

ECOLOGY OF THE INNER SENSES: AN INTRODUCTION

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This is the first issue of *Dianoetikon: A Practical Journal* from the Center for the Study of Digital Life (CSDL). The Center was formed in 2015 and is a non-profit strategic research group focused on the impact of digital technology on society and its people. We call ourselves “technological constructivists” and view human behaviors and attitudes as being fundamentally shaped by our dominant communications technologies. Since digital technology aims to displace humans (and even become self-aware in the process), it is something quite new to civilization, so it requires a new effort to understand the accelerating consequences.

We are a diverse group of entrepreneurs, investors, educators, authors and geopolitical experts who have come together from around the world to dig much deeper towards comprehending our current condition than is typically possible. We were formed to “think the unthinkable.” Our guiding principle is the recognition that the previous psycho-technological paradigm is finished and we have already been living in a different world for the past decades. Globalism, which grew out of the world order crafted after WW II, is finished -- upending that previous stability. We already live in a world of Three Spheres: East, West and Digital, which means massive uncertainty about the looming outcomes.

This new Digital Paradigm presents a wide-range of new problems, dangers and opportunities. Since many people continue to live in what Marshall McLuhan called the “rear-view mirror,” resisting the recognition of what has already happened to them, basic risks at every level have escalated -- as reflected in board-rooms and on front-pages worldwide. Confrontations, driven by raw misunderstandings, seem inevitable. McLuhan's *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1969) underscores the dangers that accompany these fundamental shifts in “identity.” The Center was formed to help minimize the escalating dangers of these potentially catastrophic clashes.

The Center's mission includes the commitment to develop a new range of social sciences -- with particular focus on psychology and economics. It is now widely recognized that these disciplines have fallen into disarray and, for the most part, have failed to achieve either the promised knowledge or results offered when they were established (and reformed) in the 20th-century. A series of attempts to reduce humans and their affairs to what can be “modeled” have left us vulnerable to all that is “exogenous” to these naive reductive approaches. In many ways, we have collapsed into the “land of the blind” along the way.

Human perception has been stripped of its ability to recognize patterns, in a world over-saturated with fantastic make-believe images. Digital technology, based on precise memory architectures, confronts this fantasy and is already changing these attitudes. In order to avoid modern fantasies of idealized “world construction,” a retrieval of earlier sensibilities is now required. One motto for the Center is “Digital retrieves the Medieval” and perhaps that is most evident in psychology. Modern psychology has removed the “psyche” (the Greek term for which “soul” is perhaps closest in English) and replaced it with clockwork and computer chips. Putting the psyche back requires retrieving Faculty Psychology, as it was shaped before the Printing Press. This issue of *Dianoetikon* seeks to begin that process.

DIANOETIKON: A PRACTICAL JOURNAL

There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology.

- Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, p. 118

Dianoetikon is a Greek word, which means ‘the power of thinking-things-through’. We have adopted it from Aristotle’s *On the Soul*. The word kept its life in the early middle ages when Bishop Nemesius made it central to his anthropology, and was further “set in stone” when St. Thomas Aquinas translated it to the *vis cogitativa*, the highest bodily power of the human soul.

Our subtitle, “a practical journal” refers to the real nature of this power, as it deals with “particulars”, not “universals”. Being bodily, concepts are alien to it — rather it is the height of subconscious human percepts, which we study and lay bare to scrutiny. The subtitle is also an homage to Marshall McLuhan’s first essay, written under the guidance of Fr. Gerald B Phelan, “G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic”, where McLuhan noted the English apologist’s skill in using analogy, chiasmus, paradox to reveal structures of being.

This journal will appeal to those who have noticed little relevance from the fields of modern social science (psychology, economics, politics), and their futility in dealing with the new problems and threats appearing in this century. We hope that it will serve as a key in pointing to a new grammar, a new mode of being brought about by changes to our technological environment which have already occurred.

Our contributors are academics and ‘autodidacts’ from many fields who are united by an understanding that we are already in a new paradigm brought about by ubiquitous digital technology.

Our intended impact is to stir further investigation into topics which have been largely ignored or forgotten, and to revitalize these fields of social science with a heightened awareness and ability to meet challenges humanity has never faced before.

OUR STUDY OF THE INNER SENSES

Shortly after CSDL was formed, we began to anticipate those areas needing further research. Psychology quickly became our focus. Its history, its motivations and its progress/failures all drew our attention. Marshall McLuhan, whose insights into the operations of technology on the human psyche guided our initial approach, also seemed to lack a firm basis in modern (or ancient) psychological theory/practice. It was decided that a “breakthrough” was needed and we discovered that this required stepping outside the modern framework. We began to look for what had been “forgotten” about psychology and discovered that it was provided by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas is typically thought of as a “theologian” (or, perhaps, a philosopher), but, alas, such modern disciplinary boundaries made little sense in 13th-century Paris. Indeed, until it became “experimental” in the 19th-century, psychology was typically considered as a branch of “philosophy” (indeed, Harvard didn’t separate these into their own departments until 1933). What sets Aquinas apart from many of his contemporaries was his careful consideration of recently “discovered” contributions from 4th-century BC Aristotle. Aristotle had “invented” psychology with his *Peri Psyche* (known more commonly by its Latin title, *De Anima*), which had stimulated much discussion over the ensuing centuries, notably by Hebrew scholar Maimonides and Islamic scholars Avicenna and Averroes. Like Aquinas, they all had incorporated Aristotle into their work, often writing commentaries themselves. As it turns out, Whitehead’s statement that “all Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato” was wrong.

In many ways, Aquinas had become the culmination of 1000+ years of psychological investigation -- some philosophical and some medical. But, since Aquinas is not widely studied today (with the exception of small pockets of Catholic scholars), we wondered where the Center would find the expertise required. Starting in 2016 (and continuing for the next two years), the Center participated in one of the only Aquinas “study groups” around, organized by neo-Thomist scholar Peter Redpath. It was there that we met Mark Barker, whose essay replicating his 2016 presentation at what we called a summer-time “Aquinas-Fest” is published for the first time in this issue. Along the way, many others were consulted. The writings of Thomist semiotician John Deely contributed much to our understanding of how “signs” first became a carefully understood topic in what he called the “Latin Age.” His protege, Brian Kemple, added a great deal and helped to ensure us that we were on the right track. Literature searches turned up (mostly) obscure scholars writing about the “inner senses” in the 20th-century (one of whom, Julien Peghaire is reprinted in this volume). Latin treatments from the 19th-century were interrogated. Investigations were launched into how-and-why the Catholic Church neglected to bring Aquinas’s understanding forward. Controversies dating to the 16th-century were explored. The Warburg Institute contributed Ruth Harvey’s 1975 monograph *The Inward Wits* (excerpted in this issue). Most recently, we have

gotten in touch with a group of Spanish scholars who have kept this research alive, as reflected in the essay by Fr. Juan Jose Sanquineti in this volume.

We sincerely hope the collection of essays in our *Ecology of the Inner Senses* captures the breadth and depth of this ongoing and vital research.

FUTURE RESEARCH

“Faculty Psychology” is just the beginning. Following the tripartite organization of what is called “Catholic Social Teaching” -- begun in earnest by the Church in parallel with the “experimental” turn in psychology in the late-19th century -- the Center's research efforts have two more significant areas to explore. Divided into Human Dignity, Subsidiarity and Solidarity, CSDL's social scientific research also has three primary components. Psychology allows us to consider the faculties/operation of the human psyche (aka “soul”), which is the foundation of Human Dignity. Subsidiarity will be the basis of our work on the second volume of *Dianoetikon*, tentatively titled “Digital Distributism” (after a phrase coined by Douglas Rushkoff). Solidarity will then be tackled in the context of Three Spheres: East, West and Digital -- a topic about which the Center has unique expertise.

Subsidiarity, familiar to many people as a result of E.F. Schmitter's *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As if People Mattered* (1973), is the principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. We are convinced that the Digital Paradigm's effects in political economics will be profoundly “de-centralizing.” Not that “digital” is fundamentally opposed to hierarchies or compelled to “flatten” all social structures but that it will be the technology which promotes the expansion of “competent authority.” Moreover, unlike the previous fantasy-dominated paradigm (driven largely by television and its offshoots, like “social media”), digital will promote human responsibility in the face of robots taking over many human activities. We suspect that this radical rethinking of our responsibilities - - personal, communal and spiritual -- that will perhaps become the most notable feature of the Digital Paradigm.

In 1985, Neil Postman, a professor at NYU and protege of Marshall McLuhan, published his *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. His thesis was a version of McLuhan's promotion of Gestalt psychology's notions of “figure” and “ground.” The underlying structures of how we experience reality are rarely investigated, since for many they appear to be dangerous and, overwhelmingly, beyond anyone's ability to claim responsibility. So we entertain ourselves. To death. This unwillingness to consider the ground characteristics of our lives is also captured in this 1969 quote from McLuhan, addressing the philosopher Jacques Maritain, “There is a deep-seated repugnance in the human breast against understanding the processes in which we are involved. Such understanding implies far to much

responsibility for our actions.” As we rethink our responsibilities in a digital world, our psychology will shift correspondingly.

Solidarity, like so much else, has become severely distorted in the previous paradigm, along with the responsibilities it implies. Television generated an environment in which people were encouraged to “Act Local: Think Global.” “Saving the world” -- which, to be fair, is a responsibility quite remote from most people's lives -- has become a meme/slogan/jingle with massive negative consequences. Responsibilities at this level are not evenly distributed. Expecting people to live their lives as-if they must “do something” about what they cannot possibly affect, distorts our whole sense of being responsible for what is, in fact, within our grasp. As with the television -series “Heroes” (2006-2010) slogan, “Save the cheerleader; save the world,” and much recent Hollywood production underscores, we are all expected to fantasize about being “super-heroes.” Recycle to “save the environment “ (when, of course, it does nothing of the sort). This is not an honest approach to solidarity. This is not the path towards taking responsibility for our own actions.

Humanity is facing an unprecedented threat. Astrophysicist Stephen Hawking summarized our situation as “an invasion of a vastly superior alien race, to which our reaction is 'don't worry we'll leave the lights on'.” Norbert Wiener, the mathematician who coined the term “cybernetics” in the 1940s, was asked in one of his final interviews, “Dr. Wiener, is there a danger that machines -- that is, computers -- will someday get the upper hand over men?” His reply was “There is, definitely that danger if we don't take a serious attitude . . . The machines are there to be used by man, and if man prefers to leave the whole matter to their employment to the machine or unwillingness to make decisions -- whether you call it laziness or cowardice -- then we're in for trouble.” Our view is these “attitudes” which cannot be changed without a radical paradigm shift. We believe that the Digital Paradigm has already begun that attitude change, admittedly a “pattern” often difficult to recognize in the welter of disorienting “information” we consume daily.

WHO ARE WE?

The Center is a unique organization. It was started based on work done for the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment (ONA), as founded and run by Andrew Marshall from 1973 until his retirement in 2015. Marshall's career stretched back to the early RAND Corporation, where he and his colleague Herman Kahn (later to launch the Hudson Institute) pondered the possibilities of a WW III conflagration and how to prevent it from happening. Under Marshall, ONA had the responsibility to advise the Dept. of Defense by taking an all-things-considered approach (thus, “net” assessment), particularly regarding the Soviet Union and its capabilities/motivations. Among the various conclusions reached

on the then-threatening Cold War, ONA repeatedly proved itself superior to others, including the CIA.

The founders of CSDL include Mark Stahlman and Phil Midland. Stahlman is a retired Wall Street analyst/strategist/banker (who brought AOL public in 1992), whose success was based on recognizing patterns many others did not perceive. Midland is a retired Naval Intelligence officer, trained to observe and understand patterns the eluded others, himself a student of Samuel Huntington and long-time collaborator with Marshall at ONA on East Asia. Stahlman brings the “digital” credentials, whereas Midland brings the “east” expertise. We believe that bringing this knowledge and experience together, also involving dozens of domain experts across other key topics, very likely has never been done before.

The Center will be expanding its reach over the next few years and publishing *Dianoetikon* is an important step in that direction. We intend to start a “graduate school” to help train the sensibilities of future digital leaders. We are also expanding into a “geopolitical expert network” for briefings/consultation with corporate and government executives. Our goal will be to sensitize more people to the methodologies of anticipation needed to “see around corners.” We are convinced that “future” has already arrived and the capability to perceive it is not yet “evenly distributed.” We are taking responsibility for doing something about that. Our study of the Inner Senses was designed to help cultivate the habits needed for this expanded form of perception. We welcome your help.