The Constituted Good Life: A 21st Century Analysis

Rebecca MacMaster

Spring 2017

Thesis submitted in completion of Honors Senior Capstone requirements for the DePaul
University Honors Program

Dr. H. Peter Steeves, Philosophy

Dr. Frédéric Seyler, Philosophy

Abstract:

What are the ethical implications if our memories, and potentially our selves, are constituted within late 20th century capitalism? How do we live the good life? In this thesis I argue that the phenomenological self, constituted through Husserlian experience, existing under late 20th century capitalism and the overarching profit motive, is necessarily constituted as inauthentic and alienated. I further argue that this alienation has lead to a desolation or a destruction of the real. I propose that the way to restructure a real and reclaim an authentic life is through rehabitation facilitated through focal practices. I will finish with a speculative look at communitarian political philosophy as a way to facilitate rehabitaiton and focal practices.

Acknowledgements:

To Dr. Steeves and Dr. Seyler, for believing in me and in this project (in that order). Without you I would not be here today.

To Rachel, Joseph, Sarah, and John, for your love and support.

To Justin, Claire, Danielle, Rebecca, Elise, Maddie, and Anna, for my flourishing (thank you for being my horizon).

To Tina and Don, for my existence.

To wonder.

Contents

It is humid in the Rainforest Café, oppressive in much the same way as it is loud. The experience of the "jungle" starts immediately. It presses in against you. Wildly inaccurate animals plaster the walls with some moving occasionally. There are fake thunderstorms rolling through at predictable intervals, with "lightning" but no noise, as noise would interrupt the radio incongruously playing today's top hits. Khakied waiters, preternaturally happy, roam the floor. To my left there is a sign lauding the Rainforest Café's commitment to woodland preservation. It is worth noting that before this experience I had never been to a Rainforest Café. I was not used to this type of experience, not necessarily the corporatization of experience as such, but the obvious structured nature of this experience. Despite the almost overwhelming amount of stimulation in this place there was one experience in particular that stuck out to me, mainly as a function of its everydayness and its relatively innocuous nature.

My friends and I are sitting near the animatronic gorillas, all of them the same size and to my eye not frightening in the least. A father brings up his toddler son to get a closer look and my friends immediately jump to frightened condemnation "he's going to scar him for life! He shouldn't get that close!" I was confused, it seemed like a fun and safe experience to me, something that a child would love. When I expressed as much, they both responded in basically the same way; "I remember being terrified of those as a kid." Our experience of ostensibly the same object at the same time in the same current context (or horizon) was markedly different. What does this mean?

Moving out of the Rainforest Café and back more than 2,000 years, Aristotle wrote in the *Nichomachean Ethics* that "[h]appiness, therefore, being found to be something final and

self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim."[1] Happiness, *eudaimonia*, flourishing, is the end of all human action. We have understood this almost as long as we have been philosophizing. Is this experience in the Rainforest Café happiness? Is this flourishing? I have my choice of meals and my meticulously prepared experience. I can experience the "jungle" for under $20. Surely that is something like flourishing? And yet, my friends did not flourish in this place. And just as surely this cannot be flourishing for the people who live in the jungle; the jungle which is mined for its natural resources to furnish this restaurant. So first, how do we account for the differences in our reactions to the gorilla and what do these differences imply with regards to flourishing, to the end of all human action? Furthermore, how can we flourish together, as a group, how can we fulfill the end at which all of our actions aim? And if our current system does not promote our flourishing, how can we order it so that it does?

In this paper I argue that the phenomenological self, constituted through Husserlian experience, existing under late 20th century capitalism and the overarching profit motive, is necessarily constituted as inauthentic and alienated. I further argue that this alienation has lead to a desolation or a destruction of the real. I propose that the way to restructure a real and reclaim an authentic life is through rehabitation (rehabitation understood as taking stewardship over lived places and lived experiences) facilitated through focal practices. I will finish with a speculative look at communitarian political philosophy as a way to facilitate rehabitation and focal practices.

---

[1] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 392

On Constituted Experience:

Before we can discuss how the self can flourish or how the community can flourish as a group of selves, we must analyze how the self is constituted. And before we can analyze how the experience of the gorilla and how experience writ large constitutes our selves, and thus our communities, it is necessary to analyze the experience of the gorilla in itself. We must analyze the constituted nature of experience before we can analyze the constitutive nature of experience. In other words, how is experience structured and how does the structure affect the way the self is structured (phenomenologically and ethically)? We will do this starting with an analysis of Husserl's phenomenological *epoché* and transitioning to Husserl's theory of phenomenological experience as a whole.

Husserl begins his Meditations (and indeed his philosophy) with the phenomenological *epoché*. This *epoché* (or bracketing) is the first step in the phenomenological reduction. In the *epoché*, "[we] put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude…"[2] The natural attitude, for Husserl, is the attitude that objects of our experience, objects physically in the world, are simply real and straightforwardly existent. Moreover, they (the objects) present themselves to consciousness as such. All philosophy pre-phenomenology has come out of the natural attitude but philosophy derived from the natural attitude has necessarily failed to get at the heart of phenomena. "[In the natural attitude] I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space, endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it….corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or others are simply

---

[2] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 65

there for me, 'on hand' in the literal or figurative sense…"[3] In the natural attitude, in

everydayness, I am aware of a world spread out before me, endless in space and in time. I find

the world immediately and experience it immediately. There is nothing which mediates my

perceptions. The objects of my perception are just there.

The *epoché* moves past the attitude that everything is just there, spread out before me and

for me; it brackets off any judgement about spatiotemporal factual being. The world as it appears

naturally (in the natural attitude) to us is excluded, but what is not excluded, Husserl says, is "the

world as *Eidos*...any other sphere of essences."[4] Consciousness as essence, as phenomenological

residuum, makes the whole phenomenological region accessible to us. This phenomenological

reduction leads us to Husserl's proposed fundamental structure of consciousness, the argument

that consciousness is always consciousness "of…" To explore the attributes of the consciousness

as phenomenological residuum is to explore what it means to experience the essence of

experience.

Husserl further explicates what belongs to consciousness as an experiential consciousness

(consciousness as consciousness of…). As mentioned previously, he argues that consciousness is

necessarily always conscious of something. This is intentionality. For brevity's sake, we will

consider the consciousness in Husserl as constitutive or synthetic, and further as a constitutive

consciousness containing two main structures: intentionality and protentiality/retentionality

(generally conceived of as memories). Intentionality and protentiality are not two distinct

activities of a constitutive consciousness imposed on the experience of a discrete thing, but

rather, the fundamental preconditions to experience as experience. To briefly speak on the

---

[3] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 60
[4] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 65

experienced object as it is a product of my experience; the thing as experienced is constituted through my experience of it. It is not straightforwardly extant -- to assume this would be to stay in the natural attitude. This is not to say the thing *qua* thing does not exist outside of my experience. Husserl is not arguing a sort of extreme metaphysical solipsism. Instead, the object as it is an object of my experience (my experience itself) is constituted through my consciousness, that is to say, by the structures of my constitutive consciousness.

Having preliminarily finished with the object of experience, I now return to the aforementioned intentionality. Broadly construed, experience is always experience of something, whether or not it exists outside of the consciousness which experiences. "One easily sees, that is, that not every really inherent moment in the concrete unity of an intensive mental process itself, has the fundamental characteristic, intentionality, thus the property of being 'consciousness of something.'"[5] For example, in emotional experience, I am emotional about something. I am sad because of X, I am happy because of Y. My emotions are directed at something, although not necessarily the cause of the emotion. More straightforwardly, when I experience the gorilla, I experience the gorilla -- and we will see, the context which constitutes the gorilla. This is necessary of all experience -- or rather, the intentional framework is a precondition for all experience.

Furthermore, there are two structures to intentional experience: the noema and noesis. The noema is exactly what has previously been described, the perceptual content; that which consciousness is conscious of. "Perception, for example, has its noema, most basically its perceptual sense, i.e., the perceived as perceived."[6] Again, the noematic conent is the perceived

---

[5] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 70
[6] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 88

as perceived, the object as it is an object of intentional consciousness. Therefore even a hallucination is an intentional act, an experience "as of" an object.

The noesis is not as easily apprehended. The noetic content, to which the noema corresponds, is the mental act-process which is directed towards the perceived object. Some examples of mental act-processes are the act of liking, the act of judging, or the act of memory. "Owing to its noetic moments, every intentive mental process is precisely noetic, it is of its essence to include in itself something such as a "sense" and possibly a manifold sense on the basis of this sense-bestowal and, in unity with that, to effect further productions which become "senseful"..."[7] The noesis is the collection of the processes of my consciousness onto the perceived object. As such, every intentional act has an I-pole -- the origin of the noesis -- and an object-pole -- or noema.

As a function of the noetic structure of intentionality, I now reach the additional structures of experience, protentions and retentions (memories). In my experience of an object, I experience all future possibilities of the object. Within the perception of the object as it is an object of my consciousness, I experience all future possibilities necessarily limited by what is actually possible for the object being experienced. It is important to note that protentions do not account for an infinite amount of possibilities, the protentional possibilities fall within definite limits. For example, in my experience of the animatronic gorilla, the experience of it suddenly coming to life and rampaging through the restaurant is not built into my experience of the gorilla.[8] A protention is the throwing into the future of the object of my experience. It is the

---

[7] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 87

[8] The experience of it coming to life and rampaging is not built into my adult experience of the animatronic gorilla. It is not inconceivable that it would be built into the child's experience of the gorilla. Although it seems that there is an inherent inability to discuss the impossibilities not built

intentional awareness of the future event as about to happen. In my experience of an object, I am

conscious of something (intentionality) and I am conscious of all the (limited) possible futures of

this something (protentions).

> "Furthermore, the perception has horizons made up of other
> possibilities of perception, as perceptions that we could have if we
> actively directed the course of perception otherwise: if, for
> example, we turned our eyes that way instead of this, or if we were
> to step forward or to one side, and so forth….Moreover, as might
> have been said earlier, to every perception there always belongs a
> horizon of the past, as a potentiality of awakenable
> recollections…"[9]

To every perception there belongs a horizon built up of other potential perceptions. I could have

experienced the gorilla from a different angle. The sound could had been turned off or the

lightning could have been not flashing. And to this perception of the gorilla there belongs my

past horizon of other awakenable potential perceptions.

However, experience is not only a throwing into the future of the object of my

experience. Built into the protentions of the experienced object (the gorilla) are also retentions,

retentions being my previous experiences (or lack thereof) with the experienced object. Husserl

uses an example of a tune or melody to demonstrate the distinction and relationship between

retentions and protentions. Within my experience of the melody I am intentionally directed to it.

I am conscious of the melody or of the succession of tones. I am conscious of the past tones

through retentionality and mindful of the limited yet infinite possibilities the song could take

---

into protentions insofar as being able to put words to the idea means it is manifestly possible.
However, we can discuss the impossibilities on the level of that if the gorilla did come to life my
constituted experience of it would be shattered. I would not be able to maintain that experience
as one total experience.
[9] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 109

through my protentionalities. Because of my experience of melodies in the past I can recognize a "wrong" or out of place note as well as throw my experience into the future in how I think the tune will turn out. If I had never heard a melody before I would not be able to have this experience. Retentions are just as fundamental to experience as protentions, indeed protentions are born out of retentions.

Take an experience of a book for another example. I see the book sitting on the table and because of its position (sitting on the table) and my position in relation to it (standing over it) I only see the front cover. Were I to flip over the book I would see the back cover of the book. But perhaps something has happened to the book which I cannot intuit from an overhead glance and the back cover has been ripped off and when I flip over the book I just see the back of the last remaining page. In the phenomenological *epoché*, I first bracket off whether or not the book actually exists outside of my perception of it. The being or non-being of the book outside of my experience of it does not matter to my phenomenological consciousness. The experience of the book is an experience of the book, it is an intentional experience of the book as an object being experienced. Already built into that experience of the book as an object of my consciousness are all the limited possibilities of that book in the future. This is why when I turn the book over and see only the back page, the back cover has been ripped off, I am able to maintain that this is still the same object of my experience.[10]

Let us return to the experience of animatronic gorilla. We can now analyze this on two levels, namely, what would make it terrifying for a young child and the difference in reaction

---

[10] Again, the protentional possibilities of the book are limited, I can maintain my experience if the back cover is ripped off, but if I turned the book over and the back cover was shrieking or perhaps composed only of bees, I would not be able to maintain my experience of the book as such.

between myself and my friends. The child, held up in his father's arms -- or indeed my friends as young people -- does not have the retentions built up in order to inform his protentions. There is nothing in the experience of a howling animatronic gorilla that informs a child that it will not take off and rampage. As adults, we "know" or at least, built into our experience of the gorilla, that it mostly likely will not hurt anyone, it will not "come to life." Built into the experience of the gorilla is the intuition that the gorilla is a safe thing made for your experience. The child knows none of this and constitutes an experience of fear in the face of the gorilla. The fear in the face of the gorilla in turn becomes part of my friends' retentionalities (and, if the young boy was frightened, will become part of his too). The fear-retentionality constitutes their current experience of the gorilla even as adults. The experience of the gorilla, and indeed all experience, is thus constitutive. This constitutive nature of experience is again is the noetic structure of intentionality. In the experience of the gorilla, the intentionalities and the protentionalities/retentionalities are synthesized, and it is this synthesis which constitutes the identity of the gorilla for the consciousness which perceives. The objective reality of the gorilla is the reality of the gorilla as it is a synthetic object of my consciousness (this is opposed to anything like an Aristotelian or Platonic idea of objective reality -- objective here means as a built up object of my consciousness).

We further see the role that context (and context based in history which is in turn based in a community) has in experience with Husserl's phenomenological horizon. "Every subjective process has a process "horizon," which changes with the alteration of the nexus of consciousness to which the process belongs and with the alteration of the process itself from phase to phase of

its flow -- an intentional horizon of reference to potentialities of consciousness…"[11] Horizon is, in its broadest sense, context. According to Husserl, all of the actual or potential experiences constituting that horizon share a sense of identity through time and space. All the individual things I perceive tangentially around the primary object of my perception create the context or horizon for the primary object of my consciousness. They, in turn, inform my protentions about said object. The horizon of the song includes but is not limited to, the place I hear it, the sight of the performer at the piano, my past experiences of songs where there is no wrong note. The horizon of the book is the table on which it is lying. The horizon of the gorilla is in this gaudy restaurant, with its artificially humid air and its loud music all of which signal to me that I am not in real danger. My friends experience the gorilla within their own horizon, in which it was frightening at one point in time in a way that cannot be abstracted away from the current experience. In this horizon, in this context built up by history, I hear the wrong note, I pick up the book, and I see the gorilla.

The problem of community is immediately apparent when considering the phenomenological horizon. If my protentions and retentions are informed by the horizon in which they are constituted, those around me are paramount to my experiences. They manifestly are my horizon. "On the contrary (and this carries over to the sociality of brute animals), is the sense of a community of men and in that of man -- who, even as solitary, has the sense: member of a community -- there is implicit, a mutual being for one another, which entails an Objectivizing equalization of my existence with that of all others -- consequently: I or anyone

---

[11] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 108

else, as a man among other men."[12] I, as an experiential consciousness, will always be among

other experiential consciousnesses.

---

[12] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 157

On Constituted Self:

It is now clear that any experience as such is constituted by previous experiences insofar as the structures of the preconditions for the possibility of experiencing are intentionality and retentionality/protentionality, constituted in a specific phenomenological horizon. But Husserl is also fundamentally concerned with the problem of embodiment and selfhood. As an embodied consciousness existing side by side with other embodied consciousnesses, "[t]he Body is, in the first place, the medium of all perception; it is the organ of perception and is necessarily involved in all perception."[13] I am a person necessarily among people. It therefore seems worth asking then, what does it means to be a person? In what way can we say that experience as a whole is constitutive? In other words, how much of the self is constituted by experience? To answer this question I will explicate two distinct theories of self. After demonstrating the merits of both I will propose an existential middle path. First I will explicate Sartre's theory of the existential self as contained in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. After concluding with Sartre I will move to Aristotle's theory of moral or virtue education as a proxy for a constituted self.

Sartre's first (and ultimately most important) argument in his lecture turned essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* is the distinction between essence and existence. Essence, he argues, is something that belongs most properly to man-made objects, like a letter opener. Sartre defines an essence as a purpose for which something is made or a reason for its existence. If I create a letter opener (or indeed, an animatronic gorilla) I create it with a purpose already in mind. I do not create an object and then decide afterwards what its purpose will be. Its essence precedes its existence. People, according to Sartre, are not made for purposes simply because

---

[13] Husserl, *Basic Writings*, 163

they are not made at all. To be made implies a creator and for Sartre, "man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself."[14] I, as a human, am nothing more than I make myself to be through my actions. My existence is a thrownness in this world and in this thrownness I will myself to be who I am.

Furthermore, we are thrust into the world within a set of circumstances. These circumstances include the time and place in which we were born, our race, gender, our ability status (but that is not to say that for Sartre these circumstances in any way limit your freedom or impose an essence, they are just circumstances to which I react). I am thrust into this life without choice. I do not chose to be born, I simply am. I must constitute my own essence through the actions I take and the choices I make given my life circumstances. This is how I, in a sense, make my own essence (although my essence is never completed, it is necessarily always changing as I act); my essence is made not through the circumstances of my birth but instead the way in which I react to those circumstances.

Sartre describes the human's thrownness as the freedom to which humanity is doomed. I am doomed to constantly make myself through action, through reactions to experience. I am anguished by my crushing responsibility to myself and indeed, to others. Sartre writes "[w]hen we say that man chooses himself, not only do we mean that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create

---

[14] Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 22

an image of man as we think he ought to be."[15] Through each of my actions I proclaim that "this

is how a person should be!" *All of my actions are ethical obligations*. My actions are ethical

obligations because in every case that I will myself (a willing through individual action) I am

also willing humanity to be this way. My actions are ethical obligations because they serve as

guideposts for how I think others should act. Again, here we see the issue of community once

moe. My actions and my decisions are mine, but they are also the other's insofar as my actions

and decisions act as a template for their actions and decisions. When I act I must consider the

community. I must consider the other. And My total freedom does not mean freedom from the

obligation of the community insofar as when I act I should consider what would happen if

everyone acted this way. Sartre writes "certainly, many believe that their actions involve no one

but themselves….In truth, however, one should always ask oneself, 'What would happen if

everyone did what I am doing?"[16] This consideration is my obligation to the community. It is not

an infringement on my total freedom but rather a guide which I could or could not follow.

  With regards to habits or values or feelings, Sartre insists that they are developed through

the actions we take. I am brave because I do brave actions not because I have a brave disposition

or brave feeling. And this means I cannot shirk responsibility for my self. I am not cowardly

because circumstances have been stacked against me, because I was forced to be. I am cowardly

because I have acted in cowardly manner. I cannot claim that I would have been brave if not for

my cowardly moments. I am free to change at any moment and to undertake brave actions. I

have no inclination to cowardly actions. I was not born a coward. "In reality, however, for

existentialists there is no love other than the deeds of love; no potential for love other than that

---

[15] Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 24
[16] Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 25

which is manifested in loving."[17] To (very briefly) conclude I am nothing more than the sum of my actions. I have no more potential to be this or that than when I am this or that.

Having preliminarily concluded with Sartre, I now turn to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, specifically his discussion of moral virtue and education. Speaking on virtues, Aristotle writes, "…men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp. Similarly, we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."[18] Aristotle, argues that ethical virtue is a product of habit. A shipbuilder is a shipbuilder solely because he builds ships, a just person is just because he does just actions. In the same way a craftsman hones a craft, a person hones their dispositions. A person is constituted by their actions, therefore, an ethical person is constituted by their ethical actions. It follows then that we must examine what an ethical action is.

Unlike art, or Sartre's letter opener, which both have intrinsic essence, actions are virtuous "…only if the agent also is in a certain state of mind when he does them…"[19] An action necessarily cannot have feelings; therefore, it must be the agent which contains the moral character. Aristotle states that an ethical (or a virtuous) act is an act which: 1. Is done with knowledge, 2. Is deliberately chosen for its own sake, and 3. Comes from a fixed disposition of character.

Knowledge (and thus education) is central to this theory of moral accountability. A brave act is not brave if the moral actor does not have knowledge of the situation in which he engaging, it is simply a foolish action. Knowledge, while immediately evident in the first qualification for

---

[17] Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 37
[18] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 397
[19] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 400

moral action, is also central to the third qualification with regards to disposition. Aristotle defines

dispositions as "…the formed state of character in virtue of which we are well or ill disposed in

respect of the emotions…"[20] Dispositions are not static from birth, knowledge (or experience)

refines them. So if I have a disposition (a proclivity to act in a certain way) towards bravery I can

maintain that disposition by training myself to endure terrors. Similarly, a disposition towards

bravery does not automatically make a person brave. If a person disposed to brave actions

(perhaps unlikely) continuously acts cowardly, we would not call that person brave. Further, if I

have a disposition towards cowardice I can alter that disposition by training myself to endure

terrors. And once I have become brave through the endurance of terrors, I can more easily endure

future terrors. Aristotle does not forget the problem of circumstance with regards to happiness

and dispositions. He acknowledges that without a certain amount of intangible luck or very

tangible money and skills it is very hard for a person to be happy. But it is not impossible.

Aristotle then writes "[v]irtue, then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of

character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience

and time. Virtue of character results from habit….Virtue comes about, not by a process of nature,

but by habituation."[21] Virtue, or morality, is something brought about and perpetuated by

repeated actions one way or the other. A person is not born brave, they are made brave by doing

brave actions which creates a brave disposition which in turn makes it easier to do brave actions.

In this Sartre and Aristotle agree, "…but just because a man has poor blood does not make him a

coward, for what produces cowardice is the act of giving up, or giving in. A temperament is not

---

[20] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 401
[21] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 33

an action; a coward is defined by the action he has taken."[22] But unlike Sartre, who implies an almost total freedom to change from action to action, for Aristotle, dispositions are incredibly hard or near impossible to changed once formed. An unjust man can become just (through just actions, in this he and Sartre agree) but it is by no means a free or easy decision. This is why Aristotle focuses so much on moral education for young people, indeed moral education is imperative to ethics or politics, so they might learn the correct moral reactions at a young age. Again, much like Sartre, Aristotle eschews morals as human nature simply because what is natural cannot be changed by habituation. A rock cannot be taught to roll uphill. If morals can be taught or constituted by experience it follows then that the self as such can be (and is) constituted by experience.

This leads me to the fundamental difference between Aristotle and Sartre with regard to moral and experiential constitution of selves. Sartre conceives of a total freedom of choice, and thus a total freedom to constitute the self. There is nothing that prevents a cowardly man from choosing to act bravely. I can make myself the best person I can be through sheer force of will to act in a specific way, even if I have never acted in that way before. This is not the case for Aristotle, and I have already shown why. Virtue is a product of habit, which is why it is so important to educate young people in moral action. Because once a habit (or disposition) has been instantiated through repeated action, it is extremely difficult to break that disposition. If a person has acted cowardly all of their life it will not be easy for them to start acting bravely, for it will be against their (for lack of a better word) nature.

Now let us return to the Rainforest Café and use this experience to critique both theories

---

[22] Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 39

of constitutive self as well as establish a middle path. Because it was my first experience of the specific animatronic gorilla, but certainly not my first experience with robotic animals, my retentions, protentions, and intentionality all synthesized in my current experience structure my experience of the Rainforest Café (and of the gorilla specifically) in that moment. I was that-who-was-not-afraid of the gorilla. My friends were those-who-were afraid of the gorilla in the past which informed their current experience and thus, their selves. According to Sartre I am (and my friends are) fully constituted by my own actions and experiences and thus my self is constituted by my experience of the gorilla. I was not born with the innate reaction to the animatronic gorilla, be it by divine artisan or by human nature. And yet, to say that we have total freedom (without hardship) to choose would be to discount the frameworks, or preconditions, of our experience. My friends are reasonable adults. They are no longer actively frightened by the animatronic gorilla. But when put in that context, that phenomenological horizon, their retentions (past experiences) are brought back to inform their current reaction, and their current opinions. The self's being-in-the-world, and my friend's being-in-the-world is informed by these past experiences. To assume a total freedom to act discounts the structure of experience as such.

We now arrive to a middle ground then between total Sartrean freedom and a naturalistic determinism. The self is not something I carry around from experience to experience, from action to action that is independent of those experiences. And as such I have the freedom to constitute myself through repeated actions (which are then constituted by retentions, protentions, and intentionalities) but like Aristotle argued, once those dispositions are formed, they are hard if not impossible to shake. But because of the structure of experience, in this case the phenomenological horizon, I truly am obligated to my community; the community in which my

horizon is located and my self is constituted. My actions are I learn virtues and dispositions in my community, in my horizon. It follows then that we must consider the forces which constitute our communities, and as such, our selves. This is where we turn to the corporation.

On Corporations and Alienation:

Jerry Mander, American activist and author, is best known for his arguments against both technology and capitalism. His book *In the Absence of the Sacred* explicates and analyzes, in great detail, the structure and implications of the corporation. Before I explicate Mander's theory of the corporation, I will briefly go over the various theories or conceptions of the corporation over time, focusing on three definitions: the concession, the aggregate, and the reality. Once that is finished I will explore in more depth the way the corporation constituted individual selves and thus communities.

According to the concession theory, the corporation is nothing more than a creation of the law, an artificial person composed only of the terms of its incorporation. It is intangible, invisible, only exists in the eyes of the law, and has no moral responsibility. When incorporation became a fairly simple and mechanical process in which state influence was minimal, corporate personhood theory began to emphasize the corporation as the product of free private agreement between persons as an aggregate. Under the aggregate theory, the corporation is nothing more than the sum of its parts. Aggregate theorists emphasize the employee or shareholder as constituent parts but also include company contracts and rules as parts within the whole. Only individual people within the corporation can be held morally responsible for corporate misdeeds since there actually is no 'corporation' *per se*. This changes under the reality theory. The reality theory holds that the corporation is an actual, existing entity which has properties separate from or exceeding those possessed by the summation of its human parts. A corporation can thus be held morally responsible for its actions because it has a personhood independent of the people within it. For the purposes of this paper I will continue with the reality theory of the corporation

simply because that is the way the corporation is considered contemporarily in the United States after *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (FEC).[23] *Citizens United v. FEC* held that corporations have a right to disseminate electioneering materials and independent political expenditures as a function of their free speech. The reality theory has incredible implications with regards to the personhood of the selves within the corporation. If there is something that hovers over the corporation writ large, a corporation which is necessarily staffed by individual selves, therefore there is something that hovers over and subordinates the individual workers. This will be fully explored by Mander.

Mander outlines eleven inherent rules of corporate behavior, ten of them as a function of the first rule, the profit imperative or motive. Profit is the ultimate measure of all corporate decision. Every other corporate decision is made in order to increase profit. "...profit is the ultimate measure of all corporate decisions. It takes precedence over community well-being, worker health, public health, peace, environmental preservation, or national security."[24] The second rule of corporate behavior is the growth imperative. Just as corporations live and die by profit, they also live and die through growth. Growth sustains profit. Mander links this to the corporate desire to find and develop scarce resources in previously pristine natural habitats (such as the jungles, commodified to increase corporate growth and profit).

The third is competition and aggression. To succeed in a corporate structure the corporate agent must aggressively push to win over both their other colleagues and competing corporations. This forces a split in the corporate worker. They are forced to be hyper-competitive at work, to compartmentalize any softer emotions they have, and to sublimate interpersonal

---

[23] *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, 08-205. (2010).
[24] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 129

relationships for corporate profit. Mander calls this the corporate schizophrenia. The fourth corporate rule of behavior is amorality. Even if the corporation has a quasi-personhood over and above its constitutive parts, the corporation does not have human feelings, morals or altruistic goals. Decisions made that harm communities or destroy the environment in the name of profit can be made without any misgivings, because the corporation's purpose is to gain capital. Corporate schemes to clean up the environment or establish community centers are false altruism. They are public relations ploys, damage controls to offset public criticism. Again, there is corporate schizophrenic attitude inherent to this. If the individual agent within the corporation wishes to act altruistically or morally, their desires are subsumed by the corporation. The corporation, in a real way, controls them. It removes them of their morality. It removes them of their dispositions built up through experiences and their experiential retentionalities and protentionalities. It removes them, in a sense, of their selves. Mander outlines the corporate/human dilemma in three cases: the Union Carbide Corporation's chemical accident, the Exxon Valdez crash, and a personal anecdote. For the sake of space I will focus only on the first example.

In 1986, a chemical plant in Bhopal, India accidentally released methyl isocynate into the air, killing more than 2,000 and injuring over 200,000. Soon after the incident the chairman of Union Carbide, Warren M. Anderson, was so upset that he promised to spend the rest of his life attempting to correct the problems his company had caused. He would make amends if it was the last thing he did. A year later he was quoted as saying he overreacted. He not only overreacted but was also prepared to lead the company against paying damages to the people injured and the families of those killed. "Very simply, Mr. Anderson at first reacted as a human being. Later, he

realized (and perhaps was pressed to realize) that this reaction was inappropriate for a chairman of the board of a company whose primary obligations are not to the poor victims of Bhopal, but to shareholders…"[25] The human is subsumed in the corporation. Humanity, or human flourishing, is incompatible with corporations. The corporation will always necessitate a split in the corporate agent. They will be forced to sublimate themselves and their communities and their fellow human being in order to further the profit motive.

The fifth rule of corporate behavior involves its natural hierarchical structure. Hierarchies in our workplaces, in our parent's workplaces, in the corporatization of education, normalize a hierarchical society. "The effect on society from all organizations adopting hierarchical form is to make it seem natural that we have all been placed within a national pecking order...Men over women. Westerners over non-Westerners. Humans over nature."[26] This decimates communities insofar as it perpetuates the notion that some people of the community will be successful and some will not. It perpetuates the notion that the success of the community does not require the success of all individual members of the community. But as I have shown, as it is the horizon in which I constitute my self, the flourishing of my community is paramount to the flourishing of my self.

The sixth inherent rule of corporate behavior is quantification, linearity, and segmentation. The corporation reduces everything to numbers, they reduce everything to exploitable quantities. By reducing everything to numbers, the corporation is allowed to operate in terms of trade offs. Pollution or dangerous working conditions are treated as value-free objective concepts. "The operative corporate standard is not 'as safe as humanly possible,' but

---

[25] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 126
[26] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 131

rather, 'as safe as possible commensurate with maintaining acceptable profit.'"[27] The seventh rule, which we have already covered in part, is the dehumanization inherent in the corporation. I will return to this at the end of the inherent rules of corporate behavior as it is paramount to understanding our current experience. The eighth rule is exploitation. This rule is simple. Profit is based on paying less than the actual value of workers or resources. It is exploitation.

The ninth is ephemerality. Corporations are legal entities, despite their quasi-personhood. They exist beyond time and place and they will not die a natural death. They can leave the communities in which they are based without consequence, as they have no commitment to place. As ephemeral, leaving is as simple as changing documents and moving factories. Communities are dependent on corporations. Schools require them for their tax base, families require them for employment, for money to survive in a corporatized world. The only thing corporations require is profit. Engagement with the community or the community of selves is antithetical to corporate behavior, as it would ground them in a community and make it harder to leave. Corporations, in a real way, do violence to communities and the selves contained in them. The tenth inherent quality of the corporation is its opposition to nature. Corporations are intrinsically committed to intervening, altering, and transforming nature. The earth is commodified, turned into sellable parts. Once one area of the globe is used up, devoid of all sellable parts, corporations move on to the next, until there will be no parts left.

The eleventh, and final rule, is homogenization. While the proliferation of corporations have delivered a greater choice of products, they have a set of shared values which they also seek to proliferate. The shared value is simply that to be is to spend, spend and spend freely. Societies

---

[27] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 132

which emphasize shared commodities are stamped out. This homogenization is represented in the Rainforest Café. Every part of the experience at the Rainforest Café is managed. There is the aforementioned humidity, the loud jungle sounds, the "thunderstorm" with no rain and no thunder, the menu and themed food. Even the human element is managed and groomed. The waiters are "safari guides" wearing khaki uniforms and preternaturally, sometimes unsettlingly, excited and happy. Everything about the place tells you how to feel, how to react, how to experience, how *to be*. Being should be fun, jungle themed, but only in a safe way that is designed *for you* (as opposed to the real world which is decidedly not for-you). A gorilla in real life would not holler playfully, standing stock still for human consumption. The Rainforest Café whispers to you "the jungle (the world) can be constituted for you, as long as you buy this experience." Susan Willis writes "'[there is] something sad in this: the quest for experience…[the] scurrying about in desperate attempts to have experiences deemed more meaningful than the sort that happen everyday.'"[28]

The experience at The Rainforest Café is more meaningful than an experience of the actual jungle because it is built up solely for the consumer. The experience is for the consumer and therefore it seems more meaningful than stepping outside into a world that is not built for you. But to be constituted by the experience is to be constituted by the consumer experience. Everything in The Rainforest Café is designed to make you spend. The food is expensive, the drinks come in novelty cups that must be purchased, the gift shop is a step away from the door, in between you and the hostess' podium. The message that The Café imparts is to be is to buy or to consume. That is what makes your life meaningful.

---

[28] Steeves, T*he Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return to the Everyday*, 148

Let us return to the problem of alienation and dehumanization. The profit maxim necessitates alienation. The profit maxim, remember, is that the corporation's fundamental goal is to make money. The worker is reduced to a cog in the larger machine, stripped away of their individuality and their autonomy. The worker is treated as a tool, a Heideggerian ready-to-hand.[29] As previously mentioned this denies them their dispositions, their self outside of what the corporation can profit from. To illustrate this let us turn to an analysis of Sartre's bad faith as found in *Being and Nothingness*.

Bad-faith, at its simplest, is the denial of man's total freedom (following what was discussed above) and the dual nature of man as incarnate consciousness. To illustrate the concept of bad faith I will use Sartre's examples of the café waiter and the example of the flirting woman.

The café waiter's movements are rapid and a bit too precise. He "[carries] his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope walker."[30] His movements and words are like mechanisms; he is merely playing at being a café waiter (or maybe, a waiter in the Rainforest Café). By playing at being a waiter, the waiter is identifying himself with his role as waiter in the mode of being in-itself. In other words, the waiter is discarding his real nature as for-itself-in-itself, to adopt that of the in-itself and discard the for-itself. He is thus denying his transcendence as for-itself in favor of facticity. In this way, the burden of his freedom, i.e. the requirement to decide for

---

[29] The concept of ready-to-handedness will be fully explicated in the section on the real and rehabitation. To briefly contextualize, a ready-to-hand is characterized by its "in-order-to" structure. The tool as ready-to-hand is encountered with regards to its purpose for the user. Heidegger is insistent that the human does not have a ready-to-hand quality because to have a purpose implies having a defined end and the human is not complete until death. The corporation artificially gives the human purpose or a completeness for its own ends.

[30] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 101

himself what to do, is lifted from his shoulders since his behavior is as though set in stone by the definition of the role he has adopted. He, as an in-itself thing, is defined and justified.

The second example is the example of the flirting woman. She is meeting with a man, and denying the point during the date in which she must make the decision whether to continue the relationship or to turn away. She is talking of lofty topics, life and sentimental speculation. She shows herself in her essential aspect: a consciousness. The man takes her hand. To leave her hand would be to consent to a further romantic entanglement, to take her hand away would be to break the charm of the meeting. She leaves her hand, but she does not realize she leaves her hand there. The hand lays inert, held by her companion. Because of her intellectual talk she has divorced her consciousness from her body. In this divorce she doesn't realize her hand has been taken. The hand neither consents nor resists: it is a thing.

The waiter and the flirting woman do exactly the opposite. The waiter has objectified himself to attempt to define himself. He is a waiter—a thing and thus justified. The woman divorces herself from the facticity of her body in order to delay an uncomfortable decision. They both divorce themselves from the opposite but are both in bad faith. The burden of their freedom of choice (the choice to live in an unjustified existence, or to be an active participant in her own life) was terrifying to them. They hid in bad faith, and in that hiding they denied their own freedom. "The basic concept which is thus engendered utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once a facticity and a transcendence. These two aspects of human reality ought to be and are in fact capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them or to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while

preserving their difference."[31] I act in bad faith when I do not synthesize the two aspects of my humanity. Bad faith seeks to push a wedge between the facticity and transcendence and as such present one as incompatible with the other.

Like the flirting woman and the reckless waiter, we deny our own freedom when we hand over the power of our experience to the Café. Like the flirting woman and the reckless waiter, the corporate worker is subsumed in the They. The worker is constituted by and for the corporation, the freedom to which we are doomed, is taken away. But unlike the flirting woman or the waiter, we do not chose a corporate constitution, an alienated constitution, consciously or otherwise. The corporation necessitates it. It necessitates our alienation from our freedom, from our dispositions (assuming these dispositions are formed outside of the reach of the corporation) and experiential selves. Without our dispositions, that which makes you you is wrested away. The worker is part of a faceless mass, the They.

To preliminarily conclude with corporations and alienation, the profit motive requires alienation. It necessitates it. The corporation decimates the community in which my self is constituted. It is not that the self is constituted, it is the way in which it is constituted. The self is not made by itself (insofar as it is made within the community) but that is not the problem. The problem is that I am constituted, insofar as I happened to be born in this time and in this body, as inauthentic, as alienated.

---

[31] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 98

On the Real and Rehabitation:

Continuing from the conclusion of the previous section I will now argue that the basis on which we are constituted, the real, is rotting away (if it ever existed). I now turn to Baudrillard and the procession of simulacra.

Baudrillard opens *Simulation and Simulacra* with a retelling of a Borges fable. The King's cartographers draw up a perfect, exquisitely detailed, one to one map of his kingdom. The map covers the kingdom exactly and as the kingdom declines so too does the map, shredding and falling into ruins. But then Baudrillard twists it, he argues that today abstraction is no longer of the map. The territory, or the kingdom, does not precede the map. In fact, the map precedes the territory. It is the generation of models without a referential, the generation of a real without origin or reality. And now it is not the map which rots away but the real itself. The deserts are no longer those of the kingdom, but ours. "The desert of the real itself."[32] But the myth, even inverted, is ill-suited for our present circumstance. There is no longer a difference between the map and the territory, no question of which precedes the other. The map is the territory, the territory is the map. A simulation turned simulacra. A hyper-real, a liquidation of all referentials and their artificial resurrection in signs produced for a hyper meaning. But first, what is the distinction or relationship between simulation and simulacra?

> "To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending….pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"[33]

---

[32] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1
[33] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* 3

The simulation blurs by necessity. When pretending to be sick the pretender is not merely pretending to be sick, he actually produces in himself some of the symptoms of sickness. He lives as a "sick person" and in a way is therefore a "sick person." Or take the example of a person with a psychosomatic illness. The psychosomatic has a debilitating leg pain and yet there is nothing real or bodily about his illness, nothing a doctor can point to and say "this is the cause of your pain." But there are real symptoms, reality tucked into irreality. If, placed next to the psychosomatic, there was a person with the same debilitating pain but with a demonstrable nerve or muscle condition we would generally consider the later as the truly ill one. He has the illness in "reality," in his muscles and bones, and the psychosomatic has it as a simulation. And yet, here they both are, in pain. A simulation occurs over time, it is the imitation of a process, a process which is necessarily temporalized. But to reiterate, for Baudrillard, and indeed for this paper, the simulation does not cover up a temporal real reality. The simulation is our reality, our experience is like that of the psychosomatic -- in pain with no identifiable cause.

Baudriallard argues that the idea of an original is meaningless. He rejects the Platonist conception that something comes first and that which comes first is the real thing. Simulacra go beyond the simulation because it rejects the distinction between the original and the copy. The original is the copy and the copy is the original. Nothing is a copy and yet everything is. Baudrillard (knowingly) misattributes Ecclesiastes for his epigraph "[t]he simulacrum is never what hides the truth -- it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true."[34] As society becomes saturated with images and signs in place of the real, bit by bit, there is what Baudrillard calls a procession of simulacra.

---

[34] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1

The first stage is the stage of faithful copies, where we believe that the sign is a true reflection of profound reality. The second stage perverts reality. Signs and images do not faithfully reveal reality to us, but still hint at the existence of a reality that the sign itself is incapable of portraying. The third stage slips into the absence of a profound reality, wherein the sign pretends to be a faithful copy but a copy with no original. The images claim to represent something real but no representation is taking place. Arbitrary images are suggested as things to which they have no relation.

The fourth stage is pure simulacrum. The image has no relationship to any reality whatsoever. The simulacra, much like the simulacrum that so bothered the iconoclasts, are the signs and symbols which constitute our simulated reality that betray the baselessness of our reality. Baudrillard argues that, as a reality simulated, all meaning is, in fact, meaningless simply because it is infinitely mutable. Meaning can be whatever the person in charge of the signs wants it to be. With pure simulacrum, in which the simulacrum has no relation to a reality whatsoever but instead rests solely on an extended simulation, signs merely reflect other signs. Lived experience is a regime of total equivalency, wherein commodities and cultural products do not need to even pretend they are real or to even pretend they are fulfilling a real need. The consumer's life is artificial, built up as a hyper real for their consumptive pleasure, so much so that even claims to reality are expected to be phrased artificially or hyper-really. In a similar vein to the staging or procession of sign order, Baudrillard identifies three types of simulacra and identifies each within a historical period. We are currently in the third period, associated with postmodernity or late 20th century capitalism. We are in the third period with fourth stage sign

order signified by the proliferation of places like Disneyland, devices like television and the corporate ideals.

Baudrillard (and also Mander, who we will return to shortly) references Disneyland as the ultimate example of the hyper-real, of a simulation of the fourth order. Consider Disneyland's Main Street USA. There is no trash and yet no trash cans. Smells and sounds are piped in, controlled down to the most minuscule degree. "Mom and Pop" stores line the street (and yet they only sell Disney branded products). It's utopic, a hearkening back to a simpler time. But this simpler time never existed. Main Street USA is a simulacrum. It is a cultural product bereft of reality but somehow considered to be the epitome of it. A history created wholecloth to profit off of a misplaced nostalgia, a way to return to Eden. *It is reality trademarked.* It is a hatred of a true lived history, a hatred of a civilization for its own foundation. So, as Disney goers and nostalgia havers, let us create a new foundation, or rather, let corporations create a new foundation. "Everywhere we live is a universe strangely similar to the original -- things are doubled by their own scenario. But this doubling does not signify, as it did traditionally, the imminence of their death -- they are already purged of their death, and better than when they were alive; more cheerful, more authentic, in the light of their model, like the faces in funeral homes."[35] Our experiences are doubled by their own added corporate context. The experience of this meal is doubled by the richness of the simulacra. The Rainforest Café is better than the actual rainforest and better than a normal café. It is bright and hypernatural (without death).. It is perfect, but in a slightly odd and arresting way.

---

[35] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* 11

We find a similar experience in the Rainforest Café. The whole experience is just that, a hyper-real. Everything is built for me, for my pleasure. It mines a true experience of a jungle but at the same time, also does not pretend to be an accurate representation of the jungle, not in the slightest. The Rainforest Café is better than a mere jungle. It is utopia. It is Eden, for a price. Disneyland is the real country, the real America. Main Street USA is small town America. The Rainforest Café is the real jungle. If we return to the fable, Disneyland is the map on which we live, a map of an empire that does not exist.

This third order simulation is perpetuated, both Baudrillard and Mander maintain, through a packaging and selling of the real. It is the selling of an idealized jungle, the jungle made for your consumption, a referential without an original, that erodes our conception of a real jungle. The community in which my self is constituted, and indeed my self as such, is constituted within the death of all referentials.

Corporations thus do violence against us in two key ways, they decimate the communities in which they are based, as illustrated in the previous section and, perhaps more importantly, they constitute a real from which I am necessarily alienated. They create a real which suits them, they create signs which mean nothing except in relation to other corporate signs. My community and my self are not allowed to flourish, as flourishing is contra to the corporate profit motive and the real which they have painstakingly created not for me but for their profit in the guise of being for me.

Mander writes on his experience of the commodification of San Francisco, the Disneyfication of his lived place. When he moved to the city in 1960 the cable cars were used for everyday transportation. Now they have been changed. Almost all of the lines have been ripped

out, except for the ones that run through tourist locations. They exist to lure and placate tourists who desire the authentic "San Francisco experience." He argues that the entire city is coming a replica of itself, San Francisco as Disneyland. This is the commodification of the city, the changing of a physical reality into something bought and sold. The precession of simulacra is insidious. It starts in theme parks, in gaudy suburban restaurants and eventually slinks into our cities, our states. San Francisco is at once an extreme and obvious example of the death of the referential, where nostalgia has taken its full meaning. "Remaking authentic communities into packaged forms of themselves, re-creating environments in one place that actually belong somewhere else, creating theme parks and lifestyle-segregated communities...all are symptomatic of the same modern malaise: a disconnection from a place on Earth…"[36] a disconnection from a real. And in this Baudrillard and Mander seem incompatible. There is no space for a disconnection from a real in Baudrillard's argument, indeed there is no distinction between the copy and the real. If there is no distinction between the two there is nothing from which to be alienated. And yet, there is a distinct disconnection that Mander is concerned with, a physical disconnection, a disconnection from place. This is not a disconnection from a Real considered in the Platonic sense. And as a disconnection from physical place, it follows that it is a disconnection from that which allows us to be physically placed, our bodies. Mander's real is a real among other reals, corporately created or otherwise; the difference being this is one we can reclaim. It is not a real further by fourth stage simulacra, through signs represented by other signs. The table I sit at can be imbued with "meaning" through the simulacra, can be deemed more meaningful. But that does not change the table (as material) I touch with my hands.

---

[36] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 158

There is another level on which we can discuss the alienating nature of the corporation with regards to the real and that is Borgmann's device paradigm. Postmodern culture, the level of the third simulation, is infused with technology, delivered to us by the corporation (and imbued with their ideals). It is infused to a point where, much like the an ignorance to the dearth of the real, we are incapable of perceiving the extent to which it affects our lives. Technology promises to bring the forces of nature under our control. A device is a physical or conceptual instrument or tool but it is not a tool like a hammer or a flint. It is a tool in which its inherent structure or mechanisms are hidden behind service interfaces. It makes no demand of skill, strength, or attention. Because it makes no demands on to personhood or embodiment, the device shrinks away from the user. It makes no demand on embodiment insofar as it does not require skill to operate. It does not require the user to grapple with themselves in order to make something work. Borgmann will maintain that there is something inherently different in pushing a button than hammering a nail. The button is the only part of the device which is visible, it is the only part of the device with which the user interacts. The rest of the device remains inaccessible to the user. This is opposed to the tool which necessarily becomes accessible to us through use (there is nothing I can gleam through a circumspective or theoretical look at the hammer which betrays its use or structure). Borgmann uses the example of the heating system to illustrate this transition from tool to device. Heating a house or a place used to necessitate fire, which required watch and a certain degree of skill to keep. It could be viewed as burdensome. "The experience of a thing is always and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing's world. In calling forth a manifold engagement, a thing necessarily provides more than one commodity."[37]

---

[37] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 41

Now there are central heating systems which heat the house at the perceived touch of a button. There is no demand of skill or strength. In actuality there is tremendous work and skill that is required to get the energy processes and delivered. The user of the device just does not incur that burden. The central heat slips away from the user, they are divorced from from the consequences of their actions.

Borgmann in making this distinction between the tool and the device invokes Heidegger's notion of standing-reserve (*bestand*), intrinsic to his philosophy of technology. Devices are not even regarded as objects, their only important quality is their readiness to use. Their only meaning lies in their being available to serve, they have no purpose in themselves. Tools, for Heidegger, do have the property of ready-to-handedness. Readiness-to-hand is part of the undifferentiated mode of existence, a mode of existence much like Husserl's natural attitude. When an object is ready-to-hand it does disappear in a way, when hammering you focus on the nail not on the hammer. But the tool has the capacity to be unready-to-hand, specifically when broken. It has the capacity to have a purpose outside of their readiness-to-hand. The standing-reserve character of the device deprives devices of their context, of their real basis. The commodity is encountered as an end, without or unencumbered by its means.

The device also provides anonymity. Things which required households or villages or towns to do together now only require the click of a button. The community is replaced by devices. So not only are we alienated from the real, from a real basis for our constitution, but also from any physical consequence of our labor, in other words, from any physical embodiment, as an individual and as a community. We are alienated from a real and from an earthly ground.

We are all the flirting woman at the café, divorced from our bodies, from the people dining and existing near us.

Mander writes, succinctly outlining our problem,

> "[w]ith the natural world -- our true home -- removed from our lives, we have built on top of the pavement a new world, a new Eden, perhaps; a mental world of creative dreams. We then live within these fantasies of our own creation; we live within our own minds. Though we are still on the planet Earth, we are disconnected from it, afloat on pavement, in the same way astronauts float in space."[38]

What is there to do? How can we reground ourselves, to be no longer floating above the pavement, and construct a new real, a real sans simulation? How can we flourish? I argue, rehabitation. Mander defines rehabitation broadly as taking stewardship over the places where in they live. Historical examples of rehabitation were the 1960's efforts to fight overdevelopment, pollution, and the control of communities by absentee owners. Or perhaps the contemporary movements of urban agriculture, linking the city dweller to the place they inhabit and the native plant species therein. These movements all seek to re-invigorate the relationships between human beings and the places on the globe where they actually live. I use native plant species as an example here not to hearken back to an original time or state where there was a "good real." Instead I use native plants to illustrate a necessity for a working-in-concert with others and with nature. Species are scientifically native because they have the ability to work together with other species in the area in order to preserve a balance. Invasive species are inherently destructive simply because they cannot work in concert. They take over, pervert a balance. This is the ethical implication of this example and this argument. Baudrillard would argue that this is just creating a

---

[38] Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, 148

new simulacra in which we live and that may be the case. But there is something to be said for

creating a simulacra which is balanced, which benefits all. We are not returning to an original

state as that is impossible scientifically and philosophically, but instead pushing to a

living-together-here in concert. This is an ethical push which acknowledges the nature and

influence of the horizon and the need for a real, a simulacra if we must, that promotes

flourishing. Borgmann, intended as a cure to the device paradigm, proposes the key to individual

rehabitation, focal practices.

We have already seen Borgmann assert that an experience of the thing is always an

engagement with the world. Skill is bound up with social engagement, it molds the person as an

agent of world and community. Skills are passed down through families, from the skilled to the

unskilled. The skill in enriched through practice, and thus through repeated engagement with the

earth and community. And from this, the device paradigm emerges. "If we are to challenge the

rule of technology, we can do so only through the practice of engagement. The human ability to

establish and commit oneself to a practice reflects our capacity to comprehend the world, to

harbor it in its expanse as a context that is oriented by its focal points. [This is the practice of

engagement]"[39] A focal practice is something that engages with either the community or the

earth. In both cases it grounds you. It reconnects you to the consequences of your actions, the

products of your labor. Borgmann's examples include: music, running, gardening, the culture of

the table, and, as we have seen before, the lighting of a fire. They are inconspicuous, everyday

tasks, but they are not hidden. They are not folded into themselves as to detract from their end.

They incorporate the means clearly and openly.

---

[39] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 207

In an example like running or gardening there is an obvious physical connection to your own body and moreover, to the ground on which you exist. But Borgmann's example of the culture of the table perfectly illustrates the interplay between the individual and the community, the cooperative flourishing. Cooking a meal requires skill, and not an innate skill, a skill brought up through practice. It requires a skilled individual, traditionally a mother or grandmother, to sit down and interact with an unskilled individual and so on and so forth back through time and place. This is not to say that the focal practice cannot be radical or subversive. The focal practice does not exist to perpetuate misogyny or racism (insofar as it is tied to traditions). A man can bake a loaf of bread just the same as a woman and a woman can run or hammer a nail (two other examples of focal practices Borgmann gives) just as a man can. To bake a loaf of bread requires an engagement with the earth, with the physical components of the bread, the flour and water and yeast. It requires an engagement with your community in order to learn how to bake the bread (and my community as such is not gendered). It grounds you in a place and in people. We are no longer cut off from Eden, floating above the ground. I am connected with my roots, with my people, and with the ground through one recipe. I pass this recipe to my friends, to my children, to the people who exist near me. I create roots with them as well.

> "But as we can in another sense withdraw from the actual and present world, contemplating what is past and to come, what is possible and remote, we celebrate correspondingly our intimacy with the world. This we do most fundamentally when in eating we take in the world in its palpable, colorful, nourishing immediacy. Truly human eating is the union of the primal and the cosmic. In the simplicity of bread and wine, of mean and vegetable, the world is gathered."[40]

---

[40] Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, 204

I am, to return to Sartre, an embodied transcendence, acting to create this bread and this connection. This is how focal practices, possible through my memories (but not beholden to them, because I was taught by my grandmother to bake does not prevent me from teaching my son, we are inspired by our memories -- not doomed to them), through my constituted self, rehabitate.

But now how can we structurally rehabitate on a broader level? How can we structurally ensure flourishing? For this, we turn to a speculative look at communitarianism.

On Communitarianism:

> "A constitution is more than a legal document. It is the single most expressive act by which separate, individual people constitute themselves as a people. A people so constituted is, in turn, the only genuine source of meaning for the word public, which in Latin, meant 'of the people.' It does not simply mean 'of people.' People in their separate individuality never become public. They only do that by a deliberate act of constituting themselves as 'the people.'[41]

Daniel Kemmis, former speaker and minority leader of the Montana House of Representatives as well as the former mayor of Missoula, Montana, opens up his treatise on the American loss of a sense of place with this reflection on the power of a constitution. He remarks that the United States' constitution opens with "we the people." Jefferson, he argues, envisioned a nation of citizens deeply involved in public life, in the public, in the notion of a people. And yet, he argues (in much the same vein as Mander and Baudrillard) that public life is experienced like a Big Mac, like a commodity. As a commodity it can be replicated in exactly the same form anywhere regardless of place. The public is placeless, commodified. His book is an effort to figure out what we need to do, economically and politically, to reclaim a vital and effective sense of place and what it means to be public. It is again concerned with how we can flourish, how we can live the good life together as a community.

Before Kemmis (and I) cover the economic and political actions necessary to structurally maintain a sense of place, he outlines the historical evolution of (dis)habitation. He focuses on republicanism, not to be confused with the contemporary political party, as the initial theoretical or philosophical basis. "Republicanism was an intensive brand of politics; it was, heart and soul,

---

[41] Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place,* 4

a politics of engagement. It depended first upon people being deeply engaged with one another...and second upon citizens being directly and profoundly engaged with working out the solutions to public problems, by formulating and enacting the 'common good.'"[42] Republicanism, he argues, in addition to citizens being deeply engaged with each other and with public problems, requires small, contained communities or units of government. Montesquieu, the intellectual father of republicanism, argued that a republic had to be small because only then could all citizens gather around and truly understand the public good. And yet, the country expanded. A sense of place morphed into manifest destiny. We were only emplaced when we were driving to expand. This became the American ideal, but it was a finite one. The frontier ran out and we were displaced. The government began to step in, to regulate disputes between people which in turn prevented individuals from being able to apprehend the public good. Individual good is conflated for public good. Corporations, as we have already seen, have infiltrated public life.

Kemmis recognizes that nostalgia is not the answer to the problem of placelessness. There are no good old days to return to. "We cannot re-create the world of the frontier, even if we thought we wanted to."[43]But what he proposes instead is a dual approach, starting with reclaiming the marketplace. He proposes moving the marketplace from the hands of the nation-state (or, if he was writing currently, the globe) into the hands of the city and its surrounding environs. This market would not be a placeless and intangible force, Adam Smith's invisible hand. It would be inherently placed, suited to the land on which it has a reciprocal relationship. Kemmis gives the example of the energy market in his native Missoula. The natural

---

[42] Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place*, 12
[43] Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place*, 72

shape of the valley prevented the air from circulating, trapping pollutants. After attempting to transition away from foreign coal and oil, the smoke from wood fires decimated the environment. Children were having record numbers of breathing problems, air and water quality dropped precipitously. Instead of returning to foreign oil, the wood mills created a co-op in which they would all contribute their sawdust and operate a wood pellet processing plant. Wood pellets would burn cleaner and reduce waste insofar as they convert the waste product, sawdust, into useable fuel. This plan only succeeded because of the proliferation of small mills who all together created a system that worked for them in their specific place. But this only came about because of a desire to stay off of foreign coal, and this desire existed because of Montana's high tax on coal. The economics of re-habitation are subordinate to the politics of re-habitation. "Here again, the development of strong indigenous economies is inconceivable apart from some political changes which would give regions and localities the political will to assert their own long-term interests."[44]

Kemmis, much like I did in the previous section, insists that there are two levels on which this work must occur, the personal or individual and the level of the *polis* (the city). I will not outline his section on the individual in full at risk of redundancy as it largely is the same as the idea of focal practices. We must will a world, will or community through our actions instead of saying "I prefer" or "my opinion is." My opinion, my political judgement is necessarily a judgement of how our common world will be. We must remember or realize this to become public citizens. So let us move directly into his proposal for the resurrection of the *polis*.

---

[44] Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place*, 108

As mentioned previously, Kemmis maintains that the seat of the economy should be centered in the city instead of in the nation or the globe. This follows neatly from an Aristotelian view of the *polis*. Aristotle argued that there is an upper limit to the size of well functioning political structure, between 5,000 and 8,000. Otherwise the city cannot pursue justice. This is not to say that Kemmis argues that all cities and governments should be set up for 5,000-8,000 people but instead that justice and the well functioning of the government is hampered by size and should be limited to its smallest iteration, the city. It follows from the city as seat of the economy then that the political system should be set up similarly. "But if this is so, then it may well be that cities are not only the primary economic units but also the basic political entities. In other words, it may be that the boundaries which humans draw across landscapes create artificial and inefficient units both in economic and in political terms."[45] We would return to the traditional Greek idea of the *polis*, of the city-state. It is the blending of the city and the country so that civic life does not rest in one or the other. The city would necessitate cooperation as opposed to regulatory policies. He cites an instance where environmental groups managed to work together with a wood pulp factory to figure out the best way to release industrial waste. Instead of involving regulators and perhaps driving the corporation out of the city, they came to each other as neighbors, as citizens inhabiting the same space.

Kemmis acknowledges that this would require a huge change in the way society is set up, but he does not give guidelines on how to actually make those changes. Until there is a total turnover in political control in America it is unlikely to see this implemented on a full scale. But that does not mean we cannot implement these policies on a smaller scale in our cities and our

---

[45] Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place*, 121

communities. We do this starting with the individual. And Kemmis does give guidelines to individual political action. So we return to Borgmann, and to Sartre, and to Mander, and the culture of the table. We return to the phenomena of being a man among men and to the imperative of our freedom. This is how we flourish at an individual level.

To briefly reiterate, in this paper I argued that the phenomenological self, as constituted through Husserlian experience, existing under late 20th century capitalism and the overarching profit motive, is necessarily constituted as inauthentic and alienated. I further argued that this alienation has lead to a desolation or a destruction of the real. I proposed that the way to restructure a real and reclaim an authentic life is through rehabitation facilitated through focal practices. I finished with a speculative look at communitarian political philosophy as a way to facilitate rehabitaiton and focal practices.

But instead of a formal structure let us again focus on the experience as I have throughout the paper. It is still humid in the Rainforest Café. It is still loud, there are still unnervingly happy waiters, the dragonfly is still the same size as the parakeet which is still the same size as the monkey. The animatronic gorilla shakes and howls and countless little kids like my friends will have their protentions and dispositions shaped by an experience in front of this simulacra. One thing is clear on this trip, this is not flourishing. This is not the good life, it cannot be our end. I sit there, as a person among people, in a restaurant typical of a fourth stage simulacra. We are a whole community of psychosomatics. Public life, the jungle, Eden, is bought, sold, and trademarked. The real slips away. But as a person among people I have an obligatory freedom, an obligation to will my community into existence. I leave the Rainforest Café, laughing with my friends, and make a dinner together at my house. I practice, focally. I flourish and as such so does my community, bit by bit.

Works Cited

Allen, Reginald E., ed. *Greek Philosophy:Thales to Aristotle*. 3rd ed. New York: The Free Press,
   1996.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1994.

Borgmann, Albert. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: a Philosophical
   Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Pr., 1988.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*.
   Edited by Donn Welton. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999. 65.

Kemmis, Daniel. *Community and the Politics of Place*. University of Oklahoma Press. 1992.

Mander, Jerry. *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the
   Indian Nations*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

--- *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel Estella Barnes. New York: Washington Square, 1992. Print.

Steeves, H. Peter. *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the Return to the Everyday*.
   Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. 148.