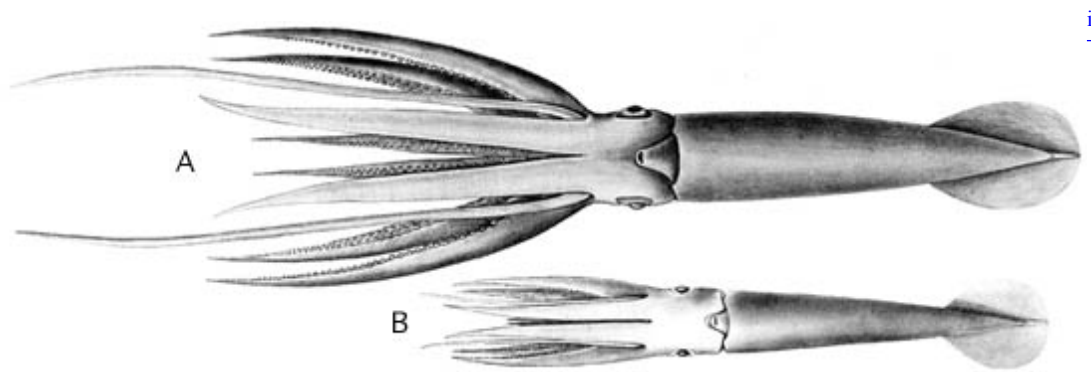


Extract from [the book](#) “Reflective Journeys: Architeuthis”



Abstract living forms, an essay on life and the nature of things.

Abstract Living Forms

At some point in time on our planet, we have estimated over 600 Million years in the past, life emerged from inorganic particles. The specifics of this event and its ‘formula’ remain one of the quintessential unknowns. There exists no accepted universal definition of life. Even our conventional notions of life are vigorously debated. Living attributes such as adaptation and reproduction bring forward inevitable exceptions in the known physical world around us. Yet for the most part, scientists are able to ascertain the state of life in a biological sense and can correlate reasonable historical sketches of living creatures on Earth.

Scientists are also keenly interested in the discovery of life elsewhere, within inhospitable environments, and on other planets. Fortunes are spent attempting to find it or its remnants across our Solar system, under the rocky deserts of planets, under the ice crust of impossibly distant moons, in the Kuiper Belt. Not satisfied with the limits of our own corner of the galaxy, we now theorize about life-sustaining planets on systems thousands and millions of light years in distance from Earth. We gauge the minutest fluctuations in the orbit of a distant sun, in search for planets of size and mass likely to bear the fruit of life. Inserting numerical pragmatism into the Drake equation, our math is put to the task of estimating extraterrestrial life.

Whatever the reasons for this search and regardless of what may be argued for its practicality or usefulness, the quest shall continue; we are obsessed with the search for life. But what do we understand about life directly in front of us, about our own lives? What is our comprehension of the living essences all around us?

We are surrounded by living things, both in the biological sense: animals, people, plants, and also in the figurative sense: relationships, organizations, communities, pursuits, journeys.

What if we were to view all of life through a new lens, one that allows us to see the patterns of nature in a new way? If we were to understand our endeavors, our relationships, our journeys through a new perspective, would our perception of life change or become clearer? What is this phenomenon we refer to as Nature? These are fundamental questions. Nature flows all around us; there is value in reasoning that allows us to be more mindful of the nature of things.

What we wish to explore here is the notion of nature and life beyond the biological, and see where this leads us. What patterns emerge? How far does logical reasoning carry us in this context? We will examine stages of life, both in the physical and in the abstract, the latter shall be referred to as 'abstract living forms'. How does each stage of life resonate to us? We will examine these living forms and their nature, in familiar and new ways. Let's begin.

We most commonly consider something to be 'alive' in the biological sense, understanding at an early age that animals, people, and plants are living organisms. Eventually we consider all biological life as nature's idea; the living creature as a transient incarnation of nature. We understand, in general terms, the beginning and end of life. The conception and conclusion of life are ultimately consistent with a rapport and harmony with nature. Nature, we refer to quite casually, but deep in the recesses of our thinking there is a sense of a powerful concept. That nature is intertwined throughout all that is alive seems practical to us but how are we to view this concept more broadly? What takes shape when we embark on this reflective journey is both familiar and surprising. Let's venture to nature, to the source, first.

Focusing on the source

What is unknown about the onset of life and its formulas is a consequence of what we cannot fully understand about nature. Nature itself is a higher notion; a source. One cannot inspect nature directly; it is immeasurable. The idea of a source, such as nature, emerges relatively easily, and we (both writer and reader) should be on guard; diligent not to use this as license into convenient mysticism or myth. It is in these realms that our exploration, however inspiring it may be to some,ⁱⁱⁱ becomes a creature of its own devices. This is not to argue against the 'Power of Myth'—, as Joseph Campbell has convincingly persuaded, rather that we may first benefit from a logical and introspective dissection of such things, without, or more significantly before entering the domains of mysticism, of religion, of myth, and so on. And this argument may be made without designating these realms as interrelated.

When we attempt to measure a source, our theoretical instruments begin to falter; we are persuaded to evoke infinity. We see nature as infinite, but infinity in this sense should inspire a sense of immeasurability rather than dimension. To an ant, the lake is immeasurable, it appears infinite. To a man in the 15th century, the ocean appeared infinite, unending. It appeared that way, but it is not; immeasurability is a question of perspective. Infinity to man is a spark that summons the fire of myth. It is thus that we have been and continue to be drawn to philosophical responses to this question. Through the epochs, such ideas about life and nature have washed upon the masses as mysticism and religion, among other viewpoints, and the resulting association of the deities and God as the ultimate source. Our ambition here

is not to debate or displace such notions. The intent is rather to, at least momentarily; consider life through a purely philosophical and rational lens, to the best of our abilities. What do we see when we examine life in this way?

We can comprehend nature as a source of life, as our own source. We are easily blinded and deafened by our proximity to it, having emerged from nature and immersed in it. We are compelled to use a new lens through which to see life.

The abstractive lens

We use Abstraction and metaphor to see new perspectives.

“Unless you are educated in metaphor, you are not safe to be let loose in the world.”

– Robert Frost

Let’s look beyond biological or physical existence. Imagine life in its abstract form, above skin and veins, above cells and nuclei.

Beyond examples that involve individual animals, we begin there as these are most familiar, living forms are seen in the life of an ant colony, a bee hive, a coral reef. Outside of the animal realm we consider living forms in geology (the life of a planet), meteorology (the life of weather systems) and many other productive areas of scientific study. Living forms are everywhere in the physical world. The concept of ‘living’, however, may also be applied beyond the physical; it may be applied figuratively, in a metaphorical sense. What happens when we employ such ideas beyond physical life? What takes shape when we speak of living in the metaphysical or abstract sense? Abstract living entities are everywhere. Our endeavors and pursuits, our relationships, our communities and organizations, the societies we are part of. These are the abstract living forms around us.

We shall refer to abstract living forms, both singular and plural, as ‘*Vitae*’ (pronounced ‘vee’-‘tah’-‘eh’), from the Latin noun for ‘Life’, and our reflecting on them as ‘*Vitaespection*’. When we frame things in this way; in the abstract, there are powerful derivatives.

As the abstract living form, the *vitae*, extends beyond and is separate from physical properties of life, it is useful to understand what constitutes its essence. Our ability to view life conceptually enables us to reflect in a rational way upon it, and this can be put to productive use in assessing the state, the shape, and trajectory of things. The reflection of *vitae* is perceptible. What about it feels alive? How is a *vitae*’s stage of life reflected from it? How might we use this in rationalizing our own existence, in tuning into the nature of things?

Our linguistics already utilize this abstract notion of life, we use expressions such as “their relationship is alive and well”, “a living language”, “a living memorial”. Something may be said to “have taken on a life of its own”. What do we mean by such expressions? We can examine things in the abstract and sense their living essence. Your relationship with another person, regardless of its basis (parental, professional, matrimonial, etc.) is an abstract living

form; a vitae. A relationship is not itself a biological entity, of course, but it feels alive. The vitae of a relationship is real, we examine it in the abstract as a separate thing. Same is in effect with a community, an endeavor, an industry, communities, cities and countries.

Essence and reflection

The living animal reflects nature. Your relationship with another person reflects the communal aspects of nature as a source. Perceptible within any vitae is its essence. A living essence is a reflection of its source, the source of a living thing. So the question of what constitutes vitae shifts from how a thing appears to us, to the notion behind the verb 'reflect' in this context. What does it mean to reflect some aspect or sense of being, to reflect a sense of living? An inorganic thing (e.g. a piece of paper) may be made of things from nature; wood pulp, and this was once alive as a tree, but this does not imply the current state of the thing, it does not reflect a sense being alive, it is not. The reflection is thus disconnected from an assessment of the contents of a thing, just as source it not a question of piece/parts. The living thing evokes a feeling, a sense related to its source, and it does this separate from philosophical musings, it does so as an intrinsic aspect of its character. Moreover the living thing reflects its source in a manner that is indicative of its stage in life. It is thus that we may narrow the living reflection to a comprehension of a given source and the stages of life it evokes.

How is this perspective useful? We are immersed in a world full of life. The vitae around us, particularly those we are part of, are important and significant in our everyday experience and awareness. Much of our attention and effort is placed on our families, our careers, our endeavors, our community, our journeys. A rational (thinking) framework of vitae can be an essential way to understand the energies and movements in our lives. This framework of thinking enhances our ability to rationalize the abstract living forms around us, to understand them more clearly and with greater depth. Such a perspective plays a crucial role in framing the proper questions. It assists in comprehending what is and is not beyond our control or that of the vitae's stage of life. Vitaespective reasoning allows us to be more mindful of the nature of things.

Living stages

What do we mean by stage in this context? All living things evolve through stages of life. Predictably, Shakespeare's "seven ages"^v manifest themselves in the figurative life. The Infant, school-boy, lover, soldier, the justice, the pantaloon^v, and notably, "the second childishness". More simply, there exist at each extremity of life a period of childhood, with an entry to adulthood (adolescence) and the adult stage in between.

bis pueri sense

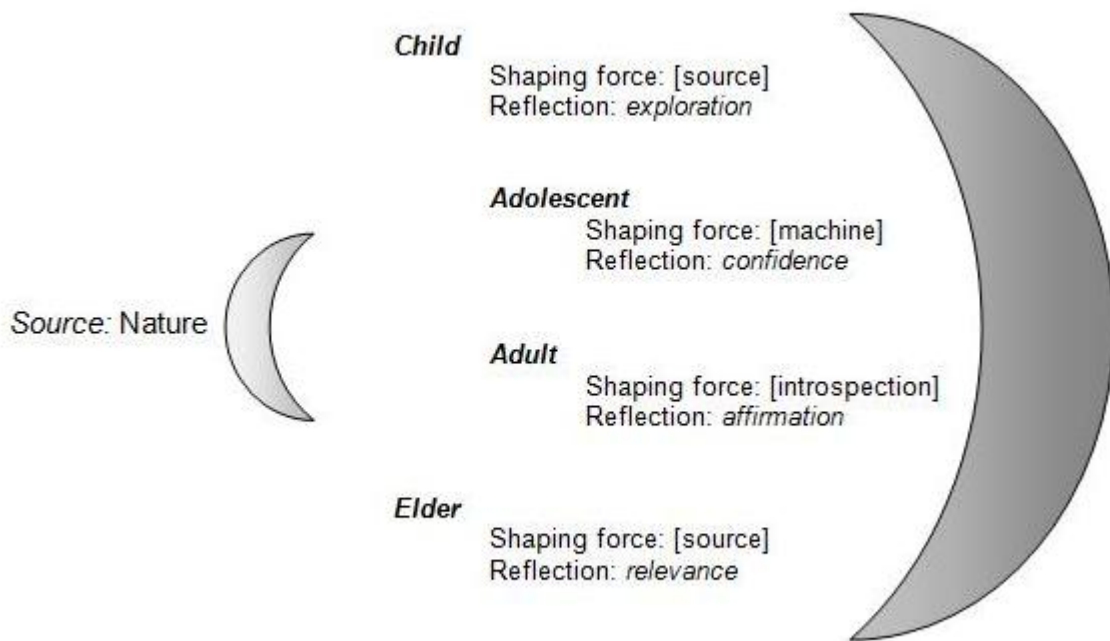
- Latin 'old men are twice children'

Childhood is about exploration, learning, growing. The first infancy is one of emergence from the life's source, of conception, birth and growth, the second is one of preparing for death; a return to the source. In between these ends are periods of intensity, passion, engagement. At each end the living is in childhood, connected to its source, in between the living is further away, at work, ambitious, engaged, creating. The midterm of life is working in and against the forces around it. It is a time to engage in pursuits, relationships, journeys. It is also a time strongly influenced by the surrounding currents; those of society, of peers, the influence of groups. Life finds itself within an organization, part of a movement. It is during this phase of a life that the contemplation of nature, of art and of thought takes its place.

The vitae evolve through discernable stages of life, just as a biological life. We expect an animal of a given species to be an 'adult' after a given period of time. For vitae, the lengths of stages of life are more interesting, less predictable. A vitae may persist at one stage for much longer or shorter and with greater variability than another of the same type. A relationship, for example, may exist (and reflect itself) in the childhood phase for much longer than another relationship and this variability remains important to consider. An abstract living form may remain in the conceptual or idea phase for longer than its eventual remaining lifecycle. Because of this we are compelled to understand the stages of vitae not in terms of periodicity but by virtue of an understanding of the form itself and the manner in which it reflects its stage.

{Living Stages}

Diagram: living stages



All things emerge from a source. For animals and abstract living forms associated with them (e.g. a community) this is nature. Many of the vitae around us manifested by society and organizations are related to man as a communal animal, and thus they also originate from nature. A relationship between people (or ants, bees, or chimpanzees), is a function of their communal character, so-to-speak their 'nature'. The source of a relationship is nature. The source may resonate within the model as a 'shaping force', which implies the primary force with which life is shaped during a given stage.

The shaping force identified in the living stages diagram refers to the primary force at a given stage of life, understanding that there are always secondary, tertiary and other forces present. The primary shaping force is unique for each stage, at each end the force is the source. Nature originated man, and he is shaped by it most strongly at each end of his life. In the adolescent stage, life is influenced by external causes such as society, industry, community. We will refer to each of these external forces as a 'machine'. An example of this is the adolescent teenager interacting with his environment, including peer groups, school environments, communities, etc. Adolescence is a distancing from childhood. The machine is a function of environment, of societal structure; it is a construct and the consequence of society, industry, religion and other organized movements of humanity.

"A single man is a crowd, and a crowd is a single man." - Democritus

We use the machine analogy to emphasize that these are man-made effects.

The effects are overlaid, one machine within the next. Individuals not aligning to the machine's patterns appear unbalanced. Most societies, for instance, are geared towards the patterns of education, vocation, profession, marriage, and while in different cultures these notions vary the underlying patterns remain similar.

Ultimately, the machine shows itself as a single instance. The corporation behaves as a single worker, the church as a parishioner, and the army as a soldier. The machine may be vain, selfish, and as temperamental as its crowd. It may be as generous, kind, as caring as its constituents. This effect of society, industry, community is itself a vitae, a living ensemble, which we will explore further on.

The adult stage is shaped by questions about itself, by introspection. This is the age of thought. This introspection, by the life itself and those around it, draws the living thing back from its machines, beginning to tune inwardly and reconnect with its source. The overall effect is cyclic.

The Reflection

The "reflection" is a tangible essence of the living thing; that aspect of life at a given stage that feels alive. The non-living thing has no reflection. This, forcefully reduced, is a reflection of the life's needs, its intrinsic longing, unique at each stage.

We can look at examples of vitae and their reflection relatively easily. A career, for example, in its childhood stage (e.g. the apprentice) is exploring and learning with most intensity. The child is primarily a learner, an explorer. It is this reflection of learning and bewilderment that resonates most clearly. The reflection of the adolescent career is one of confidence, ambition; it imagines itself 'complete' and established. It is this confidence that reflects life at this stage, distinctly from another stage. Adolescence is shaped strongly by machines: organizations, peers, environment and currents around it. The adulthood of a career seeks affirmation and is more introspective, it reflects a sense of status, it is assertive. The elderly stage or a career (retirement) is more retrospective, yearning for relevance and meaning, reconnecting with its beginnings, its source.

Examples of vitae at various stages are easily found. The relationship between two people will exhibit the stages of life. Its conception, birth, death, and the periods in between are perceptible.

"The moment when [two people] begin to love each other - to fancy each other is actually to be regarded as the very first formation of a new individual."

- Montaigne

The organization, a relationship between groups of people, also constitutes a vitae. A corporate organization, for example, will carry a discernible attitude; it will reflect a stage of life and personality, changing over time. Within the span of one's physical life, several figurative lives inevitably take shape. Living things overlapping at different stages create a discernable effect. A person that becomes part of a new vitae may feel rejuvenated as it is in its childhood stage. Similarly a young person entering a vitae (e.g. an organization) that is in its adult stage may feel more contemplative and introspective.

The perspective through which we perceive vitae varies, or should vary, depending on living stage. To ignore this is limiting, as we apply improper and unproductive assessments upon the vitae in question. Society (for the most part) does not attempt to assess the state of its youth with metrics applicable to adults, and when it attempts to do so it confronts significant challenges. We would not measure a school-aged child, for example, by examining their contribution to society, yet we are sometimes confused into doing comparable misguided assessments on abstract living forms. We may, for example, expect something similarly irreconcilable from a relationship in its early stage, or from a newly formed endeavor.

The shaping and measurements applied to vitae should be appropriate for their stage. This is another practical reason to understand living reflections through stages of life. In the vitae that is one's learning of a new trade, for example, the early stages of apprenticeship call for smaller, more incremental steps, otherwise the learner is easily overwhelmed. Often the useful periodicity and degree of measurement changes as the vitae progresses through its ages.

Life is manifested in the broader and collective context, the abstract living form as an ensemble.

The Living Ensemble

A group of people with common cause will reflect itself as alive, with stages of life transcending those of its physical constituents. The organized movement or business enterprise is a living abstract entity. The swarm of bees acts as one living entity. In the grand scale this is true of city, of country, and of all humanity as an indiscrete entity. When things of nature in the animal world group and behave communally, the resulting ensemble is an abstract living form that itself reflects nature. It is nature's idea that such groups should take shape and its creatures evolved this way, thus the resulting effect is again reflective of nature as a living source, nature doing what it does.

The living ensemble reflects a source embodied by at least one of its constituents. We may view a coin collection as an abstract living form, with the collector as the living thing that embodies the form; that animates it. Once the collector ceases to be such, the collection as a *vitae* ceases, it may persist as a non-living thing (a coin), it may break up and become part of new collections, but it is no longer alive and discernible in the prior sense. People and their way of speaking to each other create an ensemble often referred to as "a living language", a non-static collection of words, pronunciations, used to communicate. When the people involved cease to use the language, the effect is what's referred to as an "extinct" language (e.g. old English).

A functional grouping of non-living parts (e.g. a car, a building, a robot) is not in of itself a living form. The relationship between a car and its owner may be a *vitae*, and an occupied building will reflect life in this sense. Much has been made of the distinction of a robot's ability to "appear alive" or "think". Of course it is plausible for a non-living thing to appear alive, by virtue of its movements, responses, speech, etc. and this is a superficial reflection. We may assert that 'robot' has been designed and constructed from a man-made source we call 'robotics' but this is not a source in the living sense. Inter alia it is measurable and finite. Should we infuse a collection of functional parts (note that an animal's organs are similarly describable) with a proper source then we may consider it a living thing. But before we proceed too quickly towards visions of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, let us for a moment return to one of our open questions and not limit ourselves necessarily to nature as the only source. If man is to create a living machine, then a proper source might be infused within the machine. This logic leads to two rational paths: either an existing source such as nature is infused or a new one suitable for this purpose is brought to the surface. This again is deeper water.

Returning our attention to the living ensembles all around us; for professionals, the *vitae* we are most often surrounded by and part of is the organization/business/company entity; we will refer to this simply as 'the organization'. Countless volumes have been published on organizational efficiencies, so-called 'best practices', management principles, but very few examine the salient issues through the lens of the organization as a living entity, not to mention its life's stages. The early-stage business endeavor would ideally not be handled in a manner typical of a mature one; it is a figurative child and needs to be measured and handled, or 'managed', as such until it reaches further stages of maturity. Similarly the mature business should not be expected to become 'child-like' once more, to become a 'new learner' relative to unforeseen changes in the marketplace. The related consequences are the subject

of numerous exposés on various topics often cataloged under the topics of ‘innovation’ and ‘business excellence’.

Might we look further through a new lens, the lens of *vitaespection*? We are trained to look upon a business through the lenses of finances, personnel, strategy, etc. The business is shaped by its finances, the people it hires, its strategy and so on, however it is also an abstract living form evolving through life’s stages. We are prepared to accept the business’ journey through what at times surfaces as randomness, into the currents of a large marketplace and the movements of a market.

How does the business endeavor appear to us as an abstract living form? The idea for the business, its conception, is a time of excitement and anticipation for its incubators and backers. The new business, in its infancy, is fragile and still incapable but cared for closely and nurtured. In its childhood, the business explores its domain, seeking patterns and learning. Exploration and intense learning is the reflection at this stage. The people within the business in its childhood stage are invigorated by the newness of this period. It gains strength and learning over time, growing in its capabilities and confidence. The business, having found its way eventually reaches adolescence, that challenging and tempestuous period prior to its adult stage, when alignment with the market and performance expectations is at a premium. At the adolescent stage, the *vitae* of a business endeavor is confident, to a fault, shaped by the market, by the ‘machines’ of its industry and environment, its business ecosystem. At adulthood, it is assertive, while increasingly seeking affirmation. It has become introspective of its role and position in the marketplace. Ultimately the endeavor in its elderly stage is sure of itself but potentially frail, it has difficulty relearning anew and reinventing itself, difficulty adjusting to changes. The business will someday reach its proper end, perhaps absorbed into another venture or closed, and its piece/parts will return to an elemental state, returning once again to create the fabric of another endeavor.

Are these aspects of the business endeavor imaginary byproducts of the construction of a company or derivatives of nature resonating through the people that created and make up the organization? Is it a coincidence that our *vitae* examples align with nature? After all, the business endeavor and its environment are essentially groups of people working together and interacting. By perceiving the organization through the notion of *vitaespection* we are able to examine its state and progress in a new light. The people involved in the organization, its effective ‘parts’ and their overall effect can be understood more clearly. For ourselves within the organization, this rationalization assists in reaching a balanced perspective, one that considers the individual’s role as well as the workings of the group.

Through *vitaespection*, we see similar alignments with other abstract living forms. How does a personal relationship appear to use as a *vitae*? At first the two individuals don’t know each other, don’t have any rapport. When that changes, and a relationship takes initial shape, it carries the characteristics of a child, it feels childlike, new, fresh, rejuvenating, carrying the reflection of exploration and learning. Further in the relationship’s development, its adolescence, it is tested and broadened, exposed to other forces in our lives and environment. Ultimately this *vitae* may reach its adulthood, and the two individuals now ‘old friends’, having reached a point where they are comfortable in the patterns of their friendship. The *vitae* may reach its death at any stage, with the two individuals losing contact, their friendship coming to an end.

In these examples, the vitae's reflection is the key to discerning its stage of life. In perceiving an endeavor or relationship you are currently part of, how does it reflect itself as a living entity? Does its living stage raise new questions about it and your involvement in it?

Interconnections and overlap exist between living things. The birth of new life, in both the abstract and biological sense, energizes the lives around it. The birth of a baby rejuvenates the family and all the groups it is surrounded by. The start of a new personal endeavor brings new energy to the person. The endeavor is alive; it is a new life, a new child. This effect of overlap is also a significant aspect of understanding our abstract living forms.

The most common overlap is that between the adult and child. The parent and its new baby, the person and their new job, the inhabitant of a new community. People express a feeling of new 'life' when entering a new relationship. These are examples of overlapping lives and an immersion in the childlike energies examined through vitaespection. The reflection of the childhood stage of life infuses new energy in the adult life, by new in this context we are referring to "different than what was primarily there". An intersection with middle stages of life may also create overlapping effects. The energies of the adolescent and adult stages can produce a more reflective, more confident state. Being part of a well established endeavor, for example, can induce feelings of pensiveness, introspection, a sense of being more deeply surrounded by aspects of an established system, a 'machine'.

The energy of the childhood phase of life is present in our vitae. In all endeavors and journeys in life; the luxury of the apprentice should not be overlooked. The true apprentice is the learning spirit, eager and ambitious for what's next. Without an understanding of the vitae's childhood, we pretend that it is otherwise. The new relationship, for example, isn't capable of responding in any way other than that of a child. Of course every child's personality is unique.

"A good man is always a beginner"
- Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The apprenticeship of our endeavors has a rejuvenating effect on our physical lives. The elderly might say of a new grandchild 'he keeps me young'. Similarly, the second childhood and death of a living thing can make way for a new birth. By focusing on these phases of an abstract life we hone in on the source, we create and tune into the childhood theme within our lives.

The shaping force in life is often associated with struggle, or at least that is how we often perceive things.

Shape & Struggle

All things are the product of shaping, over time. Creatures are shaped by Darwinian evolutionary forces, landscapes by meteorological, planets by the astronomical. As these

processes span millennia, they are difficult to perceive. It is difficult to perceive things taking form at vastly different time intervals from our own existence. The forces that evolve and shape us in the span of our lifetime should not suffer from such imperceptions, but often do.

“What does not destroy me, makes me stronger”^v
- Friedrich Nietzsche—

Shaping forces appear to us as polarized. We view effects upon our lives (both physical and otherwise) as resistance or assistance, as disruptive or cooperative. The shaping forces are of greatest effect when they come forward as resistance. Therein is the backdrop to the theater of life’s struggles. Are these perceived as impediments against our progress or are these the forces to ultimately shape who we become? Indeed it seems hopeless for any real progress in the absence of resistance from the world around us. It is this resistance, this struggle, which ultimately forms us.

This understanding leads to the conscious and thus to some extent controllable shaping of our lives. The struggle is the tool upon the living, how do we use it? We want to avoid struggle, we prefer ease, and thus we view all resistance as impediments rather than productive shaping forces. That which is easy does not shape, however if one seeks to shape then the struggle may not only be consciously approached but embraced.

“Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage.”
– Rainer Maria Rilke

An apprentice, the child, cannot fully comprehend the struggle; it is blinded by a love with exploration, with destination. When new to something we are more ignorant of its impediments, its realities. This is quite useful. Adolescence is deceived by its own sense of confidence. The desire to achieve something softens the being, allowing the shaping forces to have their effect. Conversely, the energy of struggle and shaping may also emerge prematurely, and the apprentice overwhelmed and incapable of accepting its effects. Later a life is more rigid, more stiff, calculating and rationalizing. The tools of life shape differently depending on the stage in which they are applied. The living entity has a range of tolerances beyond which resistance can prove either overwhelming or insufficient. In such cases it either fails to produce any shape or compromises the life itself.^{vii}— It is thus that life’s struggles, received at the appropriate time, hold the key to growth and progress of our lives, of our vitae. It is also thus that the shaping forces in our lives are seen as an impediment and so often misunderstood.

“Suffering is a great teacher”^{viii}
- Balzac

What struggles are shaping our lives today? How do we perceive them? Can we view this from the perspective of vitaespection? Is the shaping effect productive or destructive? Are the shaping forces properly aligned with the vitaespective stages of life? One must be careful with such questions as often to move forward some rebuilding is necessary.

When we embrace the shaping forces that come upon us it is from an understanding, a clear visibility into its effects. It is then that we are able to seek out specific effects to shape us, our vitae, in a conscious and productive way.

Life and Death

We are accustomed to viewing all things of nature as alive. Having viewed the abstract through the lens of vitaespection, we may turn towards the biological living, often with contemplative results.

“You want to live—but do you know how to live? You are scared of dying—and, tell me, is the kind of life you lead really any different from being dead?”

— Seneca *‘Letters from a Stoic’*

Just as there are people that are living in a manner, as Seneca suggests bluntly, “really any different from being dead?” there are abstract living forms that might acknowledge the same state. A relationship, for example, may be figuratively dead, a professional career likewise, and the corollary examples are plentiful. What does it mean then to contemplate our abstract living forms in this manner? This process of vitaespection, the disentanglement of views for those lives we are part of, is as essential as our understanding of our own physical existence.

But first we must more clearly comprehend death. What is it that distinguishes the beginning of life and the condition of death? In both life’s beginning and end there is a strong transition, from a state of living/non-living to the other. There is no unified agreement on the process of life’s start. In the beginning, or the conception, the physical form of the living thing is entirely different; the plant resembles not its seed. This complicates the examination of life’s start, as the transition is both one of state and form. We might thus focus our attention on the opposite end: the death of a living thing, and the rather ambitious idea of expanding that notion to abstract living forms. The transition of a life to death in nature is, at least initially, one of state rather than shape, it is primarily one dimensional. This provides some hope for closer examination.

Death is a return solely to an elemental state. The dead body has returned to skin and bones, and this is solely what it now is. Skin and bones, and other physical aspects of the dead body have been and are its elemental piece/parts. These parts will decompose over time, but most importantly: the same body, just moments earlier, when alive, had the same piece/parts but these were not its sole constitution. The same is seen in the vitae upon its death. The uninhabited building, once an abstract living form, has returned only to concrete and steel. The death of a relationship returns two people once again as disconnected individuals. The death of a career shows itself as a static job, now referred to as ‘just a paycheck’. The vitae upon its death is no longer living; it no longer reflects life at any stage. Its elemental parts all that are left in the equation.

“To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.”

— Oscar Wilde

What takes place when we cling to vitae that are no longer alive? It is astonishing how common this is, as Seneca suggested. The dead relationship, dead career, dead organization, etc. and people that are part of them, often for lengthy periods of their physical lives. What we experience in such scenarios a type of void. In place of a living reflection and source of energy, there is nothing. Of course our emotions and minds may pretend otherwise, but the vitae's reflection is itself quite clear. It is through careful vitaespection that this will reveal itself accurately. The living overlap is real, and ultimately our vitae resonate through us.

Vitaespection

To view abstract living forms with clarity is to see all of humanity flowing from nature. Thinking about abstract living forms is part of philosophical journey that enables a higher perspective and reasoning. There are levels of thinking above our vitae, which take us further into abstraction.

1st Reflective Tier: Nature's Living Forms

As our exploration here in 'Architeuthis' has begun, the living forms are physical and abstract instances of nature, accessible, visible and all around us. These forms reflect life and its stages in consistent and familiar manner. We perceive nature as immeasurable, and examine it through its instances; the lives, world and Universe we are part of. Ultimately, we perceive nature more clearly as a source.

"Nature loves to hide itself"
- *Heraclitus*

From this vantage point, our lives are inseparable from the broader picture of life, emerging from nature. This reflective tier is pensive in the milieu of its own genre, in other words, we are reflecting on things most similar to ourselves, from our own source.

2nd Reflective Tier: Source's Nature

As touched on lightly here, source as a phenomenon of which nature is but one example. We contemplate the potential, indeed the inevitability of other sources dissimilar from nature, foreign to things of nature, to ourselves. Such contemplation scratches again at a definition of life and nature itself. To comprehend the notion of source we examine what constitutes an instance of nature. Once more this brings us towards a definition of life.

Imagine there was a notion of life emerging from a source other than nature, in a form entirely foreign to us, or in an unexpectedly familiar form. What would this feel like? Such a source could resonate quite differently from nature; instantiating things of a different sort as

we are accustomed to. Or is it that other sources have been accessible to us in ways we simply have not fully understood?

“The essence of art as what is contained in all of nature”

- Rainer Maria Rilke

The idea of thought as a distinct source has been pondered here: thought’s relationship with art in the context of mankind. Is it possible for us to engage in *vitae* disassociated with nature as their source? Might we not consider the existence of other sources? Is art, for example, sourced from nature, or does it emerge from another distinct source which human beings have evolved to understand, perhaps more accurately: to channel? If the source for art is thought, and we refer to thought as another source, how is this comparable to the source of nature, how is it different? What are the living stages of a living thing emerging from thought?

French philosopher and Art Historian Hubert Damisch^{ix} has positioned art as *“an intellectual or philosophical project”*. He views a painting as a reflection, not in the sense of the passive definition of the word, as a mirror image, but in the sense of the active definition, as an act of thought. French sculptor Auguste Rodin remarked^x *“Look at the masterpieces of art. All this beauty comes from the thought, the intention which their creators believed they could see in the universe.”*

German philosopher Martin Heidegger, borrowing from Hegel, considered *‘the dialogue between Art and thought’*, stating that *“art and thought are linked by a fundamental family relationship, since both of them are concerned not the particular beings, nor with beings in the numerical sense, nor with beingness in its generality, but with what founds Being as such”^{xi}*.

Is thought an evolved function of nature, which has surfaced over the millennia in homo sapiens, or does thought emerge from a different source which we have developed the ability to channel? In reflecting life, do works of thought carry the same essence as the living forms of nature?

3rd Reflective Tier: Above Source

If there are a variety of source types then it is compelling to imagine what lies above these sources. What gives rise to a source? Is it possible, or reasonable for mankind to ponder such questions?

Are we able to create sources ourselves, or tune into their effects? Is thought emerging from a source or does it have the potential of becoming a source in of itself? Is thought what distinguishes man above his natural surroundings, and if so, what is the essence of this source and the effects which allowed it to surface?

It is here that we shall pause.

Vitae Tractatus

The tractate is a strict and rational outline along a specific line of thinking. The thought is constrained or, as Wittgenstein would say, it is adequately “limited”^{xh}— in order to obtain a productive and connected rational framework.

1 *Thing*

1.0 All objects (*things*) exist in the physical or the metaphysical (*abstract*)

1.1 All *things* have a source

1.2 All things are examinable

1.21 The state of a thing is examinable as one or more of its attributes

1.211 The physical thing is examinable by the senses

1.212 The *abstract* thing is examinable by the mind

1.213 The senses and the mind are connected

2 *Source*

2.0 There exist many sources from which things emerge

2.1 Nature is a source of things; we say ‘a thing of nature’

2.2 Thought is a source of things

2.3 A source is not examinable except [indirectly] through examination of things emerging from it

3. *Living*

3.0 The concept (*state*) of “alive” (*living*) is a binary [living | non-living] attribute of all things

3.01 Abstract Living form, *Vitae*: the abstract *living* thing

e.g.: a relationship between people

3.1 Mortality: the lifespan (*life*) of a living thing is finite

3.2 There are perceptible ages (*stages*) within a *life* over time

3.21 Each *stage* of life carries a distinct reflection

3.22 The beginning and the end of a life (*the ends*) correspond to discernable events

4 *Living Connections*

4.0 The life of a thing is connected (*connections*) to other living things

4.1 The stage of a living thing affects its connections

e.g.: mourning the death of a relative, rejuvenated by a new relationship

4.2 A group (*living ensemble*) of connected living things constitutes a collective vitae

4.21 Machine: a collective living form perceived as a physical entity

e.g.: Industry, Community, Organization

4.22 The *living ensemble* is embodied by at least one living thing

4.3 The subset and whole of living type is a collective vitae

e.g.: the whole of humanity

Endnotes

[i](#) Illustration essay: Oral view of two juvenile *Architeuthis* A - Atlantic specimen. B - Pacific specimen. Drawings from Roper and Young (1972)

[ii](#) Equation was devised by Dr. Frank Drake (Professor Astronomy and Astrophysics) in 1960, in an attempt to estimate the number of extraterrestrial civilizations in our galaxy with which we might come in contact.

[iii](#) 'The Power of Myth' Joseph Campbell

[iv](#) As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII

[v](#) 'Pantaloone' A character in Italian commedia dell'arte, a very thin man of advanced years who is easily tricked and who wears pantaloons and slippers

[vi](#) The Twilight of the Idols "Maxims and Arrows" sec. 8 (translation by Walter Kauffman)

[vii](#) Reflective Journeys, Methuselah "Only at the proper time may we endeavor a shape, only when able to receive shape may it be worked. Too soon and the delicate touch too strong, too late and the strong touch too delicate"

[viii](#) The Works of Honoré de Balzac, Volume XV, The Deputy or Arcis

[ix](#) Hubert Damisch, Emeritus Professor of Art History and Theory at the Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris

[x](#) Auguste Rodin, 'Rodin on Art and Artists' Page 71, with Paul Gsell, 1957

[xi](#) Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Steven Rendall, Arthur Coleman Danto, 2000, Page 251

[xii](#) "Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather--not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts" Wittgenstein - Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus