

A Way towards an Education for the Communal Self

by

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Abstract

Educators have spent 130 years, from Dewey to Pinar, developing curricula in North America that have contributed to the development of the idea of an “individual self”. Such emphasis on individuality has inadvertently resulted in a narcissistic self, *i.e.*, an individualized, consumeristic type of self that is much in line with the neoliberal agenda. We humans, have reached a point in which a new structure for the self is needed. This dissertation demonstrates that we are more interconnected and interdependent than we previously admitted and, ultimately, aims to prove that we are in fact communal selves, routinely influenced and constructed by the people, animals, and environment that surround us. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to offer teachers a framework for community development and wholesome inclusion, by means of developing curricula with the idea of “communal selves” as a point of departure. In the realm of dreaming and imagining, our communal selfhood could reach the minds and hearts of every human being and shift the way we relate to each other.

Keywords: Cultural Narcissism; Community Development; Philosophy of Education.

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Chapter 1.

Exploring Concepts of the Self

1.1. Setting the Stage

Much like a cat, I am fascinated by the movement of things. I like movement because of the complexity it invites. I can also obviously admire the stillness of things and dwell in moments of boredom, repetition, and routine. But even when my exterior is still, on the inside I feel complex; I feel movement everywhere. I feel my heart pumping, my blood flowing, and air being breathed in and out. I am in constant movement, even when quietly observing the movements outside of my sensory perception.

I developed an odd curiosity at a very young age. When I became a post-secondary student, I grew weary of thesis statements, central ideas, and unifying theories. The works of scientists, politicians, artists, philosophers, and writers that most caught my attention were open-ended, inviting, and in constant flux. I grew accustomed to uncertainty, to cycles, to the things that happened between beginnings and ends, and I shrugged at easy formulas, easy writing, laziness in the transmission of ideas and feelings, because life is a myriad of forces, life is inherently complex, and to me, to not honour such diversity, complexity, and difficulty would seem dishonest.

The above is why I ask the reader to kindly bear with me. Despite being a formal doctoral dissertation, this work is more an exploration of thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. It takes the meaning of “academic essay” quite literally in its format and given that the meaning of “dissertation” can be essay, treaty, or thesis, it is more in line with the

first, although also contains elements of the latter two. It is, or aims to be, an open invitation to the reader's own reflective capacity. This study's narrative style has as its main objective to challenge the reader to reflect profoundly upon its main message. Although there is a central thesis, and that thesis is clearly stated in the title of this study, the complexity and diverse nuances that are at play in the background almost overshadow it. I shall explain what I mean by going back in time and offering as example my academic journey thus far.

I will start with some of my academic background. My undergraduate thesis in philosophy was entitled *From Strangeness to Difference: A Matter of Alterity* (2002). My central thesis was that Levinasian¹ and Buberian² alterity, or otherness, was a central concept for modern ethics, and that a much better job in adopting the primacy of the other needed to be done if we wanted to survive as a species. The number of issues that surround such a thesis statement formed the inner complexity of the topic. I could enumerate all the problems that begin with "strangeness" and "difference". For the sake of brevity, however, I will state that my thesis was basically that the act of seeing the other as a stranger leads, according to Levinas (1987), towards the notion of difference, and that alterity was the conceptual key necessary in order for humans to put others before themselves and, quite naively, I concluded that we would be able to live in community forever happily.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)

² Martin Buber (1878-1965)

In April of 2006, I defended my MA thesis in Comparative Literature. It was entitled *From the Critique of Morality to the Affirmation of Life: Intertextual Relations Between Machado de Assis and Nietzsche*. In this study, I analyzed the notion of “critique of morality” in both Brazil’s Machado de Assis’s and in Prussian philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s work in order to demonstrate how Machado, whose grandparents were slaves and who also grew up in a slum in Rio de Janeiro, and Nietzsche, who grew up in a modest and austere environment in pre-German Prussia, basically wrote about the same ideas, despite not having access to one another.

In my thesis I explored several themes common to Machado and Nietzsche: both had outstanding knowledge of diverse languages, were well-read in classic philosophy and literature, and they both adored Schopenhauer and the literary and philosophical books of the Bible. Both were skeptics in a classical sense: they didn’t negate ideas or scientific facts, but somehow advocated for the mystery inherent to life, and that it was only by protecting doubt that we could retain a sense of wonder and move forward towards better living. They were also critical of their cultural backgrounds and their own societies.

Machado and Nietzsche’s favourite novel was Lawrence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy: Gentleman* (1759-1767)³. After demonstrating how these background elements informed their work, I showed how the “revaluation of values” took place in their *oeuvre*, and how such revaluation was central in both Nietzsche and Machado’s project of placing life and the love of life as the central value above all, and

³ Please cf.: Swearingen, J. (1987), and Freitas (2014).

that the affirmation of life (in all its imperfections and complexity) was the key to sustainable living. That those ideas were at the core of their aesthetic project was a wonderful realization to me and seemed to be justified by the fact that Machado and Nietzsche were both children of the nineteenth century and had access to the same cultural artifacts of the time. Considering that there were no home delivery services in the nineteenth century, and that Machado de Assis, for instance, had to wait three months to receive books from France that arrived in Brazil by ship, it is a true wonder that he arguably became Latin America's most important thinker and Brazil's finest writer of that period.

We have finally arrived at 2019 to the present study. It is yet another study in movement. Originally titled *From the Narcissistic to the Communal Self: A Framework for Community Development and Inclusive Education*, my old concern about the imprisonment into my self and how to reach out to the exterior has returned, but this time it is shaped by my nearly twenty years working in education: observing, living and thinking about pedagogical issues and its diverse nuances, problems, beauties and imperfections. Teaching or working in education is not for the faint-hearted, and early on in my career I loved the challenge, the constant movement propitiated by education. However, as the project developed and I benefitted from the feedback of my academic advisors, I decided to downplay movement and bring the now central idea of this study to the fore: the hypothesis that we are in fact communal selves, and the need to create educational practices that will teach us to be so, challenging the age old primacy and sovereignty of the individualized self. The project then became *A Way towards an Education for the Communal Self* that you now have in hands.

1.2. Brief Summary of Main Thesis

Despite my central thesis being a simple one, it must be noted that true and effective change within educational institutions seems to never actually take place. We have spent 130 years, *i.e.*, the entire modern era, from Dewey (1859-1952) to Pinar (1947-) developing curricula in North America that corroborates with the American notion of “the self-made man”. That is the idea that we are monolithic, self-contained, competitive, autonomous individuals thrown into the world, and that if we work hard enough, are ethical enough and are model citizens, we shall thrive, succeed, own property and businesses, and, drawing from Adam Smith’s socio-economic principle of capitalism, we would be “egoistic altruists”, contributing to society through our own conduct of exploiting natural resources and human labour (and often enough, the labour of other animals).

After analyzing how human institutions helped shape the social self, I will take a closer look at how schools have served the neoliberal/capitalistic agenda very well, and that such emphasis on individuality has resulted in a narcissistic self, that is an individualized, consumeristic type of self that is much in line with the aforementioned Smithian principle of “selfish altruism”, which was later popularized in the North American imaginary through the work of Ayn Rand.

After an extended exploration of the sociological, philosophical, economic, and pedagogical mechanisms that shaped the current understanding of selfhood, this study takes a turn: acknowledging our saturation with “the self”, I explore how we have come to a point in which a new structure, or framework for what “the self” even means, is

necessary. I have gathered enough evidence from political thinkers, historians, philosophers, artists, journalists, educators, and scientists to affirm that we, *homo sapiens*, are more interconnected and interdependent than we previously wanted to admit. Ultimately, this study shall demonstrate that we are indeed selves, but we are *communal selves*, influenced and constructed on a daily basis, by the forces that surround us: other people, other animals, and the natural environment.

By acknowledging that we are a communal species entrapped in a singular body, but yet interconnected and part of the environment around us, this dissertation then aims to offer educators, in particular, a framework for community development and wholesome inclusion, by beginning from the idea of “communal selves” as a starting point when developing curricula in whichever field of knowledge the teacher is in.

It is my hope that movements and initiatives such as the slow school movement, the de-schooling movement, the flipped or flexible classroom, the green schools, environmental schools, the inclusive post-secondary education initiatives, the public squares, the cultural commons movements, the inclusion of cultural minorities or persons with physical or developmental disabilities, etc., for example, move from being pedagogical outsiders towards being the norm when it comes to schooling. After all, these movements are attempting to develop frameworks in order to operate on the level of the communal individual, *i.e.*, they begin with equality of opportunity to all, as an ethical or moral principle.

However, we must firstly learn how to let go of our certainties and biases and all the news-speak (Orwell, Bradbury, Postman, *et al.*) that incites the current hate and

divisiveness in our culture. We need to relearn how to build bridges between our differences. Ultimately, I would like to invite the reader to consider building a bridge, and to reflect how to make such bridge safe for everyone to cross.

1.3. A Meditation on Selfhood

I continue here with a brief meditation regarding the self. I would like to share with the reader a glimpse into the complex matter of selfhood, from the perspective of my somewhat uneventful life. Then I intend to reflect upon the issue from a larger, philosophical perspective.

Have you ever felt that someone did not fully grasp something you were trying to convey during a conversation? Do you often feel misunderstood when you put your thoughts onto paper, or speak to someone, or even when you attempt to interact with others? Have you ever thought that it was a difficult task to understand the motivations, intentions, and actions of others? Have you ever struggled attempting to understand why people do what they do, how the world came to be as it is, and perhaps felt frustrated that you were simply incapable of controlling the things that happen beyond yourself?

I have memories of discovering that I was a self, *i.e.*, that I possessed some unique form of mind and body, at a young age. I recall riding my bicycle on the mountains of dirt accumulated and abandoned at construction sites in Edmonton when I was a child, and how magical it seemed that I could create stories in my head while being outside, playing. Sometimes my neighbourhood friends could not come play with me, and I took comfort in biking away and creating stories in my head. I was often a secret agent looking for adventure. Or a police officer trying to solve crime. Childhood play

made me realize that I would never be, in fact, completely alone, because I possessed my imagination and stories to keep me company. Some twenty years later I would discover American writer David Foster Wallace (1962-2008) and read an interview in which he affirmed that the function of fiction was to combat loneliness. I couldn't have agreed more at the time.

As I became older, my perception about never being alone changed quite a bit. Due to a myriad of factors, humans develop in many ways and there is a built-in urge to communicate effectively, interact, and interfere with our surroundings. This is just a preliminary reflection of a complex issue, as you shall see below. I would like to share the personal experience of moving from my childhood stories in which I played in the streets of Edmonton, to demonstrating how external events pushed me to make decisions and shape the “self” that I came to be.

My father passed away when I was merely nine years old. Having been raised in the tropics, my mother never really adapted well to the cold and flat city of Edmonton, and the added pain of losing my father was unbearable for her. My sister and I had adapted to school, our friendships and our little social circles, but we felt compelled to leave with our mother to pursue her “tropical dream”. Therefore, at a very young age, we were constantly pulled from place to place, always missing school and moving around, travelling back-and-forth between Canada and Brazil. The stability I knew up to my nine years was gone forever. Up to this day, I still struggle with a sense of belonging to a place, and I often share with my closest friends (and now with the reader) how I envy those who still have connections from elementary or high school, those who grew up in a place and feel at home in it. I grew up without a sense of belonging to a place, to a

family, or to a social circle. The places in the world that I visited and that I truly feel at home in are dramatically foreign to me. Oddly enough, I feel at home in the city of Ouro Preto, in Brazil, and in Montreal, Canada; two places where I have absolutely no family, no friends, and no connections. However, there is a magnetism in their architecture, their food, their spirit, the friendliness of their citizens that makes me feel recharged and provides me with a sense of belonging. It is no surprise to me, in hindsight, that the places I feel most at home are foreign places.

In a foreign place was also where I began shaping my adult persona. In early adulthood, I managed to finish high school and establish myself as a person living in the city of Belo Horizonte, in Brazil. From a reflective perspective, this is more or less what my life looked like: I was not old enough to make big decisions, to have autonomy, or establish myself. Due to circumstances that were beyond my control, I moved from my home country, Canada, to a foreign one, Brazil, in which I spoke little to none of the language and struggled with acceptance, identification, belonging and fitting. In order to establish an identity and push myself to belong to Brazilian society, I immersed myself into studying Portuguese pretty much on my own, by living the language and reading lengthy tomes on Portuguese grammar. I would spend entire mornings doing grammar exercises and do my best to practice speaking Portuguese every time I had a chance to. Gradually, I lost a thicker accent, got better at identifying which gender of pronoun fit each noun, and started speaking more fluently, therefore building an identity as a Brazilian-Portuguese speaker.

This new identity led to many opportunities for me. Being bilingual, I began teaching English and used it as main source of income very early on. I applied to

university and got admitted and decided to major in philosophy. I got a part-time job at the university library, taught English on the side, and also did a B.Ed. in order to better understand the technicalities of teaching. Having literary ambitions, I did an MA in Comparative Literature, taught introductory philosophy at the post-secondary level, travelled to a few other countries, moved to Vancouver and began a PhD in Education. These are the things I did. These are the things that helped shape who I am.

Every time I visit my hometown, Edmonton, I cannot help but wonder what life would have looked like had my father not passed away. If Dad were alive, would we have stayed in Edmonton? If we had stayed in Edmonton, would I still have pursued studies in philosophy, literature, and education? Would I have gone to university at all? Would I still have liked going to school, like I always have? Would I have accomplished all the wonderful small things I have accomplished, and would I have also failed miserably at all the miserable things I have done, the mistakes I committed? Would I still be who I am, with all the positive and all the negative things that are inherent to my complexity as a human being?

The underlying philosophical question here is are the things that happened to me in life a result of my own agency, or am I merely a product of the environment and happenings that surround me? This seems like an important question in order for us to understand how we create ideas about ourselves and how we relate to others.

I don't know how to respond to this, because a response may present itself in manifold manners. Part of our notion of what a self is includes individual agency, and another part is mostly defined by external factors. However, I have a tendency to believe

through empirical evidence that, for the most part, external factors are a more powerful force at play than some type of individualized, inherent form of pure agency. This is a tricky conversation, given that issues of class and power and the propagation of power mechanisms and influence are at play. As an example, let's look into my motivations and reasons to become a teacher, and how my long career in teaching and studying pedagogy has led to my current life.

As a junior undergraduate philosophy student, struggling to make ends meet through a combination of scholarships and part-time employment at the university library, I figured that a good way to supplement my earnings would be to take some time away from my personal study hours and begin teaching English as a private tutor. Because learning English is always in demand abroad, my experience as a private tutor led me to seek information about getting a teaching license. I thought that since I knew grammar so well, it would also be helpful to learn about teaching techniques, methods, lesson-planning, and curriculum design. Had I stayed in Edmonton after my father's passing, I believe I wouldn't have developed an interest in teaching. I somewhat naturally eased into teaching because I was a foreigner studying in a foreign country. I also possessed some knowledge and skills that were highly valued in Brazilian society: I was a white man, born and raised in Canada, who spoke English and Portuguese fluently. I then used my position of privilege to make a living as a teacher and put myself through post-secondary education.

At the root of the reflection, I dare to affirm that the fact that I came to actually love my profession was fortuitous. I never had an example of what teaching looked like at home, nor did I have teachers in my family. The teachers I had in school did well in

motivating me and they always praised my good writing, my creativity, and my interest in larger topics related to religion and science since early elementary (and I still have my report cards from that period as evidence that I had a curious mind as a child). Add this natural inclination to tackle the big questions of life and death to the actual loss of my father afterwards, and perhaps we can consider that my early awareness of mortality, my puzzled astonishment before the contingent forces of nature, and my failure to find answers or comfort in religion or art led me to study philosophy in college.

In sum, here is one way of looking into the issue of the self: let's begin with the premise that external factors, elements outside and beyond my own self, were determinant to shape who I am and pushed me to make the decisions I have made. If we believe such premise, we may then affirm that there is no such thing as an individual, autonomous, essential self, because the self would be an illusion, merely a cultural and societal construct. As we shall see below, there are schools of thought that will argue against the premise above and state that the self is the body, the self is the brain, the self is the spirit. However, this research project will offer sufficient evidence that there is a typically North-American spin on matters of selfhood that has originated an individualistic, competitive and isolated type of self, that is therefore vulnerable and passive to the dangers of negative manipulation.

1.4. State of the Art of Selfhood Studies

After the personal account of the issue of selfhood posited above, I shall now offer the reader an in-depth exploration in the style of a literature review, in which different perceptions and concepts regarding the problem of the self will be offered,

scrutinized, and developed into their historical, cultural, sociological, philosophical, and educational implications throughout this study. Before, however, delving into the exploration in itself, I believe it would be relevant to justify such variety of nuances.

As an educator myself, I believe it to be helpful to ponder and reflect upon diverse issues from many perspectives. Interdisciplinarity, diversity, and multiplicity are highly beneficial to teachers, and it seems that often the compartmentalization of domains of knowledge is detrimental to a more wholesome framework for human development. In an interview entitled *Reading the World and Reading the Word*, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire posits the matter in a helpful way:

For me education is simultaneously an act of knowing, a political act, and an artistic event. Thus, I no longer speak about a political dimension of education. I no longer speak about a knowing dimension of education. As well, I don't speak about education through art. On the contrary I say education *is* politics, art, knowing. [Emphasis in the original]. Education is a certain theory of knowledge put into practice every day, but is clothed in a certain aesthetic dress. Our very preoccupation with helping kids shape themselves as beings is an artistic aspect of education. While being a teacher demands that we be simultaneously a politician, an epistemologist, and an artist, I recognize that it is not easy to be these three things together. (Freire in: Hare & Portelli, 1996).

I agree with Freire's conceptualization that education is in itself a way, a theory of knowledge (epistemology), a manner of mediating conflict amongst individuals and their communal surroundings (politics), and also an art of professed and continuous creation (art, aesthetics). This is why I believe that in order to understand the creation of the idea of the self, it is necessary to have a holistic approach, which will, therefore, engage our thoughts with the aforementioned fields of knowledge, and potentially unfold in many ways according to the reader's own interests. The goal of the upcoming exercise in deconstructing the notion of self will be to construct a complex theory of communal selfhood.

An introductory notion of selfhood can be defined almost immediately, given our standard condition of constantly attempting to make sense of ourselves. According to the classic Cartesian model, we possess a mind that thinks therefore, it exists and we exist. We also possess a body that announces its presence simply by being in the world, moving through it, feeling and interacting with it. Although in the history of Western thought matters of mind and body were generally set up as a dichotomy, as if mind and body, or thought and action were completely separate elements, the current understanding of this divide is that humans are total entities in which mind and body are interdependent. It is a common idea that thoughts can result from feelings, from worldly perceptions, and vice-versa. As result (and we shall see this in detail below), there is a relatively new field of knowledge called neuro-philosophy, whose major premise affirms that actions are predetermined by the brain. The quote below, by Patricia Churchland, the leading scholar in North America of this ramification of philosophical inquiry, summarizes this premise well:

My brain and I are inseparable. I am who I am because my brain is what it is. Even so, I often think about my brain in terms different from those I use when thinking about myself. I think about my brain as that and about myself as me. I think about my brain as having neurons, but I think of me as having a memory. Still, I know that my memory is all about the neurons in my brain. Lately, I think about my brain in more intimate terms— as me. (Churchland, 2013).

Although an interesting attempt to define the core of selfhood and a bold attempt to provide a scientific foundation for the idea of self, Churchland is aware of the difficulty of reducing the experience of selfhood to the capabilities of our brains for the same reason that Sigmund Freud already knew back in 1923 in *The Ego and the Id*. The unconscious plays a major role in assisting us in defining ourselves: “who is I here if the

self is just one of the things my brain builds, with a lot of help, as it turns out, from the brain's unconscious activities?" (Churchland, 2013, p.12).

Alexander Nehamas (1985) argues that in Freud's theory there is a core self that has always been there since the beginning of human life, is developed throughout our lives, and is a vulgar understanding of selfhood. Nehamas argues that the idea of an essential self is limiting because it assumes that the self is a fixed entity that is somewhere to be found. He uses Nietzsche's ideas regarding selfhood to criticize the role of education in the formation of the fixed notion of selfhood and also demonstrates how Nietzsche is convinced that the self is a mere fictional construction. One of the main goals of this study is to provide evidence that might corroborate this Nietzschean understanding of the essential self as a fictional construction.

Although utilizing diverse and somewhat comprehensive research regarding the history, social, cultural and perhaps even the biological construction of the self, I must say that this study cannot offer a new understanding of the self. Therefore, the main objective behind this chapter is to demonstrate how our understanding of the self is inherently fictional, and by comparing and contrasting different theoretical constructions about the self, my goal is to at least empty the self of its significance. By attempting to do so, it is my hope to unveil certain social and cultural structures that I deem perverse because of their broad imposition into diverse aspects of life, under the guise of maintaining social order and building a way of life that has consumption at its core.

The idea that the self is an entity created in order to foster consumerist behaviour might at first be accused of left-wing-liberal gibberish by those who are economically-

inclined, *i.e.*, believe in neoliberal ideology and free markets as the core elements of the human experience. I must state that regardless of political inclinations and the political left-right divide, the idea of consumerism is not merely an economic matter.

I shall discuss a bit further in this study how the self is “designed” to consume not only pecuniary resources, but also commodifies goods as different as food, environmental resources, knowledge, places, and that even basic human relations are permeated by consumerist behaviours.

In the study *Constructing the Self, Constructing America* (1995), the historian Philip Cushman calls the aforementioned multifaceted research into selfhood a “hermeneutics of the self”, and he blatantly explains why there seems to be so much hesitation regarding such study:

(...) because a hermeneutic study of the self might expose various political and economic issues that would potentially threaten mainstream institutions and activities, such as the cultural dominance of consumerism, mainstream researchers are often hesitant to undertake such projects. But as difficult and risky as it is, studying the self is also a crucial element in interpreting an era. When it comes to a discussion of the psychotherapy of an era, the configuration of the self is an indispensable element of the puzzle. (Cushman, *Constructing the self, constructing America: a cultural history of psychotherapy*, 1995).

I concur with Cushman’s statement. As we shall see in detail in chapter 2, the historical understanding of the self walks in line with political, cultural, and economic ways of understanding selfhood. Such an endeavour of unveiling the predominant ethos of a certain culture is risky to say the least, given that emptying the significance at the root of culture might lead to despair, which in turn could lead to relativism and violence. But before we reach this point of discussing the self as a cultural creation designed to consume and consumerism as a way of life that seeks to fulfill a certain lack of meaning, I shall offer the reader a more general overview of the steps this research will take in

order to reach its goal of unveiling the consumeristic narcissistic self, and therefore demonstrate how the need to understand and develop the communal self becomes more urgent.

1.5. From Individuality to Communality: An Overview of the Project as a Whole

The purpose of this introductory chapter has so far been to personalize my academic motivations and selfhood orientation in an inviting way with the goal of setting the stage for the reader. We must keep in mind that for about a century North-American culture has focused intently in developing an individualistic type of self in such a way that we became oversaturated with ourselves. This overdevelopment has therefore resulted in a cultural dis-ease called narcissism: the dis-ease of the self. Sick of ourselves, we are now seeking ways to develop a better understanding of communal selves. We need to encounter ourselves at the crossroads in which we put our species and others, and revisit our priorities if we wish to survive sustainably on this planet. I will now offer an overview of the dissertation's chapters as to intimate the logic of the thesis.

In chapter 2, I will offer a detailed analysis regarding the origins of the understanding of selfhood in Western culture. Often attributed to Descartes, the so-called "modern self", this thinking-existing being has been ingrained in our culture in such a manner that we often take this concept for granted and accept it as an ultimate, essential truth, thusly forgetting or failing to admit that that is just what the self really is: a concept. To not lose sight of my archeological investigation into the history of the self, I utilize contemporary commentators such as Paul Theobald, Ian Hacking, Richard Sorabji,

Charles Taylor and more fundamentally, Michel Foucault, in order to compare and contrast at times divergent perspectives regarding the origins and functions of the self. By attempting to rigorously analyse the contrasting theories of selfhood, I aim to, at the end of the chapter, demonstrate how a certain understanding of the self was adopted (and adapted) in a specifically North-American context in order to foster consumeristic behaviour, and therefore be utilized as a control mechanism. Such understanding, or variation on the self, was widely spread particularly through three channels: psychoanalysis and the early adoption of Freud's ideas; marketing and publicity, a field of inquiry largely created by Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays; and last, but not least, by modern compulsory schooling.

In chapter 3, titled *The Dis-ease of the Self: Narcissism*, I will discuss and demonstrate how the fact that North-American culture has prized the autonomy of the individual has resulted in an over-saturation with the self. This over-saturation has resulted in a disease that I chose to hyphenate as dis-ease on purpose. Narcissism has been removed from the DSM since 2009, however, it can be understood as a cultural phenomenon that has lead humans to several manifestations of their intimate selves. However, the unregulated, excessive and easy access to self-expression has resulted in an increasingly alarming epidemic of depression and suicide, which I will argue in this chapter, are symptomatic of the cultural phenomenon called narcissism⁴. In this chapter I will revisit the ancient myth of Echo and Narcissus, demonstrate how this myth has been

⁴ Please *cf.*; for example, Foucault's ideas regarding mental health and isolationism and result of rampant capitalism.

largely misunderstood, and offer a rereading of it as a perennial warning, which was closer to the spirit of Ancient Greek tragedies.

In chapter 4, titled *Communal Selves*, I will analyze a series of contemporary authors and schools of thought that have identified our oversaturation with the self, and demonstrate how the concept of “communal selves” is more in line with the contemporary ethos and also more emancipatory than the individualistic self studied in chapters 2 and 3. The idea that the self is an illusion and that, as a species, we have more in common than we would like to admit is not new. However, it took us hundreds of years of developing the idea of the individualistic self with the intent of controlling and manipulating one another, and hundreds of years of wars and destruction of the environment for new frameworks on how to operate as communal selves to gain full traction and come to the forefront of the debate in the human and social sciences. Therefore, I have identified five key elements that serve as suggestion, or basic frameworks for the foundation of the new self, *i.e.*, the communal self. I suggest that the communal self needs to be taught to be a) dissolved or diluted; b) relational; c) divided; d) ethical; and e) inherent part of the other.

In chapter 5, titled *Current State of Community Development in Education*, I will offer my reader a survey of several hands-on initiatives that have been operating within culture (in a large sense) and education (in a specific sense) utilizing the idea of “communal selves” as a starting point. At first sight, initiatives such as the slow school movement, experiential classroom, public squares, inclusive education, etc. are met with enthusiasm, and they have originated many buzzwords such as “community development”, “wholesome inclusion”, “equality”, for example. A brief analysis of such

initiatives will serve as examples of educational projects that have had some success in creating spaces for the communal self. The only issue I will argue is that these places are still inhabited by narcissists, and such realization will, therefore, lead us to chapter 6.

Realizing that communal spaces are still inhabited by selfish individuals, in chapter 6, entitled *A Way Towards an Education for the Communal Self*, I will offer my reader a potential pathway towards the education of communal agents that might be applied to persons in general, but can potentially be more effective if applied to basic tenets of childhood education. I will then a) imagine the communal self; b) analyze educational practices that propitiate the flourishing of communal selves; and c) briefly analyze educational policies that might effectively foster communal selves.

1.6. Note Regarding Research Motivations, Style and Scope

While writing this study, I felt an immense sense of relief. After all, I was undertaking doctoral studies at a *radical campus*, a place known for its social justice bent, its radical pedagogies, and its embracing of change, experimentation, and novelty. Amongst my peers were radical scholars from all over the world: Indonesia, Ethiopia, Israel, Iran, Brazil, South Korea, and Poland. There were feminists and aboriginal scholars. There was a clown scholar, a few spiritual education practitioners, and meditation enthusiasts, and also many nature and environmental enthusiasts. My encounter with such diversity and dramatically different (and often divergent) understandings of education was a significant shift from my more traditional, bookish training, particularly having undertaken undergraduate courses with Jesuit scholars, reformed priests, layman (and women) Catholic scholars, and Liberation Theologists.

My former educational background led me to write two works in which I needed to have a central argument and plow away at justifying such argument. I needed to consider different angles, perspectives, and nuances of the issues I analyzed, and needed to exhaustively defend my argument from the potential critiques of the examining committee. Most importantly of all: I needed to be logical, organized, make sense, and be able to coherently defend my central theses. I toiled away at writing a B.A. thesis and a couple of years later, an M.A. thesis, both products of in-depth analysis and logical argumentation. Alongside my B.A., my reader shall remember that I also undertook a B.Ed., because I wanted to further understand the mechanics of teaching, given that I was already teaching as a private tutor and teaching assistant. After my educational practicum, the final product of my B.Ed. degree was approved to be a creative endeavour: with two colleagues, I wrote and had approved by a committee of teachers, a project for an educational comic book that would introduce basic introductory philosophy to children. In my head, I had achieved the childhood dream of writing comics (or graphic novels, how this literary genre is more commonly known today). I was responsible for the basic plot, which I sent to a colleague who would add dialogue and sketch the scenes, and together we submitted everything to our illustrator, another colleague earning her teaching degree. Last, but not least, we also had a professional inker, a friend of mine who was an engineer and had immense talent inking panels and lettering. The final project was met with such enthusiasm, that we earned an A+, and we had offers from publishers to develop a series of educational comic books. This is when things began falling apart and the project never came to fruition, but that is a story for some other time. What matters here is that perhaps with basis of my previous experience with training in

education, I felt that studying pedagogy would be ideal for experimentation, risk taking, and the development of potentially creative ideas.

Therefore, coming to Simon Fraser University and encountering a wide array of different methodologies, ideas, techniques, and practices was more than a pleasant surprise. There was even a scholarly event that took place at a local lake, where we ate and drank and played games with our professors, and sang tunes played on the ukulele around a campfire. Coming from Catholic schools and a brief stint in two different military academies in my youth, this encounter was emancipatory, liberating, and joyous. For the most part, this ethos, or this culture of experimentation was very much part of my daily life for the first two years of my doctoral studies.

After swiftly completing my coursework and writing two highly experimental papers as my comprehensive exams, and having them approved by a committee, I most definitely incorporated the culture of the institution and spirit of adventure and experimentation that I learned from (and with!) my peers into my daily scholarly practices in their manifold manifestations: at times as teaching assistant, or instructor of record for a course, teaching online, conducting research duties, or administrative duties at diverse educational institutions. Such ethos also largely informed my approach to this thesis: to the maximum extent possible, I thought I could compile and briefly explicate the complex ideas of the diverse sources I studied for about ten years, organize them in a scholarly narrative, and offer it to my readers as a guide, manual, or thought-provoking essay, in which the reader could infer meaning on her own, be motivated to further consider the issues at hand, and develop research that could possibly continue the project. Hence the aforementioned sense of relief: for a moment, I thought I could get away with

erasing my self, a self that narcissistically would be making a point, trying to prove an argument through incessant argumentation, being defensive for fear of seeming incomplete, fraudulent, judged by imaginary critics, potential readers or my doctoral evaluation committee. I thought that compiling, explicating, guiding, and participating in a communal conversation with my antecessors and quite a few contemporaries, I would be able to, as Hyde (2019) says, mask the jumpiness of my mind and allow my voice to be part of a communal endeavour, namely, of identifying the theoretical origins of the narcissistic self and point to potential directions of creating the communal self, as antidote to the pain and illnesses inflicted by our rampant narcissism and its manifestations and repercussions in the world.

Most importantly, the dilution of my own voice amongst many other voices had the intention to demonstrate that there are other ways of being, beyond having a special, unique voice and offering a unique contribution. The challenges to such ways of thinking of my doctoral dissertation came early on, but I insisted on my endeavour, nonetheless. In an informal conversation with professor Sasha Sidorkin, for instance, I told him that I thought of my doctoral dissertation as a guide, or an instruction manual for teachers, that could help them think about the issue of communal selfhood and invite teachers to create (or experiment with ways of creating, fostering, or developing) communal selves that would work for their educational purposes. Dr. Sidorkin then posited the same challenge that my thesis advisors would later posit several times: "but what is your contribution?"

In my head, my contribution was obvious. I was the person organizing voices and contributions of others and hopefully by doing so, my voice, diluted amongst others, would make itself present as some type of vessel, organizer, or catalyst, if you will. I

don't remember exactly how the conversation carried on nor how it ended, but the truth is that however we choose to think about the murky issue regarding the limits of the self, particularly whence considered in relation to the other, attention is always drawn back to the search for uniqueness and individuality, an element that would be special in its own way. The problem is, I personally don't believe in my own voice. I do not think I possess anything unique or special to contribute. I believe I am a sum (amongst many possibilities) of my life experiences, my connections to others, the ways in which my relationships unfold and, most importantly, the way the environment that surrounds me unconsciously determines my actions, thoughts, and way of life.

I firmly believe that I am part of the whole, and that the Jason Manuel Carreiro that you see, hear, or read is merely a vessel made of the cultural elements, sociological constructs, psychological affects, and spiritual effects that surround me. Astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson often says in interviews that the most outstanding thing about the human experience is the fact that there is nothing particularly outstanding about it: the main elements that constitute the atoms of the universe are exactly the same that constitute our bodies, therefore, if there is something special about being human, it is the fact that we are part of the universe, to the precise extent that the universe is also inside each one of us. Perhaps if we could do a better job in the social sciences and humanities in teaching children about our special commonality instead of individuality, we could also develop a stronger sense of interdependence and acceptance, and with time and effort and work, perhaps effectively encounter educational models that will reproduce societal models of living in common, for the common good. I shall return to this point,

below. Firstly, I would like to remain in the realm of meta-analysis and deconstruct this dissertation and its pedagogical significance.

This reflection does not go to say that my professors or thesis advisors are narcissists who don't understand the communal self. I understand well the institutional expectations regarding the writing and defence of a doctoral dissertation, and I also understand well that schools and universities, despite isolated attempts at implementing novel ways of developing, communicating, and implementing scholarly research, are, in many ways, still a product of the self-centered ethos in which we all remain immersed in. Perhaps, on a societal level, we suffer from a certain amount of blindness regarding the issue because: a) we are too close to be able to see the issue, or b) we are too addicted to our self-centred ways of being that we refuse the possibility of branching out and experimenting with ways that challenge our selves. A blatant example of the case above, is our cultural and societal addiction to technology that surpasses mere enchantment or frequent usage due to necessity. It is often said that we are amidst a “tech backlash”, but in truth, there is no such thing. Despite such hypothetical backlash, we continue to look at our devices while walking in public. Despite campaigns to boycott the main online retail store due to its precarious working conditions and lack of benefits, we continue to shop there. We might complain if we cannot simply tap our credit cards on a merchant's machine. We are accustomed to the conveniences that were designed to cater to the self, to the satisfaction of the self, and notions such as outwardness, sacrifice, altruism, and compassion for others are, in a general sense, out of fashion, passé.

The above challenges, assumptions, problems, frameworks and ways of being are what this study aims to challenge. Not by empirically verifying, nor offering concrete

solutions, but by pointing in a certain direction, reflecting and considering, inviting the reader to consider a way towards an education for the communal self.

Chapter 2.

A Possible History of the Self from Ancient Greece to Modernity

2.1. What is the Self?

As we have seen in chapter 1, the idea I discussed so far in this thesis, of the self being a social, psychological, philosophical, cultural construct is controversial. Those who believe that the self is indeed an essence, or a “self-contained” entity of its own, or our bodies or brain, often criticize the idea of cultural construction as postmodern gibberish, relativism, or non-scientific. However, there is much evidence to support the idea of cultural constructionism at the core of the idea of self (Cushman, 1995, 2019; Foucault, 1998; Hacking 2000), making the idea of a biological, essential self, seem quite thin, to say the least. We cannot deny that our bodies are entities, but to infer from “being” that we possess an “essence” that is metaphysical, magical, spiritual or removed from the flesh and blood and murkiness of life borders the absurd. I will now invite the reader to delve into some scholarship that might further demonstrate my central thesis: that the self is a constructed element that can be manipulated, and that humans have used such knowledge to manipulate each other through an individualist approach to consumerism and education.

In the study *The Social Construction of What?* (1999), Ian Hacking, on a chapter discussing if madness can be deemed biological, *i.e.*, inherent in nature, or a social construction, affirms that the “real vs. construction” issue is a minor, technical discussion. Hacking affirms that this is mere matter of semantics because focusing on

semantic matters is detrimental to the flourishing of research, whereas the dynamics of how concepts interact with each other (what Hacking calls “the dynamics of classification”) is where the meat of the issue lives. I do not wish to pigeon-hole Mr. Hacking, but I believe it is helpful to consider him a *Foucaultian* scholar and his work is one of the major influences in the style of this dissertation.

Besides using Foucault’s philosophy in depth, Hacking (2000; 2006) has also written an introduction to the unabridged issue of Foucault’s *Folie et D raison: Histoire de la folie   l’age classique* (translated to English simply as *History of Madness*, Routledge, 2006). This is relevant, given that Foucault himself, through his archeological/genealogical method of inquiry (a method he developed influenced by Nietzsche’s *genealogy*), was a scholar who immersed deeply in the “dynamics of classification”, who established the new methodology of post-structuralist research.

Foucault rigorously contrasts and compares concepts through an analysis of historical sources and demonstrates a deep understanding of the *zeitgeist* surrounding works of art, literature, and even historical institutional documents. This method of inquiry seems to me more serious and legitimate than Charles Taylor’s understanding of the origin of the self, rooted in a metaphysical idea of the good life that simply comes out of nowhere.

However, the purpose of this study, which basically contains a defense of the idea of the “dynamics of classification” as a more rigorous methodology in contrast to biologism, naturalism and even metaphysics, I shall refrain from developing this point further. A detailed critique of Taylor’s *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern*

Identity (1989) will follow at the end of this chapter, better illustrating the contrast between Foucault's and Taylor's approach, hopefully demonstrating to my reader that the concept of the self as a cultural artifact is truer than the metaphysical one. This will be crucial in the development of my main thesis.

With the goal of demonstrating how there are divergent philosophical, historical, sociological, pedagogical, and cultural understandings about the self, and also for the sake of comparing and contrasting, this section will delve into a historical and multicultural survey regarding the origins of the idea of the self. As is common in our culture, I will begin with the ancient Greeks.

2.2. The Greek Conception of the Self

In his seminal work *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride and the Renewal of Community* (1997), Paul Theobald, a professor of rural education at Buena Vista University, begins presenting his case for community-oriented education by analyzing how the ancient Greeks had a strong sense of interdependence, *i.e.*, "to exist by virtue of necessary relations" (Theobald, 1997, p. 7). Theobald (1997) then proceeds to explain how the ancient Greeks lived in a community-oriented world and how they devoted their lives to the flourishing of the *polis* (city). Early in the book, the author sets up a commonsensical dichotomy: he affirms that whereas ancient Greeks offered an education based on values such as truth, beauty, and justice, the education we have in the modern world exists merely to prepare individuals for the market.

Anyone who has been a professional teacher at any institution knows that there is some truth to Theobald's claim that nowadays there is indeed a larger focus on individual

flourishing, and that schools in fact do market themselves as institutions that will prepare students to join the market economy. Theobald borrows a term made popular by social critic Christopher Lasch (1979), in order to demonstrate how this type of self is *narcissistic*: “The result of embracing an individually oriented liberal worldview is that a culture of narcissism, as Christopher Lasch called it, is created. That is, we have become a society of individuals obsessed with ourselves”. (Theobald, 1997, p. 42). Such obsession with selfhood has, therefore, been an integral part of our development as a species but, as we shall see, we often forget that the self is an abstract concept used for the purpose of socializing.

Theobald (1997) then affirms something that has puzzled me since I first read his book in 2011: “The Greeks were so oriented toward community life, that they simply did not have a word for ‘self’ as we have since come to define it”. (Theobald, 1997, p. 9). One often wonders to what extent a “thing” does or does not exist because it has not been given a name. However, the idea that the ancient Greeks did not have a name for self is controversial. In another seminal book on the matter, entitled *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford, 2006, Kindle Edition), Professor Richard Sorabji, who is a fierce opponent of those who deem the self as non-existent, affirms the following:

That the ancient thinkers' views were views about *self* [italics in original] is, I believe, clear both from their intense interest in the first-person ‘me’ and from their struggle to express the idea of self, as we do, through the use of pronouns and through the use of words like the Greek *autos* [italics in original], which in some contexts makes sense only if translated as ‘self’. (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Locations 103-105).

Sorabji may have a point whence analyzing the Greek usage of the term *autos*, however, as with Theobald, he also forgets to provide his reader with strong evidence. Such difficulty is understandable: much of the task of the historian is guesswork, assumption, based on whatever evidence the past has left.

Regarding how ancient Greeks spoke: I remember what my undergraduate instructor of ancient Greek used to say. While teaching us verbal declinations in ancient Greek, he openly admitted that how we pronounced the words were based on how words in contemporary Greece are pronounced, *i.e.*, even if there were declinations and usages that no longer fit in current Greek usage, we pronounced them anachronistically. To affirm that the ancient Greek word *autos*, as in some contexts only makes sense if translated as *self*, is not only an anachronistic usage of the word, but also a modern invention being placed into an ancient worldview.

The original word was used in three ways: *autos* (αὐτός), *auté* (αὐτή), and finally *autó* (αὐτό). According to Liddel & Scott's online version of their classic *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1940; Tufts University, 2015), the Greek usage of the words translate better as "the very one" (implying the somewhat religious idea of possessing a soul) or "the same" (implying an opposition to "the other"). The online Greek-English lexicon suggests that the word *autos* was many times used with an article, forming a pronoun: *ó autos* (him), *é auté* (her) and *tó autó*, sometimes *tó tauton* (it). This brief philological incursion proved fun to me because by investigating the different nuances of the term proposed by Sorabji as evidence, I uncovered the usage of *tó tauton* that is best translated as the third-person neuter pronoun *it*, in English. It is fascinating to observe how, taken as a root word, *tauton* (usually translated as "the same"), put together with

logos (normally used as “reason”) formed the word tautology, and its literal translation can be “reasoning about the same”, leading to the modern usage of the word as pleonasm, repetition, reiteration, duplication, and even somewhat derogatory usages such as redundancy and superfluity.

The neutrality and intense abstraction of the idea of tautos as “the same” indicates that the ancient Greeks indeed had an orientation toward communal life, whereas preoccupying with “the same” or reasoning about “the same” results in redundancy, because “the same” is, but only if it is devoting his, hers, or its life to the cosmos, to the totality of existence, or to the order of the universe. It is my hope that this brief incursion into Ancient Greek language may demonstrate to my reader how the concept of self came to be through language.

In *The Care of the Self* (third volume of *The History of Sexuality*), Michel Foucault (1986) offers a historical analysis regarding the development of the idea of self-care in Western thought. What I consider truly fascinating is that Foucault provides much evidence for the idea that ancient Greeks did not indeed possess a sense of self such as we currently understand it, as identity, personality, subjectivity, all the beautiful, essential things inside all of us, if you will.

While analyzing the genesis of matrimonial relations in ancient Greece, Foucault discovers by analyzing classical prescriptive texts on marriage that

the dominion of oneself over oneself is increasingly manifested in the practice of obligations with regard to others and above all in showing a certain respect for one’s wife. The intensification of the concern for the self goes hand in hand with a valorization of the other. (Foucault, 1986, p.49)

Throughout the entire volume of *Care of the Self*, Foucault makes evident that in ancient Greek culture, the development of a “stylistics of living” is tied to a deliberative art of self-conduct that was understood as the genesis of an aesthetics of “shared pleasures” (note the importance of “self” and “other” in “sharing”).

Sorabji (2006) affirms that most modern resistance to the idea of the self is an “opposition to the idea of self, but often the opposition turns out to be to a particular philosophical idea of self as something disembodied and undetectable, like a soul or Cartesian ego” (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Locations 89-90). Sorabji then affirms that this is indeed an understanding of the self, but it is only one way of looking at it. It is merely one conception of the self.

What I believe is Sorabji’s biggest error is to later affirm that “many have denied” the idea of a self, due to their distaste for a certain, specific idea of self (Sorabji, 2006). It is my belief that if there is no consensus regarding a certain idea or concept, the main reason for that is that this idea or concept cannot be understood through empirical human science. I do believe that the ancient question regarding the self’s existence or not really does not fit in scientific analysis. A scientifically inclined view of the self would corroborate that the self is the body. I have mentioned earlier that neuroscientists and neuro-philosophers deem the self our brains. For example, an anecdotal account of colleagues who study bio-physio-kinesiology shows them believing that the self is genetically determined, which implies, I believe, a certain biological form of fatalism, pre-determinism, or lack of free will, if true. This proves Sorabji wrong in his affirmation. There is no agreement about the self, because the self is not a scientific matter. It is an anthropological construct.

Sorabji then continues to discuss how Plato created a huge problem for western culture when he determined that the self was reason, contained in an immortal, rational soul. Offering a history of the self from the perspective of the ancient Greeks, he then jumps to Plutarch and affirms that for Plutarch, the self was the memory. Seneca and the stoics believed that the self was destined to return every time the universe repeated history. Later in his study, Sorabji takes issue with Foucault's understanding of the self. He affirms that

Both Gill and Pierre Hadot criticize Foucault's description of the Greeks and Romans as concerned with the care of the self. Hadot comments that the self that interests the Stoics, no less than the Platonists, is a universal reason, not an individual self. (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Locations 693-694).

However, Sorabji, through his interpretation of Gill and Hadot (2006), fails to scrutinize Foucault closely enough. As I have shown above, through a quote from *The Care of the Self*, Foucault's reading of the ancient Greeks corroborates with the view that they did not possess a strong sense of selfhood as we do today. For them, the care of the self was inherently tied to a preoccupation about how to respect the other. I will now demonstrate the evolution from the Greek concept of other-oriented selfhood, toward a more solidified sense of self that continues to develop during Ancient Rome, emblematically expressed in the works of St. Augustine.

2.3. The Ancient Roman Concept of Self: St. Augustine

According to Theobald (1997), it was with St. Augustine that the Western world first saw an emphatic reference to the self, given Augustine's extensive use of "I", and

Augustine's shift from communitarian salvation towards individual salvation. Sorabji (2006) also joins the chorus of those who attribute the creation of the self to Augustine, stating that it is with Augustine that the self becomes effectively connected with personal memory.

One might argue, however, that the old adage attributed to Dogen, "we study the self to forget the self" applies here. I shall explain. It is well documented that religious orders possess a strong sense of communal living, and that the act of prayer or meditation invariably has as one of their goals the forgetfulness of the self in order to seek reconnection with the most essential things in life.

There is consensus that the word "religion" derives from the Latin "*religare*", meaning to re-connect, to re-read, to bind once again. This indicates that religion exists, *aprioristically*, to guide us to re-connect with the most essential things in life, such as love, fellowship, the other. In a study regarding communitarian life within religious institutions entitled *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form of Life* (2013), Giorgio Agamben explains how historically, "the primacy of the communitarian life over that of the hermit is a constant tendency." (Agamben, 2013, p. 11, Kindle Edition). It is fascinating to observe in Agamben's argument how the Franciscan order elaborated a theory (and a form-of-life) of poverty and use of property. Agamben argues that the Franciscan theory of poverty and use is a valuable lesson for Western culture:

(...) how to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation. That is to say again: to think life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use. Agamben, 2013, Kindle Location 95, Kindle Edition).

This quote is clear indication that religious orders have a mandate to thrive in a communitarian world, and Agamben analyses the Franciscan order as an example that unfolds into much of Christian faith and ideology. According to Agamben, these religious orders have always sought to develop sustainable means to confront the pragmatic, consumerist demands of the world, by fostering introspective, meditative, community-oriented, and sustainable places for prayer, meditation, and communal flourishing.

There is obviously much debate in this regard. Particularly given our current cultural landscape, religious orders have received much backlash due to the rise and prominence of televangelists, constant scandals of sex abuse involving certain religious orders, and accumulation of wealth by religious institutions. It seems, however, that the issue at hand has more to deal with what I called above a “narcissistic self”, that seems like a reckoning force at play that taints the purity of the beautiful communitarian ideals of such institutions. This shall be further clarified in chapter 3 of this study when I scrutinize the narcissistic self and its consumeristic behaviours.

Paul Theobald’s (1997) study has been highly influential to my own research. I have “borrowed” many of his ideas and concepts regarding the commons in my own work, but I believe that the way in which he faults Augustine for being one of the precursors of the modern “individually oriented outlook” (Theobald, 1997, p.10) common to our culture, demonstrates a certain lack of depth, as I shall justify and develop further.

I will now attempt to demonstrate how the common conception regarding Augustine’s ideas regarding the self are in a general sense, incorrect. The main objective

of such analysis is to demonstrate that the contemporary individualistic, consumeristic, narcissistic self has its origins with the modern era. It might seem unimportant at first glance, to attempt to clear ancient Western thinkers, politicians, cultural theorists, teachers, etc. from any fault regarding the genesis of the narcissistic self. However, to prove that such self had its genesis in the modern age will prove important to unveil the power mechanisms that dominate and shape and control our lives, and also to demonstrate that our current existential crises and desperation are not result of a natural way of “being human”. Such crises are deeply rooted in the origin of capitalism. But we must firstly take a closer look at Augustine and continue our dialogue with Paul Theobald, by inviting to the conversation, a fellow Canadian scholar: Dr. Sean Steel.

In The Pursuit of Wisdom and Happiness in Education: Historical Sources and Contemplative Practices, Sean Steel (2014) challenges the common conception surrounding Augustine. Beyond a certain preoccupation with the self, due to the expansive usage of the pronoun “I”, Augustine’s *Confessions* are also a primer for understanding education and matters of self and other during the period of the Western Roman Empire (285-476).

Firstly, Steel (2014) demonstrates how schools in ancient Rome do not differ much from how we currently understand our schools:

Foremost, even in Augustine’s day, was the societal and parental hope and expectation that children attending school would, by doing so, be trained for success in worldly affairs. Twenty-first-century schools and those of ancient Rome or Thagaste are not much different in this regard. (Steel, 2014, p.141).

Steel then dwells upon Augustine's views regarding education and how the theologian worries about the state of affairs of schools. It is interesting to observe how, to a large extent, Augustine's preoccupation with schools and education possesses a postmodern tone. Steel uses a quote from Augustine to demonstrate how the theologian separates *negotium* (the negation or opposite of *otium*, meaning *business*), and *otium* (leisure). According to Augustine, chasing after worldly success is a business that negates participation in *otium, schole* or leisure, *i.e.*, worldly success gets in the way of the pursuit of the spiritual activity of achieving wisdom.

The example above would have been enough to demonstrate how Augustine's *Confessions* are far from being the religious cry of a narcissist from the Roman Empire era. Augustine's autobiography is, among many things, an attempt to convince readers to join the Christian faith, but beyond Augustine's intentions in writing his autobiography, the *Confessions* are also a great portrait of the issues of the time, as we shall continue to see.

Still regarding the educational issues of the Western Roman empire and also indirectly addressing the modern/contemporary conception that Augustine's thought is a genuine expression of self-centeredness, it will be of great use to explore Augustine's thoughts regarding the classical controversy amongst the sophists and what were sometimes called "true" philosophers, *i.e.*, thinkers who were out in the Greek Agora philosophizing to the people, for free.

For the sake of context, I must remind the reader that in ancient Greece, philosophers and the philosophical attitude (or contemplative attitude) aimed at a pure

form of love of wisdom that, to a certain degree, is uninterested. Pure, in the sense that it is not utilitarian (in a common, non-philosophical sense) or pragmatic, *i.e.*, there is no direct result expected from philosophical contemplation or speculation. The so-called true philosophers did not like the sophists for quite a few reasons, although we might consider the sophists as an embryonic form of teacher: they charged money to teach and they used philosophical speculation and rhetoric in order to teach mathematics, athletics, and music, for instance. According to Steel (2014), such as in today's world, parents in the time of St. Augustine also wanted teachers to guarantee that their offspring would achieve success in the world, and live happy and fulfilled lives. When such a viewpoint became part of the democratic ambitions of the ancient Greek state, the sophists then came to prominence as leaders who could teach political virtues to the children of wealthy Greek citizens.

The historian of ancient Greece, Werner Jaeger, indicates that it is problematic that the very first class of educators that appeared in history, appeared by professing that, in exchange for money, they were able to teach "virtue". (Steel, 2014, Kindle Location 3198). The result of such ideology, affirms Steel reading Jaeger, was that education began to be founded around notions such as achievement and success. According to Steel:

Jaeger remarks that "the sophists have been described as the founders of educational science. They did indeed found pedagogy, and even today intellectual culture largely follows the path they marked out." Indeed, "in many ways we do not begin to feel at home in Greece until the rise of the sophists." Just as the ancient Greeks turned to the sophists to ensure the success of their own sons, so too is the modern school system concerned with the same thing, except on a massive democratic scale of service delivery; for it too concerns most efficiently and effectively delivering the educational means toward the goods and services, the hopes, dreams, and passions of those in attendance. (Steel, 2014, Kindle Locations 3209-3211)

The point of briefly clarifying the distinction between how ancient philosophers aimed at “higher things” such as wisdom and happiness through philosophical contemplation, and the sophists being the precursors to the modern conception of schooling centered around success and achievement, is to return to my defense, if you will, of Augustine and the matter that he is generally accused by historians and social critics of the self, such as Paul Theobald, as one of the thinkers who had a crucial role in founding the idea of the self, due to his large usage of the pronoun “I” in his *Confessions*.

According to Steel (2014), Augustine became critical of sophistry-based education after being briefly associated with a sophist school of thought. According to Augustine, he learned that the sophists possessed a sense of self-aggrandizement or pride that comes from the belief that he is in fact wise, whereas the true philosopher, who is instead a “lover of wisdom”, knows that in reality, he lacks wisdom. Steel (2014) then uses the example of the Catholic, Neo-Thomistic philosopher Joseph Pieper (1904-1997) to reinforce the idea that a sophistic school of thought caters to selves to the detriment of life in a community:

[...] the true philosopher, thoroughly oblivious of his own importance, and “totally discarding all pretentiousness,” approaches his unfathomable object [namely, wisdom] unselfishly and with an open mind. The contemplation of this object, in turn, transports the subject beyond mere self-centred satisfaction and indeed releases him from the fixation on selfish needs, no matter how “intellectual” or sublime. The Sophist, in contrast, despite his emancipation from the norms of “objective” truth and the resulting claims to be “free,” remains nevertheless imprisoned within the narrow scope of what is “usable”[...] (Steel, 2014, Kindle Locations 3256-3258).

In sum, Pieper builds upon Augustine’s critique and affirms that the sophist possesses a narrow concern with what is usable and can be translated into success or acclaim. Steel (2014) affirms that such education is selfish because its aims are to gratify

the fleeting desires and passions of the individual, instead of aiming at the eternal truth of philosophical wisdom. This occurs because “philosophy ‘disrupts’ productivity, it renders uncertain the value of the achievements of those seeking accountability in education for predetermined, government-mandated outcomes; it ‘un-houses’ us from our workday existence”. (Steel, 2014, Kindle Location 3274).

It is my hope that, by thoroughly examining Augustine’s concern regarding a self-centered mode of educating, I have troubled Theobald’s assertion that Augustine is the founder of modern individualism because he wrote an autobiography that overuses the pronoun “I”, and that he advocated for an individualistic approach to God. Richard Sorabji (2006), for instance, has a different understanding regarding Augustine and the self. I would like to add Sorabji’s interpretation before moving on to the next philosopher that historians of the self generally analyze after Augustine, namely, René Descartes.

Sorabji connects Augustine’s notion of self to memory in the following way:

One philosopher who connects the self with personal memory is Augustine. But his Confessions offers two different views. On the one hand, he feels that the infancy he does not remember has nothing to do with him and is not part of his life." On the other hand, in his account of the heaven of heavens, the community which includes angels and probably saints, in books 12 and 13 of the Confessions, the occupants have no memory of their previous life on earth because they are rapt in contemplation of God. (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Location 1282).

This idea of personal memory having a role in the formation of the self that, according to Sorabji, is central to Augustine’s notion that humans are beings connected to God in contemplation, will unfold throughout history and have a major role in the notion of individuality thought by John Locke (1632-1704). But before we delve into Locke’s reflections, we must now analyze the foundation of the modern self with Descartes.

2.4. Descartes and the Foundation of the Modern Self

According to Paul Theobald (1997), Descartes was arguably the most influential philosopher of the modern era in terms of articulating the foundations of the self. With Descartes, the quality of one's life became permanently associated with the rational power that such individual could generate, *i.e.*, what determines our humanity is our capacity to think. Theobald (1997) then notes in an intriguing footnote that Descartes' actual words were "I am, I exist", and that the formula "I think, therefore I am" was the work of a French translator of Descartes.

The Brazilian philosopher, writer, and literature professor Gustavo Bernardo offers a different take on Descartes' thoughts regarding the existence of doubt, and of the self, as a doubting entity or an entity that thinks. According to Bernardo (2004), there is little doubt that Descartes is indeed the founder of modern subjectivity, and it is in Descartes' era that the Earth loses its status as the center of the universe and individuality, the ego, becomes the new center. This is due, according to Bernardo, to Descartes' three absolute certainties: the certainty that thought exists, the certainty that there is a "me" who thinks, and the certainty that God exists.

Professor Bernardo (2004) quotes both Descartes' original text written in Latin and the aforementioned French translation approved by Descartes. In Latin, Descartes' formula reads: *Dubito ergo sum, vel quod item est, cogito ergo sum*. In French: *Je doute donc j'existe, ou ce qui est la même chose: Je pense donc j'existe*. (Descartes: 52 in: Bernardo, 2004, p.157). A better translation of the Latin original would be: I doubt, therefore am, and, which is the same, think therefore am. The middle sentence *vel quod*

item est is too often overlooked by scholars, and it is essential: Descartes is equating doubting and thinking as condition of being.

According to Bernardo (2004), strangely enough, Descartes seems to be laying the foundations of an ontology that has doubt at its center, although Descartes had philosophical divergences with the skeptics of his time. Thus the contradiction: if thinking is doubting, and this precept is the foundation of human existence and of how we perceive the world through our thoughts; this implies that doubting the existence of what we perceive is a precondition of a radical type of skepticism. If we equate thinking as inherently doubting, as Bernardo (2004) seems to suggest, Descartes could not be the founder of modern individualism that he often is considered.

Stephen Mulhall, in *Inheritance & Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (2003), summarizes the idea above in the following manner:

The world is not a possible object of knowledge, because it is not an object at all – not an entity or set of entities. It is that within which entities appear, a field or horizon of assignment-relations; it is the condition for the possibility of an intra-worldly relation, and so is not analysable in terms of any such relation. In short, the Cartesian conception of subject and world opens the door to scepticism because it interprets both subject and world as entities (or sets of entities) – as if the world were a great big object, a totality of possible objects of knowledge, rather than that wherein all possible objects of knowledge are encountered. (Mulhall, 2003, p. 238)

Mulhall's view is helpful to make sense of Bernardo's (2004) reflections regarding Descartes' type of skepticism, *i.e.*, this intense and radical form of putting the autonomous subject into question using doubt, and doubting the world in which entities (including, of course, thinking/doubting subjects) appear.

Although all the authors above assert that Descartes is indeed the founder of modern subjectivity and also the founder of a scientific way of reaching empirical truth,

there are at least two major scholars who disagree with such view. The philosophy of the aforementioned scholars is set up as polar opposites, or at least one of them likes to think so, but when it comes to their interpretation of Descartes's radical subject, as we shall see, Charles Taylor (1931-) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) have much in common. Both philosophers connect Descartes' "discovery" of the cogito, the thinking/doubting subject to a form of metaphysical theology, as we shall see below. I must remind the reader that these diverse interpretations have all contributed to the weaving process that resulted in how we currently understand selfhood. I shall now proceed to explicate how Foucault and Taylor have contributed to the topic.

2.5 Foucault and Taylor on Descartes and the Modern Self

Taylor's (1989) analysis regarding Descartes as the founder of the modern self is more sophisticated than the common perception and nagging that scholars generally dwell in whence complaining that modern thinkers ruined the world by understanding it in a mechanistic way, by narrowing the human perception of the world to rationality, and by founding an epistemology that locates truth outside of empirical reality.

According to Taylor (1989), Descartes was "profoundly Augustinian":

...the emphasis on radical reflexivity, the importance of the cogito, the central role of a proof of God's existence which starts from 'within', from features of my own ideas, instead of starting from external being, as we see in the Thomistic proofs, all put him [Descartes] in the stream of revived Augustinian piety which dominated the late Renaissance on both sides of the great confessional divide. (Taylor, 1989, p.143)

There is some debate regarding Descartes' role as the founder of modern philosophy, in large part due to his concern regarding the proof of God. For some

medievalists Descartes is a radical, yet medieval philosopher. According to this perspective, the theocentric paradigm is a specifically medieval trait, but although Charles Taylor does not mention such controversy, his further explanation about how Descartes is profoundly Augustinian corroborates the notion that Descartes indeed had medieval preoccupations, therefore rooting Descartes in a historical period of time that displaces him as founder of modernity. The commonsensical idea that a turn inward has resulted in selfishness, instrumental rationality, and a technical worldview has metaphysics at its core. It possesses a theological, metaphysical reasoning. If we accept this as the truth regarding Descartes' philosophy, it may be argued that his philosophy was medieval, connected to the aforementioned theocentric paradigm, and a far cry from inaugurating modernism and instrumental rationality.

In the first of his series of lectures regarding the history of the self, entitled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982* (2005), Michel Foucault, always careful and rigorous as a thinker can be, offers an interpretation that corroborates with what Taylor (1989) affirmed in *Sources of the Self*. However, after criticizing the idea that one beautiful day humans broke with the *cosmos* because Descartes discovered the cogito and self-evidence, Foucault offers an important reading that seems more in-depth in relation to Taylor's affirmation that, for Descartes, the higher good comes from within. According to Foucault (2005), the root of the foundation of the Descartes' individual does not take place in the science of the time; it is still rooted in theology and we should therefore look for it there. The simple fact that two major philosophers, Taylor and Foucault, have pointed at the fact that in reality, the "creation" of the modern subject is not an empirical fact or a scientific event, but is, instead, a

historically-proven metaphysical creation, attests to the fact that one simply cannot completely or objectively “know” oneself in one’s complexity, mystery, or obscurity.

Gustavo Bernardo (2004), affirms that by doubting sensation, imagination, and thoughts, Descartes put all human representations in parenthesis and reduced the world to an evanescent hypothesis: “O mundo real pode não existir, mas o eu não pode não existir, porque este eu pensa se o mundo existe ou não. [The real world cannot exist, but the I cannot not exist, because this I thinks if the world exists or not]” (Bernardo, 2004, p.162, my translation). Bernardo offers yet another example: one can doubt that the tree one sees is either a tree or a mirage, but one cannot doubt that he or she is thinking that he or she sees a tree. Finally, Bernardo (2004) demonstrates that throughout history, modern man came to be because he began to augment the certainty that he has regarding his own self, as response to the increasing doubt before the uncertainties of reality. Bernardo (2004) then concluded that Descartes certainly did not imagine that his philosophy would have so many consequences because Descartes as a matter of fact did conceive the “I” of the cogito as a substance, a “thing in itself”, if you will. The reason for such substantiation of the subject, according to Bernardo (2004), was that Descartes intended to examine everything from the beginning, developing a path that would lead to the ability to respond to all doubt. Perhaps Descartes forgot about Plato’s old precept that nature is the supreme mysterious poem, *i.e.*, that there are certain truths that simply cannot be apprehended by human rationality.

It is a crucial part of this exploration of the self to offer an understanding of the Western idea of self, and to demonstrate how such understanding has shifted from a communally-oriented self in ancient Greece, toward a spiritual, introspective, self-

reflective type of self in the middle ages, up to the foundation of modernity, with René Descartes. Ultimately, I hope to have demonstrated how the Cartesian self has contributed to the foundation of modernity, although still deeply rooted in metaphysical theology. I have also discussed a few views of the education of selves, especially through my brief analysis of Saint Augustine.

I must note, however, that the development of the history of the Western type of self is far from done. There are implications of the ancient and medieval theories of selfhood to the radicalization on empirical thought and scientific rationality up to contemporary thought, and the attempt to ground the self that permeated the philosophy of phenomenology and existentialism in the twentieth century. Finally, the self will once again “implode” in postmodernism, or post-structuralism, to the extent that within the context of North American culture, for example, we can affirm that we are saturated with *the self*, and that such saturation has culminated in the rise of a certain type of narcissistic *dis-ease of the self* that needs to be remedied with a certain urgency.

In histories of Western thought, after analyzing René Descartes, North American scholars generally turn towards the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). Locke’s work is considered the foundation of modern liberalism and also a significant contribution to the project of the Enlightenment, which I will discuss in detail below.

2.6. John Locke and the Establishment of the Modern Self

Taylor (1989) introduces John Locke by criticizing Descartes’ radical empiricist stance of a disengaged subject, *i.e.*, a subject that was understood within a mechanistic worldview, which means a subject that had total control over its desires and worldly

appetites, a pure rational being, as the world of desires and appetites was a source of bewitchment and error. Taylor (1989) then affirms that this intense objectification of the self required more than a belief in mechanistic physics, and he affirms that thinkers such as Leibniz and Cudworth attempted to rebuild a teleological view of the self. Taylor utilizes “self” and “subject” interchangeably, but the sense that he is discussing the “sovereign Western identity” (my words) is never lost. However, it was John Locke, according to Taylor, who took the most decisive step towards a new understanding of the self by rejecting teleology and also by rejecting early definitions of the human self that defined it as naturally/inherently bent towards the good, or the truth.

The novelty of Locke’s approach to the self consists in the fact that he believes that the way we see and perceive the world are not solely rational experiences, but also syntheses of ideas we receive from reflecting about our sensations towards the world. If the reader recalls, this is somewhat similar to the idea mentioned above, that the self is in reality the brain. Taylor (1989) corroborates this interpretation, given that, by affirming that Locke believes that experience needs to “pass through” the mind to be communicated, understood, he is in fact radicalizing the work initiated by Descartes, by putting human rationality at the forefront of the experience of making sense of the world:

Locke *reifies* the mind to an extraordinary degree. First, he embraces an atomism of the mind; our understanding of things is constructed out of the building blocks of simple ideas. Metaphors to do with constructing and assembling stuff are very prominent in Locke, and not just in the usual mode, where one speaks of ‘constructing’ a theory or a view. Ideas are ‘materials’, and man’s “power, however managed by art and skill, reaches no farther than to compound and divide the materials that are made to his hand” (Taylor, 1989, p.166-7).

The “process of rationality” described by Charles Taylor above is indication that the modern concept of rationality is procedural in a “radically reflexive” manner. Taylor

then affirms that a subject who can disengage radically from her emotions, feelings, and reflexes towards the world, is what he calls Locke's "punctual self". It is an "extensionless" self, highly abstract, that faithfully reflects a certain type of responsible agency founded on the reification of human psychology.

It is relevant to point out how influential these ideas were within the context of the Enlightenment. The heart of the matter here is that Locke has founded a form of self-objectivation, because any reflection turns the reflective being towards a certain type of objectivity. Taylor summarizes this new concept of the self thusly:

...this self which emerges from the objectification of and separation from our given nature cannot be identified with anything in this given. It can't be easily conceived as just another piece of the natural world. It is hard for us simply to *list* souls or minds *alongside* whatever else there is. (Taylor, 1989, p.175).

Taylor then concludes that Locke's philosophy inaugurates one of the great paradoxes of modern philosophy: the fact that this philosophy of disengagement (because strictly rational) and objectification has culminated in extreme forms of materialism. Taylor (1989) says, "Radical objectivity is only intelligible and accessible through radical subjectivity." The turn to the self has finally moved from taking care of oneself in order to take part and live responsibly in the *cosmos* (environment) and the *polis* (city), to a turn to the self as a self-contained entity.

Paul Theobald (1997) is also a fierce critic of Locke's concept of the self, which he calls "Locke's possessive individualism". Whereas Taylor (1989) analyzes Locke through *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Theobald analyzes Locke's thought in his *Second Treatise on Government* (also 1690).

Theobald offers an account regarding how Locke, an English philosopher, became notorious as “America’s philosopher”: in a society previously based on human equality, Locke legitimated the accumulation of property. He challenged the prevailing European culture of state and church ruling countries, and logically argued for the right for people to rebel and depose any government that did not act accordingly to the interests of its people (Theobald, 1997).

Theobald also argues that, in many ways, Locke provided the intellectual foundations for the colonial revolts against England. Allied to all the above, the novelty of Locke’s philosophy was to lay in his work, the foundation of the sense that “...By nature, all individuals had certain inalienable rights” (Theobald, 1997, p.67).

Theobald then argues that it is important to recognize to what extent the talk of rights accentuated the tendency in North-American culture, towards an individually-oriented life:

Humans in the state of nature took what nature provided in order to survive. This ostensibly established the claim that humans are prosocial and that self-preservation ought to be the standard that drives political, economic, and educational thinking. For example, natural man moves about enjoying the earth in common with others, but at some point he mixes his labor with the earth. (Theobald, 1997, p.67).

Locke’s thoughts regarding the law, or private right, as we saw above, were highly influential in the English enclosure movement. According to Theobald, the architects of the enclosures (that left many people without any land) drew in great part from Locke’s philosophy, and this culminated in the worldview (still in place now) that the countryside is the appropriate locale to inflict the burdens of the costs of industrial progress through the exploitation of its resources. Theobald acknowledges that Locke

was important to the establishment of free societies in the West, especially given that his philosophy was the final death blow to feudalism, but the fact that Locke emphasized self-preservation rather than community preservation had serious consequences, from which the contemporary world is, in a broad sense, still drawing from and attempting to recover from.

Theobald affirms that such notion of universal human freedom and individual rights were completely strange to ancient Greeks and also to a community-oriented thinker such as the English protestant reformer and political activist Gerrard Winstanley (1609-1676): “For the Greeks and for Winstanley, human fulfillment is tied to playing a satisfying role in a web of social relations” (Theobald, 1997, p.69). This can be seen more clearly through Theobald’s example regarding Locke’s and Winstanley’s conceptions of freedom. Theobald affirms that for Locke, freedom is freedom *from*, *i.e.*, a freedom that is conducive to policies that facilitate capitalist accumulation, regardless of how such accumulation will affect communities. For Winstanley, freedom is freedom *to*, *i.e.*, it maintains the primacy of community as the place for human fulfillment and is summarized thusly: “One connects freedom to the capability and competence developed throughout a working life, whereas the other connects freedom to the availability of wage labor or public assistance” (Theobald, 1997, p.69).

This leads us finally to Theobald’s claim that Locke’s philosophy is a theory of possessive individualism. He affirms that this ideology, enmeshed with the Baconian and Cartesian ideas that “nature should become the slave of humans”, were the ideal constituents of the cultural *zeitgeist* that propitiated the foundations of the modern self.

Siegel (2005) states that according to Thomas Hobbes, the self was inherently materialistic, whereas Locke gave more attention to the formation of personal identity. Given the fact that modern schooling is also a product of the Enlightenment, the “birth of the modern self” will have dramatic implications for culture at large, and to how we educate persons, in a more specific sense. Now that we have seen the foundation of the modern self and how it became profoundly entrenched with possessiveness and individualism, we must verify how this idea has unfolded within the framework of modern thought.

2.7. How the Modern Self Made Way into Western Culture

Returning to Charles Taylor’s analysis of the sources of the self (1989) will be helpful at this point of this study. Taylor’s overall project is to retrace what he calls a movement, or a shift from the notion of selfhood constituted as an essential good that remains in connection with nature, towards the ample diffusion of certain principles such as human autonomy and practices of self-examination.

Taylor (1989) affirms that modern philosophers (such as Descartes and Locke, for example), undeniably helped articulate this paradigm shift. It is commonly accepted in the history of Western thought that the major philosophical paradigms were: the cosmos/Cosmocentrism in ancient thought, God/Theocentrism, in medieval philosophy, and reason, or rationality/Logocentrism, in the modern era. Hence Taylor’s affirmation that Descartes and Locke helped articulate a new paradigm for the self: the ancient paradigm of the cosmos (and the self in relation to the exterior, be the exterior other humans or the environment), to the medieval theocentric paradigm (the self in relation to

divinity), culminating in the modern logocentric (also radically self-centric, if you will) paradigm, in which the self is a self-sufficient one. Taylor then proceeds in an important endeavour, in which he attempts to examine how philosophical thought helped shape certain social, cultural behaviours, such as “...the new valuation of commerce, ...the rise of the novel, ...the changing understanding of marriage and the family, and ...the new importance of sentiment” (Taylor, 1989, p.285).

We shall now see how the modern self branched into culture, and the implications this idea has for the valuation of commerce, the rise of the novel, the understanding of marriage and family and the (new) importance of sentiment, for example. The establishment of the modern self in relation to the elements cited above has drastic implications for the contemporary understanding of selfhood, and its diverse facets as id, ego, subject, subjectivity, etc. I believe that it is only by exploring in depth the origins of our understanding of the self, that we can truly have a better idea about how we became oversaturated by the self, sick of ourselves.

2.8. The Valuation of Commerce

Commercial activity is ubiquitous in the modern world. Charles Taylor points out that a new value on commercial activity and money-making has its origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His theory is that the new valuation of commercial activity has much to do with the recession of the aristocratic honour ethic, which created a divide: on one side, the bourgeois stood for an orderly and peaceful life and fostered the idea that production was inherently good; on the other side, there was the ethical outlook

(at least within the context of early British economical theory), that emphasized the virtues of citizenry, warrior virtues (an inheritance from the aristocratic honour ethics, and its military conquests), and the search for fame.

It was in the eighteenth century that economic theory, in its modern sense, was in fact born. Taylor (1989) affirms that political economy began in the eighteenth century with the thought of Adam Smith and the Physiocrats (the economic theory created by the French thinkers of the enlightenment period, which firmly believed in the government and exploitation of nature and its resources).

In his study *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (2005), Jerrold Siegel also offers insight into how Bernard Mandeville's (1670-1733) thought, by standing on the foundations laid out by John Locke, was highly influential in shaping the culture mentioned above, the culture of a self that is also a commercial self, devoted to the production of commercial goods and an active member of a peaceful society.

Siegel affirms that Mandeville shifted Locke's ideas regarding the "extremely rational, and well-reasoned self" (my words), towards a self that was also passion and need, that besides possessing a mind, also possessed natural qualities and was driven by impulses. Mandeville believed that the self originated deeply in the psyche, "where inborn needs and urges were refashioned into a configuration that permitted stable interaction with others" (Siegel, 2005, p.111, Kindle Edition).

Siegel notes that Mandeville's ideas would be drawn upon decisively by Rousseau and also points forward to Freud, as Mandeville's assertions regarding the

impulses, drives, natural “qualities”, for instance, are in line with Freud’s ideas regarding how the unconscious is a part of the ego (at times repressed, but a part, nonetheless, and a constituent and influential part). Mandeville’s idea of the self, and his contribution to the genesis of commercial activity, as described by Taylor (1989), possess a few similarities.

In similar fashion to Taylor, Siegel affirms that Mandeville also took part in the debate regarding ethics, virtue, citizenry, and what a self should do to thrive in society. Mandeville’s stance will be decisive for the establishment of a type of self that will be rooted in the upcoming industrial capitalist culture:

Basic to Mandeville’s dealings with these issues was his fundamental and most cherished assertion, namely that humans were not naturally sociable. Their nature was selfish in its essence; self-love and pride were built into the very bodily “frame” of their life, and creatures so constituted could not be the “social animals” of Aristotelian theory. (Siegel, 2005, pp. 113-114, Kindle Edition).

To summarize the theory of the foundation of a modern, economically-driven type of self, I ask the reader to keep in mind a few of Mandeville’s elucubrations regarding humans and their self-manifestations, namely: selfish behaviour as an essential aspect of being, self-love, and pride. I also ask my reader to keep in mind a few more key ideas: taming and domesticating of passions to allow sociability to flourish, and deflection of inner impulses. These characteristics have resulted in a culture which, within the context of modernity, has generated a self-regulating system of production and exchange of goods, as if these were an important manifestation of the order of nature, and as if such activities were inherently, constitutively a human vocation. These ideas will have important ramifications and dramatic consequences that will lead to what I have called the oversaturation with the self. But for now, we shall turn to another poignant and

crucial manifestation of the modern self that had significant impact in the formation of the contemporary identity: the rise of the novel.

2.9. The Rise of the Novel and its Role in Solidifying Individuality

Charles Taylor's next intellectual incursion regarding the establishment and affirmation of the modern self, deals with the rise of the novel as a manifestation of the new European bourgeois consciousness, *i.e.*, the consciousness of the market-inclined individual, part of the self-regulating system of production and exchange. Taylor (1989) affirms that, firstly, the type of novel written by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding⁵ reflected and furthered an affirmation of ordinary life. According to Taylor, Defoe's novels exalted entrepreneurial values, and Richardson's dealt with love and marriage from a moralistic perspective. Taylor also affirms that this new genre was a drastic shift from the exhortations to heroic figures present in tragedies and comedies since ancient Greece, passing through Shakespeare and the novels of the Christian tradition (such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*).

According to Taylor, the main difference between literature before the eighteenth century and this new way of writing novels, is that the ways in which particularities are portrayed has shifted: there is no longer a strict concern with the universal, and the inner lives of narrators has become more detailed and full of colour. Taylor makes a good point whence describing how, from a thematic, stylistic, and perhaps even ideological perspective, the rise of the novel as an expression of European bourgeois values, virtues and ways of being helped shape the modern understanding of selfhood. It is fair to say

⁵ Daniel Defoe (1660-1731); Samuel Richardson (1689-1761); Henry Fielding (1707-1754).

that during the eighteenth century, the art of literature no longer needed its hero figures, or perennial archetypes to serve as a mold, guideline, or framework for the recipient of the art form (what we nowadays call the spectator in film and theater, the reader in literature, for example). Taylor asserts that the shift from the ontic worldview of gods, in which the world is merely the embodiment of archetypes, shifts to a new worldview in which regular people are now the protagonists of the stories.

Taylor then proceeds to explicate how the death of the archetypes in literature also brought a new consciousness of time to the forefront of artistic manifestations. According to Taylor, as humans increasingly objectified the world, and such objectification became a part of the narrative art, the reader was made into an omniscient observer who was able to track and trace a series of separately narrated events, all at once.

Interestingly, this is the first moment in his analysis that Taylor reflects upon the reader. Without delving much into reception theory, or genetic literary theory, I believe that it is of major importance to understand that the solidification and effective establishment of the concept of the modern self took place both ways: from the side of the artist, who began to express the lives of everyday individuals, and whose stories narrated the values of the time in place in which the stories were written, and also the side of the recipient, the reader. Our reading habits changed simultaneously with the style of the narratives consumed by readers.

In his essay entitled *A History of Reading* (1998), the Argentine-born Canadian literary critic and bibliophile Alberto Manguel affirms that since the middle ages, there

has been something suspicious about reading in silence. Manguel affirms that Augustine was a firm believer in reading out loud, a common way of reading in his time. Manguel then affirms that in his *Confessions*, Augustine narrates how strange it was to see Saint Ambrose, sitting still, tongue inside his mouth, eyes silently scanning pages. According to Manguel, Augustine's description of Ambrose's silent reading is definitely the most ancient record of silent reading in Western culture. Manguel's description of silent reading is also a beautifully crafted description of a certain type of solitude that is generally associated with the act of concentrated reading:

Eyes scanning the page, tongue held still: that is exactly how I would describe a reader today, sitting with a book in a café across from the Church of St. Ambrose in Milan, reading, perhaps, Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. Like Ambrose, the reader has become deaf and blind to the world, to the passing crowds, to the chalky flesh-coloured facades of the buildings. Nobody seems to notice a concentrating reader: withdrawn, intent, the reader becomes commonplace. (Manguel, 1998, p.43).

It seems evident that the advent of silent reading side by side with the development of individuality, strengthened our sense of self. In an essay in which he interprets Miguel de Cervantes' *magnum opus* Don Quixote, entitled *The Enamoured Knight*, the Canadian literary critic Douglas Glover describes the "suspicious activity" or reading in silence as a pursuit that was crucial for the development of the notion of individual, given its inherent solitude. Glover then traces an interesting parallel to what is happening nowadays with the ubiquitous presence of information (written, oral and visual information) on the internet. Although describing the internet as often seen merely as a "tool of liberal democracy", an "ungovernable conduit for pornography", and affirming that people at times need to be treated for "internet addiction", in a way that reminds us of the protagonist of Don Quixote, Alonso Quixano's own addiction to chivalric

romances, Glover acknowledges that books and the internet challenge social control and cohesion. This is largely due to the fact that these tools (or technologies, if you will), allow freer access to ideas, and lure individuals into a strange type of communion with an interface that is not inherently human, or social.

Glover then offers interesting insights regarding how our sense of self shifted from a small network of human relations within the context of oral culture, and how during this period, knowledge was limited by biological memory, therefore the memorizing of myths, stories, and poems was of the essence. Glover asserts that with the introduction of writing (and books), human consciousness shifts from the reliance on biological memory towards the need to know how to access information contained in writing, in books or, as is more common nowadays, on the internet. According to Glover, the self became an assembly point for information, and this is an important moment in human history, when the individual emptied itself of substance and became a media reader instead of an entity.

Although largely seen as a major component in the formation of the modern sense of individuality, or the modern concept of the self, we must keep in mind that, in hindsight, the development, popularization, and finally advent of the written word as main means of communication between humans, whilst attempting to register the diverse instances regarding how we attempt to make sense of the experience of being alive on Earth, also has a powerful communal component since its origins.

In several of the few interviews that the American writer, philosopher, and educator David Foster Wallace gave during his lifetime (1962-2008), he affirms that what

drove him to become a writer was the fond memory of spending a rainy afternoon with a book. He affirms that it seemed like a form of magic, to exchange consciousnesses, that reading was almost a form of inhabiting another person's skin for a while, talking and thinking about difficult things that people generally don't talk and think about with each other.

Maryanne Wolf (2007) supports the communal aspect, or interpretation of the act of reading, breaking from the aforementioned tendencies to view reading and readers as solipsistic, loners, or isolated individuals. In *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Wolf affirms that the advent of reading only came to be due to the brain's ability to make connections among structures, and to be shaped by experience:

While reading, we can leave our consciousness, and pass over into the consciousness of another person, another age, another culture. "Passing over", a term used by the theologian John Dunne, describes the process through which reading enables us to try on, identify with, and ultimately enter for a brief time the wholly different perspective of another person's consciousness. ... Through this exposure we learn both the commonality and the uniqueness of our own thoughts – that we are individuals, but not alone. (Wolf, 2007, pp. 7-8).

Although scholars such as Manguel, Glover, and Taylor acknowledge that the increasing popularization of reading as a means to access information has changed the notion of subjectivity, I believe that Wolf and Wallace's ideas regarding the communality inherent to the exchange of consciousness also has profound impact on how our sense of self is determined. This is far from saying that one perspective excludes the other; on the contrary, they complement each other nicely. Although most scholarship in this regard affirms that the modern era brought with it an "inward turn" that culminated in what social theorists today call narcissism (as we shall see in the next chapter, what they really mean is self-centeredness, which is something else), it can be said that the act of reading

itself is a communal endeavour, particularly given the fact that the author of the written text might be long gone, dead for hundreds of years, but that little sample, that tiny little glimpse into her consciousness remains, and the reader can still actively engage in dialogue with the long gone author.

In a study entitled *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* (1996), Kim L. Worthington explores this tension between the withdrawn, self-conscious, solipsistic self; the possessor of its agency, celebrated by the romantics, alienated from nature, and the self that is seen as members of an intersubjective discursive process, part of a type of communal constructivism:

Subjectivity, as I conceive it, involves far more than fixed, passive positioning within the symbolic order; the webs of social structuration offer a wide range of potentially transgressive communicative sites ('communities') from which to speak or write. I suggest, in other words, that positing an interlinked network of plural interpretive sites or communities, within which human beings are simultaneously situated and between which they move, might point to a way of overcoming the narrowly conceived dualisms paraded in contemporary thought between, for example, structure and agency, relativism and totalitarianism. (Worthington, 1996, p.10).

I do not wish to get ahead of myself with a discussion of contemporary understandings of selfhood, but since Worthington (1996) affirms at the beginning of her study that the main idea that modernity has created was the rise and prominence of the self, I thought it necessary to demonstrate how she deals with the tensions of the individual self and the communal self. According to both Worthington (1996) and Taylor (1989), ultimately, the self is a narrative, a concept expressed as a summary of the cultural, scientific, political, etc., forces that surround it. This is what I call *the literary self*. Taylor (1989), for instance, affirms that within the paradigm of modernity, humans only began to find an identity in self-narration: "Life has to be lived as a story ... But

now it becomes harder to take over the story ... from the canonical models and archetypes. The story has to be drawn from the particular events and circumstances of this life” (Taylor, 1989, p. 289). This way of understanding selfhood has important implications when we think of the role of schools in assisting with the formation of “selves”.

2.10. The Role of Schools in Developing Selves

Although for the purposes of this section in particular, I do not wish to directly address the role of schools in the formation of selves. I believe it is important to note and briefly point out that schools, understood as cultural artifacts and human institutions, are always in synchrony with the spirit of their times, therefore assisting such cultural ethos in the formation, fostering, and development of persons accordingly with the social, cultural, political necessities in vogue within certain time periods. The matter of whom could have access to schools, and from where social norms, values, and morality come from are two complex matters, but matters that also should not be ignored.

There is enough historical evidence to suggest, for instance, that within the framework of Greek culture, when some of the first Western schools (academies) were founded, there was a strong emphasis on schools contributing with the formation of citizens whom, aligned with their talents, developing them and becoming specialists, would be formed accordingly to such talents, and be a fully-fledged citizen, ready to give back a meaningful contribution to the polis (city) through their work. This way of thinking is in accord with the Greek ideal of the self in connection to the cosmos (nature,

environment, outside, in a general sense). The self must live *for* the other, in direction to the other.

Now, there is also the issue of who could access information in Greek academies, given that in ancient Greece, only males above the age of eighteen who owned land were considered citizens, with slaves coming second on the citizenship scale, and females forming the third tier. In a broad sense, historians of education point to the fact that there seems to be a certain elitism inherently tied to the rise of educational institutions.

In ancient Middle East schools, for instance, only royal offspring and sons of the extremely wealthy could go to school. In India, the Brahmani (priests) were the ones who had such privilege. In ancient China, only the rich and the powerful were selected to be educated. During the Greek and Roman empires, diverging from genuine radical philosophical thought that happened in the agora, education in the academies was private (and frowned upon by philosophers, suspicious of the inheritance from the sophists of charging money for knowledge). What matters here is to indicate how schools are responsible for the formation of selves, and how the increasing development and propagation of the written word goes hand in hand with how selves are shaped, what type of information is propagated through reading/accessing information, and how this information shaped our sense of self. My goal in this subsection was to demonstrate how the shift from reading out loud, to some degree, can be seen as an act of “reaching out” to some sort of exteriority, and that the increasing habit of reading in silence, to oneself, is an indication of the increasing sense of privacy, individuality (and individualism) of the modern era.

The advent of the book as the main technology of transmission of knowledge in schools is a double-edged sword: to some extent, the act of reading involves a series of brain mechanisms and bodily activity, and can be seen as an attempt to cross the boundary of self and be effectively in touch with the author's consciousness. To another extent, such "magical form" of temporarily inhabiting someone else's consciousness requires a huge amount of solitude and concentration, and historically, "serious" readers have been frowned upon, for not being actively engaged in the cycle of production and consumption inherent to modern culture.

Now that I have analyzed the foundations of the modern self, I shall now briefly analyze the modern understanding of marriage and family, and its role in the establishment and solidification of the modern self.

2.11. Marriage, Family, and the Modern Self

Charles Taylor (1989) has an interesting insight when it comes to his analysis of marriage and the family in the modern era: "The new understanding of marriage naturally goes along with further individualization and internalization" (Taylor, 1989, p.290). To corroborate with Taylor's assertion, it is helpful to look back to Michel Foucault's classic study *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality* (originally published in 1984, with the translation to English appearing in 1986, being Foucault's last complete essay ever published).

In a chapter entitled *The Cultivation of the Self*, Foucault affirms that even in the Hellenistic period of the Roman Empire, there has been a certain shift of the prevalent ethos of communal orientation, towards a more individual framework that aims to serve as guideline for selves and others to develop ways of being, modes of conduct. Ultimately, Foucault will discover, the ancient world aimed at developing the care of the self because only then one could also care for the other. Therefore, the role of the family and the establishment of marriage become central in the formation of the self.

Furthermore, Foucault proceeds to explicate that three major manifestations of individualism in this period accentuated the development of the cultivation of the self, namely: a) absolute value attributed to the individual, b) the positive value attributed to privacy, and c) the increasing intensity of the relations to the self. Foucault then affirms that the idea of the cultivation of the self increasingly became an art of existence. The Greek term *techné tou bayou* became an imperative of ancient life, being widely reproduced and taught. Foucault asserts that “Here we touch on one of the most important aspects of this activity devoted to oneself: it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice” (Foucault, 1986, p.51). The affirmation above is clear indication of the prevalent ethos of seeking individual care to better contribute to the societal whole. Besides being a social norm that lead to a series of regulations towards familial habits and marriage, to take care of oneself also had an educative connotation, as Foucault points out:

A whole series of medical metaphors is regularly employed to designate the operations necessary for the care of the soul: put the scalpel to the wound; open an abscess; amputate; evacuate the superfluities; give medications; prescribe bitter, soothing, or bracing potions. The improvement, the perfecting of the soul that one seeks in philosophy, the *paideia* the latter is supposed to ensure, increasingly assumes a medical coloration. Educating oneself and taking care of oneself are interconnected activities. [...] The school should be thought of as a “dispensary for the soul”: “The

philosopher's school is a physician's consulting-room [*iatreion*]. You must leave it in pain, not in pleasure.⁶" (Foucault, 1986, p.55).

Foucault's insight above stated is a significant historical and cultural development that points in the direction of the modern understanding of how institutions can contribute to the shaping and development of the self. Furthermore, Foucault will affirm that this increased importance given to the problem of the self will result in an early form of a crisis of subjectivity, given the fact that there will be an increasing tension or discrepancy between the uses of pleasure that are connected to three types of subjective authority (these being authority over oneself, over the household, and over others), and the growth of public constraints and prohibitions of all sorts. In this sense, says Foucault, the subject in crisis faces a difficulty to form him or herself as the ethical subject of his or her actions, given that in ancient thought, there was a perception that submitting to rules did not fulfill an existential void, *i.e.*, did not offer the individual a sense of having a purpose to be part of the social mechanism.

Foucault's philosophy then leads to a series of studies, practices, and explorations that aim to regulate human bodies and sexual practices in order to maintain both social order and also attribute value to human life. It will be noted that these series of regulations of sexual practices, marriage, pleasure, and family, for instance, go in the opposite direction of the type of modern, Victorian, British familial ethos that Taylor (1989) addresses, and the reader must keep in mind that the ethos of a certain time is determinant to how schools approach the diverse modes of cultivating selves. There is a

⁶ Quote in original reads as follows: Epictetus, *Discourses*, III, 23, 30; III, 21, 20-24. See also Seneca in reference to someone who attends the classes of a philosopher: *Aut sanior domum redeat, aut sanabilior* (*Letters to Lucilius*, 108, 4).

quote from Foucault's work that I would like to offer the reader at length, to further contrast with the type of ethos prevalent in Taylor's analysis of love, marriage, and the family in the modern era. These somewhat divergent perspectives will have a fundamental role when I analyze the transformation of the modern self into the contemporary self, which is called the neoliberal self, the capitalist self, the empty self, and the consumerist self, culminating in the contemporary westernized understanding of the narcissistic, self-centered self. But firstly, we shall return to Foucault:

...the art of matrimonial existence, while continuing to be concerned with the household, its management, the birth and procreation of children, places an increasing value on a particular element in the midst of this ensemble: the personal relationship between husband and wife, the tie that joins them, their behaviour toward each other. ...the principle of moderate conduct in a married man is placed more in the duties of reciprocity than in mastery over others; or rather, in the fact that the dominion of oneself over oneself is increasingly manifested in the practice of obligations with regard to others and above all in showing a certain respect for one's wife. **The intensification of the concern for the self goes hand in hand with a valorization of the other.** [*my emphasis*]. The new way in which the question of sexual "fidelity" is sometimes formulated attests to this change. Finally, and this is the most important point in the present context, this art of marriage – in the form of a symmetrical relationship – accords a comparatively greater place to the problems of sexual relations between spouses. ... (Foucault, 1986, pp. 148-9).

Foucault's analysis regarding how the increasingly common care of the self shaped a way of being in ancient culture is evidence of the aforementioned "other-directed" way of being in Greek life (I am considering here, under the umbrella term "Greek life" classical ancient Greece, and the Hellenistic period of the Roman Empire). Now, for the sake of comparison, we shall return to Taylor's analysis of the modern forms of family and marriage.

Taylor's explication of the foundation and establishment of modern forms of selfhood is much in line with Foucault's investigation (although Foucault begins his investigation from the framework of ancient thought) regarding the government of self

and others. Taylor (1989) affirms that the stress on individuation and personal commitment to a relationship, within the context of modernity, “leads to **a greater place for contractual agreement.** *[my emphasis]*. And in some societies, this even leads to a greater tolerance for divorce” (Taylor, 1989, p 290).

Such extreme and direct external influence upon extremely private matters might indeed seem appalling to a contemporary reader. This is an early example of the detrimental ways that life in community might assume. To the extent that breaking this idea of the family belonging to a larger order meant that individual independence, intimate personal relations, and the idea of privacy of the family are strengthened: “...the companionate marriage and the demand for privacy, rose together. The family based on affection had to be formed by affinity” (Taylor, 1989, p. 291). As the sovereignty of the modern self heads towards being established, we are now left with one last aspect of it to reflect upon: the new importance of sentiment in the modern era.

2.12. The Rise of Sentimentality and the Self

Taylor (1989) affirms that the intimacy gained with the new forms of marriage, love, and familial autonomy came hand in hand with the rise of sentiment, especially considering the Anglo-Saxon countries and France, more specifically within the context of the eighteenth century. Love, concern, and affection for one’s spouse come to be celebrated and increasingly articulated: “What changes is not that people begin loving their children or feeling affection for their spouses, but that these dispositions come to be seen as a crucial part of what makes life worthy and significant” (Taylor, 1989, p.292).

The literature of the time made this new sentimentality more visible, and as the main cultural product, with increasingly more literate people amongst the masses, literature effectively contributed to the intensification and propagation of these “sentimental ideas”, if you will. Taylor also affirms that there is an increasing interest in this form of sentimentality due to the also increasing growth of the feeling for nature.

Living in the country, country walks as elements that give individuals pleasure, the popularity of the “rustic idyll”, etc., all constitute a modern, bourgeois form of “returning” to nature. Taylor affirms that “This new orientation to nature was not concerned directly with the virtues of simplicity or rusticity, but rather with the sentiments which nature awakens in us” (Taylor, 1989, p.297). Feelings of awe, peace, or sublimity felt and described within the context of modernity are all predicated on the idea of the modern identity and, to some extent, have also contributed to the contemporary commodification of the natural environment, and the fetishization/reification of nature in culture.

This newly discovered love of nature with the new cult of sensibility, indicates a profound cultural change in Western tradition. Whereas in ancient thought morality, the common good, and virtue were categories directed towards the exterior, *i.e.*, the well being and good life within the polis/city; from modern thought onwards, the modern identity, firstly and gradually “created” amongst the educated classes, besides beginning to spread popularly, redefining ethical behaviour, and moral conduct, also creates the notion that the sources of morality, goodness, and ethical behaviour are inside each one of us, which is a significant paradigm shift that establishes once and for all the sovereignty of the individual.

In this chapter, I hoped to demonstrate how the idea of the “modern self” was founded and established, mainly through four major societal shifts that were at the crux of the new understanding of modern life: an increased valuation of commerce, the rise of the novel, a new understanding of marriage and the family, and a new valuation and importance attributed to sentiment. With a strong idea of how self was historically formed in the Western imaginary, it is now time to briefly analyze contemporary understandings of the self (from the nineteenth century onwards) in order for us to understand how European culture became saturated with the self, and the subject, the identity, the id, the ego, all became manifestations of a crisis generated by our over-saturation with the idea of the self. This crisis will obviously generate a very typically North American type of individual who is sick of him or herself: the self-centered individual, the narcissistic self, the potent solipsistic self that manifests in despair, and seeks healing at all costs.

Chapter 3.

The Dis-ease of the Self: Narcissism

3.1. The Contemporary Self

In general terms, it can be said that the modern understanding of selfhood is as follows: modern culture prizes the autonomy of the individual, places increased importance to self-exploration and expression, and the good life, with all the ethical and moral implications that such notion ensues, demands personal commitment to it, *i.e.*, the onus of being an ethical individual lies on individual choice, which has dramatic implications for contemporary life, as we shall see in this chapter. Considering the scenario above, what is, after all, the contemporary self?

In the beginning of this study, I aimed to demonstrate that the concept of the self began as a mystery inherent to the condition of existing. Assuming that non-existence is the norm, given that life forms that have come to life as we know it have already returned to their non-existing condition, we can assume that coming to existence and possessing a shape, form, or body is an exception in the ultimate meaninglessness of being. Being and existing would correspond to just a little spark of light within the normativity of nothingness. Given that self-destruction is inherent to each and every-body, we can affirm that every single living being naturally goes back to its condition of being nothing, through the slow deterioration of its living faculties and bodies. Entropy is a natural and inherent law of existence.

These big existential and ontological claims might seem quite overwhelming to the reader, but my goal is to demonstrate that the need for an idea such as an identity or a sense of self (however one wishes to call it) comes, ultimately, from a certain existential angst that is generated from the naturally ephemeral condition of life. I believe the famous poem by Virgil, entitled *Lacrimae Rerum* (Tears in Things), from book I of the *Aeneid* offers a valuable insight for my argument:

Sunt hic etiam sua praemia laudi;

sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.

Solve metus; feret haec aliquam tibi fama salutem.

(Here are your rewards and praise;

There are tears at the essence of things and our mortality touches

the heart; this realization shall bring you comfort)⁷.

Although never fully realizing the deeper meaning of this poem, within and without the context of the *Aeneid*, I always believed it unveiled some essential truth about the human condition: that there are tears at the essence of things, given that things come to be, just to die away. Once we come into being and get attached to life, it is indeed a terrifying, sad realization. This idea ties into the idea of the construction of the self. The idea of the self is a form or a manifestation, if you will, of the need for one to affirm oneself in existence. I hope to have provided in Chapter 2, enough evidence to

⁷ My translation. My understanding of the Latin meaning “tears at the essence of things”, however, draws from the poet Seamus Heaney’s interpretation “There are tears at the heart of things”.

demonstrate that the self is indeed a social, psychological, philosophical and, in sum, cultural construct that results from our existential and biological need to affirm ourselves in existence and attribute meaning to the ephemeral nature of life. Now, I would like to address what the realization that the self is a mere construct means, in a pragmatic sense.

There is a story that I like to tell in discussions with students when I teach classes in sociology, history, or philosophy of education. The story goes like this: humans are such complex and mysterious beings that, every time throughout history that we have had good ideas that could potentially lead to peace, sustainable use of natural resources and exchange of goods, and acceptance, for example, we also discovered that we could manipulate others (humans, animals, the natural environment) for our personal gain.

Subsequently, I generally discuss two examples of great human ideas that ended terribly: religion and communism. At the core of any religious doctrine around our planet are love, compassion, and fellowship. And yet, religious systems are often used to control, manipulate, and generate discord among people. At the core of communism is the idea of living in common and sharing “common ground” sustainably in order to offer equal division of labour and distribution of resources to all. And yet, the Russian gulags and the Chinese Cultural Revolution have happened. The same applies to the idea of the self.

At its core, it might be considered a wonderful idea. In a broad sense, nature “hardwires” beings into possessing a sense of themselves for them to affirm themselves in nature and survive the struggles that life will be imposed upon them. Devoid of sharp teeth such as tigers, for example, or claws such as a lion, or even the velocity of a

cheetah, humans developed rationality as a defense mechanism⁸ to survive in nature. The natural human drive for affirmation and survival then evolved, I hope to have demonstrated, into notions of selfhood, the concept of the self, and the diverse ways in which such concept unfolded, such as the id, the ego, the subject, and the notion of subjectivity that will be analyzed below. Once more, humans took a somewhat pure idea and distorted it for perverse and exploitative purposes. In the modern age, as we saw above, humans realized that selves could be manipulated, controlled, under the guise of education, social order, and pecuniary gain.

This brings us to a brief analysis of the foundation of the narcissistic self and how schools have reinforced narcissism through designing curricula that tapped into expressiveness, entrepreneurship, and entitlement as core values to be developed to the detriment of inter-connectedness, kindness, and fellowship. Hopefully, by identifying this major issue, we will be able to move toward alternative views and understandings of selfhood and will be able to develop ideas and theories that will unfold into actions taken up by communal agents, or fully aware citizens that, through love and fellowship, will possibly foster a cultural shift in upcoming generations.

3.2. A North-American Type of Self Inherited by Sigmund Freud

With the establishment of the industrial revolution and the creation of the modern/contemporary self, something particularly unique happened in North American culture. American ideals drawn from the successful implementation of capitalism as a social, cultural, and economic model began to take shape in more decisive and central

⁸ Cf.: Friedrich Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873), an unfinished essay.

manners. The American psychologist Philip Cushman cites Michel Foucault in order to demonstrate how Foucault was right on target whence denouncing the social mechanisms that infiltrate, dominate and shape the human experience, for better or for worse:

This is the message Michel Foucault taught us: The configuration of the self, even a configuration composed of an absence, is socially constructed by those in power. The self is always a product of a specific cultural frame of reference, configured out of moral understandings and local politics. There are reasons and functions to most social phenomena, even if seemingly benign or obscure. (Cushman, 1995, p.12).

This goes to further justify the somewhat strange, yet decisive adoption of psychotherapy in the United States in the late nineteenth and, more decisively, early twentieth centuries. If today in North America, Freud's ideas regarding the unconscious, narcissism, the interpretation of dreams, etc., seem dated, non-scientific, or merely literary interpretations, his ideas were taken seriously in the early twentieth century and were very much used to shape a type of self that I call in this study "the narcissistic self". In addition to being saturated with itself, it seeks pleasure almost hedonistically, it can be understood as a "self-gratifying machine", as Deleuze and Guattari (2008) would arguably say. The narcissistic self also consumes cultural artifacts in order to satiate its continuous hunger, which in turn, is a result of an interior emptiness, a "hole in the middle of its chest", if you will; a permanent state of existential anxiety that results in an incessant quest for gratification. As we will see below, this framework for selfhood originates from Freud's ideas regarding the self.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was an Austrian psychoanalyst, and, according to his main biographer, Peter Gay, alongside Karl Marx, Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein, Freud is among the most influential mind-makers of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, Freud's essay entitled "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1913-14) is considered by

Gay to be a significant departure from earlier ideas, therefore standing alone as a remarkable accomplishment by Freud. Gay also writes that in this essay, Freud, for the first time, undercuts his theory of drives (a theory in which he explains how ego drives are not necessarily erotic and libidinal drives are not necessarily egotistic), on which he worked for nearly twenty years. Gay also affirms that the main novelty of Freud's essay is the introduction of an "ego ideal" that he would only conclude in 1923 in his seminal essay "The Ego and the Id".

Freud attributes the usage of the term narcissism to a clinical description by German psychiatrist Paul Nacker (1851-1913). Freud affirms that Nacker's definition of narcissism establishes it as a perversion. Narcissism would be "the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated" (Freud, 1989, p 545).

Freud goes on to define narcissism not as a perversion, but as "the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature" (Freud, 1989, p. 546). He later affirms that it is necessary for us to pass beyond the limits of narcissism (which he seems to understand as a form of self-centeredness) in order to be able to attach our desire, our libido, to objects. Conversely, he admits that a strong sense of egoism is necessary in order to protect us from falling ill, but that it is also necessary to learn to love in order to not fall ill. In this part of the essay, Freud shies away from further developing what learning to love might look like and furthers his argument explicating how narcissism achieves its pinnacle in the figure of the child. Freud affirms that the child is so endearing due to its self-contentment and inaccessibility and compares the endearment adults feel

toward children, to the endearment we feel towards cats and large beasts of pray: they do not concern themselves with us.

Freud's argument that narcissism is the manifestation of the immortality of the ego, faced and terrorized by our condition of mortal beings, might be well manifested in the following citation:

At the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child. Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents' narcissism born again, which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature. (Freud, 1989, p.556).

I hope to have demonstrated in this section, how Freud equates narcissism with self-centeredness. This theory is at the crux of the foundation of what I called above the "North American Self", which is a consumeristic, self-centered, narcissistic self. In the following sections, I will analyze how this type of "self" came to influence North American culture, in a general sense, resulting in an oversaturation with notions of selfhood, and the consolidation of psychological discourse (which I henceforth shall denominate the *psychologization* of society-at-large). Subsequently, I will explain how such "self" shaped curriculum design in North American schools, from the early twentieth century onwards, and what type of implications such world shaping ideology has had in culture. Finally, I will offer a reinterpretation of *The Myth of Narcissus and Echo* in order to demonstrate that the original story told in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is, in reality, a perennial warning left to us from classic western culture, and I will defend the hypothesis that the story, in reality, can assist us in thinking about the possibility of communal selves, in stark contrast to the contemporary attempts of medicalization of the discourse around narcissism, particularly by psychologists.

3.3. Constructing the Self, Constructing North America: Freud, Bernays, and the Victory of Newspeak and Propaganda

It is important to keep in mind that our current understanding of the self is a contemporary twist on a modern idea. Immersed in the present, it is easy to lose sight of human development and to simply take the current state-of-affairs for granted, as if we were always as we are.

As we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, the ancient concept of the self was vastly different: in ancient times, humans were understood as one element within a communal unit that sought the greater good as an ultimate ideal; in medieval times, humans possessed a soul that was in direct contact with the divine and needed to act ethically in order to seek eternal salvation. In modernity, the understanding is that the body possesses a mind and a self that needs therapy in order to find balance and meaning. The fact that each era possesses a foundational set of elements that configures the self solidifies the main argument of this thesis: that the self is merely a social and cultural construct that can be manipulated by power structures and institutionalized means of transmitting knowledge, behaviour, and culture-at-large.

Freud's theories had a decisive role in the process of founding our understanding of the self. By affirming that we are beings driven by our egos and desires, Freud gave shape to a form of self-centeredness that fit well with industrial capitalism, as we shall see below. In order to understand the psychologization of discourse surrounding the self, and to demonstrate how such discourse shaped North American culture in a specific manner, *i.e.*, in a manner that fit with the ideologies that back up industrial capitalism, we must firstly understand how such phenomenon came to be. To further our understanding

of the issue, two works in particular shed invaluable light on the issue of the consolidation of psychology and therapy into North American Culture: Christopher Lasch's (1932-1994) *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979), and professor Philip Cushman's *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (1995).

Lasch's book was highly influential in the late 70s and early 80s and continues to resonate in North American Culture. Recent seminal works such as Jean Twenge's *Generation Me: Why Today's Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (2006) and *The Narcissism Epidemic* (2010) owe largely to Lasch's insights.

Lasch was the first social critic that popularized the notion that cultural narcissism and the predominance of psychological discourse serves industrial capitalism and consumeristic behaviour, by inciting competition and consumption of material wealth and goods as ultimate values to fulfill human desire and quest for meaning. Lasch was a visionary, and considering the current ethos we are immersed in, one might argue that he was also a futurist. In the late 70s, Lasch was able to foresee that governmental and institutionalized bureaucracy would face significant resistance (think of the significant rise of nationalism, populism and racism on a worldwide scale); images would proliferate and shape cultural discourse (think of the advent of social media and the propagation of ideology through it); therapeutic ideologies would have stronger presence in cultural discourse (think of the openness regarding discourses about mental health issues, disease, and the medicalization of behaviours, also think about the often indiscriminate use of the term addiction); the rationalization of human life (think of the rise of sentimentality

analyzed in chapter 2 of this thesis) and lastly, the cult of consumption (needless to ask the reader to think about examples for this one, given how omnipresent consumerism is). Lasch states that the pathologization of human behaviours serves industrial capitalism to the detriment of authenticity in human relations:

The emergence of character disorders as the most prominent form of psychiatric pathology, however, together with the change in personality structure this development reflects, derives from quite specific changes in our society and culture— from bureaucracy, the proliferation of images, therapeutic ideologies, the rationalization of the inner life, the cult of consumption, and in the last analysis from changes in family life and from changing patterns of socialization. All this disappears from sight if narcissism becomes simply “the metaphor of the human condition” (Lasch, 1979, p 32-33, Kindle Edition).

Along Lasch’s highly influential critique of North American cultural life, Cushman, also a historian and social critic, offers a nuanced analysis regarding the motifs behind the power structures that helped shape the contemporary self, *i.e.*, the narcissistic, consumeristic, hedonistic self. Philip Cushman affirms that the relationship between industrial capitalism and psychotherapeutical discourse is complex, nuanced, and diverse, and he claims that it is crucial for historians to interpret this relationship in order to illuminate the present and further our understanding of this new configuration of the self.

It is important to notice that Cushman aligns his criticism alongside those who believe that urbanization, industrial capitalism, and increased secularization of discourse have caused more harm than good to North American culture. Cushman also adds that the discourse of self-contained individualism is a major factor in our decline as a civilization. He is also adamant about positioning his thought within the tradition of social constructivism (as we have seen in chapter 1 of this thesis):

historical humans do not have a basic, fundamental, pure human nature that is transhistorical and transcultural. We are incomplete and therefore unable to adequately function unless we are embedded in a specific cultural matrix composed of language, symbols, moral understandings,

rituals, rules, institutional arrangements of power and privilege, origin myths and explanatory stories, ritual songs, and costumes. (Cushman, 1995, p. 17)

After analyzing social constructivism and defending the idea previously stated in this thesis that the self is a mere construct, Cushman lands on a fascinating insight: “Because the dominant dynamic of our era is consumerism, the preeminence of the isolated, autonomous self is probably, somehow, both a consequence of that dynamic and a means of reinforcing and reproducing it” (Cushman, 1995, p.20). Cushman then reaffirms what I have been attempting to demonstrate through this study: that the idea of the self is widely propagated and disseminated through compliance with rules and social norms, power relations (that include issues related to gender, race and class), and the incessant and intense pursuit of happiness expressed through material goods such as new objects, foods, experiences, and the affirmation of unique identities that would make individuals feel special.

Cushman’s analysis is very much in line with the ideas of this thesis and I owe to him a great debt. His study on the construction of the self, or better said, the North American type of self that I intend to demonstrate to my reader that is peculiar to our continent was largely shaped by his research, and the following development in this study shall explain why. In chapter 2, this study aimed to demonstrate how “the self” evolved and took form from the perspective of ancient European thought up to the industrial revolution. We then analyzed how the “modern self” came to be and established itself as the center of gravity of the modern ethos of consumerism, progress, development, and technical and technological expertise. Cushman will add to this perspective by demonstrating how North American culture turned this perspective on “the self” into

something particularly its own, that he calls “the configuration of the white, bourgeois, self”.

Cushman explains how the configuration of the white, bourgeois self was crucial for psychotherapy to be adopted, and for the medicalization and psychologization of discourse to predominate. One might even affirm that the current oversaturation with the self is a by-product of the creation of the self. Cushman explains how the dichotomy created between European colonizers and indigenous peoples was also central to the formation of the self and the advent of consumeristic behaviour. In his own words, we can see how the capitalist order of supply and demand became a central ideological component to the formation of the narcissistic, consumeristic, and self-centered self, given that such order was propagated as a scientific truth, as if it were inherent to human nature, and not merely a discourse of power carefully crafted by those in positions of power:

The economic functions of the myth [*author’s note: of the white, bourgeois, self...*] were all the more influential because the dichotomy between the civilized, individualistic, entrepreneurial bourgeois and the savage, lazy, sexual, communal Native American (“the other”) was embedded in the ongoing confusion in America about the proper configuration of the white middle-class self. ... the nineteenth-century American bourgeois self was a self that was individualistic, hardworking, moralistic, frugal, and emotionally restricted. It was a self dedicated to the building of (its own version of) civilization and the taming of the wilderness through hard work, the postponement of gratification, and the calculated use of the labor (sic) of others. (Cushman, 1995, p. 61-62)

The specific characteristics of the white, hardworking, bourgeois self mentioned above, paved the foundations for the cult of personality. The cult of personality then led to the advent (and victory, considering that these are the predominant forms of public discourse in the contemporary world), of therapy, newspeak, and propaganda. It is precisely at this point that we shall see how the ideas of Freud and of his nephew, Edward

Bernays (1891-1995) were seminal in the construction of what I call the narcissistic self of the contemporary age. But we shall back up in time and continue to follow Cushman's analysis regarding the genesis of such configurations of the self, in order to offer my reader as much depth and understanding as possible.

Cushman argues that the dramatic changes in the cultural landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries caused immense moral dilemmas due to the "lack of guidance from tradition, the loss of religious certainty, and the effect of new business and social pressures combined to produce new personality traits" (Cushman, 1995, p 63). Cushman then argues that such new personality traits transformed into psychological symptoms on a psychosomatic level: an increased sense that reality was insecure and fleeting, therefore not worthy of attempting to control, and an increased sense of nihilism and alienation that has resulted in a worrisome increase in substance abuse, existential dread and despair. Cushman affirms that the elements above are an "eerie foreshadowing of the emptiness and narcissism of our current era" (Cushman, 1995, p.63).

I ask you to keep in mind that the scenario above is happening simultaneously in diverse cultural domains and social institutions. Ideologies were being shaped and propagated in the media, the news, schools, workplaces, art, and politics. It is important to keep in mind that despite seeming removed, ideological, or abstract, the ideas that shaped the contemporary world have real-life effects, and that, to a large extent, the ways in which we act, think, make decisions, etc. are a direct result of what is called social constructivism, by scholars such as Cushman, Hacking, and Foucault. There is truth in the old adage that states, "you are a product of your environment". At times, we are just

too immersed or too close to our reality to see the truth of concurring events: what is going on outside of us, and, quite paradoxically, within ourselves as well.

I make such affirmations because it is easy to dismiss ideas as removed, too philosophical, or tautologically “too ideal”. But the truth of the matter is that the self, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century was already shaped to become, in Cushman’s words, “lonely, undervalued, ‘unreal’, fragmented, diffuse, obsessed with gaining personal recognition, and lacking in guidance” (Cushman, 1996, p 67). It is paramount to also keep in sight that the “cure” to such fragmentation, alienation, separation, and detachment was simultaneously being developed and the idea that the individual could shift from believing that she was a citizen, to becoming a consumer, was taken seriously during that time period. Here is a brief anecdote that Cushman shares with his reader, that I believe is of value to demonstrate how the genesis of consumerism played a decisive role in shaping “the self”, *i.e.*, the narcissistic self: in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the habit of smoking was generally associated with masculinity, and despite not being strictly prohibited, it was frowned upon for women to smoke. Cushman affirms that to get women smoking cigarettes was one of the first accomplishments of modern advertising. The cigarette brand *Lucky Strike* began advertising cigarettes as a product that allowed women to have access to leisurely activities and sensuous experiences, therefore feeling empowered, free, sensual, and glamorous whence smoking.

In the documentary-series *The Century of the Self* (2002), British filmmaker Adam Curtis goes as far to demonstrate how early advertisement agencies consulted directly with Edward Bernays and requested him to analyze cigarettes in order to

transform them from strictly male products to also be consumed by women. Bernays allegedly stated that by possessing a phallic shape, cigarettes symbolized male empowerment, therefore, in order to convince women to consume them, advertisers would need to capitalize upon females' lack of phallus and convince women that they could achieve the same level of empowerment and strength and freedom that males possessed whence smoking cigarettes. Both Cushman and Curtis affirm that the advertisement campaign was highly successful, and that the number of women who began smoking increased drastically, and that women who already smoked safely continued to do so without any sense of shame, due to the normalization of women being allowed to smoke in public.

Cushman says that it was during this time period that the new self was established, solidified. He also states that from this period onwards, this concept of personality or selfhood became suspiciously similar with the way in which we currently understand the psychological concept of cultural narcissism. At this point, I believe it is important to define what narcissism is in a more direct manner, in order to demonstrate to my reader how the consumeristic, narcissistic, self-centered self is much in line with the consumeristic agenda that, as we have just seen, was created at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This definition will be crucial in order to understand the reasoning behind the development of the cult of personality and individuality that schools also partook in, assisting, in a decisive manner, with the creation of what henceforth I shall denominate "the consumeristic citizen".

According to Cushman (1995), the similarities between cultural narcissism and the consumeristic citizen begin with the qualities embodied by celebrities: magnetism,

beauty, public notability due to good looks, self-assuredness, self-centeredness, and self-absorption. Add to these characteristics a sense of being special or unique, attractiveness, and self-consciousness. Although often considered for removal from the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual of the American Psychological Association* (henceforth *DSM-V*), narcissism remains present in updated versions of the manual and, according to Cushman, is characterized by grandiose self-importance, fantasies of unlimited power and success, exhibitionism, feelings of rage or emptiness in response to criticism or indifference of others, entitlement, interpersonal exploitative-ness, overvaluation or strong devaluation of relationships and last but not least, lack of empathy (Cushman, 1995, p. 70).

Considering these elements in light of the current obsessiveness with self-promotion and excessive speech propagated through social media makes the point above clearer. A very specific type of self was created and its purpose has been reduced to finding ultimate existential solace in consuming goods for self-expression. However, such a consumeristic self fails to acknowledge that there are other selves, the selves of persons in positions of power and ownership that profit from creating and selling such goods, and the ultimate price that the consumeristic citizen pays is her lack of freedom and continuous feeling of emptiness.

Cushman argues that such “dis-ease” of the self (my choice to hyphenate) was created on purpose, and that the advent of popularized forms of psychology and even religion began to offer scientific advice in order to become popular, impress peers, achieve success, as if monetary success was the ultimate measure of the experience of being human. Complex psychological concepts such as psyche, therapy, subconscious, mindfulness, etc., began to appear more in the popular lexicon, and as result,

sociohistorical, cultural, and philosophical aspects of behaviour and mental health were gradually substituted by the individualization and medicalization of psychological discourse. The suppression of the sociohistorical aspects of human behaviour in favour of a medical perspective favoured the commercialization of psychology and of approved medical practices and activities that, from this period onwards, benefited immensely those who were in positions of power, *i.e.*, in the medical industry. The mental health industry and the corporate business environment were therefore inherently tied to each other and the stage was set for the advent and predominance of newspeak and advertisement.

Psychologists forged alliances with corporations that, in return, enhanced their means of manipulating consumers, solidifying the habits of the consumeristic citizen and also consolidating its control over the workplace. As we have seen above, through the example of the cigarette company, *Lucky Strike's* successful usage of profound psychological concepts in order to make it acceptable for women to smoke their products in social settings, the alliance between psychology and the marketplace was irrevocable, therefore generating advertisement of products (henceforth simply “advertisement” or “marketing”) as more than a sales tactic or mechanism: it became a fundamental element of our societal ethos.

Cushman (1995) affirms that “New fields such as advertising and psychology have responded to and further developed the new configuration of the empty self”, but failed to address the historical, philosophical, and sociological reasoning behind the empty self. Instead they promise to heal such emptiness through mere consumerism which, given pop culture’s main focus on consumeristic habits and the increased

emphasis on showing yourself constantly happy, charismatic, and content, in detriment to having difficult conversations and facing the existential void inherent to the human condition, led to an increase in narcissistic behaviours. Cushman explains the ingeniousness of advertisement and consumerism's roles in fulfilling the narcissist's life thusly:

Advertising certainly does not address itself to the underlying causes of the customer's problems (for example, alienating or uncertain employment, loneliness, loss of community); instead it turns to the refuge of what I will refer to as *the lifestyle solution* (italics in original). Because advertising is unable to effect lasting change by developing political solutions to the problems of modern life, its cures are illusory cures. (Cushman, 1995, p. 81).

"The Lifestyle Solution" is a theory that professor Cushman encountered to express the vainglorious behaviour of the narcissist, who attempts to transform his life because life is always unsatisfying, and ultimately realizes that it is better to possess the illusion of change through the consumption of objects and experiences, instead of actually engaging with the murkiness and difficulty inherent to actual societal change. Such behaviour manifests itself through the illusion of having commodities instantaneously through spending money that one does not possess (credit), or through the obsessive habit of registering experiences such as dining or travelling and exposing oneself to the world at large on social media. Add to these the cult of sexuality and the usage of sexuality, in particular of the female body, to sell products, or the creation of patterns of beauty and attractiveness to market to consumers, who in turn should be driven to consume once faced with their inadequacy, incompleteness, or unattractiveness.

In this section, I hope to have demonstrated how the alliance between psychology and corporate ideology assisted with the establishment of a certain kind of self, which is consumeristic, empty, and self-centered: the narcissistic self. I am well aware that at first

glance, these ideas might seem a tad abstract, distant, and removed from empirical reality. Not even the example of *Lucky Strike* might be enough to convince a certain type of reader who might be more pragmatic, scientifically-minded or in search of evidence. In defense of my thesis, however, I must reaffirm the blatant reality in which these ideas are rooted in, and I shall also demonstrate how education had a crucial role in planting the seed, developing, and establishing the narcissistic self, as we shall see in the following section.

3.4. The Education of Selves: The Myth of Self-Esteem and the Narcissistic Curriculum

The alliance between psychology and advertising led to the creation of the field of public relations which, in turn, expanded into marketing and advertisement. In broad strokes, public relations became a field of inquiry utilized in organizations as diverse as businesses, public agencies such as government bureaus and even schools. Although not going into much detail regarding Edward Bernays's influence in the creation of public relations in this study, it is pertinent to highlight the fact that both Cushman (1995) and Curtis (2002) widely regard Bernays as the "father of public relations". As I have analyzed in the previous section, Bernays utilized his uncle Sigmund Freud's ideas in order to develop marketing strategies: by capitalizing on the inherent existential void, businesses could incite consumers to surpass their boredom, emptiness, and ordinariness, offering us an opportunity to feel special through the high we get from obtaining objects, experiences, or emotions, but yet failing to recognize and problematize how aprioristically curated and mass produced such cultural artifacts, or objects and foods, really are.

It seems safe to affirm that the field of public relations had its origin deeply connected with consumerist culture, or more blatantly put, capitalistic ideology. Concurrently, marketers formed alliances with psychologists, therefore propitiating an increase in medical discourse and scientific ambitions that psychology, as a discipline with scientific ambitions, partook in. The problem increases when we consider the role that psychology has had in influencing education and schooling and curriculum design from a period as early as the twentieth century up to today. According to Canadian Educational Psychologists Jack Martin and Ann-Marie McLellan (2013), psychology's influence on education goes hand in hand with its increased scientific aspirations and its drifting away from its status as a social or human science, such as history, philosophy, arts, or education. "It is the widespread acceptance of the scientific status of psychology and its applications in education that we consider the key to understanding how psychology changed students during the twentieth century" (Martin and McLellan, 2013, p. 3).

Martin and McLellan are also adamant that the influence of disciplinary psychology has also shaped and influenced the ways in which students were trained to become more attuned to their own interests, increasingly self-aware and self-directed, to the detriment of their responsibility towards communal participation. In the important book entitled *The Education of Selves: How Psychology Transformed Students* (2013), the authors offer an invaluable framework that supports the main argument of this thesis, *i.e.*, that the narcissistic, individualistic, monolithic, self-sufficient, and consumeristic self is a typically North American creation, and that it has developed in a manifold way: potential positive outcomes being high levels of confidence, motivation and stronger

sense of self, potential negative outcomes being maladjustment to communal living, and excessive self-interest and increased absorption into self. The alliance between psychology, advertising, and schooling might seem as a stretch at a first glance, however, as I have argued in chapter 1 of this thesis, there are diverse cultural elements that shape our personalities (selfhood), conversations (cultural history, art, news, etc.), beliefs (religiosity and participation in religious institutions), and ways of being (ontological and existential understanding of life and its multitudes). Much in line with Cushman's (1995) approach to criticizing psychology from a historical perspective (which turns out to also be a sociological, philosophical and, more specifically, ethical critique), Martin and McLellan (2013) acknowledge that as public social institutions, schools possess a fundamental role in shaping selves.

It is often said that schools are responsible for reproducing the existing culture, therefore shaping values, personalities, beliefs, etc. According to Martin and McLellan (2013), social revisionists from the 1960s and 1970s often affirmed that schools were responsible for social regulation and control, therefore exercising power over racial minorities and the urban poor. Utilizing a Foucauldian approach to their analysis, the authors acknowledge that in addition to performing such regulatory and reproductive roles, schools are also places where selves are shaped as a construct that is result of the often contradictory and conflicting goals established by educators, and such goals might often be resisted or embraced.

The scenario described above was propitious for disciplinary psychology to emerge as a highly influential technology of the self in Western culture. As I have analyzed in chapter 1 of this thesis, coming from a working class family of Portuguese

immigrants, my schooling was of the essence to shape who I am, and allied with the contingencies that struck my experience as a human being attempting to thrive, create meaning, and live life in the best manner possible, my educational experience was arguably the most decisive element of my life, given that the philosophical, literary, educational conversations, readings, and research I took part in influenced my way of being and my worldview in ways that only the power of hindsight can allow me to acknowledge. This is to illustrate how the social institution of schools is a powerful technology of the self. In a series of seminars regarding selfhood, published as *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault describes such technologies thusly:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

According to Foucault⁹, social institutions assist in shaping ways of being and types of subjectivity in order to allow us to make sense of, create and recreate ourselves. At the core of his philosophy of the self is an aesthetic preoccupation with the techniques we utilize to self-fashion, and with the sensibilities and attitudes acquired. In sum, the main point here is that such technologies of the self are also responsible for educating us, therefore also possessing a pedagogical dimension. Foucault's philosophy has much to offer to the conversation regarding the influence of education and schooling from a cultural and historical perspective that Martin and McLellan (2013) partake in. Before you ask how could a contemporary, deconstructionist, French philosopher be relevant to

⁹ Please cf.: Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, 1975/1995; and Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Vintage, 1963/1994.

the understanding of the construction of a specifically North American type of narcissist, we must bear in mind that, in *Technologies of the Self* (1988), the organizers of the seminar offer a first-hand account in which they affirm that Foucault told them that his own project on the self was suggested, or inspired, by a reading of Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979). The point here being that a North American cultural critic's account of the problem of this typically North American self was the starting point for Foucault's now notorious genealogical investigation of the self that constituted the last major theme in his overall philosophical project.

Martin and McLellan then affirm, utilizing a Foucauldian framework to analyze the issue at hand, that in liberal societies, common practices and social conventions that diagonally relate to education, such as child rearing, doing business, military training or even the development of personal relations, produce technological ways of thinking, feeling, acting autonomously and with virtuosity but, conversely, such practices do not teach one to oppose powers of influence over subjectivity. Therefore, the freedom to practice the self and to shape it as one wishes, or as one fashions oneself, may risk becoming inherently subservient and docile, being tame instead of emancipated. Another risk to selves, according to Martin and McLellan (2013) is that often the self has become a mere commodity for commercial and political interests: "The irony is that in pursuing individual freedom we may adopt technologies of the self that actually reduce our freedom" (Martin & McLellan, 2013, p. 13). The example of all the controversies that Facebook is currently involved in fits well in this scenario: by advertising to consumers that by joining their social platform, they would be more connected, communally-oriented, and knowledgeable, the advertising company made a huge profit from selling

personal data and content produced for free by its users, to the extent that it sold users' personal data to think tanks and companies that analyze political data in order to manipulate advertisement¹⁰, therefore reducing freedom.

The scenario described above goes hand in hand with the advent and increase of influence that the “new psychology” had in education. As a powerful technology of the self that supports selves, and trains and educates selves, psychology became an instrument of human management and, in Martin and McLellan’s view, particularly from 1950 onwards, psychology shifted education and schooling from the ideals of active contribution to the development of life in community towards rampant individualism, and inward-ways of looking at selfhood that therefore resulted in making students “increasingly expressive, strategic, and entrepreneurial in pursuit of their own self-interest” (Martin & McLellan, 2013, p. 15). They also acknowledge that, despite also possessing aspects from Romanticism and the Enlightenment, this psychologized version of the self, ultimately, is in service of its own gratification.

Martin and McLellan also argue that certain practices and theories of mainstream psychology were fundamental to shape the narcissistic, decontextualized individualism in North America from the 1950s/1960s onwards. Amongst such practices, they enlist self-report measures, information-processing flowcharts, and behavioural observation and analysis, with the intent of reducing persons to selves that could, hypothetically, be reduced to the ways in which they function and respond to stimulus, as if they were mere

¹⁰ Cf.: Granville, 2018. *Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: What you Need to Know as Fallout Widens*. In: **The New York Times**, March 19, 2018.

animals, such as rats in a laboratory. Consequently, the majority of research conducted by mainstream psychologists increasingly influenced educational psychologists¹¹, theorists, practitioners, and policy-makers, resulting in an increase of the presence of terms, ideologies, and practices such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-regulation, and self-efficacy, to the detriment of the authentic self, which is only possible, I shall argue in chapter 4, in a setting in which selves can partake in communal traditions, practices, and ways of being with others. The advent of the expressive self and of the managerial self were the result of social and psychological pressures that educational institutions suffered in order to increasingly contribute to the personal development of students. The issue being that the ways in which schooling and curriculum design favoured the hybrid expressive-managerial self, resulted in the solidification of the masterful, independent, narcissistic self, excluding the idea of selves as communal agents. The result of this movement, according to Martin and McLellan (2013), Pajak (2012) and Hewitt (1998), for example, was the subsequent development of self-esteem as an educational goal.

At first glance, one might argue that to possess self-esteem is a positive trait. Early research gathered by the likes of Martin and McLellan (2013), Dr. Edward Pajak (2011), and the American professor of sociology, Dr. John Hewitt (1998), for instance, indicate that there was a widespread belief amongst educational theorists, psychologists, and teachers that thinking positively about oneself led people to live happier, seek healthy habits, and to be more productive (the word “productive”, here, obviously tied to the aforementioned capitalist agenda, in which selves are shaped to produce within the

¹¹ Please *cf.*: Martin & McLellan, *The Education of Selves*, 2013; with particular emphasis on chapter 2, entitled *The Self Before and After Psychology: The Transformation Begins*.

context of market exchange). To the traits above, theorists also added the language of cultural identity and social justice. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem or regard could develop negative traits and behaviours such as depression, anxiety, stress, and lack of meaningful roles in life. All of the researchers above have done extensive research and seem to indicate that there is not enough evidence to suggest that the boosting of self-esteem through therapeutic practices, particularly in school programs, might cause any benefits to students. However, all of the aforementioned theorists claim and provide enough evidence to support the thesis that such paradigm shift in thinking and practicing pedagogy, led to an increase in the narcissistic traits that I argue, are typically North American values that, alongside many other North American material products, have also been exported throughout the world (often branded as *Americanization* or *McDonaldization* of the world).

William Pinar (2012) also joins the chorus of scholars who claim that in North America, educators have suffered from the predicament of *functionality* in educational theory and curriculum development, to the extent that the curriculum (in a broad sense) became inherently linked to the economic facet of societal exchanges. Such approach (the pragmatist implementation of functionality into learning), resulted in an increased sense that education and schooling were a mere process from means to end, *i.e.*, students would need to produce or reproduce knowledge, and be given a score generally through standardized tests¹².

¹² Besides William Pinar's 2012 speech entitled *Allegories of the Present: Curriculum Development in a Culture of Narcissism and Presentism* (Presented at University of Tallinn, Estonia, in 2011), please also *cf.*: Kincheloe, *Knowledge and Critical Pedagogy: An Introduction* (2008), particularly

Even John Dewey's (1859-1952) early experiments at the University of Chicago have famously contributed to the foundations of the North American narcissistic curriculum, *i.e.*, the curriculum centered on self-esteem. Despite often seen as a departure from traditional educational aims, due to his emphasis on children's play and own interests, Dewey was arguably concerned with achieving some balance between course content and learner interest, and therefore between self interest and benefitting the community-at-large. The issue with Dewey's philosophy, as one might see in *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), is that the safeguarding of the child's self-esteem and self-interests precludes and overpowers involvement in community and the ethical obligation towards others. Dewey was often accused of being too academic, or too theoretical in his analyses of curriculum, educational institutions, and schooling processes and intricacies, however, it is undeniable, as I commonly like to counterargue whence accused of being too abstract or idealistic, that Dewey's work was highly influential in all branches of education (administration, theorists, teachers, psychologists, policy makers, etc.). Pajak (2011) explains, quite extemporaneously, the outcome of Dewey's ideology:

Many strategies commonly used in schools to boost student self-esteem, however, may actually contribute to narcissism by fostering a preoccupation with self and appearance and by encouraging students to feel good about themselves as an end in itself. Teachers should instead strive to help students attain an "optimum self esteem" (Katz, 1995, p.5) that is based on actual accomplishments. Rather than relying on slogans or constant messages about how wonderful they are for simply existing, optimum self-esteem can be achieved by treating students respectfully, along with their views, opinions and preferences, which can be brought to bear on choices and decisions that matter to them. Praise should be linked to concrete achievements that take significant effort, not to trivial tasks. (Pajak, 2011, p.2039).

Pajak is correct in his evaluation of pedagogical practices and theories, and as a scholar involved in pedagogy, working in schools often as a teacher, researcher, and at

the concept of FIDUROD (Formal, Intractable, Decontextualized, Universalistic, Reductionistic, One-Dimensional), p. 21-24.

times in administrative duties, I can first-handedly affirm that the viewpoint expressed in the citation above is true. Martin and McLellan (2013) make a fair point when they affirm that such measures cited by Pajak (2011), such as self-concepts, self-esteem, purposeful and self-striving individuality, marks a concept of personhood that lacks any sociohistorical, critical situation of what the self really is, how it should operate, or what an actual good, ethical practice for the self would look like. And such configuration of the narcissistic self is typically North American, and became more popular in North American culture more than anywhere else in the world, due to the fact that the concept of self-esteem alone appeals, as I have affirmed in chapter 1, to the Smithian ideal of capitalistic self-reliance: work hard, pull yourself up, be good, and you shall be entitled to your place in the sun.

Hewitt argues in *The Myth of Self-Esteem: Finding Happiness and Solving Problems in America* (1998) that the concept of self-esteem is also detrimental because it distracts from social inequality, putting the onus on individual initiative and effort, disregarding the larger social order. As a person raised within a working-class family of Portuguese immigrants, who somehow became the only member of the family to raise through the ranks of academia, I used to believe in meritocracy. I personally believed that because I worked hard, studied, read and wrote a lot during my free time, that my personal effort would lead me to succeed. What I failed to acknowledge, as I have analyzed in depth in chapter 1, was that being a Canadian-born, white man, was largely responsible for the opportunities I was offered in Brazilian academia, and to some extent, after returning to Canada, in my home country as well.

I believe this to be a good example of what Hewitt (1998) means above: meritocracy is a myth based on the principle of self-esteem, *i.e.*, on the concept of the narcissistic, self-sufficient self that could and should thrive alone in the world, through his/her own efforts. I want to emphasize how much such ideology is deeply rooted in the logic of capitalism, as we may see exemplified well in this exemplary citation by Martin and McLellan:

Americans and Canadians live in a social world that emphasizes the right to pursue personal goals and interests and advocates individual responsibility for personal decisions and actions. In the education system, these values permeate most pedagogical practices, including those intended to enhance communal ideals such as social responsibility and to help students master curriculum content. (...) In other words, the classic tension in liberal democratic societies between individual and social ends is resolved by effectively treating others as means to one's social satisfaction and success. (Martin & McLellan, 2013, p. 79)

The commodification of human relationships is not necessarily a novelty in cultural and academic discourse, and it is not only the fault of students. Often, by analyzing student behaviour and top-bottom pedagogical practices, theorists have a tendency to over focus on one side of the issue, *i.e.*, the students, and what teaching does to teachers is often forgotten. In a groundbreaking 2012 article in which he revisits sociologist Willard Waller's *Sociology of Teaching*, Edward Pajak introduces the concept of *narcissistic pedagogy* that focuses on the needs of the teacher (particularly the need for admiration). Pajak argues that narcissism, or self-centeredness, can't be taught to students from the perspective of altruistic teachers, psychologists, or policy makers. The culture of narcissism we are currently immersed in is result of a generational ethos passed on from teachers to students. As example, Pajak affirms that teachers will often experience classroom relations and view students as an extension of themselves, rather than independent beings, with their own dynamic motivations and acts. Martin and McLellan (2013) will acknowledge, for instance, utilizing a Foucauldian framework of

analysis, that there aren't studies or directions that might clarify or make a convincing case regarding the dynamic between the pressure on student self-regulation and the teacher's self-regard, and often the issue of transference is seen merely as a strategic or manipulative mean of socialization in which students are indoctrinated to believe in self-sufficiency.

I conclude my analysis of this dynamic between the narcissistic teacher and the narcissistic student for the time being. For now, it shall suffice to identify the problem. In this section, I offered an overview of how self-esteem and narcissism, allied to capitalistic ideology, became dominant discourses in North American education from the twentieth century onwards, resulting in what we today call *the culture of narcissism*, in which we are so obsessed with the capitalistic tenets of aprioristic selfishness, consumption, gratification, and immediatism, that we have been gradually undermining our roles as ethical, communal beings.

It is my hope that the brief historical, sociological, psychological, and philosophical survey of the issue above will help my reader see the issue with more clarity. In the next section, I would like to offer my reader a reinterpretation of *The Myth of Narcissus and Echo*, which is a story in the chapter entitled *The Wrath of Juno*, in Ovid's classic work *Metamorphoses* (8 AD original, 2004 English translation by Bernard Knox). My work in revisiting the myth aims to deconstruct the psychological and cultural discourse surrounding narcissism as a dis-ease of the self, and to demonstrate how the story offers a perennial message that urges us to be communally oriented beings. Such rereading of the myth turns out to be necessary due to the fact that the current culture of narcissism has generated educational relations that are often sanitized, apathetic,

technical-relational, and exploitative to the detriment of what Alexander Sidorkin (1999), for instance, considers the most important aspects of teaching as a relational act: the dialogical expression of internal complexity, the cherishing of plurality and use of time for actual reflection, a renewed sense of humility and respect that has little to no place in the culture of greed, triviality, sleazy sexuality, ironic detachment, cynicism, and consumerism we are immersed in. For now, we shall return to the ancient myth and hopefully, be able to demonstrate how we are, in fact, communal selves, and how this new understanding, or paradigm if you will, plays out in education and schooling.

3.5. Reclaiming the Myth of Narcissus and Echo

Thus far, in this chapter, we have seen that the self is a social and cultural construct, which in turn results in a series of ethical and moral issues. Owing to the fact that the self is socially constructed, it may also be manipulated. We also saw how Freud's ideas were highly influential in the construction of the North American type of self, *i.e.*, the narcissistic self. Subsequently, we also did a brief survey of the historical origins of public relations and propaganda, which is a field of study created by Freud's own nephew, Edward Bernays, largely by reinterpreting and using his uncle's psychoanalytic theories. Through the lens of critical history as a method of interpretation, we saw how the typically North American type of self established itself culturally and became a norm to the extent that it infiltrated education and schooling, becoming a technology of the self widely responsible for manipulating individuals accordingly with the tenets of capitalism, *i.e.*, of legitimized forms of institutionalized exploitation of human relations and needs for the profit of the owners and creators of products that shall appease basic human existential anxiety.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to challenge the psychologization and medicalization of discourses surrounding the dis-ease of the self. This is not to say that psychology and medicine do not possess value in themselves: they do. Many advancements in human development and well-being come from scientific findings that medical researchers and psychologists have developed. However, the predominance of the aforementioned discourses to the detriment of the benefits of the sociological, historical, critical, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions of the human experience have profited few practitioners and industry conglomerates in their respective fields, and at times, have created segregated spaces for treatment of issues that, at times, are illnesses that go beyond a chemical imbalance in the brain, or low blood sugar, because the experience of being alive and human and inserted in culture is also permeated by a veil of mystery that surpasses the ambitions and pretenses of sheer rationality and scientism. The inclusion and subsequent challenge and constant threat to remove narcissism from the *DSM-V*, for example, suggests that rampant self-centeredness or grandiosity, as narcissism is understood these days, cannot be treated within a medical perspective. This might also suggest that narcissism is a cultural uneasiness which justifies, I might add, my choice to hyphenate dis-ease throughout this thesis.

But if narcissism is not an actual disease that may be treated with scientifically-based behavioural therapy or medicine, what is narcissism? I would argue that narcissism is a cultural uneasiness, and that the myth of Narcissus and Echo has been largely misread for the purposes of creating a type of discourse that would be of easy assimilation within public discourse. With the above in mind, I now invite the reader to reinterpret and reimagine the myth of Narcissus and Echo. I believe it is necessary to

revisit the ancient story in order to reclaim it for what it is: a perennial warning inherited to us from ancient culture. A warning regarding the dangers of inaction.

Firstly, we shall revisit the elements that the *DSM-V* utilized to describe *narcissistic personality disorder*: grandiose sense of self-importance, preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love; belief in the uniqueness of oneself, need for excessive admiration, sense of entitlement, use of other people to one's own advantage, lack of empathy, envy, and arrogance. In a broad sense, these are all terrible elements that no one would admit to being aligned with, which is in itself an issue: how can such abstract notions such as the elements enlisted in the *DSM-V* be quantified, measured, and cured? Most importantly: our minds are hardwired to hide from ourselves that we might possess some of the elements above. This brings to mind Nietzsche's critique of the primacy of Western rationality above the remaining elements of the human experience: how can human rationality advocate for itself and put itself at the core as most valuable element? In sum, the creed that narcissism is grandiosity and self-centeredness is a defense mechanism, which in turn results in us being lied to by ourselves. This, therefore, contributes to a culture in which, according to Tolentino (2019), we are immersed in, acts of self-delusion and trickery, because we fool ourselves and also fool others.

I will now analyze how the myth of Narcissus became the main symbol for the (aforementioned) default setting of self-centeredness and selfishness in North American cultural discourse. By looking closely at this story, I hope to challenge the current understanding of the myth, and to provide the reader with the tools to reclaim the usage

of the term narcissism in a historical, literary, and cultural context, free from the clinical, medical, DSM-V discourses.

In book 3 of the *Metamorphosis*, entitled *The Wrath of Juno*, Ovid's narrator tells the story of a sixteen-year-old who seemed to be both boy and man. The story begins with the affirmation that Narcissus yielded such radiant beauty, that men and women desired him. Narcissus, however, was inflexible and proud, and no man or woman ever moved him. Under the title *Narcissus and Echo*, the story seems to begin with its solution being foreshadowed: Narcissus was doomed to failure, because he was simply incapable of loving others in return. What several scholars and mythologists miss, however, is that Narcissus is actually introduced in the story before *The Myth of Narcissus and Echo*, entitled *The Judgement of Tiresias*. At the very end of this myth, the sky-blue nymph Liriope gives birth to Narcissus. Admiring how adorable her progeny was, Liriope asks the prophet Tiresias if her son would live to ripe old age. Tiresias simply responded: "If he knows himself – not" (Ovid, 2004, p. 104).

Now, we shall return to the main story, centered on Narcissus. After rejecting several lovers, one rejected lover became so furious with Narcissus that he begged the goddess Nemesis: "May he himself love as I have loved him ... without obtaining his beloved" (Ovid, 2004, p. 106). Nemesis, the goddess of justice and balance (and not vengeance or retribution, as is commonly understood)¹³, abode by the prayer and led Narcissus to fall in love with the image he saw when he looked into a pool of water. However, as we all know, Narcissus sat staring at the image forever, in the hopes that the

¹³ Please cf.: *Hymn to Nemesis*, by Mesomedes. The reader shall see there that Nemesis was revered in Ancient Greece, as the goddess of justice, just measure, balance and order.

image someday would love him back. The story is generally understood as Narcissus not being able to love others because he was in love with himself. Theorists, commentators, and mythologists often miss the realization that Narcissus was in fact *punished* by Nemesis: he fell in love with his own image as punishment *because* he was incapable of loving others. The most important element of the myth consists in understanding Tiresias' prophecy: what could not knowing oneself mean?

In Greek mythology, prophecies are often acted upon and generally result in a tragic ending because of how they were misinterpreted. A famous example is the Myth of Oedipus: when Laius and Jocasta were told that their own son Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother, they pinned him and abandoned him in a forest. In comparison, after hearing Tiresias' prophecy regarding Narcissus, it is safe to assume that Liriope and Cephisus went to extreme lengths to assure that Narcissus did not get to know himself, to the extent that he did not recognize his own image in the pool of water. Narcissus was arguably shielded from the challenges of day to day life in order to be protected from knowing himself. Narcissus remained inactive, staring at his own image in vain. At the end of the story, after successive attempts to reach out to the image in the pool, Narcissus realizes that he was foolishly in love with himself, and was attempting in vain to reach out to himself. This realization lead Narcissus to finally know his true self and to die, transforming into a flower with white petals and a saffron-coloured center, therefore materializing Tiresias' prophecy and becoming ultimately immobile, numb, and

paralyzed. One might argue that there is a relation between Narcissus' ultimate fate and depressive tendencies¹⁴.

In the classic study *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) explains that the root of the Greek word from which the name Narcissus comes from is the same as the words *narcosis* and *numbness*. In chapter premonitorily entitled *The Gadget Lover*, McLuhan explains how the point of the myth is the danger of persons becoming fascinated with extensions of themselves and becoming enamoured with such extensions. I have developed this argument elsewhere¹⁵: the real dangers of our obsession with excessive self-care, self-regard, and self-esteem reside in the potential for us to remain inactive, put our own interests before others, as if we were only concerned with ourselves.

The real point of the Myth of Narcissus and Echo, I assert, is contrary to the way the myth is incorrectly understood in the modern self-oriented era: we cannot know ourselves or we will die such as Narcissus died, and we shall not pursue self-knowledge at all costs because, as a result, we would incur in the exclusion of the other. We need others. We are an interdependent species and our self-concept is largely constructed through the eyes of others, through our interactions, communal living, sharing of common traditions, ideas, knowledge development, etc. Hence the importance of Nemesis in the story. Nemesis led Narcissus to his destiny, therefore completing the

¹⁴ For a detailed literary analysis of the relation between depressive behaviours and self-centeredness, please cf.: Wallace, **The Depressed Person**, In: *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men: Stories*, Little, Brown, 1999, p. 37-69.

¹⁵ Please cf.: Carreiro. *Social Media Has Us Rapt with Our Own Reflections*. In: **Vancouver Sun**, Aug. 27th, 2012, p. A9.

cycle: Narcissus' self-reflection does not lead to understanding or wisdom or self-knowledge, but to paralysis first, and ultimately, after realizing that he had remained paralyzed by his love of his self, the realization lead to his death.

Understood as a primordial myth, particularly in psychoanalytical circles, the myth of Narcissus is a representation of the enigma of human subjectivity and addresses a series of behaviours and attitudes to which we are bound, as they are inherent to our mysterious condition. In addition to the above, the myth or story also serves a pedagogical purpose more than a medical or psychological one. Ancient Greeks told these stories as meditations and case studies, and not as ethical or moral prescriptions. The myth of Narcissus is the story, the meditation, or the call for us to not be numb or narcotized. It is a call for us to be communal, to be capable of loving one another, and to be able to navigate the complexity of human relations because we need to navigate such relations in order to make sense of who we are. The myth of Narcissus and Echo is not, I must reaffirm, simply a myth about self-love. It is a warning about the paralysis inherent to only loving thyself.

In the following chapter, I will make the case that we are communal selves: more interdependent than we would normally like to acknowledge, and I will offer a survey of contemporary alternative theories regarding what a "communal self" might look like. Such incursion is a natural development of our historical inquiry into the shifts of the concept of self and its social implications. In chapter 5, I will discuss how this new shift towards communal selves is being implemented, and I will analyze, with particular interest in educational institutions, the benefits and potential pitfalls of communal being. Ultimately, I will argue that the unknowability of the human condition and the need for

interconnectedness are the core of the human experience and need to be more openly discussed and attended to, in order to propitiate meaningful lives for all, particularly given the existential framework I have analyzed at the beginning of this chapter. Life is ultimately a short and worthwhile endeavour, and living a wholesome and fulfilling life is a matter of human rights. We must learn to live with our uncertain condition and essential ignorance about ourselves, relating with the exterior and generating meaning because ultimately, utter and complete knowledge of oneself can only come with death, as Argentine poet Jorge Luís Borges says in his final poem, *In Praise of Darkness*:

(...) I reach my center
my algebra and my key,
my mirror.
Soon I will know who I am.

(Borges, 1969).

Chapter 4.

Communal Selves

4.1. What Are Communal Selves?

Thus far, this thesis demonstrated that, despite being inherently mysterious, the nature of being has been determined by social constructivism. In chapter 1, I demonstrated diverse perspectives regarding what constitutes a singular type of self, by sharing personal anecdotes regarding my own perception of the issue in order to prepare the reader for the theoretical frameworks utilized in chapter 2. Chapter 2 demonstrates, through a critical-historical, sociological, philosophical, and psychological perspective, the development of concepts of selfhood from Ancient Greece up to modernity and the industrial revolution. The goal of such theoretical incursion was to demonstrate what Canadian-British psychologist Bruce Hood (2012) calls “the self illusion”: that what we think is more influenced by the environment that surrounds us than we would like to admit, and that the activity in our brain creates sense and stories based on our experiences, because we cannot have direct contact with reality as is, therefore being shaped by what he calls “the social brain” (Hood, 2012, Kindle Location 161).

After demonstrating how the concept of self evolved from a community-oriented perspective in Ancient Greece towards a theocentric paradigm in the Middle Ages, and subsequently towards a turn inwards in modernity, in Chapter 3, I demonstrated how the concept of self was fashioned in a unique manner in the North American social imaginary. Such North American type of self was influenced and shaped by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and had as its most powerful allies publicity,

propaganda, and newspeak, in order to establish itself as propagator of the neoliberal agenda. The ideologies that inform consumerism, exploitation, and economic transactions thusly became cemented as the main ethos of North American selfhood since the late nineteenth century. I then discuss how this type of self has culminated in the narcissistic self, who is extremely self-centered, consumeristic, and shallow. I demonstrated that at its conception, the narcissistic self claimed to be ethical, *i.e.*, we were led to believe that, in order to take good care of others, we must firstly take good care of ourselves. Based on the Smithian principle of selfish altruism, such concept of the self backfired, culminating in excessive self-love (Blackburn, 2014; Cushman, 1995; Hewitt, 1998).

Consequentially, there was an increase in mental and behavioural disorders that apparently originated from excessive preoccupation with the self, and discourses regarding self-centeredness became increasingly medicalized and psychologized (Cushman, 1995; Martin and McLellan, 2013). This scenario became alarming to the extent that the most prominent North American researcher in the field, Jean Twenge, claimed that our culture suffers from a narcissism epidemic (Twenge, 2006; 2010). I then proceeded to trouble the primacy of medical and psychological discourse and demonstrate that, despite indeed living in an age of rampant self-centeredness, we could benefit from distancing from medical and psychological discourses and instead understand the issue from a complex, cultural-critical-historical perspective. I then argue that narcissism is not a disease *per se*, being, conversely, a dis-ease, *i.e.*, a discomfort or uneasiness that could perhaps be cured should we shift our exaggerated focus from self-love towards outward, communal living. In order to achieve such a feat, we must, however, begin by reframing the self from a communal perspective.

Martin and McLellan (2013) argue that educational psychologists erred when they framed the self as an isolated entity, attributing to it primacy over our inherent communality as social beings. The authors state that instead of bemoaning the narcissistic traits of our culture, we could, to the contrary, educate a generation of student-citizens that would be more closely connected to their surroundings and to the other citizens that partake in society with them. Martin and McLellan (2013) name this process the education of communal agents.

American psychologist Kenneth Gergen (2009) adds to the chorus of scholars who believe that we are, in fact, communal selves (Appiah, 2006; Bastien, 2004; Beam, 2018; Blackburn, 2014; Cajete, 1994; Campbell, 2010, *et al.*). Gergen states that it would be necessary to begin the transformative process by eliminating the dualism between inner and outer worlds within the context of selfhood studies. The author then says that we must develop an understanding of what selves are, but as selves that are in relation with others, therefore creating a theory of relationality as the core element of selfhood studies. Gergen (2009) also states that relationality is a concept of embodied action, therefore removing the primacy of self-centeredness and installing in its place, as a foundational ethical and moral principle, the primacy of relationships as a starting point in selfhood studies.

In sum, a communal self would begin by coming to know itself primarily through its relations with others: we are imbricated within our web of relations first, and “recognition of this basic fact of human existence has significant moral, political, and pedagogical implications” (Martin and McLellan, 2013). This does not implicate the erasure of the self, however. Nor does it implicate an overtly romanticized or glorified

apologia of communities. To glorify outward communitarianism would be to incur in the same mistake as prizing self-love as foundation of the self. The communal self, as I will demonstrate in the next section regarding the state of the art in communal selfhood studies, honours its individuality while still being an ethical agent in relation to the community it is a member of, recognizing that it exists in relation.

4.2. State of the Art of Research on the Communal Self

As we have previously seen, the ways in which selfhood was historically conceived was determined by the paradigms that shaped the social imaginary of determined historical periods. We began with a community-oriented self (cosmo-centric) in Ancient Greece, moved on towards a self concerned with individual salvation in the Middle Ages (theo-centrism), and finally arrived at a self-aware, modern self (logocentrism). It can be argued that the most important philosophical paradigm of the contemporary age should inform how we live well with each other, how to preserve the environment, and how to develop sustainable ways towards a better future. If we accept the premise above, we may also accept that the current paradigm, or overarching idea that informs the social imaginary of the self, is ethics.

Gergen (2009) attributes to McMurray and Levinas¹⁶ the inspiration to search for the theoretical foundations of the ethical self, *i.e.*, the self in relation. According to the philosophies of McMurray and Levinas, individual subjectivity cannot be independent from others. Gergen (2009) states that if we accept this, then the self can only be a self in

¹⁶ Scottish philosopher John McMurray (1891-1976), and Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995).

relation. He also says that, despite not believing in utopias, he does believe that schooling and culture, in a general sense, need to be reoriented towards relationality, *i.e.*, reoriented towards the acknowledgement and the recognition that we are communal selves. This reorientation might consequentially result in a stronger, clearer understanding of the ways in which we could coexist from an ethical and moral standpoint.

Given that the current immersion of selfhood studies into perspectives regarding the communal self is relatively new, the present chapter aims to summarize the main characteristics that constitute the communal self, offering a sample of the current research in selfhood studies that are searching for a definitive framework for communal living, beginning with finding ways to teach first what it looks like to be a communal being. I arrived at these five elements by noting that they were recurrent in diverse sources during my research process. Analyzing trends in educational theory, cultural studies, and educational institutions, I have concluded that five potential attributes of the communal self are: a) dissolved, b) relational, c) divided, d) ethical, and lastly, e) other. I will now proceed to demonstrate what a dissolved self, a relational self, a dividual, an ethical self, and a self as others mean, and how they might be the key elements in order to assist in creating theoretical frameworks that can be the foundation of the communal self, therefore offering a reorientation towards communal living, while still honouring individuality.

4.3. The Dissolved Self

According to Sorabji (2006), the concept of self is more relevant, or central, in some cultures than in others. It is central in Indian culture, for instance, where there is a

concept of self called *reductionism*, in which, according to the author, the self is reduced to both mind and body. Sorabji (2006) also says that, according to Buddhism and Hinduism, the foundation of the self begins with individual suffering and he believes that the distinctions made from these ancient schools of wisdom are more sophisticated than the concept of self of the Ancient Greeks, for example. The author then proceeds to explicate how different Buddhist and Hindu schools of thought ended up attempting to distinguish themselves by thinking about concepts of the self in different ways.

The first group were the *Personalists*, for whom the self was a stream of psycho-social events. The second group are the *Nâgârjuna*, who sought to simply dilute the self into a stream of psycho-physical events, therefore eliminating it, proving its ultimate emptiness. The third branch of Buddhist thought comes from the Buddha of our era (563-483 BC), where there is no continuing self at all, *i.e.*, where the self is completely diluted. This ultimate dilution of the self aims to eliminate the idea that we lose the self when we die. The self would be simply a temporary illusion that grounds us for a short moment in reality. This notion aimed to turn citizens into persons that were unselfish and not concerned with the primacy of the self, therefore leading to ethical and moral conduct based on outward behaviour and action.

According to ancient Buddhism the self is a mere convention and, therefore, there really is no self, given that there is no thing such as a doer, given that all that really exists is doing. Sorabji often takes issue with what he calls the postmodern culture of implosion or dissolution of the self: "...I was worried because the elimination of self, towards which Vasubandhu sometimes seems to veer, was something I found difficult to square..." (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Locations 3558-3559). Subsequently, Sorabji (2006)

analyses Candrakîrti's thought, claiming that he has a better solution to the issue of the dilution of the self. According to Candrakîrti, says Sorabji, the self is inherently empty: "Although the Buddha spoke of I and mine when teaching, he had no philosophical thesis of a real, substantial self. In fact, I and mine are 'empty'. The self is merely a name, and it would be wrong to reify" (Sorabji, 2006, Kindle Locations 3568-3570). Contradicting his own masters, Candrakîrti affirms that the self does not contain nor own any elements from psycho-physical reality, and he also disallows that the self can be reduced to anything at all.

The following step in interpreting the diluted self according to Buddhist precepts refers again to the Nâgârjuna school. According to this tradition, the self resides within the emptiness of emptiness, *i.e.*, it is devoid of void. According to this development of Buddhist thought, or tradition, the above is not a prescription for what the self is, nor is it a remedy nor conclusion regarding the significance of the self. If this is clearly understood and accepted, says Sorabji (2006), we will be able to better understand the ideas of Sântideva regarding the dilution of the self in Buddhist tradition.

According to Sântideva, says Sorabji (2006), the suffering of all beings is an illusion, but it is also a necessary one in order to develop compassion. All pains should be the object of compassion. Suffering becomes an important element in the constitution of the diluted, or empty self, because having access to the suffering of others leads people to be free from everything, all the things that they hold dear, consequently being free also from fear. According to Sorabji (2006), this essential emptiness of all things, *i.e.*, the illusion of the self, is intended more as existential balm than scientific statement of fact. This essential emptiness of the self, says the author, would be the metaphysical element

that unifies all beings in fellowship, therefore providing the foundational stance for communal living.

After the conclusion above, Sorabji (2006) analyses the response that the Nyaya school provided to the Buddhists. He is particularly excited about the Nyaya school's response because the Nyaya thinkers considered interrelations and psychological aspects of individuality. This line of thought states that if there really is no self, or nothing that can perceive visual and tactual sensations, it would be impossible to think of the sensations themselves, given that they do not pertain to an object-in-itself.

Sorabji (2006) then takes issue with the final development of the concept of self in Buddhist thought: the concept named *atman*, which translates as soul. According to the author, the Naiyâyika Udayana school of thought makes the case for a diluted yet unified self, however, it is a self that exists as an incorporeal self. As example of what such incorporeal self would be, this school of Buddhism utilizes as example the hunger of a newborn child. A newborn comes to life already hungry, instinctively desiring the breast in order to feed its hunger, therefore suggesting that there is a metaphysical prior existence of souls that is retained after the death of the previous incarnation's body. This argument leads to the conclusion that all metaphysical selves exist aprioristically in a plan or dimension that has primacy over our faulted and imperfect reality, therefore suggesting inherent interconnectedness amongst all beings and things in a realm of pure energy that is beyond the limitations of our human perception. This form of metaphysical grounding attributed to the meaning of communal selfhood is often deemed as communally-oriented, given that it implies that we are all part of the same dimension:

coming into reality, leaving it, returning to the metaphysical realm, and reincarnating back to reality in an unending cycle.

This dissolution of the self is obviously permeated by many problems and polemics, but particularly in Western Culture, we have increasingly looked more carefully towards Buddhist traditions seeking frameworks that would allow us to reframe our concept of selfhood towards communal living. This is true and manifest not only in spiritual communities, but also in schools (or educational institutions in a general sense, as we shall see in the next chapter) and the adoption of mindfulness practices by several institutions. After coming to an oversaturation with the self, our culture has looked in a more serious way towards Buddhist thoughts in order to seek liberation from the self.

Another way of looking at the problem of the self might be through its relations. This does not exclude the dissolution of the self analyzed in this section. My intent is to add interpretive layers to the conversation regarding the foundations for a communal self, and at the end of this thesis, suggest that a communal self is constituted in reality by all the elements analyzed, and I would also like to invite my reader to fill in my interpretive gaps with potential new frameworks or ways for communal being. I shall now proceed to analyze another aspect of what I believe would constitute the communal self: besides being a dissolved, non-self-type-of-self, the communal self would also be emphatically relational.

4.4. The Relational Self

According to Gregory Cajete (1994), the indigenous notion of self is inherently community-oriented, originated from a strong sense of interdependence amongst all

beings on Earth: “The legacy of the traditional forms of American Indian Education is significant because it embodies a quest for self, individual and community survival, and wholeness in the context of a community and natural environment” (Cajete, 1994, p.34). Also present in the indigenous concept of self, according to Cajete, is a sense of incompleteness, despite its senses of interdependence and interconnectedness to the world. Such incompleteness of the self, says Cajete, brings to the fore the fact that, because it is incomplete, the self is always learning about itself, about how it develops, unfolds, and relates to the world around it. There is also a sense of responsibility present in such concept of self: being in relation to the world implies being responsible towards it and also towards its inhabitants. Cajete (1994) says that indigenous education seeks to educate the inner self by enlivening and illuminating one’s inner being, while simultaneously learning about the key relationships such selves will be subjected to.

Such knowledge of the self originates from a series of mythic, visionary, and artistic foundations of the indigenous worldview, says Cajete, and this triad is complemented by affective, communal and environmental foundations, forming what the author calls *The Summer Element* of aboriginal ways of teaching and learning. Cajete (1994) states that the highest form of thought is thinking about one’s self, community, and environment in a way that should be respectful and compassionate, therefore resulting in the systematic perpetration of a more wholesome life.

According to Cajete (1994), the path of self-knowledge is central to indigenous epistemology: only if one has a deep understanding of the self, and if one can consciously understand the nature of one’s relationships to people, life, and the natural world in a broader sense, then we shall be able to understand with generosity all the similarities and

differences amongst us, consequently respecting life's diversity, and the myriad ways life manifests itself. Cajete also states that "Education is essentially a learned external orientation to family, community, places, societies, and cultures. Education is also learning an internal orientation to self and, in its metaphysical sense, to spirit" (Cajete, 1994, p.49).

In a later work, Cajete (2000) develops the premises above in detail, informing that Native philosophy is broad-based, *i.e.*, not based on rational thought alone, but attempting to consider, to the maximum of its capacity, all the nuances of the interactions between humans and nature and making sense of the truth and knowledge that comes from observing the interactions between body, mind, soul, and spirit. Within the learning process, Native Science embodies diversity, self-regulation, cooperation, change, creativity, and connectedness, for example. All of this occurring, according to Cajete (2000), according to cognitive and linguistic "maps" that are responsible for guiding or orienting both individual wisdom and collective wisdom. It is worth pointing out the emphasis on wisdom, instead of knowledge. The stakes seem higher when wisdom is invoked as an element that is present in human relations and that can serve as ultimate guideline for the community. There is also, in Native science, according to Cajete (2000), a strong emphasis on relationality, and a deep level of reflection regarding such relationality of things and the causality that governs the natural order of things. Education is at the forefront of the relational process and, despite taking place through the guidance and facilitation of Elders, it is ultimately the individual's responsibility to learn.

Kuokkanen (2007) also demonstrates how the aboriginal understanding of the self differs from the way the self is established in Western culture's imaginary. Kuokkanen

offers several accounts regarding the strong sense of inter-dependence between self and other, or even amongst self, other, and the natural world. Analyzing the Sami people's identity, Kuokkanen says that the Deatnu river sustains the Sami physically, nourishes her people spiritually and mentally, permanently connecting the Sami to the ancestors that lived along the river before Kuokkanen's generation. As foundation of the Sami's understanding of self, says Kuokkanen, is the concept called "transmotion", which means that individuals are constantly in motion, changing, becoming, and are far from being self-sufficient beings. It is a communal self in motion, interacting with its surroundings and being interdependent as well.

This concept has direct implications in the way the self perceives, learns with, and learns from the world. Cajete (2000) names these ways of knowing Native Science, or Native philosophy, whereas Kuokkanen (2007) names such ways, sciences or philosophies, simply indigenous epistemologies. Kuokkanen states that in indigenous epistemologies, knowledge is generated through individual and collective experiences. She contrasts this way of knowing to traditional Western epistemology, where treating experience as knowledge might lead to solipsism and self-referentiality. Throughout her study, Kuokkanen utilizes theories from Jacques Derrida's philosophy, particularly the concepts of *deconstruction* and *hospitality*¹⁷ in order to demonstrate how indigenous epistemologies and European philosophy can be used together in a convivial manner. Kuokkanen uses both *deconstruction* and *hospitality* as central elements that contribute to indigenous scholarship because they inspire a reorientation towards an ethical community

¹⁷ For further clarification on both philosophical concepts, please *cf.*: Derrida & Dufourmantelle (2000). **Of Hospitality**. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

in which the self is inherently “turned” towards the other (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. xix). The author also imagines a new possibility, a new framework, of reorienting the Western concept of self towards something else, what she names *collective identity*: “...Western conventions of thought typically emphasize individual status and competition; in contrast, indigenous cultures place more value on consensus, cooperation, and collective identity” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.2). Kuokkanen states that in order to change reality, we must firstly change the social imaginary. This idea was one of the inspirations for this research project.

Bastien (2004) also provides insight into what might constitute the relational aspect of the self I am proposing in this thesis, *i.e.*, the communal self. Her account, however, comes from the perspective of the Siksikaitstapi people, and openly addresses the dire consequences of a self that is dissociated from the natural world:

Self is that part of one’s identity that provides the source for decision-making in life. It creates meaning out of experiences and provides motivation for behaviour. These processes are the internalization of social beliefs and values. (...) This process severed tribal people from who they were and continues to promote a Eurocentered (*sic*) human development perspective based on looking outside of one’s self, outside of one’s tribal culture, and outside of one’s relationships with a cosmic universe. The dissociated self and its dissociation from the natural order are the result of conceptual abstraction in an objectified, separate world. This view of reality is fundamentally contradictory to a world premised on interconnectedness and interdependency of relationships. (Bastien, 2004, 9.165).

Bastien’s account should be taken with immense seriousness, given that it details the consequences of superimposing one ideology, or way of being, upon another without taking into consideration that humans can develop in manifold ways. She continues her argument seeking a means to heal the effects of the assimilation of indigenous ways of knowing by European ideology. She says that our inherent interconnectedness as a species is the basis of life, reality, and truth, and that in order to seek actual healing,

Indigenous tribal paradigms need to be increasingly heard more, consequently leading to ideas, practices, and policies that facilitate the resurgence of indigenous ways of knowing.

Gergen (2009) states that because of the primacy of the self in Western social imaginary, the significance of relationship is diminished. There is a loss of the sense of the common good, relations become increasingly instrumental or commodified, therefore carrying enormous costs, such as separation and loneliness, excessive self-aggrandizement, narcissism, and the idea that the self is a commodity. The author also suggests that we should look back towards cultures or values or frameworks that provided the social imaginary with ways of living as relational selves. This is a crucial aspect, I believe, of coming to educate future generations as communal selves. Gergen (2009) says that we now study alternative epistemologies in order to find new, sustainable ways of being because our traditional ways have proven unsustainable. He calls this new outlook the “narrative movement in the social sciences”, where researchers, policy makers, and influencers open space for groups or theorists or epistemologists that have been previously excluded from the Western-industrial-self-centered ethos. Opening space for, honouring, listening, inviting, partaking, learning *with*, all go hand-in-hand with reparation and reconciliation.

Thus far, I have briefly analyzed two potential frameworks that might constitute what I call in this thesis the communal self. The diluted self, *i.e.*, a self that is non-self, fluid, part of totality and interchangeable, and the relational self, *i.e.*, a self that is in relation to others, to the environment, and the world as a whole, potentially opening new possibilities for a new movement that, according to Gergen (2009) is taking place today.

A movement in which we are creating ways to actively engage in dialogue with each other in order to seek more sustainable and promising futures. I will now add a third element that hopefully shall contribute to this dialogue regarding frameworks, or ways, or epistemologies that might help shape the communal self. The shift from the individual self towards the dividual.

4.5. Dividuality: Sharing the Self, Creating a Shared Self

Lewis Hyde (2010) has made a name for himself since 1983 as an advocate for the arts and the cultural commons. According to Hyde, "...Cultural properties belong largely in the commons so as to enable certain kinds of collective being – civic, creative, and spiritual – valuable in their own right" (Hyde, 2010, Kindle Locations 2574-2575). Hyde (2010) closely analyzes how notions of individuality and of collectivity have determined early ideas regarding the government of self and others. As example, Hyde's historical inquiry into the creation of the American Constitution led him to the case of Benjamin Franklin as demonstration of what a common individual would look like, or express itself like, confronting an already highly individualized culture.

According to Hyde, Franklin openly acknowledged his debt to Newton, whose optics influenced Franklin in his theorizing about electricity, Addison, whose essays helped Franklin learn to write, and six anonymous European authors whose books regarding fireplaces helped Franklin design the woodstove¹⁸. Hyde also invokes Goethe's idea that he was a collective being under the single name Goethe, as a potential model or framework for the communal self that would be collaborative, derivative, and open about

¹⁸ Isaac Newton (1643-1727); Joseph Addison (1672-1719).

being influenced and admitting influences. Hyde (2010) is fiercely critical of what he calls the North American myth of individualism, and after using the examples of Franklin and Goethe, he inquires if the common self may be understood as inherently creative, consequently landing at the first conceptualization of *dividuality*:

...self-reliance, self-help, self-teaching, self-making, etc. These terms are part of the national myth, and as someone once said, a myth is a story you can't get out of, so I doubt any analysis of mine will alter it much. But note, at least, how wacky are such phrases as "self-reliance" and "self-help". To rely, to help: these are not reflexive verbs. When men and women yell "Help", they usually mean to indicate they have a problem they cannot solve on their own. ... The genius of a man like Franklin is as much dividual as it is individual. (Hyde, 2010, Kindle Locations 2847-2849).

The term dividual expresses a self that can be divided and shared, *i.e.*, Hyde says that Franklin is an individual who admits to drawing from, appropriating from, and conversing with inventors that came before him and have therefore influenced his work in decisive ways. Note the absence here of any claim of originality, individual genius, or self-aggrandizement. The realm of dividuality, in contrast to the selfish claims of appropriation, self-promotion, and ownership that pertain to the realm of individuality, is a realm in which sharing would benefit the community in its entirety. Hyde says that any human can be made to seem unique, or to look unique if one adjusts the lighting properly, and this points to the major issues regarding the ways in which selves can be manipulated into feeling empty, and therefore needing to fill the void through rampant consumerism, as we have seen in chapter 3.

Hyde proceeds to defend the concept of collective beings whose work may only flourish and thrive if there is a wealth of knowledge in the commons available to them. He says that "creativity in science is almost always cumulative and collaborative; it proceeds collectively and thus thrives when barriers to collectivity are reduced" (Hyde,

2010, Kindle Locations 2853-2854). Hyde states that academic papers and conference presentations are called contributions because they are part of a gift economy, therefore being part of the cultural commons. He says that one would be offended to get paid for publishing a peer-reviewed paper because the intellectual ethos of academia can only thrive within a communal model, where ideas can freely circulate.

Hyde then proceeds to analyze how certain representations of Franklin have changed throughout the years, confirming the paradigm shift from a communally-oriented self towards rampant individualism: in a painting by David Martin from 1767, Franklin is depicted near a bust of Newton, reading a pile of papers on top of a book. In another painting, but from 1816 by Benjamin West, Franklin is depicted alone proceeding with an experiment with the help of little cherubs in the background scene. Hyde explains that the shift from one representation to the other is significant and says that the second painting is a fair representation of the ethos of the time, *i.e.*, the apogee of Emersonian¹⁹ individualism in the United States.

Hyde goes on to discuss how this conceptual shift took place in the United States in particular, and how the idea of personhood conceived as an entity connected to the world gave place to an “American type of individualism whose essence lies in always being free to decline external demands” (Hyde, 2010, Kindle Location 2876). He also indicates that the popularity of the ideas of Emerson was largely responsible for this

¹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882).

paradigm shift. The author develops his analysis of the problem by comparing Emerson's philosophy with the thought of DeTocqueville²⁰.

According to Hyde, Emerson's ideas regarding individual liberties were largely misinterpreted as a form of licentiousness, instead of being a form of human liberty that would imply a sense of service towards the community. Individuality was quickly becoming solidified in the social imaginary of the time, to the extent that, during a visit to the USA, DeTocqueville would suspect that the typically American form of self-reliance on government did not affirm the communitarian ends promulgated through the idea of civil liberties. Hyde (2010) concludes that rampant individualism is detrimental to the virtues of public life. Following the thought of Arendt²¹, Hyde demonstrates how in ancient Greek and Roman societies only those who lived active, public lives, were considered to have entered their full humanity. He also demonstrates a linguistic demarcation that reinforces the superiority of life in common, in opposition to individualism: what is our own was called *idios*, and what we hold in common was called *koinon* in Greek. Hyde concludes that the first term originates the word *idiot* because the Greeks believed that any life spent wholly on one's own is idiotic.

Proceeding to analyze modern creative practices, Hyde then attempts to establish what a communal self (not an idiotic self) might look like. He acknowledges that there are not single models for creativity, however, to the same extent that Franklin refused to patent his inventions, Edison²² patented all his inventions. Also admitting that often,

²⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1895).

²¹ Hannah Arendt (1906-1975).

²² Thomas Edison (1847-1931)

reimagining concepts of personhood or contrasting individual selves to communal selves might not seem useful to some critics, Hyde decides to take a leap of faith, and he then analyzes three short studies in order to attempt to make a case for the communal self, or, in his terms, the possibility for dividuality. I will now follow Hyde's analysis of John Sulston, Bob Dylan, and Martin Luther King Jr. According to Hyde, these persons might illustrate what a common self, or a dividual, might seem like.

According to Hyde (2010), the story of the mapping of the human genome is exemplary of the conflict between scientific knowledge being simultaneously common and proprietary. He tells us that between the time in which scientists could read amino-acids (1975) and the time the human genome has been nearly completely mapped, two major initiatives to sequence the human genome became prominent: one private and the other public. The main question Hyde focuses on is whether the human genome can belong to the private domain, given that it is not inherently a human invention. Hyde then establishes a distinction between commercial science, which is directed towards profit, and pure science, which, for instance, explores the human genome instead of exploiting it, and keeps its findings open ended into the cultural, or scientific commons (open access). Hyde makes the case that the public project led by John Sulston, of mapping the human genome, such as public roads and railways, pertains to the commons, therefore potentially resulting in a variety of uses for the common good, some of them perhaps even being commercial.

Analyzing the publication of the results of the mapping of the human genome in 2001, Hyde was shocked: the private group published its results in the journal *Science*, whereas the public initiative published theirs in the journal *Nature*. To everyone's

surprise, Celera, a private company, had used and incorporated the data made public into their own results. Refusing to engage in a particular polemic on the issue, Hyde then says that this case illustrates well that the existence of a knowledge commons is better than keeping relevant research private, therefore maintaining research open-ended and allowing common selves to participate in the common knowledge property, resisting the enclosure of knowledge.

Hyde's second case study regarding potential ways of understanding the communal self regards the early influences and early career of Bob Dylan. Hyde offers an interesting account about how a young Bob Dylan considered himself similar to a sponge, absorbing all the music he could absorb, studiously breaking verses apart in order to analyze the structure of the words, thoroughly studying chord progressions in folk tunes. Dylan was largely influenced by the old English ballads collected by Francis James Child and folk singers from Dylan's early years. They all offer similar accounts of what Dylan was doing at the time: with grand curiosity, Dylan soaked everything up, mixed elements, added and subtracted from them, and also made them his own. The type of music that Dylan was creating in the 1960s was similar with the culture of remixing and reusing cultural artefacts today, particularly in the music industry.

Hyde then offers the example of Dylan's song *The Times They Are A-Changin'* which is in fact directly derived from a nineteenth-century hymn entitled *Deliverance Will Come*. It was also noted by Hyde that variants of the same tune were used at least in two other tunes written by Dylan: *When the Ship Comes in* and *One Two Many Mornings*. Within the ethos of current artistic practices and policies, it might seem that Dylan is nothing more than a major plagiarist, however, besides the ethos being different in the

60s, Dylan was also consciously aware that he and his work were part of a cultural commons, and that his self was in fact, a communal self.

Hyde accounts for the fact that Dylan read and was impressed by Rimbaud's famous adage *Je est un autre*²³, commonly translated to English both as *I, is an-other* or *I, is someone else*. Inspired by Rimbaud's dictum, Dylan crafted the persona of a seer, a communal self that was finely tuned with his senses and also in connection with the totality of being.

Hyde asks who Rimbaud's *someone else* or *an other* might be. Rimbaud's letters speak of a universal intelligence, therefore, the poet's non-I may be interpreted as the traditions that artists, scholars, scientists, et al. inherit, *i.e.*, the non-I might simply be a nod towards those who came before you.

There is an old understanding of artistry as theft. Hyde illustrates this, citing T.S. Eliott's famous adage "Immature poets borrow; great artists steal". Hyde proceeds to problematize the quote. If we openly admit to stealing, what would be a more proper way of speaking about artists? Hyde concludes that a better way of doing so would be by openly addressing the matter of influence and giving credit to whom it is due. This would be one of the most important characteristics of dividuality that might help constitute one of the elements of the communal self: the simple fact that we are influenced by the exterior, or the other. As example, Hyde (2010) says that if we speak of Picasso, it might be pedagogically sound to also speak of Velásquez; if we study the music of Muddy

²³ Please *cf.*: Rimbaud's letter to Georges Izambard dated May 13, 1871. In: Rimbaud (2008). **Complete Works**. Harper Perennial, p.113.

Waters, it might be helpful to revisit the music of Son House. In sum, Hyde presents the case of Dylan's music and artistic worldview as an example of what a dividual might look like, after removing the primacy of the I.

Last, but not least, is Hyde's analysis and fierce criticism of Dexter Scott King, the son of Martin Luther King Jr. Hyde states that the Dexter King Jr. case is a "sorry story" about how Martin Luther King Jr.'s heirs have poorly managed his legacy, by treating absolutely everything that Dr. King left as a commodity. Hyde laments the fact that Dr. King's estate, currently controlled by his son, treats Dr. King's legacy as intellectual property, therefore exploiting Dr. King's message of peace and equality for profit.

The author acknowledges that many times an estate is formed in order to protect the reputation and dignity of certain personalities, but subsequently, Hyde will demonstrate that this is not the case of Dr. King's estate. Hyde also understands that technically, commercial ventures are not illegal, and that one might argue that the usage of Dr. King's intellectual legacy might be similar with the Walt Disney Company's usage of characters that pertain to folklore. The problem, says Hyde, is that both Disney and Dr. King himself have used sources from the public domain, albeit in different ways: The WDC used characters and stories pertaining to the public domain in order to seek out profit by marketing the characters' images and exploiting them in diverse medium, whereas Dr. King made himself and managed his career, also drawing from the sources of public domain, but appearing as an honourable preacher who could offer a message of hope for social and spiritual change.

Hyde (2010) is correct in his analysis. *The Annotated Alice* is one of my personal all-time favourite books, and after studying Hyde's work, I went back to my copy in order to revisit John Tenniel's famous illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, that were published in 1865. I compared them to Disney's 1951 animated version of *Alice in Wonderland* and the similarities are so striking that one might even accuse the WDC of plagiarism, given the fact that they did not acknowledge Tenniel's influence, at minimum. Hyde compares the lack of ethics of the WDC to Dr. King's way of being, and according to Hyde, Dr. King was very much aware that he belonged to a cultural commons, openly citing the sources he drew from, being such sources from political or biblical rhetoric, or the major themes he borrowed from grassroots African-American speeches of resistance and preaching.

Hyde concludes that our current social imaginary does not pay enough attention to the fact that our practices and policies regarding cultural property are directly connected to the diverse ways in which we simply *are*, *i.e.*, we do not pay attention to the relationship between how we deal with cultural property, and how such ways of dealing with it helps shape certain notions of selfhood. Hyde then distinguishes between commercial beings and public citizens, and that Dexter Scott has moved himself, and his father's legacy, from a public citizen towards commercial being. In Hyde's own words, Dexter "prived" his own father, converting a voice that once belonged to the public, to a voice that belongs to the realm of profitability, business, and ownership: "If Dr. King knew himself by the social movement that contained him, by his collectivity and its encumbrances, the son knows himself (and his father's estate) by the freedoms of the

marketplace, by the unencumbered play of fungibles” (Hyde, 2010, Kindle Location 213).

Hyde’s final critique of Scott King is emblematic. He states that Martin Luther King Jr., once a political and spiritual leader, a public man, a dividual whose message once pertained to the common good, or the cultural commons, has become increasingly hard to locate. Hyde then blames Scott King for erasing his father’s legacy, by turning his image and legacy into the image and legacy of a commodified self.

Implied in the notion of dividuality is a conversation regarding ethics. After all, if we accept that the common self is dissolved, diluted, or a non-self; if we accept that it is always relational, and we accept that the self can be divided, therefore being more dividual than individual, there are ethical grounds for communal living. This leads to the next section in this thesis, where I will argue that the common self also needs to be ethical in order to live sustainably with the other. This new layer will add, as my reader shall perceive, to the other elements of the communal self, *i.e.*, analyzed, divided, shared, dissolved, and relational. It is my hope to demonstrate, and the end of this chapter and with the practices analyzed in chapter 5, that such elements are conditions for the flourishing of communal living.

4.6. The Ethical Demand of the Communal Self

In order to explicate the ethical demand of communal living, I must firstly ask: what is ethics? There are several definitions for the term, however, amongst all definitions, there are a few elements in common: ethics deals with issues of value, or morality, in relation to the right way or wrong way of living and doing; ethics deals with

the issue of how to live a good life to the best of our ability. Todd (2003) states that ethics offers us a discourse in order to be able to reflect upon our relations to other people, within the context of an education for social justice. Scanlon (1998) states that there is no need to ask metaphysical questions regarding right or wrong, good and evil, because what we owe to each other as a species begins with rational judgements, and, therefore, pertains to the realm of rationality, to the extent that we make decisions based on what we have reason to do. Reich (2018) says that there is a common good that binds us together, however, such notion of common good has been replaced by self-interest and selfish development aiming increased profitability, and the author claims for us to restore the common good if we are to survive as a species. Harari (2015) states that contemporary ethics is founded in the selfish principle of “if it feels good, do it”. Critchley (2008) asks what he believes is the fundamental question of ethics that might lead to the foundation of an ethical self. All ethics are relational because ethics deals with how we relate to the other in the best way possible; therefore, Critchley asks “How does a self bind itself to whatever it determines as its good?” (Critchley, 2008, p.8). Critchley then claims that questions of normative justification of justice, rights, duties, or obligations should refer to an ethical experience. Such experience would be the core of the moral self, therefore defining the existential base of what ethics really is. Critchley then proceeds to develop a theory of ethical subjectivity.

According to Critchley (2008), his central philosophical task is to develop a theory of ethical subjectivity that can thusly be summarized: “A subject is the name for the way in which a self binds itself to some conception of the good and shapes its subjectivity in relation to that good” (Critchley, 2008, p.10). Critchley then states that it is

not necessarily the task of the philosopher to create moral selves, after all, moral selves already are created through education and socialization: the self shapes itself through its relation to whatever it determines is good, be it the Torah, biblical truths, moral law, or the communities we live in. This ethical demand, tied to the idea of what is good, needs approval from the self to take place. However, the classical presupposition that the ethical experience and the subject of such experience may be the foundation of the self is, according to Critchley, problematic. He then enunciates a new possibility: what if the self was an ethical subject organized around certain core values and commitments that are external to, and not inherent to the self?

Critchley then concludes that the moral foundation of the self is the expectation that the self will devote itself to a larger cause, a greater good, to moral conduct, and to ethical behaviour. However, there remains plenty of evil in the world and there is an intricate system constructed around the idea that those who divert from the “supreme good” shall be judged, excluded, or readjusted. Critchley is also critical of what he deems a nihilistic, reactionary stance many times adopted by the bourgeoisie that is apathetic, cynical, empty of meaning, and narcissistic that leads to the urgent necessity to create a new motivating theory of an ethical subject. Two years before Lewis Hyde’s work, Critchley named this ethical subject the *dividual*²⁴.

As we have seen above, the nature of the ethical individual is circular (from self to good and good to self), and the ethical experience commences with the approval of a demand. Critchley’s ultimate claim is that “at the basis of any ethics should be a

²⁴ Cf.: chapter 2 (Dividualism – how to build an ethical subject) of Critchley, S. (2008) *Infinately demanding: ethics of commitment, politics of resistance*. London, Middlx: Verso.

conception of ethical experience based on the exorbitant demand of infinite responsibility” (Critchley, 2008, p. 40). More so, the subject shapes itself in relation to the demand that it cannot effectively meet. Critchley considers the later works of Foucault as an effective example of what he means above. The main research question that oriented Foucault, says Critchley, was the problem regarding how sexuality came to be a moral issue from Ancient Greece up to late antiquity, and Foucault was particularly interested in the issue of *how* one comes to be a subject of morality. Critchley suggests that in Foucault’s historical and psychological analyses of practice-based accounts of autonomy, the care of the self corresponds to a practice of freedom because the self is inherently tied to the concept of what is good.

Critchley then proceeds to analyze the issue of the ethical demand. Firstly, drawing upon Løgstrup’s²⁵ work, Critchley establishes that for the ethical demand to effectively function, one must organize one’s life around the ethical demand that we are always in relation with another. Furthermore, drawing upon Levinas’s philosophy, Critchley establishes that at the crux of the ethical experience is the demand of the fact. However, such fact is not the Kantian fact of reason but instead is the fact of the other, *i.e.*, the ethical experience does not correspond to individualistic autonomy as in Kant, but instead creates such autonomy through its relationality.

Critchley explicates how he understands Levinas’s ethics thusly: the ethical demand of being in relation with the other commences with the old imperative “you shall not kill” that begins in the moment of the encounter with the other’s face. Such demand

²⁵ Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1905-1981)

results in an act of approval and affirmation, *i.e.*, a standing “Here I am”, or “I am here”. Therefore, the subject discovers itself as an object and this leads to the paradox of the “relation without relation”, *i.e.*, the fact that the subject is inherently in relation to the other but, simultaneously, the subject is not the same as the demand made upon itself. Critchley then concludes that the subject relates itself to something that exceeds its own relational capacity.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Levinasian ethics consists of the fact that the ethical experience commences through the responsibility that the subject must feel when approving of a demand that it cannot meet. For Levinas, to be an “I” signifies not being able to escape responsibility; it signifies being responsible even before having done anything.

Attempting to analyze more realistic implications of Levinas’s philosophy, Critchley then turns to Lacan to make sense of Levinas’s ethical demand and to verify what Levinasian ethics might look like in reality. After all, the issue of the impossibility of true alterity has been a matter of concern and anxiety for many philosophers. Critchley, using both ideas from Lacan and Levinas, concludes that the other is impossible to reach, to know; therefore, the other needs to be acknowledged. Acknowledgement seems to be the key element for the ethical demand of responsibility for the other, given that one cannot empirically reach out to someone else’s thoughts and truly understand them, cannot feel someone else’s feelings, nor have full grasp of the myriad forces and properties that constitute all of us. Therefore, the belief that true empathy is impossible, given that the other’s complexity and wholesomeness, such as our

own, cannot be fully understood. Such impossibility lays the foundations for the new theories of the self that I am presently analyzing.

As we have seen in the previous section, Hyde (2010) utilizes examples from scientists, artists, and politicians whom have openly thrived by keeping their production in the cultural commons. Critchley (2008) argues that there is a need to construct a new theory of the ethical subject that could perhaps erode the sovereignty of the Western individualized self, and both authors call this new self a *dividual*, *i.e.*, a self that can be shared, that is always in relation to the other, and that is also interdependent with the exterior. In addition to the above, the *dividual*, or common self as I prefer to call the self that shall result from the current theories of selfhood studies, is ethically bound to be responsible for the other, particularly considering that we are all inherently inter-related and cannot apprehend, comprehend, or grasp the other's otherness.

In addition to being diluted or dissolved, being relational, being divided and ethically bound, the next step at the heart of the possible foundation of the common self is the difficult theory that the self is a component of the other. Last, but not least, this difficult concept will be explicated in the final section of this chapter.

4.7. The Self in the Other

DeGuia (2005) invites us to consider the possibility of the existence of something communal, larger, and beyond the individual self. A German artist and writer, she married a Filipino film maker named Kidlat Tahimic. Her incursion into a different ethos, *i.e.*, the culture of her Filipino husband, had a profound impact on her to the extent that she developed research aiming to determine a theoretical framework for the Filipino

understanding of selfhood which is, according to DeGuia, different from her German-rooted understanding of selfhood. DeGuia commences laying out her research project sharing with her reader an anonymous poem, which I would also like to share with my reader:

The heart in its purity knows no boundaries.

Its only longing is to connect with other hearts.

Samples of tissues taken from live hearts beat in their own rhythms.

Laid together touching in a petri dish, they instantly begin to beat together.

This is alchemy. The transformation from separation to wholeness.

- Text found by Perry Argel in Melbourne on the seat of a citytrain (sic).

(DeGuia, 2005, p. xiv)

The imagery of heart tissue beating together when laid out on a petri dish is haunting, and there is a vast array of studies in science and social psychology that inform the scientific reasoning behind the event of hearts beating in synchronization²⁶. One might say that this is empirical proof of our inherent inter-connectedness. Such concept of the inherent inter-connectedness of all life on Earth is expressed in the Filipino concept of selfhood, named *Kapwa*. DeGuia (2005) establishes that *kapwa* is a shared self in which there is no divisions between past and present, adult from children, people and their dreams, creator and created, people and their fellow beings. She asserts that both the microcosm and the macrocosm are one, in perpetual continuity.

²⁶ The reader may confirm for yourself through a basic search through your preferred search engine, that there are many papers on the matter, from many reliable sources. I have also consulted with a friend who develops research on the effects of protein in the heart, and he explained to me why hearts do beat synchronized once close to each other. However, in order to remain focused on the topic of the communal self, and given the narrative nature of this research project, I chose not to include scientific research, in order not to compromise the narrative flow of this study.

After establishing a basic concept for *kapwa*, DeGuia (2005) constructs a Filipino psychology of the self. According to her account, in the recent past the greatness of an individual was measured by strength, modesty, balance, beauty, vigour, creativity, and inspiration. Compassion and leadership, paired with humility and ethical conduct, were considered the noblest traits of a person. DeGuia then contrasts the above with elements that, according to her, constitute the modern urban environment's concept of personal greatness or success: material success, accumulation of money and assets, and an expensive education. Through such dichotomization of the issue, DeGuia intends to demonstrate how the concept of *kapwa* is crucial in order to provide the foundation for a communal self. After all, it reflects a viewpoint in which the essential humanity recognizable in every person is invoked, therefore connecting people. *Kapwa* also extends to other non-human life forms. Understood as part of the perennial flux of human memories, and as a part of nature, the concept of a shared self also implies in a shared life, *i.e.*, it extends to animals, plants, springs, rocks, and even the spirit world(s). DeGuia (2005) then concludes that *kapwa* is an ecology-friendly, systemic orientation for selfhood.

DeGuia (2005) states that such orientation or worldview could be understood as an academic discipline, or even a movement. She also acknowledges that the mandate implied through *kapwa*, *i.e.*, that there is a need for us to search for deeper ways to understand and live interpersonally, is unfashionable within the contemporary ethos of rampant narcissism and consumerism. She calls us to consider the possibility, however, that claiming that perhaps educational institutions might be the ideal places to begin the movement, given that schools dictate and reproduce societal values and possess a

decisive role in the formation of persons. Indeed, it is one of my hopes that this thesis will inspire future educators to further research on the communal self and better understand what implications might incur should we agree, as a society, that there is in fact room for, and need for, a new paradigm for the self. We seem to be hinting at this through our increasingly inclusive initiatives, but as we will continue to see below, there is much more space to learn.

Masolo (2010) also contributes to the idea that we are, in fact, communal selves. Reading the African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, Masolo states that “For Wiredu, the African Subject starts with a clearly and radically different axiomatic assumption – he or she is dependent for his or her being on relations with others” (Masolo, 2010, p.11). Masolo then elaborates that according to the African framework for understanding personhood, the self is a complex biological organism that is thrown into life and needs to function within the social world of meaning-making. As DeGuia (2005) utilized the Filipino concept of *kapwa* (shared self) as counterpoint and counterargument to the Western sovereign self, Masolo (2010) introduces us to a concept named *juok*, which is openly a relational self. As with *kapwa*, *juok* is also a type of self that becomes other or is an inherent part of the other. Masolo explicates that *juok* is rooted in communitarian ethics and serves as reminder that society is a function of the positive moral agency of those who are part of it. *Juok* is also a guiding principle for the inherent intersubjectivity of daily life. Whereas in Kant, for instance, human rationality is the basis for ethical conduct and decision-making, *juok* implicates that the mind is not a separate substance, but a disposition that leads to ethical conduct. Incorporating the mind as a disposition or capacity that is wholly integrated with the body, the African theory of personhood, says

Masolo (2010), results in a different framework for understanding morality. As example, Masolo states that whereas in Western culture we shall not do to others what we would not like done to us, from the perspective of a relational ethics founded in *juok* as framework, the goal of leading a virtuous life is not to benefit one's self, but to earn admittance to the immortal community of ancestors. This model of personality based upon being part of an ancestral conversation, says Masolo (2010), is predicated on an ontology that has as an ultimate framework the guidance of God. Relationality, says Masolo, is the condition and context of all existence, including our cognitive and moral experience of the world.

Despite the guidance of God being a determinant factor in *juok*, Masolo (2010) rejects those whom criticize this African theory of communal selfhood as a metaphysical concept. Making the case that metaphysics came from “zealous missionaries intent of splitting Africans’ worldviews into ... unequal spheres...” (Masolo, 2010, p.192), the author says that *juok* is pragmatic and as real as it gets, given its action-centered quality. Masolo defends *juok* as a concrete way of being and understanding that possesses real life implications and leads to ethical and moral behaviour. There is an emphasis on the performativity and morality of human actions indeed, but such are in connection with others, given our co-dependency. Concepts such as *kapwa* and *juok* invite us to try to understand that the self is not a fixed, sovereign, and independent entity, but conversely, **is the other**, such as we have seen in Rimbaud’s famous maxim.

Harari (2015) corroborates all the above theories regarding the existence of a communal self. He states that current scientific consensus is, given that our bodies are made of approximately 37 million cells, our bodies and minds go through several

permutations and transformations, and since we possess a myriad of voices in our heads, there cannot be such a thing as a true, individual self. He says that we are not even individuals, but rather dividuals, given the complexity of ideas, biological facts, and experiences that we are bound to. Harari (2015) is adamant that there is no single self making decisions, no matter how unique or personalized or special our narrative selves shape our stories in order to attribute sense to living. Rather, our decisions and actions and the ways in which we interact with the exterior result from “a tug of war between different and often conflicting inner entities” (Harari, 2015, p. 342). Such affirmation is much in line with the theories I have briefly surveyed in this chapter. By understanding selfhood as a) dissolved, or non-self, fluid, b) relational, c) divided, d) ethical and e) part of the other, I hope to have offered my reader a glimpse into the current state of selfhood studies. This new self, if you will, would be more generous, directed to the other, less protective of its individuality and selfish behaviour. It would be a more inclusive self that sees all life through the lenses of love for life, care, and respect.

The next step in this dissertation will be to briefly survey how this new understanding of a communal self is being reflected in educational institutions. It is observable that we are in the middle of a paradigm shift, or a new understanding of what the self is, *i.e.*, that we are inherently a communal species, living co-dependently with other animal species and the natural environment. There are many attempts to create institutions that are communal spaces, however, it often seems that based on my own experience as educator that such attempts remain on the surface, or merely ideological, because people often behave as autonomous, sovereign, selfish beings. I will address this conundrum in more detail in the following chapter, but I can anticipate that the solution

begins with establishing the communal self as a starting point in basic education. A few additional research questions that guide the following chapter are: a) how can we create spaces for authentic communal selves to flourish, b) how can we honour individual needs within a learning community, and c) what practices can teachers incorporate in order to promote wholesome communal living.

Chapter 5.

Current State of Community Development in Education

5.1. Community Education as Response to the Dis-ease of the Self

Hitherto, I have utilized a perspective inherited from continental philosophy, namely a critical historical deconstructionism in order to demonstrate how Western notions of self have been manipulated and exploited by social institutions, industries, and advertisement agencies. I also demonstrated how the deliberate development of the narcissistic self has led to a cultural dis-ease that is in line with capitalistic ideology, and that this excess of narcissistic behaviour backfired. Therefore, our oversaturation with the self led to the need to encounter new frameworks in order to move from a self-centered individual towards a communal agent.

Harari (2015) makes a fair point when he states that there are, indeed, positive outcomes from adopting capitalism, such as overcoming famine and plague, for example. He also says that the belief in growth led people to view the economy as a game in which people win together, given that much of the economy is invested toward reducing human violence and increasing cooperation and tolerance. The issue I have analyzed in this thesis, however, was the placement of capitalism and consumerism as primary ways of being. Such primacy indubitably led to an increase in exploitation of natural resources, social inequality, and a blatant increase in mental health issues and substance abuse as consequence of poverty and lack of meaning.

I then surveyed a series of studies that aim to offer new theories and ideas that might be developed into a framework to create what I call a common self, *i.e.*, a self that is at the same time an individual, but in synch with its inherent commonality with the world around it. In this chapter, I will discuss the spaces that are created for the communal self to inhabit, learn, and flourish. There are a few examples of places and institutions that have been adopting community education as an umbrella term to welcome communal selves, or ways of being.

Broadly, communal ways of being may be grouped into three major theories of communal living that inform the aims and practices of institutions: a) communitarianism, b) the commons movement, and c) relationality. These three groups seem to be the major trends in the studies of social sciences and humanities regarding selfhood. I will now proceed to briefly analyze each group in order to demonstrate how community development is currently being thought about, and how education for community and the development of communal selves go hand in hand.

Golby (1997) defines communitarianism as a political and philosophical movement that aims to create attitudes and policies to shape communities and facilitate social cohesion and equality. At its center is the problem of studying the links between personhood and its social and political contexts. The author states that particularly within the context of education, communitarianism stands for moral renewal.

I will now briefly discuss the commons movement, which may be defined as a group of scholars, artists, activists, politicians, and policy makers that have been prolifically creating and developing initiatives to sustain spaces for communal living. At

the center of the movement, is a radical stance against the enclosure of spaces that are appropriated by capital and the logic of the market. One of the main theorists of this movement was the Nobel Prize winning economist Elinor Ostrom (1933-2012), whose work regarding the development of policies to govern the commons remains highly influential. The commoners, as they at time call themselves, have a straightforward stance regarding education: schools and knowledge, in a broad sense, belong in the commons and should be free from the hegemony of neoliberal discourse.

Thirdly, community education has been developed using relationality as a basic framework in their practices. In general terms, scholars of relationality argue that we are aprioristically, relational agents, or communal agents, before being autonomous, independent, or sovereign individuals. Scholars in the subfield of relationality mostly come from philosophy, sociology, and psychology of education, and this might be because schools are the primary places in which strangers first encounter each other. At the center of relationality, says Gergen (2009), is the promulgation of alternative ways of living life in common, beyond the traditional limits of self and community.

With the above frameworks in mind, I will now proceed to analyze a few of the most prominent educational initiatives that have drawn from the five aspects of the communal self seen in chapter 4 (namely dissolved, relational, divided, ethical, and part of the other). Such initiatives have been developing practices that exemplify and represent spaces for the communal self to flourish by utilizing the tenets of communitarianism, the commons movement, and relationality as guidelines. Such educational initiatives have been grouped into subsections according to their similarities when accounting for what type of communal self they represent. Such movements are: a)

De-schooling and the Slow School movements, b) initiatives for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, c) the green and environmental schools, d) educational public squares and cafés, and lastly e) the wisdom schools. These initiatives have had some success in promoting life in community, however, I believe that they are communal spaces inhabited by the narcissistic self. Despite the inspiration from theories of communal selfhood, the elements of the communal self discussed in chapter 4 have not yet been wholesomely incorporated into basic schooling and public discourse, therefore, we are still many steps away from completely being able to genuinely live life in common.

5.2. De-schooling Society and the Slow School Movement

The term de-schooling became prominent due to the work of Ivan Illich (1971). Up to the present day, Illich's philosophy is associated with educational movements such as homeschooling, critical pedagogy, and liberation theology, and may be understood as a communitarian endeavour given its inherently strong anti-capitalistic stance, and its strong commitment to environmental issues. Illich (1991) states: "Observations of the sickening effect of programmed environments show that people in them become indolent, impotent, narcissistic and apolitical" (Illich, 1991, p.47). This sentence exemplifies how Illich was against the relationship between the institutionalization of self-centeredness, therefore forming one of the bases for alternative educational movements.

Bruno-Jofré and Zaldívar (2012) point out that Illich's ideas regarding schools have been misunderstood and misappropriated. In an old interview found by the authors, Illich stated that he was barking up the wrong tree when criticizing education, despite acknowledging that some educators were inspired to reflect on unwanted social side

effects caused by institutionalized education. However, some educators interpreted Illich's message as a cry to end schooling, and Illich was heavily criticized for this. Such controversy gained immense proportions and, as early as June 1971, Illich published a defense of his ideas in which he explained that his ultimate objective was to liberate education from the state and move the control of schools to grassroots organizations. He also claimed that he used the term "disestablishment of education" in the same sense that in the United States, the term is used to address the separation, or "disestablishment" of church and state.

One might argue that the fact that Illich was advocating for grassroots organizations to be at the forefront of public education would just result in schools being influenced by the liberal agendas of such institutions. Far beyond the discussion between conservatives and liberals, however, is the philosophical and pedagogical issue of doing what is right for the common good, or training citizens to place rampant capitalist exploitation as their main value in life. If the conversation between conservatism and liberalism has come to a matter of doing what is correct for the common good, as we have seen in chapter 4, particularly through Critchley's analysis of the ethical individual, or the ethical demand on the individual, then I would argue so be it. As would Illich, as we shall see below.

Illich's concern about the institutionalization of education and its inherent gesture toward capitalistic individualism was so rampant that in 1976, he closed the educational grassroots institution that he founded for fear that the government would take it over, or, perhaps worse (in his view), that it would be bought by an American university. Illich's institute was an avant-garde place for countercultural movements, and several

communitarian alternatives regarding the best ways to develop options to capitalistic progress took place there.

The end of the institution also represented, a shift in Illich's intellectual journey and this resulted in a repositioning of his critique of schooling. In this later phase, Illich explains the parallel development between the advent of the organized page and the categorization and organization of knowledge through alphabetization, as elements that generated a new concept of individuality. Such "alphabetic mentality", claimed Illich, was crucial for the formation of institutions, the creation of subjectivity, the means in which we relate to the natural world, how institutions were created, etc. All these elements shaped our reality and our sense of self. It is also during this period that Illich acknowledged that liberating education from the influence of the state would not suffice, given that schools were already permeated with fundamental aspects of modern life, such as a strong sense of self and consumerism as main value. This is the point where Illich differentiates between education and learning.

According to Illich, education needed to be something else. Something pure and substantial that would lead to wisdom, whereas learning would be something planned, highly measurable, and imposed upon others. An interesting dichotomy is thus formed: education could lead to communality, whereas learning caters to the individualistic self. Illich was strongly against the discourse surrounding learning, to the extent that he affirmed that notions such as "learning needs" or "lifelong learning" polluted society. Illich was often criticized for demolishing societal mores without providing alternatives to his critiques. In many ways, this research project is an unintentional nod to Illich's work, given that in chapter 6, I shall offer my reader a glimpse into what I imagine a way

towards the education of the communal self, and the future of education might look like, therefore providing such alternatives and inviting my reader to imagine with me.

Illich's community-oriented educational philosophy continues to have repercussions in today's world. The most blatant repercussion is, I have said above, homeschooling. The concept of homeschooling is so dramatically subversive and emancipatory that in such countries, it is prohibited. I take as example a country that I know well, Brazil, where homeschooling is completely illegal, and compulsory schooling is imposed to dramatic effect. Failing to enrol their children in schools, parents are also depriving them of having their ID cards issued, and the Federal Ministry of Education keeps track of every possible citizen who fails to enrol in any school.

The reality in Canada is different, beginning with the simple fact that we do not have a Federal Ministry of Education, therefore establishing autonomy to the provinces to make decisions regarding educational policies and practices. Since the 1970, homeschooling is perfectly legal in Canada, and in the province of British Columbia alone, the government estimates that 2200 students are homeschooled under the new curriculum. Clearly inspired by Illich's precept of removing government influence from education, therefore offering the possibility of selves to develop in a communitarian-oriented framework, in a 2015 white paper published by the Fraser Institute, homeschooling is defined thusly:

... home schooling is an alternative method of learning that takes place outside the public or private school environment. Parents choosing homeschooling have the primary responsibility of managing, delivering, and supervising their children's courses and program of learning, which can vary from a very structured curriculum to free-form learning. (Fraser Institute, 2015, p.2).

Empirical research on homeschooling is often difficult and inconclusive, given the variety of methods, approaches, and geographical locations in which studying takes place. It is important to observe, however, that despite the fact that homeschooling removes governmental influence, and from an ideological viewpoint such initiative is sound, children who are homeschooled are still, unfortunately, subjected to standardized tests in order to prove their competency. Such fact is mandatory in the USA, but not in Canada. This is not to say that the Canadian curriculum or standardized testing system does not have its problems. Canadian poet Tim Bowling (2012) affirmed that he refused to enrol any of his three kids in schools, given that schools reproduce elements of our culture that are abundantly promoted and replicated within the schools' walls: sleazy sexuality, ironic detachment, cynicism, and consumerism as a value. All these elements, one might argue, cater to the narcissistic self.

In many ways, schooling is indeed problematic and uncertain, particularly given its inadvertent combination with individualistic and capitalistic values, or ways of knowing and being in the world. Homeschooling might seem as an emancipatory, community-oriented, de-institutionalized form of schooling, but the problem of the correct values for community development being developed through homeschooling is also a reality. In Canada, for instance, some homeschooling materials are openly Christian, which obviously will not suit a diverse range of spiritual and cultural particularities that certain groups or families might have. Another common complaint in Canadian homeschooling is that materials are often "too American", *i.e.*, they promote values that are inherent to American nation-building, and that do not necessarily reflect Canadian reality.

Further research is needed to analyze ways in which homeschooling could be truly emancipatory and effective in belonging to communities, families, or grassroots initiatives that might support communal education, or the education of communal selves, as contrast and alternative to the narcissistic self that has been so decisive in dividing us as a species, and exploiting ourselves and the environment that surrounds us in destructive ways. I will now turn my attention towards another communitarian pedagogical initiative that has achieved some success in reclaiming community, power to the people, and emancipatory education, by confronting the imperatives of market ideology: the slow school movement.

5.2.1 The Slow School Movement against Uniformity and Measurability in Education

Holt (2002) was a fierce critic of the fact that parents were often encouraged to focus on their children's achievement and not on self-realization. It must be noted, however, that according to Holt, self-realization in education has nothing to do with the self-centered ontology of the narcissistic, or consumeristic self. In Holt's sense, self-realization signifies creating the means for human flourishing and holistic development of one's potential. Holt was the founder of the Slow School Movement that was inspired by the Slow Food Movement, a manifesto created by Italian chef Carlo Petrini, in response to the global proliferation of McDonald's restaurants.

Holt's essay called for similar resistance towards a "McDonaldized" approach to education, and its emphasis on uniformity, predictability, measurability, and end results, therefore arresting human potentiality. Holt states that it would be important to move away from any mechanical models in education, and that we should instead examine and

improve activities and spaces in which genuine insights can arise in the process of exploring, creating, and conveying knowledge. Often pigeon-holed as an impractical idealist (a common critique of community-oriented scholars), Holt draws from the Slow Food Movement to defend his stance on education: he affirms that the slow food movement concerns itself with everything practical, and that it is about real people eating, discussing, and legislating how they think about certain issues. The main philosophical tenets of the movement are reflective practice, tradition, and character, and last, but not least, moral choice. In an educational context, Holt affirms that schools need to move away from determinism, control, predictability, numerical expression, standardized testing and efficacy, and in place of these elements, create a place where understanding issues in a profound manner matters more than reproducing historical facts. The practical element of the slow school would be, therefore, the creation of spaces that are open for rigorous intellectual scrutiny, argumentation, and potential conclusions, that might then lead to citizens that are more nourished, instead of being stressed due to concerns regarding their performance.

Holt then briefly analyzes developments in Japan, where since 2002, public schools have pursued a curriculum that allows students much more free time. This model is similar with what happens in Finland as well, where students have more leisurely time in school to explore and research topics on their own, and also more free time out of school in which they may pursue their own passions. The Finnish education system has been considered for many years now as the best in the world. Holt's final argument is that in many ways, doing things slowly in life is associated with pleasurable moments,

therefore, schools should not be fast-paced environments that stimulate the self by bombarding it with facts that masquerade as knowledge.

As a person working in education since the age of eighteen, I have been through quite a few stressful moments myself, but it was only when I became an adjunct university professor that I have noticed the immense toll that our fast-paced, production line model takes, particularly on the mental health of young adults who want to pursue education. In a broad sense, I am in favour of mass education. However, I do acknowledge that the current educational model, inherited from the dawn of modernity and empirical rationality, has resulted in more detrimental aspects to human development than positive ones that allow individuals to flourish in community.

Holt and other proponents of “slow” manifestos are often criticized for being elitist (yet another common critique of scholars who work towards community-living). Critics argue that “being slow” is a luxury for those who have time to be slow, and that in our fast-paced world, in which millions are bound to sell their time to obtain payment for basic necessities, there is no time to think, reflect slowly, or be wholesome. While I agree with such statement as it is, and concur that such stance might indeed result in an elitist separatist movement between those who are mass educated, and those who were educated in better scholarly environments, I believe that deep down, critics miss the point.

Such movements don’t aim to be little institutions in themselves in order to create their own ethos and space. They aim to infiltrate and change the culture at large: mass education could be better for all, particularly given that one might argue that to be educated is a human right, and not a mere luxury for the few. Current educational models

are highly problematic and incomplete and failing our students, due to the fact that capitalist ideology has shaped policies and practices since the nineteenth century, and as we witness the change in the political climate around the world, the increasing rage of the rural classes, and the constant cycles of abundance and collapse of the economy, we desperately seek alternatives, but fail to reach more decisive outcomes, perhaps because we are in the middle of the storm, therefore being unable to distance ourselves enough to see what the real issues are. There are currently several public schools in Canada, for instance, where children learn how to plant, harvest, and cook, besides learning basic academic skills. These initiatives are a clear manifestation of ideologies that come from homeschooling and the slow school movement, *i.e.*, initiatives and scholarship from persons concerned with community development, and the fostering of communal agents, or communal selves.

I hope to have introduced the reader to two highly influential educational models that are currently being explored, tried, and developed in contemporary educational practices. Both models claim to confront the capitalistic self and reclaim education towards human flourishing and wholesome community development. We will see, in the next section, another movement that has unfolded from the challenges to the narcissistic self: the movement for inclusion of persons with disabilities.

5.3 The Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

I have stated above that some consider education, or access to education, a matter of human rights (Slee, 2011). Some argue that education is a luxury for few, and this ideology, or way of thinking, can be proven historically accurate, given how strict and

selective access to education was in antiquity up to modernity. In order to situate my reader, in case I have failed to make my own stance as a scholar and teacher clear up to now, I must affirm that I firmly believe that education is, indeed, a matter of human rights. Should there be any doubt, those who think that education is a luxury, or a commodity, should read article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that clearly states that everyone has a right to it.

Unfortunately, from a historical perspective, schools' reliance on rationality in order to convey, create, and transmit knowledge has resulted in the exclusion of those who function in a different manner. Knight (2011) states that the neo-liberal (capitalistic) social imagination promotes exclusion and competitive individualism as part of a system of rationality, therefore hindering the promotion of inclusive practices, community development, and cultural shift towards true, effective, pedagogical reform. Strhan (2012) says that "...totalizing tendencies of capitalist accumulation and commodification fail to recognize 'the other'" (Strhan, 2012, p.113).

Slee (2011) professes the belief that schooling, which is, in his words, our most important experiment in democracy, is suffering from an excessive rhetoric of achievement and excellence that has dulled imagination due to the standardization of pedagogical practices. As we have seen, Slee's outcry is in a similar vein of educational theorists that we have studied in chapters 3 and 4, such as Martin and McLellan (2013), Steel (2014), and Illich (1971). Slee then proceeds to promote a radical idea that he has named "the irregular school" which, in contrast to regular schooling, would be a social space in which students with disabilities could partake in. He is adamant about the fact that advocating for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in schools is partly a political

position, and partly an ethical endeavour. It is a political position because it is an idea that challenges the values inherent to the social norm, *i.e.*, the neoliberal tenets of competitiveness and rational outcomes and productivity, and it is an ethical endeavour because it is an issue that speaks to the (i)mmorality of excluding persons due to factors that are not their own fault.

Slee then proceeds to diagnose the main issues in relation to the exclusion of persons with disabilities in schools: special education remains exclusionary, teachers are not prepared correctly to work with, and deal with (or study with) students, and society remains indifferent to the problem. He then affirms that despite several attempts by governments, schools, and grassroots organizations to advocate for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in schools, students remain treated and seen as “others”, *i.e.*, as outsiders that are non-members of the group of functional, rational students. Slee then identifies a series of research paths that might be taken up in order to effectively move from the rhetoric of accessibility and inclusion, and move towards effective inclusion: a) a deeper analysis of special education and its antecedents in medical and psychological practices, b) stronger critical theory regarding pedagogical practices, c) an alliance between disability studies, cultural studies, feminism, post-structuralism, political theory and policy making; d) research into curriculum theory and implementation, and e) the improvement of teacher education. At the core of these issues, affirms Slee (2011), is the problem of identity politics and the philosophy of difference. The task might seem immense, and there still is plenty of ground to cover, but we must remain hopeful, because change might take time to happen and it might happen gradually, almost imperceptibly, but it is possible, as I shall illustrate below.

I have personally worked with students with diverse physical and developmental disabilities, and I would like to offer my firsthand account regarding the exclusion that they have been subjected to: it is heartbreaking and not based on any empirical evidence, due to the fact that despite functioning differently than persons who function within a certain rational framework, persons with disabilities can still learn, create, participate in their own capacities, and become valuable and valued members of the community. I was often told by students I supported that in school, they were left out of reading certain authors, or partaking in communal discussions, because they were deemed incapable by their peers and teachers. However, given the opportunity to partake, to read, to write, and create and interact within the process of knowledge creation and acquisition, I have seen with my own eyes that such persons can in fact shine despite being considered incompetent. Besides this empirical element, there are also theoretical and policy-level elements at play, as we shall now see.

Kliewer, Biklen, and Petersen (2015) deconstruct the discourse surrounding intellectual disabilities on both the policy and the practice levels. They begin their argument by challenging the labelling and categorization of persons with disabilities: once they are categorized, they are subjected to a series of strict and limited discourses regarding their educational, sociocultural, and intellectual incompetence in comparison to others, therefore devaluating and dehumanizing them, making their life experience impoverished and devoid of genuine opportunities to actively flourish in their own way. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for persons with disabilities to be marginalized, left out in the streets in extreme poverty, and mistreated as criminals.

Much in line with Roger Slee, the authors propose that a deep and wholesome pedagogical shift is of the essence if we are to shift from a culture of exclusion, alienation and disconnectedness, towards the development of an actual, connected community that includes persons with disabilities and propitiates them the opportunity to shine and flourish in their own way. The authors affirm that social connectedness is an important matter in order to foster a culture of change. The first step towards connectedness would be to develop increasingly complex connections in order to dissolve perceptions of intellectual deficiency. Such complex connections could be as simple as creating spaces for classroom participation, actively listening, and including the person in conversations and in the process of studying, or researching, and such attitudes would therefore redefine the culture and practices of leading meaningful lives and belonging to community. The authors make use of a metaphor to express the main reason why persons with disabilities are fully capable to belong to any community of learners, if we could only change the culture of selfish competitiveness towards wholesome communal living: “Human development is not a crash of cymbals but rather an elaborate symphony that plays out in movements (albeit with crescendos and moments of raging percussion)” (Kliewer, Biklen & Petersen, 2015, p.9). I would argue that the same metaphor applies to teaching and learning. The educational process is complex, often advanced and frequently stunted, and generally takes time to generate the best results. All elements that do not seem to have place in our fast-paced culture of efficiency and primacy of velocity to the detriment of incorporating and living the knowledge that was learned.

The authors conclude that in order to shift the culture, we can no longer blame an individual’s intellect for not performing accordingly with a set of scholarly expectations.

The presumption of connectedness and competence, as different and diverse as competences might manifest, are the key elements in order to involve ourselves with others making meaning of the world together, therefore developing a sense of rightful value and belonging in the world. This concept is much in line with the diluted, divided, shared concepts of selfhood seen in chapter 4. If we are to believe and imagine and teach that selves are not fixed, unique, special entities, but are individual, mutable, shared, and common entities, we will be more inclined to accept others in a convivial manner, despite their apparent difference.

The scope of the project is tremendous, yet centres for accessible learning, grassroots organizations, and governmental policies exist, therefore providing hope that effective change might take place. Slee (2012) affirms that inclusive education needs to be incorporated as a goal with several strategies in an overall educational reform. Instead of continuing the culture of segregation with “special” education, inclusive education should be everyone’s business: communities need to be better informed about the negative outcomes of the culture of exclusion, and the toll such culture takes on individuals and their families.

Last, but not least, Slee (2011) acknowledges that there are reasons to be cheerful: particularly Indigenous educators have been taking up the challenge of inclusive education, and have been successful in utilizing alternative visions of Aboriginal identity free from stereotypes in order to promote a vibrant, strong, and smart network of educational institutes that favour inclusion and challenge the ethos of apathy and ignorance of issues that seems to be still, very strong in our culture, as we have also seen in detail in chapter 4, through the Indigenous frameworks of outward-orientation for the

self. It is my hope that this aspect of communitarian education has been insightful to my reader. Continuing our survey of the community-oriented initiatives that unfolded from the search for a new framework for the self, we shall now proceed to discuss the rise of the green schools, often also called environmental schools.

5.4. The Environmental School Movement

As we have seen in chapters 2 and 3, given the rampant focus on the self, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, where the first baby boomers were beginning young adulthood, it might seem natural that there would be a lingering sense of oversaturation with the self, within a period in which the self-esteem movement was at its peak. It almost seems like a logical development that pedagogues, or educational theorists, would begin to look outwards, *i.e.*, would begin to seek out frameworks and teaching methods that would go beyond the self. My reader might have inferred by now that several communitarian initiatives have originated in counter-cultural manifestations, therefore, it is no surprise that the first organized efforts to teach with environmental concerns and sustainable living at the core, would emerge in the 1960s under the umbrella term *Environmental Education*.

Neil Evernden (1985) discusses the dramatic effects of our separation from nature. He argues that the divide between nature and mind, subject and object, thing from thought, etc. has resulted in a natural alienation of our species from nature. Acknowledging that it is easier to live alone, as it is easier to create buzzwords regarding environmentalist movements, Evernden discusses how learning the constraints and obligations of communal living, and ontologically incorporating environmentalist

ideologies into daily practice, are difficult tasks. My reader must also be sensing a trend here: in each of these community-oriented segments of educational theory and practice, there seems to be a divide between the theories that inform them and effectively incorporating the professed practices²⁷. However, there are several initiatives taking place in order to potentially transform education, in a broad sense.

There are the Eco-Schools, which is an international programme designed to teach students and empower citizens towards sustainable living. There are several Green School initiatives as well, each one of them aiming to promote environmental literacy. Perhaps a more emblematic example of environmental school is the Maple Ridge Environmental School project, which is part of School District 42 in British Columbia, and is a public school. I will emphasize the Maple Ridge project given that it is a local case, and its proximity might shed further light on the issue of how to incorporate educational frameworks and theories into educational practices.

According to Derby, Blenkinsop *et al.* (2013), the project was created to respond to the fundamental research question of what would happen if the rigid structures and learning objectives of traditional schooling were removed. Notice here the echoes of Illich's philosophy, or the outward orientation of Indigenous scholars we have studied in chapter 4. Other initiatives about the school would be to remove the actual, physical walls from schools and foster the primacy of sensory-rich, primary experiences. Utilizing frameworks such as place-based, ecological, and imaginative education, which are well

²⁷ I have discussed potential solutions created by educational theorists in order to bridge the divide theory *versus* practice elsewhere. Please *cf.*: Carreiro (2014) Just asking: how do philosophers of education proceed when schools and students want more practice and less theory? In: *Antistasis*, 4(2).

established pedagogical frameworks that draw from the selfhood theories discussed in chapter 4, the researchers were granted permission to open the school in 2011.

Basically, administration and teaching staff appear to profoundly reject any of the restrictions inherent to mainstream schooling: the division of knowledge, time allotment in order to learn how to read, write and do math, all elements that, as we have seen in chapter 3, pertain to the realm of the self-esteem movement in schools. The authors argue that it is nearly a reversal of traditional, or conventional schooling. Staff and administration seem to facilitate true, somatic experiences of the natural world, which they call “embodied experience”, a term originated from a pedagogical framework named experiential education. Staff and administration also seem to have a “hands-off” approach when facilitating students’ personal reflections and interpretations of their encounters with nature, the environment, the weather, and in sum, the world.

Lastly, but most importantly, the authors are very much aware of potential pitfalls of the project: “A robust democratic and ecological form of education requires that educators work to avoid the possibility of students becoming either experienced illiterates or inexperienced literates” (Derby, Blenkinsop, *et al.*, 2013, p.5). A true and wholesome educational experience would be locally framed within sensitive and locally ways of understanding how we, humans, are embedded in the natural world, and leading students to draw attention to their relational ecology and way of being.

There also seems to be, embedded within the discourse in favour of environmental education, a certain concern with social justice issues. On one hand, it might seem obvious to my reader that values such as community development, inclusion,

human flourishing, development of sustainable action, etc. go against the tenets of rampant individualism that promote competitiveness, exploitation, and unbalanced use of natural resources for personal gain. On the other hand, such dualisms might be the exact reason why every time a community-oriented initiative is analyzed, we are faced with the same problem: the ideas are set in place, at times, and grassroots organizations and governmental agencies are provided with the opportunity to implement communitarian frameworks on a smaller scale, however, when it comes to actual and effective societal change, we seem to always be stuck and incapable of letting go from our neoliberal, destructive, and consumeristic ways of being. We shall now proceed to another movement that is somewhat connected to environmental education, however it warrants a section of its own, given that it represents the initiatives put forth by established public educational institutions to make themselves belong in the cultural commons, and provide society with the image or idea that they are providing a service.

5.5 Schools and the Public Square: Service Education, the Cultural Commons and Education

You have probably attended a free lecture, a café discussion or debate, or an artistic intervention promoted by a public university or a school. At their core, schools and universities are currently guided by the notions of *service education*, which demands that such institutions participate in the *cultural commons*. I shall explain. In a broad sense, service education is a term used within the context of adult education and training skills for specific, technical jobs. However, in a philosophical or theoretical sense, *service education* goes hand in hand with theories of community development, *i.e.*, with the idea that the knowledge produced in public institutions should, somehow, be given back to the

community-at-large in order to effectively contribute or participate in public discourse, therefore contributing to the betterment of society and the development of individuals who do not necessarily attend such institutions.

A more cynical approach, however, might accuse such institutions of promoting these initiatives of community outreach in order to promote their brand of schooling, which I must concur, makes sense and rings true, despite the fact that this research project did not preoccupy itself with seeking out evidence that the discourse of community engagement and communitarian participation counts with any assistance from the marketing and promotion departments of schools and universities. It goes to say that every institution's policy and practice guidelines will include community development and communitarian engagement as frameworks for action and public presence, therefore unfolding in initiatives such as public debates, cafés, public squares, invited authors, scientists, and artists, etc.²⁸

Schultz and Peters (2012) have developed a program named *Open Field* that illustrates well such communitarian endeavours and the reshaping of schools and education, in a broad sense, towards a more participatory and decisive presence within the public sphere. According to the authors, their initiative uses the concept of *the commons* (as we have seen earlier in this chapter, meaning all the things that belong to all of us) as a philosophical and programmatic framework in order to reimagine public gathering places that will promote serendipitous interactions, creative agency,

²⁸ In order to illustrate the statement above, I invite my reader to visit the strategic visions, for example, of British Columbia's two major research institutions, *The University of British Columbia* (may be read here: <https://strategicplan.ubc.ca/>), and *Simon Fraser University* (may be read here: <https://www.sfu.ca/engage/background.html>)

experimentation, the free exchange of ideas, etc. Such gatherings may take place at a schoolhouse, a demonstration at a public square, or a simple gathering in a public park. Such as with the environmental school movement, the “commoners”, as they at times identify, also promote minimal mediation when it comes to discourse or learning and researching processes.

Lewis Hyde (2012) affirms that in the United States in particular, the tension between individuality and the group, or between public and private seems more unusually marked than in other cultures, particularly given that notions such as “commonwealth” and “civic virtue” were notoriously present in the language of the foundations of the USA as a sovereign nation. An example of this tension occurred to me one night, once I lived on campus at a public Canadian university. A friend had given me a ride home, and due to her itinerary back to her place, she needed to drop me off on one side of the campus, therefore, I needed to cross the entire university in order to get home. It was about 2 in the morning. When I walked past a Starbucks coffee shop, the university security approached me and asked for my identification card. He also asked several questions, based on I do not know what assumptions, given that I was silently walking back home, such as where I was going, why was I out at 2 am, etc. I understand that legally, I had no obligation to engage with him, I could have simply ignored him and walked home, but instead I complied: showed him my identification card, explained that I needed to cross campus to reach home, wished him goodnight and uneventfully strolled in my leisurely pace back home.

Several questions came to mind while I walked home. Given that I did not engage in threatening behaviour, was silently walking home, what gave the public servant, *i.e.*,

the university's security guard, the right to ask to see my identification? Why did he want to know where I was going, if I was walking on public grounds, technically, owned by all Canadian citizens? If a homeless person needed to seek shelter in the university grounds, wouldn't it be her right to be warm and seek asylum, even if for a night only, at the university? Another issue bothered me: why was a public servant, who works for the university, strategically guarding a post near a private coffee shop on campus? Did the coffee shop request so, or was it the university's orientation? Is guarding the coffee shop part of a public servants' duty? It is my hope that this brief anecdote illustrates the tension, or in Hyde's own term, friction, between public and private ownership and service. Schools and universities are, from the ground up, complex places designed to advocate the common good and promote the betterment of society through technological advancement and community development, however, at times, they are held hostage to private endowments, donations, or commercial interests that end up influencing research results²⁹.

As I have analyzed earlier in this chapter, Korsgaard (2018) openly states that "communing" consists of "the process of making a living of the land without appropriating, enclosing or privatising it, but by sharing in the natural resources that the forest or the land offers" (Korsgaard, 2018, p. 2). The author then proceeds to justify that the concepts of commons and communing are rooted in anticapitalistic frameworks and to what is currently being called *postcapitalism*. Therefore, one might argue that the

²⁹ As an illustration of this friction, please *cf.*: Tate (2015) The business of bias: balancing the role of private money in scientific research. In: Students 4 Best Evidence.

promotion and circulation of knowledge pertains to the commons³⁰, and that schooling is inherently an activity that should not be concerned with production and outcomes, but should be a specific place of relationality, *i.e.*, that fosters a way of being and living and creating together.

Another aspect of commoning is the restoration of the idea of the common good. In an age in which most people walk around looking at their handheld devices and are preoccupied with their own selves and interests, the idea of being part of a whole, or of civic duty, seems to be overall old fashioned and cliché. In *The Common Good* (2018), Reich argues that children need to understand themselves not only as individuals capable of self-expression and seeking lucrative careers, but should also hold close to the idea that they are fully fledged citizens that need to operate and promote common core values. It is emblematic that “civic education” has been long wiped from North American curricula, given our increasing shift towards technical skills and labour issues. When I was living in Brazil, the Federal Government made philosophy and sociology mandatory subjects in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. What followed was a significant (yet insufficient) amount of employment opportunities for humanities and social science graduates, however the government’s agenda, through the Federal Ministry of Education, was to promote civic education through philosophy and sociology. As of April of 2019, the current Brazilian right-wing government is rolling forth measures to empty funding

³⁰ Knosgaard is not alone in his claim. To see the authors that back up his claim, a claim to which I personally agree with, please *cf.*: Bollier (2013) *The wealth of the commons: a world beyond market and state*. Levellers Press.; Hess & Ostrom (2011). *Understanding knowledge as a commons: from theory to practice*. MIT Press.; Menzies (2014). *Reclaiming the commons for the common good*. New Society Publishers; Wall (2014). *The commons in history: Culture, Conflict, and Ecology*. MIT Press.

towards philosophy and sociology, and the government's dangerous discourse is to shift funding towards fields of knowledge that will propitiate direct results to taxpayers³¹. The rhetoric rings familiar. The rhetoric of "us against them", of instant gratification, and of preoccupation with the economic aspects of society is common ground whence right-wing governments are in power. That community-oriented, anti-capitalist, anti-individualist initiatives still stand, and resist, is heartwarming in itself, however there are more elements that need to be factored into consideration if we are to effectively exercise broader, societal change: and perhaps the next step in such community building, or fostering of the communal self, is an education for wisdom.

5.6 The Continuing Search for Wisdom in Schools

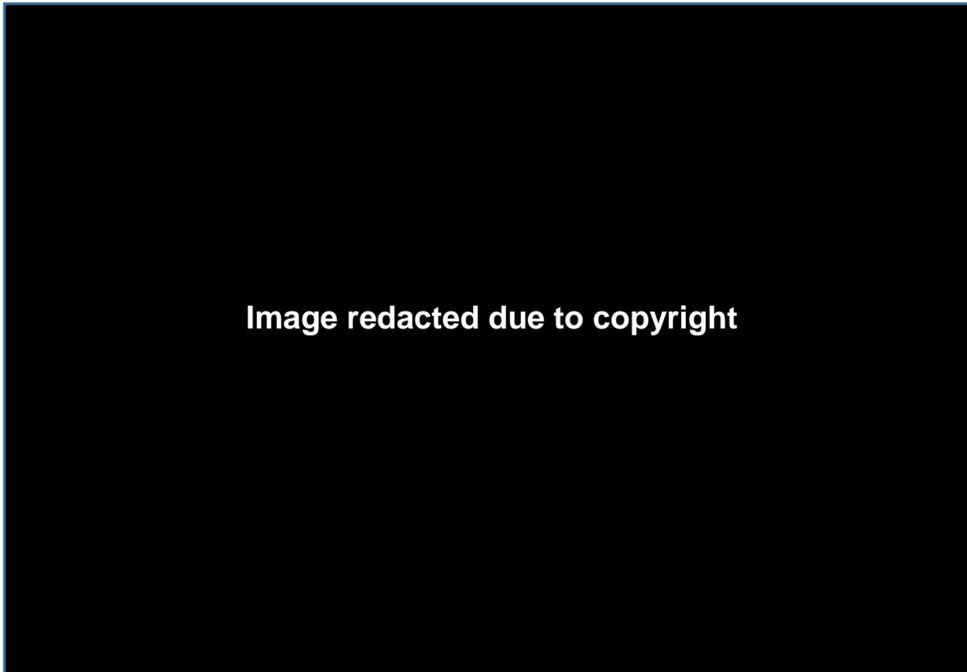


Image redacted due to copyright

³¹ Please *cf.*: Redden (2019). Brazil's Bolsonaro takes on philosophy, sociology. In: Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2019/04/29/brazils-bolsonaro-takes-philosophy-sociology>

The comic strip above, from Bill Watterson's series *Calvin and Hobbes* (1995), is emblematic. Advertisement conditions our behaviours, we often place blame onto external forces, and we are addicted to technological devices that reflect our own values, therefore deepening our immersion into our own... selves. We live in an environment that prizes lifelong learning and knowledge acquisition for self-betterment and self-care, but that conversely fails to teach us how to be wise and be able to live harmonically with each other. Steel (2014) establishes that our current ideas regarding education and wisdom discourage the pursuit of wisdom and replaces it with an emphasis on accountability, assessment, technological savvy, competitiveness in the global market, and the process of going to school resembling going to work, instead of going to learn and research at a leisurely pace. The former incites individualism and self-centeredness to the detriment of the latter.

Steel affirms that intelligence is not necessarily applied to a common good, whereas wisdom always is. Therefore, schools promote intelligence but fail to provide frameworks for wisdom seeking. Why would seeking wisdom be such an important element to schooling and education? And why would seeking wisdom help develop communal selves? In a broad, yet simple sense, Steel establishes that wisdom involves balancing the interests of self with those of others, consequently, taking into consideration a multiplicity of points of view. This theoretical framework establishes the communitarian aspect of wisdom education. Wisdom, Steel affirms, works under the presupposition of overcoming selfish ends.

Steel also addresses the ideology that schools should drift away from theoretical speculation and be places of analytic reasoning, and that will lead to the promotion of

talents or skills that will be acquired for the sole purpose of joining the labour force. Steele argues that at its root, the word theory, or *theoria* (θεωρίᾱ) in ancient Greek, was related to seeing, beholding and gazing upon, *i.e.*, reflecting. According to Steele, medieval scholastic philosophers (and ancient philosophers as well, I would add), considered theory the supreme and most authoritative way of knowing because “the empirical-scientific methods of knowing lauded by Dewey rely on the senses, and sense experience attends to the phenomenal world of appearances” (Steele, 2014, p. 32), *i.e.*, reflection, contemplation or theorizing would be superior because they are possessed by its subject and also incites the power of imagination³². Steele then explains the path that schools must take in order to move between practice and theory, claiming that theory will be superior because it is the critical element that can lead to wisdom:

...whereas the point of action or *praxis* is to attain the highest end for human beings as both mortal and human, the end of *theoria*, or the kind of “seeing” that is cultivated through leisure (*scholē*) is *Sophia*; and this end is not specific to human beings insofar as they are merely mortal (*thanatos*), but rather to the extent that they participate in what is immortal (*athanatos*) and divine. (Steele, 2014, p.47)

Steele ardently defends the superiority of theory in the path to wisdom. He affirms that theory is not an elitist affair for the spiritually inclined; on the contrary, it is an element of existence enjoyable by all human beings at the level of sensory perception. The author then concludes that wisdom, or *sophia* (σοφία) is the greatest good, and can be achieved through *scholē* and *theoria*, therefore leading human knowledge to partake in the context of a communal, “immortalizing” education.

³² For a detailed account regarding the power of imagination and its role in curricula and classroom practices, please *cf.*: Greene (1995). *Releasing the imagination: essays on education, the arts, and social change*. Jossey-Bass. I also invite the reader to revisit Yoko Ono and John Lennon’s artistic endeavours regarding the power of imagining peace in the several art installations, poems, and songs they released in 1971.

One of the merits of Steele's work, which very much inspired my own research project, is his ability to discuss theory from a historical, philosophical, and ontological perspective, and provide real life examples, discuss potential pitfalls, and contextualize philosophical thinking within the reality of schools. In a chapter devoted to the challenges of implementing contemplative education in schools, Steele acknowledges that the main barrier to the implementation of true contemplative practices is that in order to establish such practices, they demand that all thoughts about the self and self-assessment be left behind. In a sense, contemplative practice, within the context of Steele's analysis, consists of seeking knowledge through theorizing the entirety of reality as is. Steele is also weary of how institutions incorporate ancient wisdom (as we have discussed before in chapter 3, while reclaiming the myth of Narcissus and Echo) and promoting it as a technology of happiness. As example, Steele cites the case of the ever-increasing popularity of yoga, in which he claims that the practice of yoga might, as matter of fact, be driven by narcissism, given that it addresses some of the self's main preoccupations, such as attractiveness, sexual energy, health, and longevity.

Steele then proceeds from the potential pitfalls or problems of contemplative practices in schools, to propose what he names a "metaxic education", *i.e.*, an education of the "in-between", where elements such as love, friendship, participatory knowledge, and an emphasis on being and becoming would be part of the curriculum in a scholarly environment that prioritizes research at a leisurely pace. My only issue with Steele's conclusive remarks is his underlying pessimism. He acknowledges that in today's (neoliberal, I might add) world, actual contemplation and effective, organic change in education might not be possible, but if we cannot change the world around us, at least we

can change ourselves. As an educator since 1999, I am tired of not changing the world, or of the world not being changed by the billions of communal agents that inhabit it. And I am a firm believer that, yes, we can indeed and should fight to change the world.

5.7. Final Remarks Regarding Communal Institutions for the Communal Self

This is a propitious moment to add that, except for the environmental school movement, I have had firsthand experience in several initiatives that claim to offer and advocate frameworks for community development. For the sake of full disclosure, I must make clear that I did not partake in any of my educational roles, be them teaching, researching, or conducting administrative duties in order to gather data for my research.

My research project is a narrative inquiry, rooted in critical historical ontology (Cushman, 1995) with a hint of philosophical speculation and non-behaviourist psychological analysis, and therefore does not possess a single element of empirical data. However, I would be remiss if I did not say that my firsthand account within several of the community-oriented initiatives studied here was not insightful in order to identify the genesis of the failure of such initiatives to enact actual large-scale societal change.

Besides organic and meaningful change needing time, effort, or an actual revolution to take place, all the initiatives researched and cited above failed to deeply identify the problem of the foundation of the self in the contemporary age as an issue that needs to be addressed at its core. What happens is that we have community oriented initiatives where narcissistic consumers participate, at times to speak to themselves, at times to attempt to release from the bounds of the self. Truth be said, we are deeply

enmeshed in a neoliberal ontology and we have not yet figured out how to move beyond it.

The issue at hand is tremendous. Often there is much lip service regarding collaboration, community development, and communal living (Gergen, 2009; Theobald, 1997; Strhan, 2012), and we must also be aware that excessive emphasis on communal living might also be an oppressive force. We are ultimately individuals, albeit communal individuals, as a certain level of individuality needs to be respected and preserved in order to allow collaborative endeavours to flourish organically, without mediation. It is therefore the main motivation of this research project to offer my reader a possible path to understanding the historical ontology of selfhood and identify how we came to be and live and coexist in today's world.

Last, but not least, it is my proposal that in order to move from neoliberal, individualist, exploitative, mechanistic ontologies, we need to reclaim community from a perspective that goes beyond the mere lip service of ethics, morality, or care, and implement such frameworks in a more wholesome way. Such way might be a way towards the education for the communal self that I will subsequently analyze in three ways, utilizing three main frameworks: imagination, educational practice, and educational policy.

Chapter 6.

A Way towards an Education for the Communal Self

6.1. Prolegomenon to the Communal Self: The Power of Imagination

I am often asked what a true, empirical, real communal self would look like. As I have stated in chapter 1, I would much prefer to leave this matter for my reader to imagine, to utilize the frameworks I offered throughout this dissertation, to study the theories and try them out in the classroom. However, I shall, for the sake of offering a glimpse of a personal contribution and to honour the demands of an educational mode of expression that needs to honour my authorial self, henceforth imagine the communal self.

The communal self shall be educated to believe that all life is ephemeral, and therefore precious and worthy of unconditional love, respect, care, and compassion. The communal self will be taught that all humans should be treated with dignity and respect, such as we have seen in the section regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities. All life deserves respect regardless of physical differences, different means of expression, or ethical, moral, and sexual orientation. The communal self will be taught that she is, in fact, an individual, to the extent that she possesses a body, a mind, and she occupies space. The extensions of the communal self's individuality will be limited by the ethical demand of being in relation to others. If the communal self is introverted, she will be granted enough alone time to recharge from contact with others. If extroverted, the communal self will learn to be generous and limit his or her influence in the group, or community. If in the communal self's culture, silence is honourable, she will not be put

on the spot to participate in group discussions. If talkative, the communal self may be instructed, or helped, or guided to learn more about the benefits of silence.

I can hear the reader thinking how naïve, and perhaps excessively modest, or lazy the ideas above might sound. In a world in which we are increasingly divided politically, and cannot seem to find any consensus regarding age-old wars for land, cultural heritage, economic and social advantage, in which professional politicians succumb to the desires of their egos and commit subsequent corrupt actions in an interminable cycle of horror and stupidity, it is difficult to find a place for love, respect, understanding, and communality.

The problem of genuine communal selfhood complicates on a much more hands-on, empirical, or pragmatic level as well. Back in 2012, one of my thesis co-advisors suggested that I tended to romanticize community to the detriment of individuality, and he also suggested that I experience community more. To be fair to my co-advisor, I never disclosed to him the type of community work I had done as a member of youth groups in Brazil, nor had I discussed the work we did in Brazilian slums. I did, however, throw myself into communities in my current hometown, and did a fair share of volunteer work, part-time employment, and at times, full time jobs in community-oriented non-profits. For the sake of full disclosure, I believe I need to legally affirm that I did not take up any of the employment opportunities or volunteer positions for the sake of this research project. I volunteered at places where I was accepted because it was decided that I could be of help, and I was granted part time or full-time employment in places where I was deemed a good fit to contribute. My point here being that, besides teaching and researching, I have also done a fair amount of community-oriented work in other

institutions, and it was not uncommon to hear from my colleagues, often highly trained social workers sentences such as “I need to deal with this scum every weekend”, “these people are the lower of the lowest types of bums you can ever imagine”, “I hate humans despite working with them my entire life”, and “my brother was murdered for nothing, therefore all murderers deserve the death penalty”.

I understand why at times we think less of each other, and why at times we are not capable of care, understanding, or peace. Much of it comes from our inherent instinct to protect ourselves, however, we must not fall into the traps of biologism in order to justify human actions and therefore extirpate ourselves from communal responsibility and care for each other. Perhaps, if we taught our children that our selves are all interconnected anyway, in a dramatic yet inherent form, we would not snap at a co-worker because she was talking while you were trying to concentrate on your task. You could approach the co-worker calmly and ask her to lower her voice. Once again, I rely on examples that might seem trivial, but, to a certain degree, I feel that often we are losing our sense of humanity on a very basic, trivial level. I find it more difficult than ever to walk downtown Vancouver during rush hour, largely because individuals are not mindful of each other while walking in public, making it increasingly difficult to share communal spaces. There might come a time in which we simply forget how to walk.

The communal self does not need to be a stereotypical do-gooder nor beatifical. MacFarquhar (2015) accounts for a series of persons that possess an impossible ethical and moral standard on how to live their lives in service of others. At times, the subjects of her study appear as excessively eccentric, incoherent, dangerous, or simply annoying, difficult to live with. In her studies, for instance, MacFarquhar (2015) tells the story of

the vegan activist who spends an hour preparing lentils, and sixteen hours advocating for animal rights, but, at the end of the day, he is incapable of washing the pot in which he cooked the lentils in the first place, therefore profoundly irritating his partner. This is yet another trivial but concrete example of the real-life implications of often abstract ethical demands.

To finalize, I would like to return to the frameworks for the communal self analyzed in chapter 4. If we assisted in the development of a self that is diluted (or dissolved), and understood that the self is a mobile entity in constant flux; if we assumed that the self has an ethical demand to the exterior, if we assumed that the self is outward-oriented and needs to act in relation to the exterior with care and compassion, we could flip the ethos of rampant individualism, competitiveness, and consumerism on its head, and orient a new type of individual that would naturally take care of her surrounding, take responsibility for the ways in which her actions unfolds, and foster more sustainable ways of living. Does this still seem a bit too idealistic and abstract to you? I am sure it does. It is often difficult to verify how ideas in fact shape our world, particularly when we are in the eye of the idea-storm. This is precisely why in the next two sections, I will discuss potential policies that schools could effectively implement in order to assist in the creation and development of communal agents/selves, and I will also discuss educational practices that I have adopted in order to attempt to develop a sense of communal selfhood. In the following section, I shall briefly analyze some success I might have had, although they might have also been examples of failure.

6.2. Well, At Least I Tried: Educational Practices for the Communal Self

You will remember how I fell into teaching rather than deliberately choosing my profession. The reader will also remember that how I came to love my profession was fortuitous: as a young man struggling to make sense of his self, his place, and his being-in-relation to the world, I had little to no idea who I was, nor of what I could do professionally. I liked drawing but was bad at it. I liked writing, and my early writing drew some attention from my schoolteachers, yet, here I sit, now a forty-one-year-old man, never having realized my childhood dream of becoming a writer. To a large extent, I might confess, I always had writing at the back of my mind, and I always sort of kept writing both fiction and non-fiction as a hobby. Independently of the pursuits I undertook professionally, what remained to constantly fascinate me were the stories that the people whom I interacted with told me.

Perhaps my love of stories, narratives, and storytelling, in a general sense, inform my approach to teaching for the past twenty years. I was never a traditional teacher who filled the board with facts and ordered my students to copy that information and reproduce it in a test. Nor have I ever claimed to possess any supreme truth that could be told and taught and reproduced. On the contrary, I always thought of teaching as facilitating the spark of knowledge to catch on, or of inciting my students to think for themselves, and draw conclusions, and be challenged. To the best of my ability, I tried to inspire my students instead of preaching or professing to them.

In sum, I always thought of myself as a facilitator, not necessarily a teacher nor a professor. Perhaps my strict Catholic upbringing made me horrified of the idea of

professing anything, although at times, I will admit, I have tried to be the smart guy in the room and have pontificated. In hindsight, it is strange that I am until this day averse to professing, but yet can still see humour in pontificating, because the moral implication in my pontification is carried with self-deprecating humour. Aware of my limitations, I might have wanted to be seen as the smart guy in the room, but was blatantly merely making a fool of myself, without being ashamed of it.

Part of the lack of shame of taking risks, making a fool of myself, or attempting to seem like the smart kid in class, knowing that I was far from being so, was partly a defense from myself, and partly an attempt to be free from myself. Even my strictly pedagogical belief and my role as teacher/facilitator have been much in line with my writing. As facilitator/teacher, I also thought of myself as mere vessel in which ideas, knowledge, and research projects would pass through and fill the heads and hearts of the students who chose to partake in the collective endeavour.

My role as teacher/facilitator is complicated to explicate because in teaching, one never truly knows how one might affect or inspire or influence the heads and hearts of students. Beyond any hard skill that could be taught, verified or measured, my role as a teacher/facilitator of philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, and even or English grammar, was much more in line with inspiring the community of learners, *i.e.*, me, my colleagues, and my students, to search for the spark of knowledge and develop enthusiasm for ideas, and also a sense of wonder for the search in itself. Such inspiration obviously is murky territory, given that certain difficult aspects of the human experience are largely result of the way in which certain soft skills are developed, communicated, accepted, or negated. I shall explain.

Todd (2003) states that our responses to the narratives of others incurs in risking one's self-identity. As result of such ethical demands and the inherent relation between selves and others, the self is continuously renewed in relation to the other who signifies. I must add that I also have thought of teaching/facilitating as an artistic, aesthetic endeavour, rather than a scientific, pragmatic, or even pedagogical one (pedagogy here used in a strict sense). My artistic view of the teacher is much in line with Maxine Greene's (2008), who saw teaching as an artistic and therapeutic endeavour, in the sense in which the teacher/student relationship is permeated by a continuous sense of adventure and love of knowledge, *i.e.*, philosophy. But I must return to Todd (2003) in order to justify some of my facilitation ideas, in which I attempted to contribute to a community of selves in common.

Todd (2003) continues her argument, exploring how everyday relations make our sense of selves, and how learning takes place through genuine listening and attentiveness to the other. Todd (2003) obviously comes from within a context of classes in the social sciences and humanities where discussion and the analysis of difficult socially oriented topics is more common. I would argue, however, that contribution is in fact the fabric of true knowledge, as we have seen in chapter 4, through my analysis of the notion of dividuality proposed both by Lewis Hyde and Simon Critchley. With the above in mind, teachers and professors in STEM or any other hard science could very much benefit from fostering collaborative learning environments. I shall exemplify from the humanities and social sciences, however, because these are the fields in which I possess firsthand experience, therefore being able to account for better.

In my classrooms, I always prepared short presentations or assigned readings in order to initiate conversations. From the start, on day one, I would make the point that all ideas were valued, and that we should genuinely listen to each other in attentive, wholesome ways. For the most part, students would simply buy into this requirement, and although often disagreeing with each other, they would keep their composure, communicate their thoughts, state points of disagreement, and simply agree to disagree and move on. Student feedback was generally positive, and several accounts in evaluation forms have stated that they felt valued, inspired, and comfortable contributing because there was no true right or wrong (although, there obviously was!), or because classes were a non-judgemental environment (it obviously was non-judgemental, and I made a point of making respectful interactions and relationality be at the core of research exploration, complex thinking, and sense of awe before the challenges discussed in the classroom, or read about).

I also made a point to, when possible, remove any pressure regarding assignments and deadlines. When I was instructor of record, I would generally assign two formal papers: a 1500-word essay due after seven weeks of class that would be annotated by me, and returned to students within two weeks. After I returned the paper, that could be about any specific topic relative to the class topics that specifically interested them, they could utilize my feedback and develop a 3000-word final paper due after thirteen weeks. There were also peer-review sessions in which they were able to share each other's papers and contribute to each others' ideas. This removed the constant pressure, made students feel valued and respected, and shifted their attention to inquiring and pondering and reflecting about the many topics we developed in class, such as the complex relation between

schools and societal normativity. A former student of mine, let's call her Zadie, affirmed in an article she wrote for another class that my assignments made students focus on what really mattered: to develop independent research and to communicate such research within the community of knowledge. I often encouraged students to choose topics that were relevant to public discourse and discussed with them the possibility of transforming the 3000-word essay into a 750-word op-ed to be submitted to a local newspaper. Some students took up the task, understood the value of service, and have successfully had pieces selected for publication.

It is my hope that the examples above illustrate to the reader somehow, how the communal self might act. By simply attempting to be thoughtful, caring, mindful of actions, and engaged within the community, selves are porous, interconnected, interrelated, interdependent, yet, respectful of the individual boundaries of the communal self. I most definitely attempted to bring elements of dialogue, shared community, service education, and a search for wisdom in substitution of mere technical expertise to my classroom. I do value technical expertise, but I also believe that the emphasis on hard skills and technical development has largely contributed to the cold hearted solidification of the narcissistic self as main ontological framework, therefore diminishing the usage of soft skills such as inter-personality, effective and clear communication, work ethic, compassion and care. But I shall return to pedagogical examples in my practice.

My few examples above were not met without challenges. I would like to share with my reader the potential pitfalls I subjected myself to, and how I handled two particularly difficult situations despite, to this day, not being able to know if I effectively solved the issue or not. I will now tell the story of two self-proclaimed conservative

students, and I shall name them David and Jonathan. David identified as a conservative Asian-Canadian, and Jonathan identified as white male of Swedish descent. David was my student in a class I taught in 2011, and Jonathan took a different class with me two years later. Both students were extremely uncomfortable with reading Paulo Freire's classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and discussing any issues regarding multiculturalism, inclusion, or diversity in the classroom. Both students booked office hours in order to openly challenge me. Without really having a clear idea about what was going on in their heads, I took the meetings.

I shall begin with David. David sat down in front of me without any hesitation and simply stated that our reading materials were leftist propaganda. Back in 2011, I must say, I personally was not aware of any increase in the divisiveness within our cultural political discourse, so I was quite taken aback by David's accusation. I asked him what made him feel like the course material was leftist propaganda, and he mentioned Freire's references to Marxism, to empowering the oppressed, and so on and so forth, and offered me a stringent defense of capitalistic logic: that the logic of the market was imperative, added to the survival of the fittest, and human nature.

As this dissertation demonstrates, without at the time having fully fleshed out what my thoughts were, I obviously disagreed with David. Without confronting him, or utilizing any rhetorical mechanisms in order to disprove his rationale, I simply defended the pedagogical value of offering readings and thoughts and ideas that were alternative to what was offered in the mainstream, *i.e.*, that were alternatives to the narrative of the victor, capitalism. I also defended myself, stating that I could not be accused of being leftist or a member of the right, given that I was not affiliated to any political party. Such

fact, therefore, established me as an independent, agenda-less thinker and educator (or so I thought), that, armed with the imaginary academic freedom of part-time faculty, could openly challenge his students' assumptions regarding schooling, society, and social mechanisms. David did not seem too pleased with my response, but I like to think that we reached some form of consensus, given that we continued to actively participate in classroom discussions in a helpful and productive manner. I do not recollect David making fun of, being disrespectful towards, nor dismissive of any of the course readings or discussions from our meeting onwards. Perhaps consensus here might seem like agreeing to disagree, perhaps not. I like to think that I made my point come across, and that David accepted it and chose to become a member of the learning community. In many ways, I like to think that this dissertation is some sort of response to people such as David.

Precisely two years later, Jonathan was a student in our class, and he also asked to book an office hour meeting with me, given that not only *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but also our reader in multicultural issues were deemed by him as leftist propaganda. Jonathan also seemed very comfortable with explaining to me the meaning of propaganda, indoctrination, and he comfortably lectured me on human inequality, biologism, and human nature. I basically explained the same I had explained to David two years prior: my role, as an educator, was to present alternatives to mainstream discourse, and incite my students to come to terms with how they choose to navigate life in their own way.

Jonathan at times was the type of student who would be dismissive, or disruptive, making random statements to diminish the value of issues discussed in class, but I always

remained calm and incorporated his contributions into what was being discussed. If he deliberately chose to be the classroom clown, I let him be, and without punishing him, would often thank him for making his peers laugh, or would motivate him, saying that his intelligent and humorous observations would be always welcome in class, and that his peers very much valued what he said. It might not have been a perfect pedagogical solution, but Jonathan did tone down his jesting, and often actually did contribute in more meaningful ways. At the end, he wrote a well-researched, challenging, yet well thought-out paper, and received a good grade for demonstrating effort, hard work, and being able to back up his opinions through his thorough research.

As I have stated above, one never truly knows how much one influences or helps or inspires one's students. To the best of my ability, I treated every student I ever worked with or for, with the maximum of dignity, and the classroom environment I facilitated was always a space in which communal individuals could thrive. Shy students were welcome to keep to themselves and only speak to me and/or their peers in private. Extremely extroverted students were encouraged to attempt to listen more, and to support the voice of those who did not have a voice as strong as theirs. All in all, I attempted to balance and value individuals as a collective, *i.e.*, the individuality of perspectives as being valued part of the totality that constitutes the learning community, and if I was ever asked what would be the one and only thing I would have liked students to take with them, it would be that they be capable of loving life, and that they find within themselves to value life and all the connections we make with our exterior because nothingness is the norm of existence, and life is a beautiful and rare occurrence. To me, at least, this is the true meaning of community, beyond good and evil, beyond richness and poverty, beyond

social inequality, and beyond anything that divides us. Perhaps still a bit idealized or utopic, in my head the above would be manifestations or indications toward an education for the communal self.

Also worthy of note was the period in which I acted as a somewhat pedagogical facilitator support young adults with developmental disabilities. Part of my work, the most important part, was to assess each students' learning styles and modify lectures, course materials, notes, or provide instructional and educational videos and/or audio clips in order to facilitate their learning experience. To facilitate the access of young adults with developmental disabilities to post-secondary education was certainly one of the highest honours of my entire professional career, and an honour as a mere citizen, as well. However, to surpass the many societal, institutional, and prejudiced barriers imposed upon the students whom I worked for was also an immense personal challenge. It became clear to me that Gebauer *et al.* (2012) were absolutely correct in their assessment of the existence of spaces for communal narcissists to inhabit, given that rational communal agency resulted in the exclusion of persons with developmental disabilities, and if often students with autism could go on unnoticed or socialize in positive ways, the physical manifestation of students with down syndrome often resulted in them carrying the heavy stigma and burden of being avoided in communal spaces. In many ways, as I have said several times above, it became apparent to me that our society was just not ready to overcome our imaginary inequalities, nor to acknowledge that we owe to each other the decency of treating each other with love and care and understanding, given that we are fellow passengers in the brief moment of life.

I shall now proceed to discuss potential policies that schools could put in place in order to foster, develop, and propitiate the flourishing of communal agents. It is my hope that my reader understands that, since we are in the middle of a paradigm shift towards communitarianism, at times, my educational examples and practices might seem thin or perhaps even trivial. However, if my reader has attentively made her way through the theories that inform an orientation towards the communal self, she shall notice that such practices are inspired, drawn from, and practiced from the perspective of the frameworks for communal selfhood. I must anticipate that a few educational policies we shall analyze in the following section might also seem thin or too preliminary, but schools and educational institutions in general, have been notably attempting to shift towards genuine communitarianism and collaborative knowledge-creation. As I analyze policies, I will also briefly comment on the ways in which the practices used as examples in this section connect to each policy.

6.3. Educational Policies for Communal Selves

What follows still draws from the imaginative activity proposed in section one of this chapter, in which I offered my reader an abstract viewpoint regarding what the communal self might look like. It is also somewhat inspired by actual policies that institutions have been adopting in order to figure out how to create communal spaces for communal selves to inhabit. I will now proceed to describe educational policies that could support genuine communal selves, and briefly discuss a few educational practices that might support such policies.

Martin and McLellan (2013) say that educational psychology's main error was to conceptualize the self as an isolated and empirical entity, therefore creating an abstract being isolated from community. With this principal in mind, we must challenge the sovereignty of this assumption (as I hope to have done well enough in chapter 2) and, from acknowledging that the self is an abstract entity created in order to assist in meaning-creating or meaning-giving, reshape the self towards its more communal aspects, such as its fluidity, similarities, the benefits of sharing, and the benefits of being in relation to, from an ethical standpoint. Utilizing Mead's (1964) famous principle, we must accept that we do not learn in order to socialize, but we socialize in order to learn. After all, it is primarily through our activity in the world that we come to know who we are, therefore the social nature of education is inherent to living ethically, and the teacher has a central role in mediating or facilitating student development in relation to the student's socializing process.

Steel (2014) says that the self is enemy of *scholé*. In its origins, the term that originated the modern "school" meant leisure. Steel affirms that the classic understanding of school was permeated by an ethos of a leisurely exploration of communal living, where, once self-interest was removed and the self was no longer an impediment to learning, the path to wisdom could be paved. In terms of academic or scholarly content, for instance, the age old scheme of translating a book into a lecture and a lecture into a discussion and a discussion into assignments where students need to reproduce the content through rote memorization, or something similar, is far removed from the original ideas regarding a place for wisdom and communal living.

One potential policy could be that academic content be connected to the development of local communities. Students in the social sciences and humanities could write opinion pieces to local newspapers and magazines, STEM students could participate in projects that improve local technology and infra-structure, learning on-site when possible. The same could apply to elementary and secondary school: besides basic academics, students could engage in developing community gardens, or schools could be more integrated in ways that influence local communities.

Policies could then structure communal partnerships in which engagement, reciprocity, diversity, equality and diverse voice could impact students, families, and citizens-at-large. Case studies, online portfolios, journaling in order to propitiate in-depth reflection, experiential essays and artistic installations could all substitute traditional school papers, multiple-choice, or standardized tests. Such policies would be much in line with service education, or education seen as an integrated and wholesome service, integral to local communities.

Last, but not least, Reich (2018) says that we need to restore the common good as a renewed commitment to civic education. He argues that children must not only see themselves as individuals capable of self-expression who must seek lucrative careers and pursue material goods, but must, above all, be invited and taught to see themselves as citizens, capable of upholding common values. Reich (2018) also defends that, as a public good, policies should be in place in order to guarantee access to education in order to develop the notion of civic virtue, therefore reconnecting to its moral roots. Therefore, a policy must take place in which civic education would be at the heart of educating and schooling. Such education, says Reich (2018), would equip young persons to be able to

communicate with whom they don't necessarily agree with, or I might add, might seem different or might seem to function differently in relation to oneself. Reich also proposes that students could very much take up responsibilities in their communities, such as mentoring groups, taking care of elders, coaching, etc.

To finalize, educational policies to foster communal selves must have at their core a strong sense that, as communal selves, we owe to each other support, compassion, help, courtesy, and ethical behaviour, beyond the limitations and needs of the individual self. Perhaps we are too late to the game. Perhaps we are already broken to the point of no return. Perhaps, I might say, scientists, pundits, journalists, and politicians are right and we are, indeed, beyond any possibility of changing or improving our conditions of surviving as a species. As an idealist, I have been broken repeated times before the coldness and cruelty of stark reality. I choose however, to remain dreaming on and invite dreamers to use this study, and push beyond it, hopefully coming up with better ideas and offering actual solutions that I at times point at, but do not seek to grasp, nor could I ever claim to. If this study can inspire action in teachers and citizens, whomever its potential readers may be – it will have been well worth the adventure.

6.4. Final Considerations

Three of my current favourite writers are Zadie Smith, Jia Tolentino, and Leslie Jamieson. In many ways, all three are heirs of David Foster Wallace, also one of my favourite writers. But these final words are not about my favourite writers. They are about *what I admire most* in their writing fiction and non-fiction. All four writers amuse me and continue to amaze me, because, as if by magic, they proceed to investigate

subjects, topics, or themes, and yet are still capable of transmitting to their readers a certain sense of self-doubt.

In this sense, I believe that my favourite writers and favourite teachers in life were way more generous, intelligent, and compassionate than I ever will be as a human being. If you ask me if I think I am right in affirming that communality is better than rampant individualism, if sharing is better than accumulating property, if marketing in order to extract interest and profit is evil, wrong, twisted or unethical, I would certainly say yes, I do think all of the above. One element that my favourite writers and teachers all do have in common that I also possess is the hidden feeling that I am fooling myself. Deep down, I know humans will never change, that as a species we are in fact doomed, and that nature will find a way to continue thriving without us, continual will to power that it is. And yet, perhaps my delusions are a necessary element of my persona, of being a caring, other-oriented educator-facilitator, who has devoted his entire life to assisting others: either as a church-going youth member and later youth organizer, as teaching assistant, as busser or server at restaurants, or responding to customer questions and concerns when I worked in retail, or as college and university instructor, or as part-time journal editor, janitor, housing manager, non-profit facilitator, university administrator support staff, or government employee. I did not spend enough time analyzing my many failures, the things that went wrong, analyzing the compulsiveness of my themes of interest, the disgust I often have with my own self-centeredness hidden under the veil of the caring educator-facilitator. Whoever knows the real Jason Manuel Carreiro up close knows that I am a farce, and yet day in and day out, I continue to pretend because I know I will be judged and remembered by the two or three people who shall remember me, based on my

actions, my influence, anything I did or performed in order to try to be better, to overcome my selfish orientation, my own narcissism, my need for love and validation from others.

In many ways, this project is also the communication of a failure. I am very aware that I bit off way, way more than I could chew when selecting a topic of inquiry, and yet, I am fortunate to have returned to a topic that I began investigating as an undergraduate philosophy and pedagogy major. Thanks to the generosity of my institution and my academic advisors, I could write a doctoral dissertation in a strict social science, *i.e.*, in education, and develop this long essay on educational matters of self and other, a topic so difficult, yet fascinating to me. Have I failed? Have I succeeded? I try not to think about life in terms of success or failure. Nor do I try to think about having an impact, reaching a goal, planning the future. I have learned that all I can do is live in the present.

I have also learned throughout the years that I no longer have any desire for any conclusions, endings, unifying theories. Therefore, it is my hope that this study inspires dreamers who can do better than I did, and that my reader may forgive my confusion, uncertainties, and also the jumpiness of my mind, and see them as the manifestation of what I wanted to be a communal voice, that would be inviting, open-ended, and, most importantly, worthy of your time and attention, imagining a way towards an education for the communal self.

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