

Unlearning Together

by Martin Winiecki

Movement, perception, thinking, effortless achievement and healing are inherent to life—they happen by themselves. When we observe children learning to walk or speak, ecosystems regenerating themselves, or animals self-organizing, we notice there's a masterful way of functioning that's fundamentally different from our dominant culture. Encaged in a reality bubble of fear and separation, as Westerners in particular, we've culturally barred ourselves from life. True unlearning is the process of bidding farewell to such detrimental cultural programming, fostering imagination and awe in relation to life, discernment and empathy in relation to our world, and community and Eros in relation to one another.

The Two Worlds

Life is a true miracle—the great unknown master that never ceases to touch and move through us. We know the gift of grace when it suddenly, often unexpectedly, takes hold of us, be it through an unusual encounter, a near-death experience, a psychedelic drug, an enlightening vision, the deep perception of another being's soul or intuitively knowing how to escape a dangerous situation unhurt. No matter how the magic occurs, we bear witness to the way that everything seems to happen by itself, in a kind of perfection that's often beyond rational explanation. We feel the presence of a dynamic, creative, intimate current that's both within us and that connects us with everything else. We find ourselves changed, unified in a world of full contact, resonance, and communication.

After witnessing the walls of everyday reality crack, when we glimpse a completely different 'reality,' we can either suppress our experience or begin to deeply question: What is real? What isn't? After all, who can answer?

This essay is for those who no longer want to suppress the experience of what is most essential. Such moments are more than just personal happiness, they're revelations of another reality which we've forgotten—the *déjà vu* of a world order entirely free of fear—that we encounter as much more real and familiar to us than most of what we believe about ourselves.

Reconnecting with this reality is no longer just an arbitrary individual question, but a political one, decisive for our very survival. Our collective alienation from the living world has become so extreme that it has provoked multiple and converging existential crises that won't be overcome if we don't address their common root. Understanding the depth of our disconnection, unlearning its mechanisms and consciously embracing life again have become conditions for humanity's decent survival. It's a journey we must walk together, for it is our entire civilization that needs a different foundation.

As psychoanalyst and futurist Dieter Duhm puts it, "There is the world that we create and

there is the world that has created us. These two worlds must come together. This is the goal of our journey.”

A Collective Firewall of Separation

Our dominant culture has been based on the denial of the world that has created us. This is our central disease. Reminiscent of Plato’s cave allegory, in which the people in the cave believe that all that exists are the moving shadows on the wall, today’s capitalist culture is based on a mental and spiritual firewall—a kind of imaginal control program that society and its institutions propagate and that we all, more or less, internalize in our socialization. Operating as a transpersonal energetic entity or ‘field,’ this firewall blocks out all information and experiences that don’t correspond to the dualistic, materialistic, mechanistic worldview that it reinforces, thereby making it difficult for us to consciously experience the living world, both in nature and within ourselves. Its method of hardwiring us into a mindset of separation and fear often prevents us from entering into genuine connection with life and so discovering our true agency in the world.

This is why, today, we can feel limited to an isolated and separated ‘self,’ which hinders us from experiencing our interconnectedness with other beings. Believing we can rely solely on our own personal capacities to achieve anything, we are constantly stressed, circling around ourselves, competing and fighting with others. Spellbound by this deception, we are convinced there is never enough and thus always primed for fight.

Through upbringing, schooling, mass media, dogmatic science and dogmatic religion, our dominant culture fosters this delusion of consciousness by muting our creative source through fear from early on. When children openly express their joy of life through freely loving impulses, playful sensuality, boundless curiosity and movement, they’re one with life. Yet when adults, as happens often, respond to this with rigidity, punishment, or even violence, children suffer trauma because they’re unable to understand why something that feels so natural and beautiful is ‘bad.’ In this, their consciousness is divorced from the direct sensation and truth of their bodies. Separated from the life within them, they also become unable to connect with the life outside themselves. Once children’s free, innate expression of their life energies has been stifled, they begin to copy the psychological and social patterns they observe in the adults around them so they can cope with the helplessness they experience. This is how society confines us to the prison of the isolated self from early on, consolidated by programs of duty, the pressure to perform, and a guilty conscience.

Unlearning begins by recognizing that it’s the collective thought forms (or mind-viruses) we subconsciously or unknowingly follow which cause the state of separation and fear we personally experience. Unlearning these programs is inevitable—if we don’t do it voluntarily, life will deconstruct them by force. It’s happening already in the dramatic and increasing collapse of societies, ecosystems, and our long-sustained certainties. We’ve entered the era that the Hopis predicted in their prophecies of the “great purification,” the unstoppable entropy of not only our external political, economic, and ecological systems, but, above all, the unexamined assumptions underlying those systems. The question is: Will we desperately try to hold onto what we know (i.e., defend our ‘cave’ against those telling us about the sun) or will we learn to surrender to the current of transformation?

Three Stages of Unlearning

To reconnect with life, we need nothing less than a holistic system change in the entire way we live. The more consciously we understand and make this change, the more the process of entropy will find a healing direction. As I see it, there are three essential interconnected stages of unlearning:

1) A Revolution of Consciousness

Embracing life begins with a revolution of consciousness. Pioneering this, quantum physics suggests that there is no such thing as an objective reality existing independently from our observation. Even if you've heard this statement already, it will shake your organism if you actually take a moment to let it sink in. The observer and the observed are inseparably intertwined in the emergence of what we experience as reality.

A key part of Gnostic teaching and practice, before the rise of dogmatic religion in the classical era, was the awakening of *epinoia*—the divine creative imagination. Gnostics, pagan mystics and intellectuals believed that when we activate our imagination, we're not just fantasizing but actually partaking in the creative process of the universe's emergence. They believed that imagination isn't a merely human affair, but the action of the universe as it dreams up reality. This understanding is held by many traditions, most powerfully, perhaps, by Australia's Indigenous people who affirm that everything emerges from dreamtime.

Aboriginal painting at Jabiru Dreaming, Kakadu NP, Australia | Wikimedia Commons

It's as if, through humanity's reflective consciousness and imagination, the unknown subject that has given rise to all that is becomes able to reflect upon and further propagate itself. A divine blessing and a deadly curse, our imagination cannot but create reality. Whenever we observe, think and imagine, we create. This isn't something to take lightly, but an enormous responsibility.

By believing in an objective reality that exists independently of our imagination, we obscure the fact that it's precisely this imagination of the supposed separation between self and world, mind and matter, God and humanity, and so on that creates the corresponding experience. Actually, our imagination isn't dead but operates in the shadows without us noticing.

In the moment that we begin to realize to what extent our unexamined assumptions about reality, nature, humanity, ourselves and others shape our experience of reality and contribute to the state of the world, we stop living thoughtlessly. Our true imagination begins to awaken with urgency, glimpsing the infinite planes beyond all 'fixed' realities, supposed laws, and inevitabilities. We discover a world outside our projections.

We begin to wonder: Who are we? Why are we here? What is life? What is light, the sun, water? We find ourselves standing in awe of the sheer wonder of existence. How come all this exists? How come there is anything at all?

When our imagination embraces life, when our thinking awakens to the wonders of existence, when we are no longer satisfied with the answers that we are given but follow our true questions, an ever-accelerating process of creative evolution and renewal begins.

2) Empathic Connection to All Life

We're all bound up in the same inescapable worldwide conflict—the war of globalized capitalism against life. Confronting this insidious conspiracy that's colonizing, exploiting, torturing, and killing living beings around the world, there can be no neutrality, as this would mean siding with the system of destruction. It's as if we face a collective test: Will you, humanity, continue to let destruction prevail, or do you love Life so much that you will stand up for it, no matter what?

Our loss of participation in the world equals our loss of conscious connection to the life force within us and our loss of empathy for other beings around us. According to Einstein, we break out of the prison of our isolated existence “by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” True compassion transcends the apparent separation between self and other. This is why thoughts, words and actions driven by compassion bring about healing for others and ourselves.

One of the brightest examples I know of people taking a wholehearted stand for life in the face of devastation is the peace community of San José de Apartadó in northern Colombia. In March 1997, after suffering expulsions and massacres in the Colombian war, 1,350 displaced farmers came together to protect themselves, establishing a Peace Community of nonviolent resistance. In response, the armed groups killed more than 200 of their members, including most of their leaders. Almost all the victims died at the hands of the paramilitary and national armed forces, many working in the service of multinational corporations. Despite the horrors they have faced, the members of this community continue working together bound by a commitment to nonviolence and reconciliation. Eduar Lanchero, one of their late leaders, explained what holds the community together:

The armed groups aren't the only ones who kill. It's the logic behind the whole system. The way people live generates this kind of death. This is why we decided to live in a way that our life generates life. One basic condition, which kept us alive, was to not play the game of fear, which was imposed upon us by the murders of the armed forces. We have made our choice. We chose life. Life corrects us and guides us.

In both political affairs and our most intimate personal questions we face this choice. So long as we're unaware of the interference in our world we're bound to be victims of the conflicts and diseases we're facing—politically and personally. To stand up for life fully and free ourselves, we must learn to distinguish between life and its antithesis.

3) Relearning Community

Marx famously said, “social being determines consciousness.” In other words, the kind of societal ecosystem of which we're a part and the way we relate to each other determines what we think and therefore, what we become.

Though we can unlearn individually to some degree, true unlearning happens or stalls together, as we are relational interdependent beings. For the past few thousand years, collective culture followed the principle of harsh power and this led to the illusion of liberation through individual escape from the collective. Yet, true liberation—not just in political, but also spiritual, psychological and social terms—is a matter of creating a new collective culture, one which no longer suppresses life but welcomes and cooperates with it.

True unlearning always means relearning community. Community isn't a particular lifestyle but a universal form of existence. We are community beings by our very nature. Only through a history of brutal destruction has humanity lost its primordial communitarian way of life. In a post-capitalist world, I believe humanity will return to live in community.

Imagine an increasing number of transformational centers around the world where people research and create a different kind of 'social being.' Such places are where they come together with the collective intention to transform patterns of separation and fear in all relations and areas of life, building communities unified by unbreakable solidarity and trust. The more they discover the foundations for a human culture compatible with the laws of Life and follow it, the less they are subject to the laws of the dominant culture.

As more and more people become involved, a new collective energy field would arise from those places, which ultimately could serve as base for a new planetary culture. In a nutshell, this is the basic idea for global transformation underlying the Healing Biotopes Plan that's been in theoretical and practical experimentation in the Tamera project in Portugal for 40 years.

Trust is the crucial factor in creating such transformative centers, as trust is the primordial healing power which reconnects us to each other and the world. To develop trust, we need ways of living together in which we can dare to drop our masks and freely express what we genuinely think, feel and love. Whenever we can do this fully, we experience liberation and allow others to "see" us. When truth is allowed, trust emerges naturally—to be seen is to be loved.

That's easily said but actually requires an unshakable decision for solidarity, because the path of trust-building leads us right through the wounds of history. There's no way around it. Our wounding is most painful in the realms that also hold the deepest promise for insight and delight—especially sexuality, love and partnership. Throughout millennia of patriarchal suppression, a demonic spell was cast on humanity: You must not express the erotic truth of your body freely, nor find fulfillment in love, nor meet the divine in sexuality. We must lift the spell, by creating a culture that will honor sexuality and love as sacred life forces again and allow people to express them freely and trustfully.

Whenever that becomes possible, we develop a fundamentally different relation to our bodies. We no longer see them as obstacles or prisons to be transcended, but organs of perception and knowledge that sensually connect us with each other and all of Earthly existence. A body free of fear is a direct expression and mirror of life itself—it can neither lie nor submit to being occupied by oppressive or violent forces, neither politically nor spiritually.

To arrive at the point where we can live freely from a source of authentic creativity, discovering ourselves and our relation to other beings in trust, we need to dismantle the fallacious thought forms and programs that have been instilled in us throughout the past few thousand years. The three stages of unlearning I have described here are all focused toward the same system change: an unconditional embracing of life, in all its beauty and chaos. Once the living world truly becomes part of the social fabric of humanity, we will find ourselves in a different world where we can finally obtain lasting solutions to the crises that currently threaten the continued survival of the entire family of Life.