> "Therapies may align themselves with the interests of specific classes… may mediate and reinforce certain ideological elements. They are created within a given social order, but also reproduce that order. An essential issue is which set of values is being transmitted and in whose interests."[10]

This suggests that our prevailing conceptions of the mind have been deeply influenced by normalized European socioeconomic perspectives from the nineteenth century. If one needs reminding, these perspectives were (and remain) deeply ethnocentric, misogynistic, and racist, not to mention blindingly teleological. Mullings goes on:

> "Western therapy reflects its origins in the advanced capitalist societies of Europe and the United States…As numerous scholars have observed, the individual became the basic unit of the society with the consolidation of capitalism…Early studies…cite the emphasis on individualism, enhancement of wealth and social status, and self-reliance underlying…the American mental health movement."[11]

David McNally criticizes the nineteenth century society from which Freud's subcon-

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6   Descartes 1998, p. 81.

7   Wynter 1984, p. 24.

8   McNally 2011, p. 72.

9   Mitchell & Black 1995, p. 112.

10   Mullings 1984, p. 1.

11   Ibd, p. 192–193.

scious emerged as "fraught with possessive individualism. In such a social order, scientific investigation all too easily serves personal aggrandizement, not societal well-being."[12] He points to contemporaneous literature that "condemns…individualistic enterprise detached from social obligations and responsibilities"[13] and highlights how "privatizing…carries with it a dangerous social pathology."[14]

While there have been decolonizing efforts in academic psychology, the popular form of psychoanalysis remains premised on the normalization of the European ego. The insights of psychology have become deeply naturalized. When we hear phrases like "it is human nature to be _____" (greedy, competitive, altruistic, curious), these are the pronouncements of psychology. While this may not be a sentiment held by all psychologists today, it is born from the theorization of the mind—the idea of innate and universal desires. Anthropology (at least since the mid-twentieth century) has steadfastly tried to refute the idea that there is a single human nature consisting of such attributes.

For example, a common refrain is that it's human nature to explore and expand. This isn't human nature. It is one of innumerable human capacities that some societies have valorized and which other societies have ignored, suppressed, or demonized. As Rosi Braidotti explains, "Individualism is not an intrinsic part of 'human nature', as liberal thinkers are prone to believe, but rather a historically and culturally specific discursive formation, one which, moreover, is becoming increasingly problematic."[15]

While some ideas of Freud's psychology (e.g., the Oedipal complex or dream analysis) are dismissed by large swaths of the population, it is difficult to deny that we live in a psychoanalytic world. As Thatcher would be happy to hear, "If psychoanalysis was still to be conceived of as a battle, it had become…a full-scale attack against culture."[16] Even those that do not believe in the benefits of psychotherapy implicitly adhere to the notion that our actions, behaviors, and beliefs are to some extent dictated by the unknown and recessed powers and influences of our minds. This psychoanalytic Self, regardless of what insight we may draw from it, is a Eurocolonial invention.

Given this troubling past, as Luce Irigaray concedes, "psychoanalysis needs to reconsider…the cultural background and the economy…that have marked it, without its knowledge."[17] Irigary further outlines how early women psychologists identified and attempted to push past the patriarchal individuality intrinsic to psychotherapy:

> "[Karen Horney] appealed almost exclusively to determining sociocultural factors in order to account for the specific characteristics of the sexuality known as female. The influence of American sociologists and anthropologists such as Abram Kardiner, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict led Horney to distance herself more and more decisively from the classical psychoanalytic viewpoints, for which she substituted…the analysis of social and cultural factors in the development of 'normal' sexuality as well as in the etiology of neurosis."[18]

That is, the better psychoanalysts have long incorporated anthropological insight. Early psychologist Harry Stack Sullivan, who "envisioned the mind as thoroughly social"[19] even borrowed the phrase "participant observation" from anthropology to describe therapeutic efforts.

Selfish Responsibility

The idea promoted here is that the construction of the Self as the primary mode of marking identity has significant drawbacks. To be sure, the concept of the Self has allowed rich artistic and philosophical explorations of great cultural value. However, the larger impact has been to normalize exploitative social relationships. Identifying

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12 McNally 2011, p. 91.

13 Ibid, p. 93.

14 Ibid, p. 94.

15 Braidotti 2013, p. 24.

16 Mitchell & Black 1995, p. 26.

17 Irigary 1985, p. 66–7.

18 Ibid, p. 51.

19 Mitchell & Black 1995, p. 71

as a Self promotes ideas of autonomy, sovereignty, and independence, which sound nice but inversely correlate with sentiments of empathy, care, and social harmony. Much Enlightenment rhetoric places freedom above community well-being. Most tangibly, this centering of individual Self-liberation mutates notions of responsibility.

Increasingly, from the sixteenth century onward, laws that curbed self-interest in transactions and encouraged mutual aid were repealed, and in many cases replaced with laws that demanded the pursuit of self-interest and forbade mutual aid. Economic historian Richard Tawney writes of a shifting sentiment from society as a community bound by mutual obligations toward something more like a stock market where everyone is in competition for the best deals. Within post-Reformation Puritanism "[i]t was individual responsibility not social obligation" that became emphasized.[20]

While many have pointed out the increased individualization of responsibility in the past 200 years (to which psychoanalysis, *self*-help, and insurance have contributed), there is another level at which today's formulation of mind and subconscious serve to abdicate responsibility. The discovery that many of our desires and motivations are beyond our conscious awareness excuses some unsociable impulses—greed, envy, and indifference. Deferring responsibility for such behaviors to the subconscious makes it difficult to hold individuals accountable. Responsibility has been abstracted into the ephemeral depths of the mind.

A common objection from those that resist meaningful legislation in the U.S. addressing climate change goes something like, "why should we rebuild our infrastructure if China is still emitting so much fossil fuel" (and the rest of the world says the same about the U.S.). This is a very selfish (almost childish) outlook on responsibility, revealing that the idea of "personal responsibility" is an oxymoron. Personal responsibility is not responsibility at all, but selfishness, a means of disregarding our role as interactants with others.

In a world of diffused Selves, there is a responsibility impasse. There's a need for a "non-hierarchical We" as Wynter has advocated.[21] Bedour Alagraa elaborates on Wynter's push to map "an alternate genealogy of the human that delinks from Enlightenment representations of the human… Wynter's assertation is that we must move beyond Western episteme's preoccupation with Man…as the controlling iconography for the Human."[22] The centering of the Man over the We tacitly authorizes a disregard, an irresponsibility, toward the non-Self.

The whole point of a society, though, is that everyone is responsible for each other all the time. This is why humans organize themselves into groups—to share responsibility. The entire reason we have communities is to offer support and mutual aid. Today's prevailing individualization is the result of a purposeful dismantling of society in the colonial-capitalist era. By 1987 Thatcher could legitimately say there is no such thing as society because we broke society through overly valorizing the mind and the individual.

Anthropologists have shown numerous methods by which responsibility is shared and collectivized in non-Western societies. "The healer was explicit about the collective nature of lineage responsibility…The collective liability of the lineage is implicit… harm first befalls the kin of the guilty party, not the guilty…by not taking responsibility for the actions of an individual member, the entire lineage implicated itself."[23] This contrasts sharply with Western notions of responsibility and culpability, but also biomedical approaches to healing and recovery in which "The individual has the power—indeed the moral responsibility—to maintain his own health by the observance of simple and prudent rules of behavior relating to sleep, exercise, diet and weight, alcohol and smoking."[24] Mullings concludes that "Western therapy emphasize[s]…the responsibility of the individual…'ego-strengthening,' 'instilling self-esteem', and so forth."[25] This serves to reinforce a "'blame the victim' ideology."[26] Discussing changing

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20   Tawney 1954, p. 226.

21   Wynter 1995.

22   Alagraa 2018, p. 164.

23   Mullings 1984, p. 113–116.

24   Knowles 1977, p. 80.

25   Mullings 1984, p. 183.

26   Ibid, p. 194.

views on poverty following the Christian schism in Europe, Tawney writes of a rising "refusal to admit that society had any responsibility for the causes of distress."[27]

Today the idea of "Personal Responsibility" is a highly lauded attribute. The idea that every individual is responsible for themselves and themselves alone, though, far from a virtue, seems borderline sociopathic (or at least sad). Personal responsibility bespeaks a vanity and a distrust of others—others cannot be relied on, others may be out to get you, others are competing against you. This is the normalized paranoia of Self-centered colonization.

Among most populations (including pre-capitalized Europe) responsibility is foremost about mutuality, forging reciprocal social bonds. As seen in some West African traditions, people are defined through their mutual obligations to each other—a person is their obligations.[28] In no small part due to the introduction and normalization of insurance, responsibility in the capitalized world is now a purchasable commodity (responsibility costs), as opposed to freely shared.

Privatization & Police

Private property is selfish. Excluding access to resources is selfish. Excluding access to resources based on skin color or sex is obviously racist or sexist. Drawing such exclusions based on wealth is perfectly acceptable, normal, and some might even say "natural." This naturalization of private property accompanies a self-centric view of our species. "Many historians consider the hallmark of Western civilization to be private property."[29] The process of exporting and mandating private property around the world over the past few centuries knows no better name than colonialism. Locke specifically advocated for taking lands from indigenous people because their lack of private property laws marked them as savages, inferior to Europe's more "advanced" belief in maximally exploitative land usage.[30]

The normalization of private property in the West over the past 500 years parallels the emergence of the Self. While many see these developments as emancipatory, both developments are more immediately geared toward concentrating wealth and disempowering commoners. There may be lofty rhetoric about the sovereignty offered by owning private property or the passions discovered in unlocking the Self, but foremost these socioeconomic ideas normalize indifference toward neighbors and a suppression of empathy. Charity came to be seen as naïve and counterproductive. "[S]uch doctrines turned severity from a sin into a duty, and froze the impulse of natural pity."[31] That is, lack of compassion was rebranded from sinful to righteous.

Many advocates of classic liberalism, prominently Adam Smith, equate private property with freedom. For most people, however, in most places at most times, the exact opposite has been true. Private property has entailed stripping of agency, limiting of choices, and concentrated hierarchical control. It is striking that so many today consider private property the key to autonomy, when it was the implementation of private property that took away the capacity for self-sufficiency. The privatization of land made self-subsistence illegal—"a concerted and generalized assault against self-provisioning."[32]

Given the historic disdain and distrust of private property, enforcement of exclusionary property rights mandated the birth of what is today called the police. Modern policing and private property are co-constitutive. While there are rules, civic punishments, and trials without private property, state-backed patrols securing exclusive access to resources are not found among non-privatized populations. This suggests that a world of Selves is one that needs to be policed and surveilled. Every non-Self is so inherently untrustable!

Policing forces are hardly necessary in a We-centered or commons society. Without

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27   Tawney 1954, p. 224.
28   Strathern 2020, p. 10.
29   Hudson 2018, p. 25.
30   Locke 2003.
31   Tawney 1954, p. 221.
32   Goldstein 2014, p. 358.

ownership there isn't theft. In Robert Peel's vision for the first Metropolitan Police force in London in 1829, he considered "the role of police to protect property, sub-due riots, put down strikes and other industrial actions, and produce a disciplined workforce."[33] Policing is an extension of capitalism and ownership. Alongside policing, of course, comes incarceration. As is frequently pointed out, the incarceration of criminals is a relatively recent practice.[34] There weren't really prisoners as we think of them today prior to the 1800s.

It could be argued that policing and prison are more humane and rational than com-munity justice (or mob justice if you like). Surely, community justice can get it wrong and punish the innocent occasionally. However, the private property regime is a form of social organization which punishes the *entire* community *all the time* and sows distrust within the population. Again, private property is so normalized that we rarely experience it as a punishment or a disempowerment today, but we need only look at the fierce resistance to privatization by commoners around the world to see how unjust is its imposition.

It is in urban areas that policing and private property converge most visibly. Policing originates in towns because this is where self–centrism is most ill–fitting and most difficult to enforce.[35] In medieval towns where you can know your neighbor, "an ethic of mutual aid" was the norm.[36]

How do you ideologically atomize people that live so close to each other? By policing them. Policing is a bureaucratic strategy that prevents a population from relying on each other, prevents them from developing organic reciprocal bonds with their neig-hbors. You could live in an apartment building with a neighbor five feet away, but in a moment of distress (commotion, burglary, domestic abuse), you call those official strangers who are *responsible* for keeping order, as opposed to your neighbors. And, most likely, your neighbor doesn't feel or want that responsibility. They're not getting paid to be responsible for you.

Policing (whether in the form of officers or surveillance infrastructure) is deeply wo-ven into the urban imaginary. "Police are everywhere in the urban world."[37] The idea of not passing several cops or their cameras on a commute is difficult to imagine. As Foucault had it, "to police and to urbanize is the same thing."[38]

It is no coincidence that police presence is most strong in areas with the highest property values. Given the value of New York real estate, the New York Police De-partment employs over 50,000 people (more than the FBI). "Urban police forces act as the armed wing of the real estate state: what planners and policy makers enact, police enforce."[39]

In the same sense that industrially grown corn is not food, it's a commodity, New York apartments aren't homes, they are investments. Many residents of cities are enduring the uncanny experience of living within an investment. It is as though we're walking around a virtual stock exchange, where neighborhoods, streets, or corners are spe-culated upon. It looks like an actual city, with storefronts and cafes, but those aren't really stores. They are staged display items, engineered to make spaces feel more valuable. Aggressive policing "clears the terrain for future investment and makes we-althier households more comfortable with the idea of living among poorer people."[40]

Populations who have been (and continue to be) systematically denied access to pri-vate property ownership are in particular need of policing (and not coincidentally are categorized as the most psychologically non–compliant, non–normative). As Gillihan highlights, police departments developed "due to the heightened demand for control over their working class, immigrants and other minorities. The desire to control mi-

33   Gillihan 2019, p. 2.

34   Davis 2003.

35   Oestrich 1982.

36   Tawney 1954, p. 30.

37   Owens 2024, p. 1489.

38   Foucault 2007, p. 337.

39   Stein 2019, p. 64.

40   Ibid, p. 64.

nority groups was not unique to the development of formal police departments, but rather how they originated."[41]

The effect of enforcing this unnatural individualization upon dense populations has psychologically destabilizing effects. If, as Fanon pointed out, psychology serves as an "auxiliary to the police,"[42] is there a means of alleviating this distress outside of self-centric mediations and therapies? This is the aim of the personographical exercise below.

Selfie City

The U.S. Surgeon General along with U.S. Census data and a swath of reporting from the *New York Times* to Fox News have presented evidence and argued that people are getting lonelier and lonelier (see also the 2000 Robert Putnam book *Bowling Alone*). Many have blamed this on technologies such as the internet, smart phones, and self-checkouts but these are just more symptoms of the underlying cause: putting the Self at the center of our identity. It makes perfect sense that we would follow *The Century of the Self* with what *The Atlantic* recently called "The Anti-Social Century." Self-centrism is anti-social. Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism, private property, these are all attacks on socialization and the very concept of society.

Living in the self-centered world can be disorienting for a social species like us primates. From Wynter's theorization of sociogenics ("the phenomenon of 'mind'… is the emergent property of …socialized senses of self"[43]) to evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar's social brain hypothesis,[44] many have argued that the mind was built (evolved) through socialization. This mind we're so proud of developed through interacting with others, not through isolated contemplation. Evolution itself doesn't care about individuals; it cares about groups.

In prioritizing the Self we become untethered. We are lost without others with whom to share our thoughts and words. This dislocation, this getting lost was precisely the aim of the radical psychogeography movement promoted in the 1950s and 60s by The Letterists and Situationists, most famously Guy Debord. The aim of these upstarts was to destabilize the routinized urban lives of postwar Westerners, break them out of their machinic stupor.

"Psychogeography…was a mode of navigating the city intended to disrupt the imposed cognitive cartography of the worker under capital through creative meanders; to discover 'a new city via a calculated drifting (*dérive*) through the old'."[45] Psychogeography was about getting lost, wandering, drifting, errant detours, and wrong turns. The new sensations and feelings experienced during these detours were supposed to snap residents out of the drudgery of wage work so they could get on with the anti-capitalist, anti-imperial, anti-boredom revolution. This spirit was epitomized by Debord's graffiti tag "NEVER WORK" (*Ne travaillez jamais*).

Indeed, much of the graffiti that decorated the streets during the May 1968 uprisings in Paris indicted boredom as the enemy. "Boredom is counterrevolutionary." "We don't want a world where the guarantee of not dying of starvation brings the risk of dying of boredom." "People who work get bored when they don't work. People who don't work never get bored." "In a society that has abolished every kind of adventure the only adventure that remains is to abolish the society."

Boredom is a feeling, an emotion, that for most is unpleasant. Psychogeography tried to break boredom by deviance and misdirection through urban peregrinations, to break the boredom by losing yourself, a way of losing and loosening the psychosocial controls built into colonial-capitalist societies. In this sense, "psychogeography could be understood to be an extension of how the Surrealists drew from psychoanalytic ideas."[46]

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41   Gillihan 2019, p. 3.
42   Fanon 2020, p. 517.
43   Wynter 1995, p. 37.
44   Dunbar 2003.
45   Shaw 2018, p. 447.
46   Shukaitis 2015, p. 50.

Suzanne Césaire writes of surrealism's desire to express "the forbidden zones of the human mind, in order to neutralize them…[T]he most urgent task was to free the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called Western reason."[47] That is, surrealist psychogeography was a move against the feeling of being pinned down and repressed.

The tragedy of the post-war years is that the avant-garde didn't break capitalist-colonialism, it became domesticated and co-opted to promote and advertise accelerating economic exploitation. The selfie as a photographic form and style epitomizes this neoliberal liberation. The selfie is a perfect format for the inappropriately named "social media" platforms that have risen in the twenty-first century. Social media is a platform for expressing yourself, aesthetically, politically, sexually. In exchange for this public platform of free expression, we concede to ingesting advertisements. As many have noted, the line between a post in an Instagram feed by a real acquaintance expressing themselves and an advertisement from an influencer is increasingly invisible. Freedom of expression simply is advertising. Countless ad campaigns from the 1980s to today encourage us to "be yourself" or "be your own person."

Cities today are increasingly designed to facilitate this neoliberal expression. As Debra Shaw points out "popular tourist hotels now provide 'selfie spots' where tourists are able to locate themselves strategically in the frame with a notable landmark."[48] With neoliberal freedom of expression comes neoliberal freedom of reflection. The Self loves to reflect. While this can be a rather generative exercise, allowing us to learn more about ourselves and our motivations, as well as to plumb new depths of feeling, it is intrinsically alienating. As suggested in Lacan's mirror stage, recognizing one's Self indicates an inward concern and an impulse to see our Selves everywhere. The Self is obsessed with its own reflection.

In her surrealist novel, *You Don't Love Yourself*, Nathalie Sarraute wrestles with her insides.[49] The plurality of vocalized perspectives she hosts within her ponder those who are capable of loving themselves. In much of the world today, not loving yourself is considered almost pathological. A healthy person is supposed to love themselves, or at least wish themselves well. Those who hate themselves or pursue Self-damaging behaviors are sick. Sarraute's novel points to the hypocrisy (or at least short-sightedness) of not considering the opposite—that excessive love for oneself (a healthy ego some might say) is a pathology as well, or that this Self-love is the pathology, as opposed to a healthy indifference to Self.

Sadly, most of us remain unable to heed Debord's advice to "never work." But for many, the Self is detachable from this labor. Our identity is not our job; our Selves have been unleashed. The Self is free to be wherever, whoever, or whatever is marketed to it. It's hard to keep track of our Selves. The Self has made the body redundant, but this isn't liberating. It's a marketing tactic.

Our Selves have gotten away from us. *We* are not in charge of "our" *Selves* anymore. When out in public traversing the city, we are not our Selves. The Selfie city has become a targeted ad. You're not paranoid. The city is advertising to "you" directly. It's not advertising to "us." It knows where you're going and what your Self wants. Your body might not need a Gucci purse, but your Self does. That is, the city knows what your Self wants. The Self, after having been detached from our bodies by Descartes is no longer under our control. It is operated on and manipulated by marketers and financiers.

The psychogeographers had the best of intentions, but we no longer need to get lost. It's time to get found. While not always the most inspirational urban designer, Le Corbusier once declared that it was time to "measure afresh the consequences of being bodies."[50] This is the goal of the Personography below.

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47   Césaire 2012, p. 34–5.

48   Shaw 2018, p. 445.

49   Sarraute 2000.

50   Le Corbusier 1964, p. 36.

Selfless

A problem with disembodied entities is that they are not bound by finitude. As Descartes elaborates, a *body* "is capable of being bounded by some shape, of being enclosed in a place, and of filling up a space."[51] Spirit, mind, soul, psyche, and Self are concepts that need not be so enclosed. This boundlessness may sound liberating, but it is the ideological prerequisite for a form of social organization premised upon perpetually accelerating economic exploitation—a practice that would seem absurd to entities bound by finitude. In rematerializing the individual, it is brought back within the realm of finitude, reattached to the world. While the endlessness of abstract conceptuality is charming, romantic perhaps, it can foster unhealthy, painful disorientations. Within finitude, it is possible to more firmly grasp *where we are*, our form, our weight, our spatial displacement, and most importantly our impact and effect on people and things around us.

Personography attempts such a rematerialization. Personography confronts a world of disparate wandering Selves detached from the earth and its bodies, and attempts to locate these identities in space (and place). Personography is presented here as a strategy, a methodology, and hopefully a therapeutic modality.

In attempting to materialize and map identity, I focus on a specific genre of personographic experiences—the physical spaces in which my behaviors caused anguish in others. One could map sensory experiences of elation, confusion, accomplishment, or despair. I choose to materialize a geography of where I have made people the angriest at me because these moments are deeply seared into my memory, unshakeable. Thus, whatever my identity is, it seems like these moments have a strong influence upon it. Materializing these moments, then, might carry significant therapeutic benefit.

The map below indicates eight spaces over the last twenty years where I induced enough anger to be yelled at. In four of the incidents the aggrieved party was a long-term romantic partner. One incident was a close friend, one a relatively casual acquaintance, and two of them total strangers.
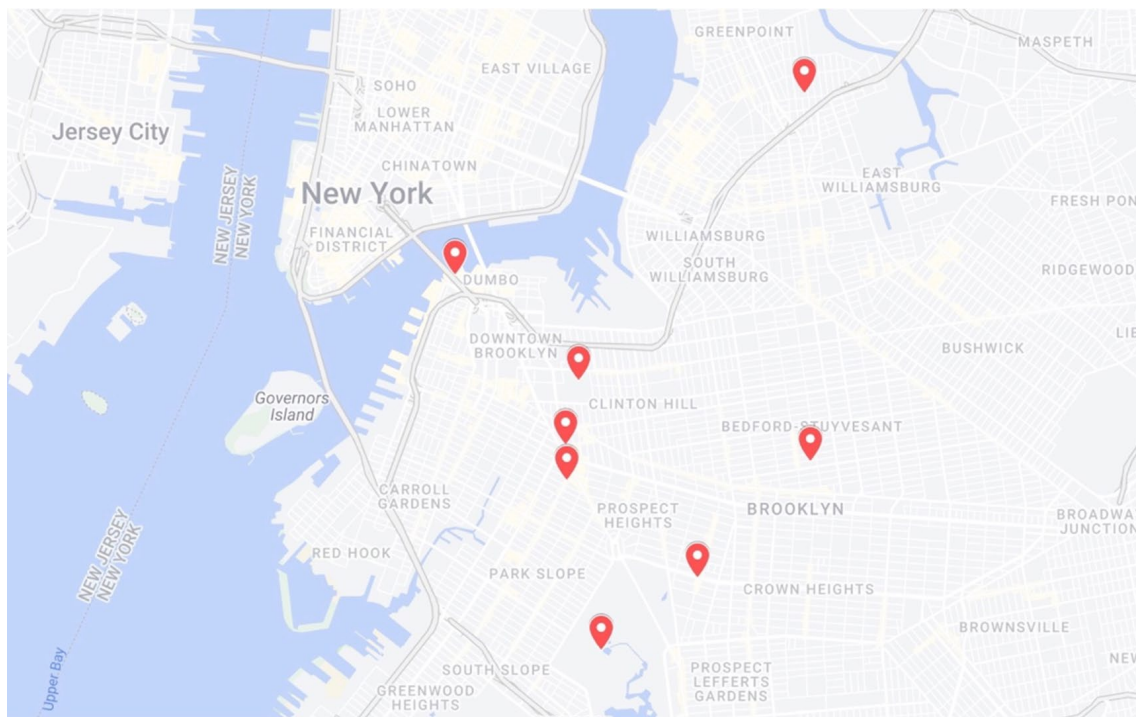

Figure 1: *Map of places where I've been yelled at in Brooklyn.*

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51   Descartes 1998, p. 64.

Employing a critique of the Self (Self-criticism) in analyzing this geography, it could be said that many of these ruptures share some manner of disagreement between my body and my Self or mistranslation between Selves, a mismatch that caused confusion and hurt. In four cases, my physical body didn't go where another person wanted it to go. I was asked to go to a place I didn't want to go, so I declined. But who was the "I" in this situation? Was it my Self or was it my body that didn't want to go? I think it was my Self that didn't want to go, but my body would have happily gone if I had been less Self-centered. Is it possible to say something as absurd as my Self disagreed with me?

Either way, "my" refusal to go where I was asked to go was perceived as a refusal/rejection of the Self of another. My refusal in all these cases was not out of a dislike of another, it was perhaps an overvaluing of the thoughts and time of my Self. It was a kind of retreating into my Self or a withdrawing/withholding of my Self from another Self. This can cause pain. Selves are sensitive (thin-skinned, un-skinned!), especially when they venture to trust a not-Self.

In another instance, I did a bad job of translating another person's Self to a third person's Self—always a dangerous undertaking. In one instance, a stranger spat on me and asked me to die for smoking a cigarette, not sure how to read that one.

Another feature of these incidents is that they frequently correlate with transportation in some manner. In three instances I was traveling by bicycle while my interlocuter was not. The physical act of walking your bike on the sidewalk alongside someone in a busy city (or even worse, taking a bike on the subway) can cause dissonance between the physical body and the Self. The dissonance I experienced in these situations may have been reflected in how I engaged with my interlocuter. In two instances, the anguish occurred outside a subway as discussions were had over the next destination. The emplacement of our bodies in this geophysical space induced fissures. In one instance, a stranger didn't like the way I was using transportation, and they verbally hated me for it.

Transportation and the geography of transportative sites can serve as potential pivots for splitting, diverging. Otherwise agreeable Selves might imagine their future geographical courses differently. Transportational discord could just be considered a run-of-the-mill disagreement that requires improved resolution skills, but the distress caused by divergence over future trajectories seems specific to lost egos, lost Selves. That is, the anger and hurt I caused as a result of my refusal to relinquish my Self to another announced that our Selves were on different paths, not occupying the same trajectory. The Self is often envisioned as on a course. And in a world of diffused Selves, others frequently impede our Self's path. This agitates us as some kind of attack on the sovereignty of our Selves.

If the foregrounding of the Self and the assumption of a mind-body dichotomy were not so dominant, would geographically disagreeable episodes manifest such anger? With no Self, what would be offended? In a non-Self-centric world, there would not be bifurcated senses of responsibility. The responsibility for feelings and future geographies would be shared. Neither party would feel pitted against the other in a contest of divergent desires. This is not to suggest that disagreements would not occur in a "We-centered" world of interpersonal interaction, but rather that disagreements would not be antagonistic, one side versus the other. Rather, disagreements would be shared experiences that de-emphasize conflictual notions of "right" and "wrong" in favor of obligation to interpersonal repair and strengthening.

Ego Artifacts

The moments of anguish discussed above should be considered a significant part of my identity. They are never far from my memory. I can hardly cross these geographic points without recalling the incidents. More than just flickering memories though, these aspects of my identity have empirical attributes—shape, smell, noise—they exist in spatial and temporal extension. I want to use these characteristics to materialize the anguish I've caused. I want to build an aguish organ to hold and study, to wear around my neck so I can feel the tug of gravity upon my identity.

As Andy Merrifield writes of the psychogeographers, "they were intent on accumulating rich qualitative data, grist to their 'psychogeographical' mill, documenting odors

and tonalities of the cityscape, its unconscious rhythms and conscious melodies: ruined facades, foggy vistas or narrow, sepia-soaked streets."[52] In a similar vein I want to give tactility to my identity by charting it. To this end, I have attempted to sculpt the anguish I've caused into a geometric form. Drawing on the map above, I can draft a two-dimensional polygon of my geo-ruptures (figure 2). This shape may then be extracted from the two-dimensional surface of the map and rendered with a 3-D printer (or sculpted using a variety of plastic arts). The result would be an artifact like that found in figure 3.
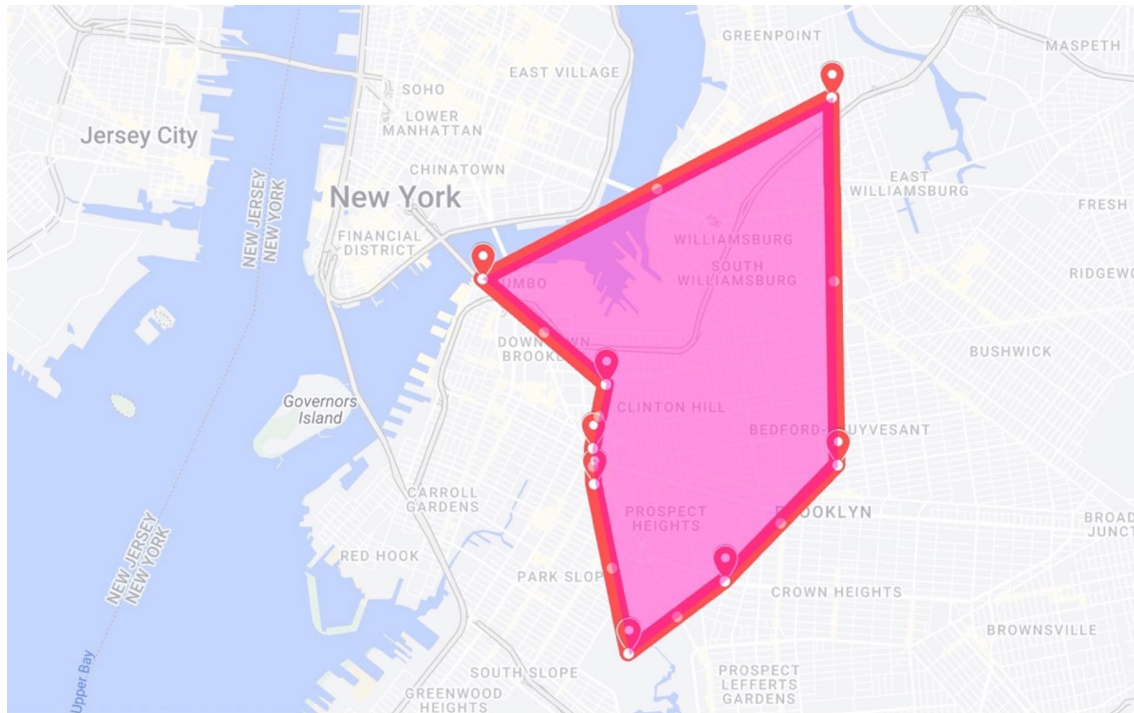

Figure 2: *Creating a shape from my map of anguish.*

With this artifact, I have materialized the experiences of anguish I've inflicted on others. I have rematerialized the wandering Self and reinscribed my identity within the finitude of this specific shape. While the psychogeographers and many of those that have normalized a Self-centric world might see this giving of spatial dimension to feelings as inhibitive and constricting, my conjecture is that this materially finite object is a therapeutic for the dissonance of the ephemeral, lost "sense of Self" that permeates the colonized, atomized, individualized world.
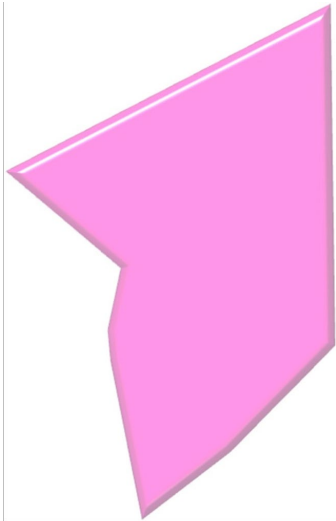
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52   Merrifield 2005, 31.

Figure 3: *Sculpture/artifact of geographic anguish*

It is significant that this cartography is focused not on my personal feelings of anguish but the anguish I've caused others. It is not my feelings that are foregrounded in a We-centered non-Self-centric world. It is the feeling of hurting someone else, causing someone else pain, that is much more compositional of identity than ruptures which have caused ego-hurt or ego-anger. It is the anger of others that has impacted my identity more than my own anger. Just as Personal Responsibility was questioned above, this suggests that there aren't really any Personal Feelings. Feelings are created and conditioned by navigating through a society. Feelings don't exist in a vacuum. They are a part of bodies and a body's position in a sociogeography.

Personality Disorder

Horror author Thomas Ligotti writes:

> "What is most uncanny about the self is that no one has yet been able to present the least evidence of it. Like the soul, that figure of speech which has long since been snickered out of existence, the self may be felt but never found. It is a spectral tapeworm that takes its reality from a host organism and grows along with the physical matter in which it is encased."[53]

> This toxic Self is a Cartesian-Freudian degeneration of the psyche and soul that was contemplated by late Medieval Scholastics. Much like orthodox Buddhism which attempts to de-center the Self, Scholastic Christians expressed hesitancy about the Self as the center of identity. Likewise, practitioners of Vodun emphasize "the importance of withdrawing the self and serving others."[54]

> These theological efforts to de-center the Self probably arose because Self-centrism is dangerous and corrosive. One needs to get out of oneself, for their own health as well as that of society. Rather than framing power and success as the ability to impose one's own point of view, as has become the norm in self-centric modernity, power could be reconsidered as the ability to appreciate as many points of view as possible.

> A big question that Plato, Aristotle, and the Medieval Scholastics wrestled with was whether the spirit-soul is eternal or if it dies with the body. In order to explain what exactly experiences the afterlife, the Scholastics had to understand the soul as an eternal entity not bound to the flesh.

> Aristotle's view was a bit more nuanced. He made the rough formulation that body = matter and soul = form.[55] For Aristotle the soul had substance but not matter. The distinction here is that a form is something like a Platonic ideal. For

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53   Ligotti 2010, p. 88.

54   Michel 2002, p. 101.

55   Aristotle 2004.

example, the triangle is a form that is defined by having three sides whose internal angles add up to 180°. This is a hypothetical form that exists (or can exist) apart from any actual triangle we might encounter in the physical world.

A de-centered Self might be considered something like a form. A triangle isn't free to be whatever it wants. It can take zillions of permutations, but a triangle has some inalienable properties that make it a triangle. If it doesn't adhere to these properties, it isn't a triangle. A finite Self, a physical Self that exists in space must also be so constrained. The point of the above cartographic exercise is precisely to *triangulate* a part of my Self and attach it to the space of the planet. The abstract form above is a geography of anguish that outlines the constraints that make me who I am.

To play with Deleuze and Guattari, the Selfie city has been deterritorialized without being reterritorialized, or the reterritorialization is without form.[56] The architecture of ego upon which the contemporary city is constructed is brutal in its lack of form. There is nothing to hold, nothing to press against, just form-poor ephemera wobbling around town. The gravity is weak here. We slip and fall on the gooey nothing of Selfishness. The century of the Self built cities of the Self. Finding a way out of this nebula may require cartography and compass. As helpful public urban maps often inform us with arrows and circles, "You are here."

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56   Deleuze & Guattari 1987.

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