

DECONSTRUCTING AND CONSTRUCTING THE SENSE OF SELF

Héctor Leos



My ever-progressing interpretation of the sense of self depicts it as a circular mechanism necessary to navigate the paradoxical nature of a being taking itself as its own object of study. This project is at the same time an attempt to interpret my own self as an *ever-progressing interpretation* and an effort to draw a semi-objective picture of this phenomenon that can be effectively communicated to others.

A reaction to the crisis-speaking awareness bleeding through the “fragmented self” of the cognitive sciences, I begin by asking: **How can we make sense of an objective theory of the cognitive mechanisms which give rise to the subjectivity through which we devise such mechanisms?** (The question is necessarily convoluted.) Maybe the answer is: we can't.

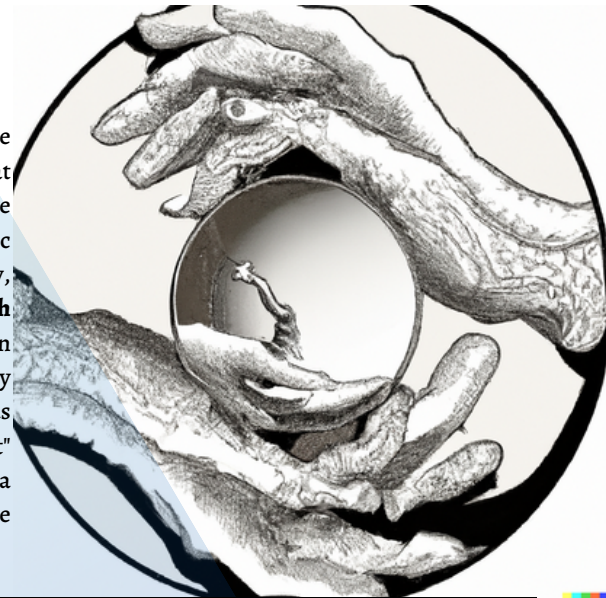
By engaging in self-referential creative writing, I am in the process of deconstructing the very notion of who I am in order to understand who I am becoming. Crucially, this personal transformation will not occur in isolation, but in a world full of others.

Ultimately, my goal is to construct a theory of self which is aware of its own construction and that embraces the paradox therein—a theory that will make justice to the recursively-rooted process of a conscious being deepening its multi-faceted relationship with its own being-consciousness.

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BACKGROUND

The knowledge I acquired during my undergrad at McGill left me with a strange feeling of dissatisfaction. This feeling, I suspect, is rooted in the fact that cognitive scientists are using their own brains, along with their cognitive capabilities, to develop a theory of cognitive processing. While scientific research commonly separates the subject from its world to achieve objectivity, **the cognitive scientist takes as his object of study the thing-in-the-world which perceives, conceptualizes, and understands his world as such.** This realization makes it hard to believe that an understanding of *ourselves* can ever be a truly objective effort. If ever, that sort of effort will only yield a view that sees us as lifeless, knowledge-seeking machines, a view that would inevitably "leave us out" of the picture. In this project I seek to approach the self, not through a methodology that aims to be explanatory, but *interpretative*. Only then will these investigations disclose the being that can know his world but not himself.



WE MUST FULLY EMBRACE THE PARADOX THAT WE ARE

SUBJECTIVE RE-EXAMINATION OF MY OWN SELF

By working with the frameworks of hermeneutics, existentialism, and process philosophy, I'm formulating my investigation as a **continuous process of self-interpretation**, as opposed to a systematic puzzle-solving approach that has the end in mind from the start. I begin by allowing an *authentic* conversation to occur between the inner voices that narrate my life, without claiming ownership of any of them, and by letting them speak their truth as they get to know each other. This is done with the intention of **deconstructing my whole into the parts that form it**, in order to construct them back into someone I'm inclined to recognize as *myself*. The psycho-existential nature of such a task requires a form of expression that can open up the space for deconstructive creativity; I chose the permissive vessel of a short story. Here are some of its key excerpts:

You, parasitic apperception of tones and silhouettes bundled up into a space made for me to feel. This is a desk; this is a chair. This multitudinous electrostatic incarnating is your right foot cramped under the weight of this, the-rest-of-your-own-body. Tell me, oh mirrored, self-absorbing, self-consuming being, **What is your purpose in the world?**

TORUS IS THE SHAPE OF EXISTENCE

HECTOR LEOS

You, evolvingly apish, inconsistently lucid being, asking me not to understand things, and what is worse, asking me what my purpose is. **In this incongruence we have turned ourselves to be.** You know better than asking; I know better than conceiving this reply. **What I'm trying to stress here is just that—our purpose is theory.**

Stop wasting your time writing this stupid "story" and start working on an article or something that you can publish in a journal where the experts are going to be able to give you feedback. This is how theory is built—it is a *collective* process. **Creative writing is not collective; it is a deeply personal pursuit.**

You, always you, trying to explain me away, to **conclude me for me**, shoving me into a complex logical system of floating grounds that can certify the contradiction in what I am conveying. Listen, so-called theory-maker, but do it pre-cognitively, as you preach.

Contemplate and appreciate the dazzling beingness of nonbeing. Reflect about this incongruence, oh logical psychopath, as you shut the gates of your cogitative stream and let the *gulf of all overflow* overflow over all your other senses overflow and **become all your other senses all at once**, once again, purely synesthesia in an arching continuity drizzle-drizzled by this arching overwhelming continuity without the necessities of logic or the silent hands of standard aestheticism. Allow just your manner, in so fractured a gesture, in so hollow a substantiation. You bring your foot down, terrified of the idea of losing it forever. Three minutes later, right-foot is back. You managed to write a whole paragraph full of nonsense, including one or two of

The person is part of the world and so the theory is an interpretation of the person



FRAMING THE NOTION OF COLLECTIVE SELF

In his book "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", Thomas Kuhn suggests that when a scientific community adopts a new paradigm, its members start *perceiving* the world differently, in the same way an individual may perceive a Gestalt in two different ways. Although Kuhn is careful to point out that his observation might just be metaphorical, I'm curious about the theoretical circumstances in which such a notion would make sense. I begin by asking: **If we assume that the collective self has some sort of ontological reality, what are the conditions of possibility for its full realization?** Neuroscience presupposes that the sense of self arises as a function of the deeply interconnected brain. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that our neural networks are at the same time inevitably connected to the external world, and that this world is inhabited by *other* conscious neural networks. **Could we frame our social reality in terms of a system capable of developing an awareness of itself?**

INSIGHTS GAINED FROM MY EXPLORATION

DECONSTRUCTION MUST AT THE SAME TIME CONSTRUCT

A blind and undirected process of deconstruction can be harmful. This is why it is essential that one continuously re-evaluates what aspects of their identity need to be reformulated, and which ones must act as the driving force in their quest for self-discovery. Only then will one deconstruct oneself in a direction that will be hermeneutically productive: **the self must interpret itself back.**

THE PROCESS CAN GROUND ITSELF

The only way we can approach the recursive paradox of the self "unveiling its true nature" is by **taking the process in itself as the beginning, means, and end of itself.** Indeed, I am proposing a truly circular solution, which I argue is necessary to account for the circular nature of the self taking itself as its object of investigation.

Hey! Indeed! Really hope you don't discover the theory of "everything", otherwise you'd probably lose your meaning in life

Its a paradox I believe



THE SELF AND THE OTHER CO-SUBJECTIZE "THEMSELVES"

In contrast with a Sartrean, almost pessimistic view of the Other, my time at Building 21 has led me to realize that "the stare of the other" has the potential to subjectify us in meaningful ways. There might no be any need for the individual to reach the so-called *collective self* through a community: the fact is that people we share our lives with, by shaping our experience of ourselves-in-a-world-with-others, offer us a realm of possible definitions we can adopt for ourselves. From the language built to explain a shared reality, to the supportive and nurturing reception of self-expression, a collective can act as its own source of meaning and orientation. **A collective can create its world.**

After deconstructing the Western individualistic account of selfhood derived from the thought of Descartes, my hermeneutic journey has brought me to a satisfactory relationship of Self, one which can be outlined by the tenet of the African philosophy of Ubuntu:

"I am because we are"


ROAD TO SAN JERONIMO

HÉCTOR LEOS

We are driving down the highway to old San Jeronimo like we used to do when we knew each other and our place in the world.) Time hasn't faded the bone-ticking thrill of this escape. You know what I'm talking about: the taste and touch of sweaty windows rolled down, wide open bottles, the roar of engines, and lyrics of confessions and love. "oh Aiden, how do you describe it? It's like a warm blanket, they're going to be in my go of would

Tell me, then: what are we going to do next?
Write.
Love, and write.





When God first perceived themselves he became human. Time spun forward and space spanned outward, both into a world that he no longer was. From this creative nihilation his memory creative nihilation his memory sprung. He will never forget the truth in instantaneity never forget the truth in his own nothingness, for these (truly a single two-sided truth, darling, my darling) subsist as a vortex in unconscious life. As long as he exists, he is condemned to be oriented towards them towards. But he can only make them prayers. He can only make them art towards.

That's the reason why I follow prophets and artists alike. Not just any of their kind, but those who spread their word and virtue in dreams. For how else could they regain the pure perception that was by and from them stolen? *Mañana comemos*. Sometimes I meet them while they are dreaming, oh, while they are dreaming with their eyed prisms translucent, multicolored eyed prisms translucent. Prophets preach in utter silence a meaning so profound I'm almost pleased I cannot hear. Artists snap their tricks in linger, help me reel my wets and dries I walk in circles, in circles overarching, darling. But I follow; boy, do I learn and do I follow. For one day we just might all forget. One day we just might stop existence in paired steps and not-be all at once, one day, once again. When I finally find myself, face to face, tell me, oh to-face, will you be ready? When I finally flip my origins, back to front, tell me, oh perceiver,
will we recognize our pulse sublime?