



Poetics of Vitality

Reflections on Education and
Symbiotic Intelligence

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Abstract

This paper proposes to address a series of sensitive reflections, readings of the present and pedagogical strategies about different forms of connection or symbiosis of the human being with his emotions, the mind, technology, the non-human, paradoxes and the world of the sacred. These relationships result in forming a propitious space for the deployment of poetics of vitality, inspiring new ways of being and thinking, mutually educating ourselves and a context for more affirmative, creative and regenerative ethical and political commitments.

Keywords: symbiotic intelligence; art; education; systemic thinking; spirituality

Poética da vitalidade Reflexões sobre educação e inteligência simbiótica

Resumo

Este artigo se propõe a abordar uma série de reflexões sensíveis, leituras do presente e estratégias pedagógicas sobre diferentes formas de conexão ou simbiose do ser humano com suas emoções, a mente, a tecnologia, o não-humano, os paradoxos e o mundo do sagrado. Estas relações criam um espaço propício à implantação de poéticas de vitalidade, inspirando novas formas de ser e de pensar, educando-nos mutuamente e um contexto para compromissos éticos e políticos mais afirmativos, criativos e regenerativos.

Palavras-chave: inteligência simbiótica; arte; educação; pensamento sistêmico; espiritualidade

Poéticas de la vitalidad. Reflexiones en torno a la educación y la inteligencia simbiótica

Resumen

Este artículo propone abordar una serie de reflexiones sensibles, lecturas del presente y estrategias pedagógicas acerca de diferentes formas de conexión o simbiosis del ser humano con sus emociones, la mente, la tecnología, lo no-humano, las paradojas y el mundo de lo sagrado. Estas relaciones resultan conformado un espacio propicio para el despliegue de poéticas de la vitalidad, inspirando nuevas maneras de ser y pensar, educarnos mutuamente y un contexto para compromisos éticos y políticos más afirmativos, creativos y regenerativos.

Palabras clave: inteligencia simbiótica; arte; educación; pensamiento sistémico; espiritualidad

Symbiotic Intelligence

Only in the mirror of another life we can understand our own lives. Only through the eyes of another person we can become ourselves.

ANDREAS WEBER

The world does not need more highly developed people on the edge of a mental breakdown.

The world needs reasonably balanced human beings who have healed their trauma and function well in their daily lives.

HANZI FREINACHT

In a time “between worlds”, such as the one we are currently living in with the popularisation of artificial intelligences and the development of various expressions of civilisational crisis, the question arises as to what intelligence, education, creativity, and good citizenship truly mean. This crucial period in human history presents us with multiple challenges and opens us up to sensitivity and imagination. It also invites us to discover, within the concept of symbiotic intelligence, subtle whispers of poetics of vitality, integral forms of education, and connections between the human being and their own mind and emotions, as well as with the non-human, technologies, and the sacred.

Based on some recent developments in science, especially in complexity theory, we’ve come to understand that although intelligence is linked to many highly complex systems, it is often seen as more of a process than a fixed skill. It is commonly associated with problem-solving, performing well under certain limits, and adapting to our surroundings in flexible ways. Before continuing, it is worth making some clarifications regarding the notion of intelligence. Cognition does not arise merely from having a body, nor solely from neural interaction and plasticity, but from millions of years of evolution and a relationship with the ecosystems that nourish us and upon which we depend. Intelligence is not always synonymous with rationality or wisdom; one can be highly intelligent and deeply foolish at the same time, as is often the case with corrupt individuals or those with psychopathic tendencies. Intelligence is not confined to the brain or to the theory of the two hemispheres; it is also distributed throughout our bodies, within

the communities in which we live, and across the biosphere. We have begun to understand how interpersonal experience shapes the growth of neural networks in the brain. Two paradoxical points arise here: first, according to Damasio (1999), we sometimes use the mind not to reveal truths but to conceal them; and second, our relationship with the antagonist plays a key role in the development of our intelligence. According to Howard Gardner (2011), human beings possess multiple intelligences. We may excel in some while lacking in others, and most often, their development occurs unevenly.

Having made these clarifications, let us mention the remarkable forms of intelligence found in living beings and other species, which not only evoke wonder but also nuance the rather arrogant idea of human beings as the most intelligent creatures on the planet. We might say, rather, that different forms of cognition have evolved at different times and levels of complexity—for example, the intelligence of viruses, bacteria, bees, hives, spiders, ants, and schools of fish; the intelligence of flowers, the magic of pollination and photosynthesis; the distributed cognition of roots, webs, trees, fungi, and mycorrhizae; the ingenious feat of squirrels that can remember the precise location of acorns for years; the intelligence of elephants expressed in their way of communication using infrasound over hundreds of metres and their astonishing mourning rituals; the communication patterns and local dialects of whales and dolphins; the gut microbiota—unique to each individual, just like fingerprints which facilitates the digestion of food and the production of vitamin K, responsible for blood clotting.¹

As we can see, there are many forms of embodied cognition and intelligence in living systems that lie far beyond human capability many of which are of immense importance, beauty, and complexity. This context calls us to adopt a degree of epistemic humility, encouraging us to value the forms of symbiotic intelligence present in our environment sources from which we may draw inspiration for new narratives, a universal grammar of value (Temple, 2024), the design of new institutions, innovative

1 I recommend the following books for the exploration of forms of natural and symbiotic intelligence: *The Secret of Our Success* by Joseph Henrich (2015), *Behave* by Robert Sapolsky (2019), *Beyond Words* by Carl Safina (2017), *The Nation of Plants* by Stefano Mancuso (2020), *The Overstory* by Richard Powers (2019), *Underland* by Robert Macfarlane (2020), *Entangled Life* by Merlin Sheldrake (2020), *The Evolution of Beauty* by Richard Prum (2019), *The Intelligence of Flowers* by Maurice Maeterlinck (2022), and *Journey of the Universe* by Brian Swimme and Mary Tucker (2017).

approaches to art and education, and why not convivial tools and rituals of shared intelligence.

The key in the preceding examples lies in the concept of symbiotic or integrative intelligence, which entails recognising our deeply evolved, animated intelligence, with the intention of integrating its wisdom into our identity, values, and life choices (Lent, 2021). From an integral perspective, being intelligent is associated with better mental health, greater complexity in reasoning, improved relationships and meaning making, the ability to detect patterns, and increased relevance within specific contexts.

To expand our knowledge, perhaps we need to practise more conversations among friends, to create ecosystems of thought and diverse communities, extrapolate the distributed cognition in society, become more present, and more aware of the self-deceptions and lies we often tell ourselves. Beyond the importance of having a broad and informed vision of what intelligence is, one could argue that, if it is not accompanied by virtues (such as generosity, openness, presence, humility, and courage), it leads to flat knowledge production and may trigger cognitive delusions, hyper-rationalisations, and crisis of cultural identity².

To conclude this introductory section, a provocative idea: perhaps we are not lacking in intelligence. There is plenty of it in society, but much of it is wasted people alienated from sharing their knowledge and creativity with others; many disconnected creative potentials; thousands of individuals performing mechanical jobs that obstruct the development of their intelligences, preventing connection with their deepest desires and more altruistic purposes. We insist what we may need is not more intelligence or problem-solving ability, but rather epistemic tools to understand problems better —and the ability to choose the problems that matter most, are urgent, and truly worth solving.

Holistic Education

A holistic and integral education is one that encourages the full development of the human being and multiple intelligences, enabling individuals to connect with their primary archetype or essential soul quality. It is also a form of learning that creates environments for self-discovery, fostering

2 As the mystic, philosopher, and painter F. Schuon said, knowledge that comes only from the head and is cut off from real human life can be dangerous. It can lead to mental and emotional problems, such as thinking too highly of ourselves, being self-centred, or feeling overly proud. (2004, p. 86)

a love of knowledge and learning. Moreover, it invites us to create stories, engage in deep understanding, nurture collective creativity, and develop innovative social experiments through the creative use of technological repertoires.

In the pedagogical approaches I have been developing in recent years within university settings, I often work with the following triads: connection, understanding, and co-creation; truth, beauty, and goodness; being, consciousness, and happiness; I, we, and they; personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal; the personal, professional, and civic; art, science, and technology.

Let's take a quick look at the 3Cs approach to learning: connection, comprehension, and co-creation. In the connection phase, people take part in rituals, games, group of activities, singing, dancing, meditations, and artistic experiences using different ways of expression. These helps bring full attention and presence to the learning process.³ At this stage, spaces are created for emotional co-regulation, for deepening states of consciousness, and for the creation of micro-stories about emotions, where sincerity and heartfelt openness (vulnerability) are woven together. People create short stories about emotions, speaking honestly and opening their hearts. Also, experimental narratives are created to integrate the past, present, and future; to foster new understandings of who we have been becoming; to explore deep learning processes⁴; and to bring focused attention to our shadows, wounds, and traumas, as well as to deep human connections, networks of affinity, privileges, and social capital.

In these connection practices, I have seen how they help people become more present, more empathetic, and more open. They often lead to powerful moments of truth and healing. This shows that telling our stories is not only a

3 This blog post documents the ritual of abundance carried out through mediabiographical installations: <http://ciberciudadanas.blogspot.com/2024/02/ritual-de-la-abundancia-instalaciones.html>

4 Deep learning is about integrating the things we have lived through, the freedom to think, and learning how to deal with complexity and paradoxes. This kind of learning reminds us that each encounter offers an opportunity to expand our frequency, to widen our bandwidth, to grow our basket of gifts —bringing in what life calls us to explore, questioning what feels sacred to us, sharing our uniqueness, and opening paths towards individuation and self-transcendence. Deep learning is not about knowing something *about* something, but rather a sense of wonder in knowing, a *desire to be*, which involves exploring our unconscious. It is not about holding truths but embodying them making knowledge an act of kindness and beauty. Deep learning draws from silence as much as from words, from life as well as from death. It is a learning that happens through the creative tension between opposites, that emerges from being part of a web of connections, and that often arises where we least expect it.

key part of learning it is also a deep kind of medicine (Marya & Patel, 2021).

In the realm of understanding, spaces for dialogue are created around matters that speak to the soul and socially complex issues, encouraging encounters with truth, depth, paradox, and beauty. These conversations also serve as opportunities to integrate tools from systems thinking, which will be discussed later. A regular practice in my teaching is to invite students to hold podcast conversations with inspiring individuals or collectives rooted in their local territories. I have observed that this activity broadens the civic scope of knowledge and connects learners with the creativity and wisdom that lie dormant within social environments.

Another valuable educational experiment is the appropriation of Ken Wilber's AQAL tools (2009), based on the four quadrants, which creates an environment in which students explore the multidimensional causes and potential solutions to the issues raised by each group. This is done through four "corners" in the classroom, each representing one quadrant. Participants rotate through these spaces within set time frames, taking notes on the dialogues that emerge in each.

At the end, the group comes together to share their findings —summarising insights, emotional responses, reflections, and proposed solutions.⁵

After making connections, engaging in sensory exploration, gaining systemic understanding, and immersing themselves in the field they seek to investigate and transform, students move into the *co-creation* phase. This is a co-design experience developed in collaboration with stakeholders and subject-matter experts, aimed at creating a *real-scale social experiment or prototype*.

⁵ Another important finding is that thinking in a more connected way and really feel and engage with the web of life, we can grow in humility, respect, generosity and gratitude. It also helps us feel more wonder and care for other living beings, life forms, ecosystems and species. The metaphors (myths and narratives) we use to make sense of the world influence the values we hold, the collective actions we take, and the decisions we make as a society. Narratives shape our outlooks and personalities, and they frame our collective imagination.

For this stage, the guidelines outlined in the document *How to Make a Prototype* by Antonio Lafuente and Mariana Cancela (2023) are especially helpful. It is recommended to keep in mind some of the key qualities they describe —such as being open, iterative, hopeful, and experimental.

Dialogue Between Emotions and Politics

Negative emotions are a necessary component of emotional health.

Denying that negativity only perpetuates problems rather than solving them.

MARK MANSON

I have been understanding that working on the relationship between emotions and politics is highly important in educational processes, as it invites us to recognise how emotional and subterranean currents fuel and are fuelled by social issues. Another important reason to strengthen this connection is that no social or political crisis can be adequately addressed while we remain numb, fragmented, and wounded (Hübl, 2020).

I therefore propose that we seek to understand the emotional foundations underlying social conflicts such as racism, fanaticism, sexism, speciesism, classism, and extractivism.

These contexts not only reveal aspects of our collective traumas and highlight urgent areas of work, but also bring together dynamics of domination, superiority, and control alongside fear, guilt, shame, disgust, hatred of the other, resentment, and a host of fanatical, prejudiced emotions and ideologies, distorted worldviews, and limited and disabling thought patterns.⁶

In addition to defining the structural and historical dimensions of social conflicts and placing them within broader timelines, it is urgent that we also decode the emotions that arise when we engage with these issues the feelings that often dominate such complex social realities. Perhaps by shedding light on how these emotions function within culture and within ourselves, we can move towards greater freedom. This means we need to connect with what we feel and explore the unconscious patterns that shape the social and political realities we inhabit.

Here are some ideas and strategies I find useful when addressing the relationship between emotions and politics in educational contexts:

1. Avoid generalisations about any group, culture, or ethnicity and don't romanticise them either. Saying "they're all like that" just supports unfair and damaging generalisations.
2. In a time when statues that glorify colonisation are being torn down, we must also dismantle the concept of the idol, which continues to influence our culture in damaging ways.
3. To recognise how fear and the promise of security are used in political speeches, and to see how this emotional atmosphere often fuels radicalisation, tension, and so-called culture wars. This has been the strategy of the right (and sadly, the left has begun to learn this trick too): using fear, hatred, and the idea of an enemy (real or imagined) as political tools. This approach has often been used to justify the suspension of hard-won rights and freedoms.
4. Working with prejudice, blind spots, and intergenerational shadows is part of the process of weakening and decentralising these expressions of violence and domination.
5. Creating diverse and cross-cultural spaces where we learn to be more open about both our truths and our ignorance, and where more meaningful and generative encounters between cultures can take place.

⁶ For a more detailed reflection on prejudice, please see the following blog entry: <https://ciberciudadanias.blogspot.com/2021/05/sobre-los-prejuicios.html>

6. Widening our conversations and stepping out of social media echo chambers, which tend to reinforce our cognitive biases. Instead, we need to strengthen spaces where we can process tensions in more thoughtful and creative ways.
7. Creating a Museum of Indignity, pointing to the experiences where we have been victims, but also where we have acted as oppressors.
8. Finally, to study how negative emotions such as fear, shame,⁷ hate, guilt, and envy⁸ show up in our lives (by tracing a micro-history of each emotion from childhood to the present day) and how they are used in the agendas of political actors and the media.⁹

On Systems Thinking

Our ability to understand and improve education
depends on our ability to understand human development,
culture and society. We cannot understand what is happening in schools
unless we understand the context in which schools exist.

BRAD KERSHNER

Systems thinking is a metatheory that emerged in the 20th century in response to the need for a broader, more ecological way of seeing the world one that makes visible the connections, interdependencies and patterns of emergence between disciplines, knowledge areas, and living, dynamic systems (systems that change over time).

While systems thinking is relatively recent as a formal field of study, many ancestral cultures already held ways of knowing that understood everything as deeply connected. These traditions emphasised the value of relationships and the balance between the micro and macro aspects of the universe.

This perspective invites us to pay more attention to processes, interactions and wholes. It reminds us that how things relate to each other is often more important than the things themselves. It matters because how we make sense of the world shapes how we behave. And although no single approach can fully explain the endless complexity of life, systems thinking helps us make sense of multiple viewpoints, understand complex problems, and approach dynamic systems (like culture, mind or society)¹⁰ in more accurate ways. Philosopher Timothy Morton (2018) refers to “hyperobjects” phenomena so vast and complex that they are hard for the human mind to grasp. These include racism, global warming, the immune system, species extinction, and social inequality.

Throughout millions of years of evolution, ecosystems have developed through self-organisation, mutual support, cooperation, inclusion, and resilience. These systems work by helping each part to thrive while

⁷ On the topic of shame, see: <https://ciberciudadanias.blogspot.com/2024/07/a-proposito-de-la-verguenza.html>

⁸ On the topic of envy, see: <https://ciberciudadanias.blogspot.com/search?q=envidia>

⁹ In this context, I recommend the work of thinkers such as Theodor Adorno, F. Nietzsche, Norbert Elias, Byung-Chul Han, Jason Stanley, Eva Illouz, Alexander Bard, Axel Honneth, Martha Nussbaum, Hanzi Freinacht, Melanie Klein, Todd McGowan, and Joseph Epstein. From fields such as sociology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, they offer valuable insights into the relationship between emotional life and politics.

¹⁰ Many curious, self-taught, and transdisciplinary minds have contributed to the development of this paradigm. They come from fields such as cybernetics, deep ecology, interpersonal neurobiology, political psychology, epigenetics, evolutionary and cognitive sciences, and more recently, from integral and metamodern philosophies. Some inspiring thinkers from these areas include: Gregory Bateson, Lynn Margulis, Stuart Kauffman, Brian Goodwin, Daniel Siegel, Maturana and Varela, Edgar Morin, Sri Aurobindo, Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber, Mónica Sharma, Jeremy Lent, Hanzi Freinacht, Fritjof Capra, and Luigi Luisi.



contributing to the wellbeing of the whole. This deep interdependence suggests that life itself is a kind of love story a dynamic unfolding of Eros in action¹¹.

Let's look at some examples of interdependence and symbiotic connections between species. A single ant cannot survive on its own. One neuron can't produce consciousness. A tree needs light, air, and soil to live. We can't fully understand a plant, or a person, by looking at them in isolation. All these examples remind us that we live in a world full of emerging processes and interconnected networks of complex relationships.

Now let's look at the human body is a great example of a bio intelligent system of systems. The result of thousands of years of evolution, where the immune system meets such as immune, digestive, respiratory, nervous, endocrine, and many more, all interacting intelligently. We are complex holobionts, not just a sum of parts, but beings formed through relationships. Our very consciousness is an emergent, systemic property.

Systems theory tells us that consciousness is not a "thing" or essence located in one part of the brain, but a process, like the body, where around 200 types of cells work together in harmony, each playing a unique role (Lent, 2021). From all these examples, we can conclude that we exist within holarchies that is, complex and interconnected systems (ranging from the tiny, like molecules, to the vast, like the biosphere) which co-evolve, sustain, and nourish life.

A beautiful example from traditional agriculture is the milpa or "three sisters" method, where maize, beans and squash are planted together. Maize supports the beans, which enrich the soil with nitrogen, while the squash keeps the ground moist and deters weeds and pests. Together, they thrive more than they would alone.

Rupa Marya and Raj Patel (2021), in their book *Inflamed*, describe how diverting a river affects multiple systems. Nutrients get trapped, algae grow excessively, and when they die, they consume oxygen, harming other organisms and releasing greenhouse gases. This is why dams are now seen as contributors to climate change.

Examples of deep beauty, interdependence, and cooperation can also be seen in the pollination of flowers

11 Two important books about cosmo-erotic humanism are *Return to Eros* (2017) by Marc Gafni and Kristina Kincaid, and a recent work by David J. Temple (2024), *First Principles and First Values*.

by insects; in the movements of schools of fish and the aerial dances of birds that move synchronously as one; in the relationships between soil microbes and those in the gut (and the wider world of the microbiome); in the ways trees rely symbiotically on animals to spread their seeds; and in how ants release pheromones to signal to others where food can be found. “The grass feeds the ants with its seeds, and the ants feed the grass by enriching the soil they offer each other possibilities for life” (Kimmerer, 2021, p. 420).

Systems thinking is also entering fields like medicine, where doctors are encouraged not only to look at physical symptoms but to consider patients’ inner lives, daily environments, relationships, thoughts, and exposure to toxins. In the arts, especially in collaborative or improvisational music, we see another form of deep connection. The shared state of flow that arises is not owned by any individual but is created through attention, trust, and resonance between all participants.

Thomas Hübl offers a powerful image of our ancestors as a forest:

“We might imagine our ancestors as an ancient forest whose living roots we all share. These ancestral roots connect us to one another and to the Earth, as they have long before our species emerged. In fact, our roots belong to the collective nervous system of humanity, and no matter how far apart we live or die, no matter how distant our relatives are, no two humans are ever fully disconnected. We are bound by our common origin.” (Hübl, 2020, p. 85)

A final example of the ecology of interdependence is shared by Jeremy Lent (2021) in his remarkable book *The Web of Meaning: Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe*. He tells the story of how the extinction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park triggered a cascade of disruptions across the entire ecosystem. As we have seen, there is a broad category of things — such as life, mind, meaning, consciousness, music, and cognition that are in fact emergent phenomena, existing only because of complex and dynamic interactions. Due to their extinction, the elk population increased, and, without their predators, they overgrazed the willows and cottonwoods. With fewer trees, songbirds declined, beavers were unable to build dams, and riverbanks eroded, causing

river temperatures to rise too high for fish; with its unbalanced ecology, the park became sterile. Just as there is a chain of consequences in the web of life, the reintroduction of wolves succeeded in generating a resilience effect that quickly led to the regeneration of the entire system.

As we have seen, there is a broad category of things — life, mind, meaning, consciousness, music, cognition — that are actually emergent phenomena, existing only as a result of complex and dynamic interactions. We have seen how the principles that apply to nature and its evolution could be applied to culture and life in society. We recommend *The Systems View of Life* by Fritjof Capra and Luigi Luisi (2014) to continue exploring systems theory applied to other phenomena in biological, social, and cultural reality.

Systemic Perspectives and Education

In this historical moment,
the commitment to systemic thinking
becomes essential,
as the web of life
faces an unprecedented threat.

RUPA MARYA Y RAJ PATEL

The relationship between systems thinking and education is a priority in our time, as disconnection across systems seems to be advancing more rapidly than their regeneration. This, in a sense, reveals the (meta)educational crisis we are facing, when systemic demands exceed our capacity for shared orientation and understanding. In a time of increasing polarization, where relationships have been limited by an addictive digital life that controls attention and alienates people, we are challenged to create new connections and co-create more beautiful, kind, and enriching collective actions for all the social systems and holons to which we belong, from the body, the home, the family, the community, to the biosphere as a whole.

Beyond being an interdisciplinary body of knowledge and a stage of psychological development — like symbolic or abstract thinking systems thinking (and meta-systems thinking) is a cognitive skill that can be cultivated and developed across the population, starting with young people and adults, and especially with educators, cultural workers, and leaders committed to fostering social change.

The *Future of Jobs Report* (2020) and *Objetivos de Desarrollo Interior (Inner Development Goals)*¹² highlight the importance of this cognitive skill as one of the key capacities for the 21st century. They remind us that, to deal with the complexity of our time, we need maps and tools that help us foster greater organisation, integrity, coherence, and more integrated and holistic understandings.

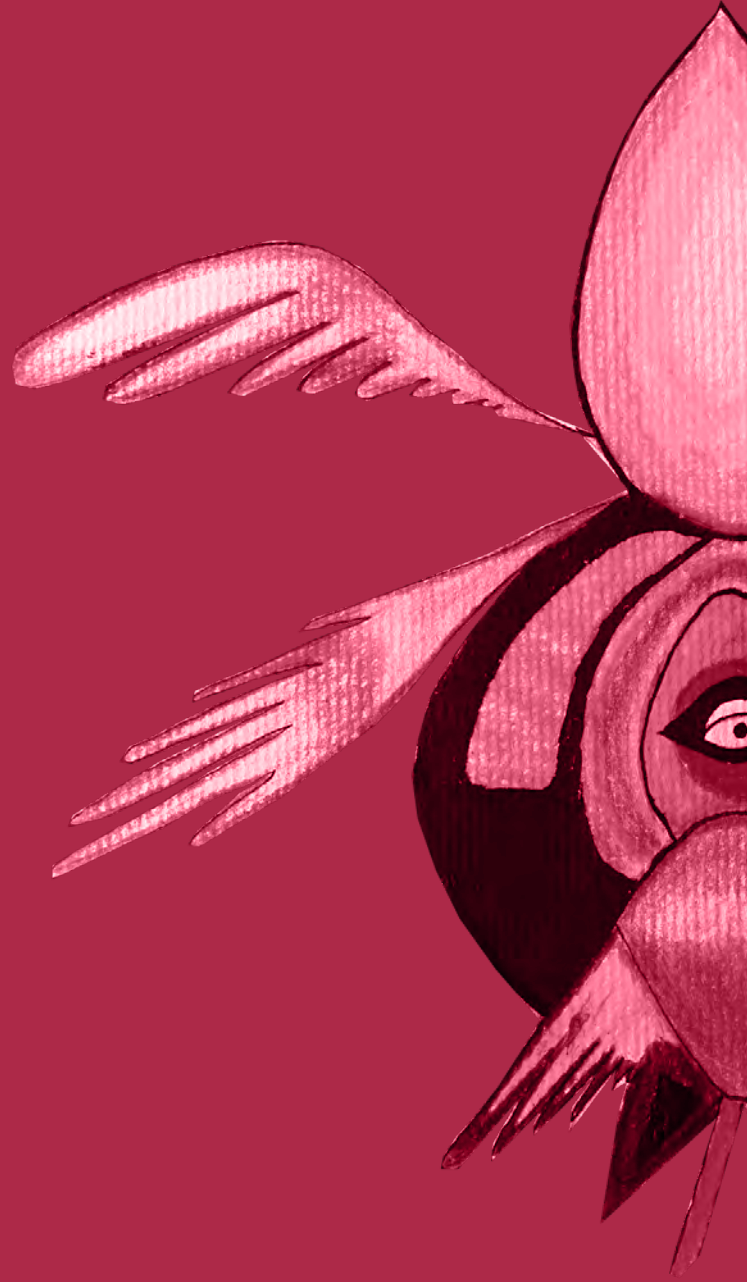
Furthermore, incorporating systems thinking into education could help us not only to understand changing systems, but also to nurture new relationships that strengthen a sense of care, responsibility, and agency. This would support sustainability and regeneration, while deepening our understanding of the qualities needed to foster personal resilience and systemic transformation. Such an alliance would contribute to the development of more integrated thinking and collective action, where pedagogical practice goes beyond technical or cognitive training and is instead oriented towards enabling full-spectrum, conscious responses (Sharma, 2017). This means that, in addition to strategic (technical) action, we also work to change norms and behaviours, while cultivating people's inner wisdom and moral virtues¹³.

Another pedagogical opportunity opened up by systems thinking in the field of history and the social sciences is the ability to observe patterns and emergent phenomena across longer time scales—a perspective known as “Big History”. The aim is to seek synthesis and deeper understanding of how issues have shifted and transformed over time. This approach invites key questions about the pattern that connects: What is the pattern that links personal, social, and cultural transformations? What is the pattern that connects all living beings? How have transformations unfolded over time? What are the future

12 To better understand the skills related to inner development, see <https://innerdevelopmentgoals.org>, as well as the YouTube series of conversations I held with my friend James Delgado, available at: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgrqitOpMuiC9719FxmfbB3ZBCjdkaVBTjysi=Du9j0DIykPTqRWju>

13 Some methodologies that integrate systems thinking and that can serve as inspiration for educational contexts and the design of social innovation projects include:

- Ken Wilber's *Integral Vision*,
- Otto Scharmer's *Theory U*,
- The *Dragon Dreaming* project design methodology,
- The frameworks and approaches for *Radical and Transformational Leadership* developed by Mónica Sharma,
- Barbara Marx Hubbard's *Wheel of Co-Creation*,
- The systemic mapping of history, inequality, and politics proposed by Hanzi Freinacht in his book *Nordic Ideology*,
- and *El Camino de la Casa Madre*, a book written by the CAR and published by IDEA at the National University of Colombia.



attractors? and what are the relationships between consciousness, technologies, and educational practices?

The question of relationships is not only what drives the evolution of art and education, but also the basis of secure attachment, the source of friendship, intimate partnership, and the development of ideas. Arthur Koestler (2018), in *The Act of Creation*, identifies a common denominator in creativity across art, science, and humour. According to this philosopher, scientific breakthroughs often arise through connections between different fields of knowledge—for example, the synthesis of electricity and magnetism (electromagnetism), or the understanding of energy as both particle and wave. In art, relationships emerge between metaphors, colours, gestures, sounds, words, and scenes. Any thought expressed through relationship, Weber (2019) suggests, can only arise as a kind of poetics. In humour, relationships are also essential: two opposing worlds or reference systems collide, producing laughter. In psychotherapy particularly in trauma healing as well as in the broader process of meaning-making, it is the connections we are able to form that bring relief, allow integration of the past, and open up new understanding of lived experience.

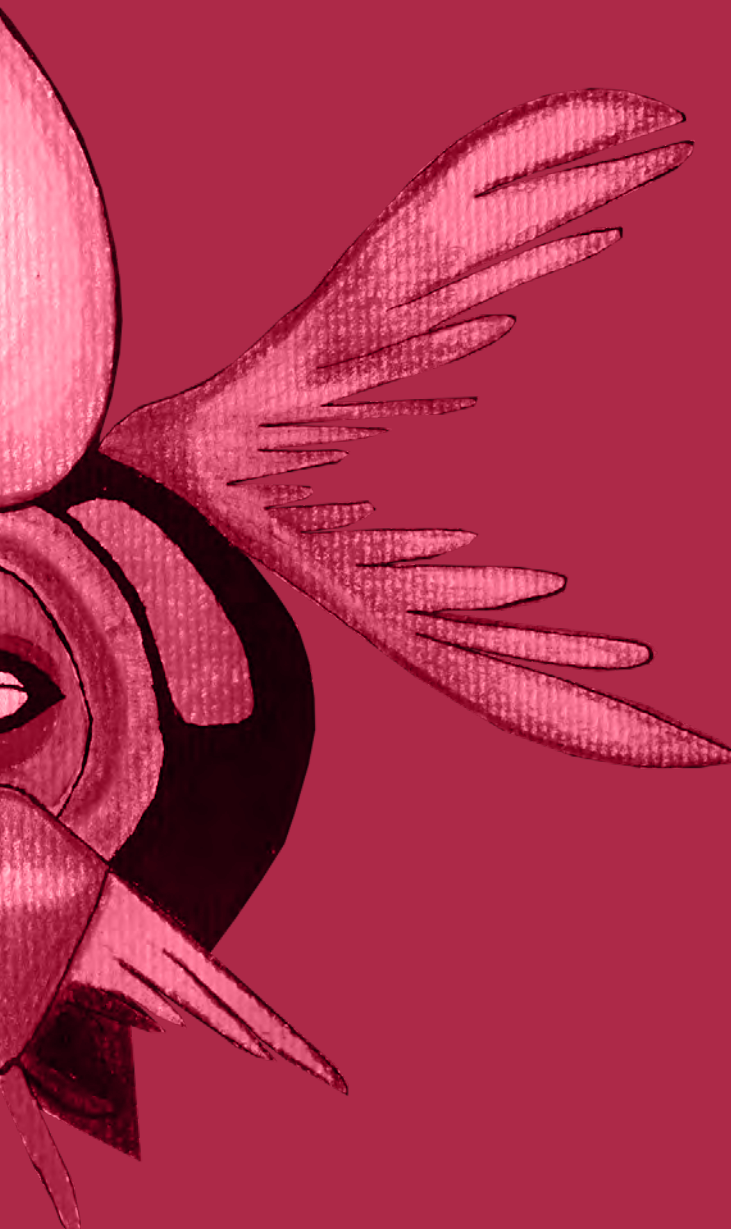
Finally, one space where we can apply a systems perspective to education is by creating learning communities and networks of mutual support, where each person or household becomes a kind of classroom with a global awareness. These cultural networks might begin with friends—those we are drawn to—with whom we regularly gather to share joys and sorrows, curiosity and abundance, paradoxes and questions, visions of the future. In doing so, we create resonances that strengthen the social fabric, expand collective intelligence, and support the regeneration of ourselves and the planet.

The Interdependence of Humans and Technology

The most significant social impact of certain technologies lies not only in what they enable people to do, but in what they reveal about how the world works.

BENJAMIN BRATTON

Since their origins, human beings have been in symbiotic exchange with the biosphere, through actions such as



breathing, eating, and metabolising. At the same time, humans have been closely entangled with tools, techniques, and machines. There has never been a moment in history when technical devices were absent a condition that, beyond being a defining feature of humanity, also forms the foundation of what we now know as civilisation.

Each technology is simultaneously an expression of culture and historical time, where various forms of knowledge, ways of thinking, imagining and doing converge. Technologies embody values and worldviews — from codes of behaviour, writing, and laws, to systems of thought, social institutions, psychotechnologies, cybernetic technologies, and diverse ways of automating human actions in order to optimise energy and effort. We can say that every technique shape culture, and every culture transforms and co-emerges with its techniques.

Marshall McLuhan (1995), one of the great thinkers of the 20th century who rigorously explored technological transitions throughout history, observed that technology is an extension of our bodies and senses. Speaking about the printing press, he noted how it influenced political transformations, fuelled nationalism, and reinforced the dominance of the sense of sight. Each technology alters perception offering new ways of seeing and new forms of blindness —and increases interpersonal connections, the flow of information, and the complexity of the world.¹⁴

Iván Illich, another important voice of the 20th century, offers a powerful idea to help us rethink our relationship with technology. He calls it “convivial tools”. According to him, convivial tools are those that give each person the freedom and independence to create, and that help people enrich their surroundings with the results of their own imagination and vision. Conviviality is also a useful idea for thinking about moving away from dominant industrial ways of thinking. These convivial tools can be seen as social technologies (including institutions) that give people freedom in how they use them —in other words,

“they allow the user to express their meaning through action” (Illich, 2006, p. 19).

It would be quite naïve to believe that convivial tools will suddenly replace the controlling or centralised technologies of the industrial era. However, they might help us imagine a broader, freer and more decentralised way of thinking about how tools are used and what effects they have. In a time when automation is growing fast, technologies are starting to act as replacements for spirituality, while we continue to let machines take care of mechanical and repetitive tasks.

Many human jobs have been improved through energy advances and modern technologies, and now, with the spread of artificial intelligence, we are being challenged to rethink what it means to be human, the purpose of work, and the importance of our emotional and social lives, as well as our values —all those things that are hard to compute, turn into code, or virtualise on digital platforms.

According to many technology theorists, we are witnessing the rise of superintelligences, a situation that brings serious existential risks.¹⁵ These risks must be addressed, as they could grow beyond our control and become the last tools we ever build. A rather paradoxical aspect of this progress in computing and AI is that it exists alongside a decline in truth, the spread of misinformation, the rise of post-truth, growing distrust in institutions, cancel culture, toxic tribalism, and a general decline in people’s mental health¹⁶.

Another context that becomes evident and which should be central to ethical and political debates is that technological advancement makes us more prone to accidents due to acceleration and contributes to increasing polarisation in public conversations. At the same time, there is a decline in spirituality and a rise in false religions.

Another symptom of our times, which affects both mental health and politics, is our growing inability to process vast amounts of information, to channel anger and

14 The tetrad proposed by McLuhan (1995) is a powerful metaphor that helps us look at the effects of a new technology on society from a complete point of view. According to this philosopher, all forms of communication and technology (a) make something in a culture stronger, while at the same time (b) make something else outdated. They also (c) bring back something that was once forgotten or no longer used, and (d) change or reverse when pushed to their limits. This tool is useful when we want to reflect on any new invention by asking the following questions: 1. What does the tool or invention increase? 2. What does it wear out or make old-fashioned? 3. What does it bring back that was once out of use? 4. What does it flip or change when taken to its extreme? (McLuhan, 1995, p. 26).

15 An existential risk is one that threatens to cause the extinction of intelligent life of terrestrial origin, or to permanently and drastically reduce its chances of developing in the future. See *Superintelligence* by Nick Bostrom (2016).

16 According to the latest Global Mental Health Report (2022), “young adults worldwide are three to four times more likely to struggle with their mental health than their parents’ generation.” The overall decline in mental wellbeing is largely driven by the weakening of the social self. The generation aged between 18 and 24 faces a significant risk of experiencing episodes of depression and anxiety. They are also more prone to self-destructive behaviour and suicide, largely due to the fragility of their social ties and lack of social capital.

indignation. Combined with the lack of spaces for social exchange, this has been linked to a noticeable decline — especially over the past decade — in freedoms and democracy.¹⁷

Each technological innovation brings with it paradigm shifts in how we think and how we live —from the use of tools like stone, agriculture, animal domestication and the plough, to writing, the printing press, the telegraph, radio, artificial intelligence, gene editing (CRISPR), and the internet— our most significant techno-cultural development in recent centuries. Each technical innovation transforms culture and shapes how we are, think, and act. Likewise, many of the major shifts in society have been closely linked to changes in the energy matrix¹⁸ (Smil, 2021 and 2023). Most recently, we are undergoing new transitions moving from systems of objects to a metadata-driven economy, a situation that echoes what philosopher Alexander Bard (2014) has described as the shift from capitalism to attentionalism (or informationalism).

Another rather confusing aspect of recent technological developments lies in the way they are described using abstract terms such as *cloud*, *virtuality*, or *platform*. This leads us to think of computing and digital technologies as ethereal matters disconnected from ecosystems. However, this is highly misleading. Researchers such as Kate Crawford (2022) and Benjamin Bratton (2016) have pointed out that computing is not virtual; it is a deeply physical process that involves the extraction of materials spread across all continents and the consumption of vast amounts of energy to build and maintain the entire digital ecosystem.

Another alarming issue in the human–technology relationship involves processes such as screen addiction, user design manipulation, techno-feudalism, algorithmic warfare, the exploitation of personal data by large corporations, job losses due to AI, the disruption of attention, and the absence of reflection.

Triad: Art–Science–Technology

To add to this section, where we have been discussing the close relationship between humans and technology, we offer some reflections from the fields of art, science, and technology. We can no longer build knowledge only through science, evidence, numbers, and data. We need the art of telling stories, imagining possible futures, building *protopias*, and creating collective experiments that help us make sense of the chaos we are living in. As machines take over the task of processing information, human abilities such as judgement, synthesis, appreciation of myth, and emotional understanding become even more important. People do not make decisions or change their behaviour based only on facts and truth. The world and the way we create knowledge is shaped above all by emotions, stories, and metaphors.¹⁹

Art demands not only truth, but also vulnerability and transparency of the soul. Art is not just a way of doing it is also a way of inhabiting the planet and experiencing each moment of everyday life with sensitivity. It means paying attention and contemplating reality with full presence, making visible and tangible what few people see or feel. This is one of the reasons why it is worth democratising art that is, encouraging and creating artistic experiences within social life, turning our lives and relationships into marvelous works of art,²⁰ being artists in every moment of our lives: in our work, our relationships, our homes, in difficult times, with those who challenge us, in politics, in play, in the ways we make love, and in the ways we live well and die well. To be an artist is to live with wonder and attentiveness to all the signals and details of existence. Artists, scientists, and those drawn to tinkering and technological invention often share qualities such as open-mindedness, passion, and enthusiasm. They tend to experience their work as a pleasure itself. These individuals are in the minority, as far more people around the world carry out what David Graeber (2018) called “bullshit jobs”. We might say that creatives are privileged beings (though some are also arrogant, envious, and ruled by unmanageable egos) because they are constantly learning, know how to deal

17 See the Freedom in the World report produced by Freedom House, available at the following link: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf

18 Over the past two centuries, we have witnessed a rapid shift in primary energy sources across the globe, alongside the expansion and diversification of fossil fuels. This has made possible improvements in food supply, large-scale travel, the mechanisation of production and transport, and real-time personal communication. Modern history can be seen as an unusually fast sequence of transitions to new energy sources, and the modern world is the cumulative result of those conversions (Smil, 2023, p. 29).

19 From experience, what students remember most about their teachers is not the statements or lessons (the *logos*) they were taught, but how they were made to feel — the emotions and moments that emerged through their interactions. When someone touches our soul, we do not forget it.

20 As my friend James Delgado once said on Facebook: “The new works of art are relationships. All our relationships are potential works of art, and we are all artists.”



with boredom, and are capable of recognising moments of ecstasy when they discover unexpected and meaningful connections in their ordinary lives.

The podcast *The University of the Future*,²¹ which I have been producing since 2021, has allowed me to engage in dialogue with a wide range of artists who are experimenting at the interface of science and technology. Some of the most notable include: the curatorial project *Entre Ríos*, led by Lisa Blackmore; the bioart experiments of Hamilton Mestizo; the cultural space *Minkalab* in Santa Rosa de Cabal; *Arquitectura Expandida*, coordinated by Ana López; the political ecologies and sound practices of Rossana Lara; the pioneering *Digital Narratives* projects by Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez; the *Machines for Thinking and Handcrafted Education* by Julián González; *Teleperformance and liminal arts* by Lanet; the work on cooking and art by the artist Ingrid Cuestas; the sound art and deep listening practices of Ana María Romano and Jorge Barco; and the open science initiatives of Luis Fernando Medina.

Perhaps the deepest sources of inspiration for the reinvention of education and art will come from self-taught (*outsider*) individuals who navigate across different fields of knowledge with a healthy degree of (in)discipline, courage, and imagination. These are people who have built communities to learn and enjoy together, and who also carry a deep love for knowledge and a reverence for the wisdom of all peoples. Inspiration will come from those who recognise their limitations, ignorance, and vulnerabilities —those who serve as bridges between different communities and have identified their talents in order to

21 All episodes of the podcast *The University of the Future* can be found here: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgrqitOpMuiAl_1JxGgSFB30SB_KLso_0&si=m6OLs6F5JnRtkcY8

put them at the service of others. They are the ones who see every situation as a learning opportunity, have a constructive mindset, and know how to work with their own shadow.

Those who will inspire the future of art and education are the ones who keep a playful spirit of openness, adventure, wonder, and self-criticism —those who stay alert to the signs life offers and walk guided by their intuition through crossroads, forests, and oceans. They are the ones who value silence, contemplation, magic, rationality, waiting, science fiction, speculation, justice, integrity, and coherence between their thoughts and their actions.

Deep down, we all carry many of these qualities, and we must care for them, because the background noise of what is already established tends to deny, dismiss, or ignore them. So, joyful spirits, let us enliven this celebration with song and dance, with words, images, writing, music, food, and the magic of human encounters. Let us dissolve ourselves with joy and shine brightly in every paradox we inhabit.

Managing Our Ignorance Through Paradoxes

If a man would make his world large,
he must always be making himself small.

CHESTERTON

It is exactly this gift of combining contradictions
that makes up all the elasticity of the healthy man.

CHESTERTON

Working with paradoxes is a mental experiment that involves bringing into conversation the nuances that lie between opposing positions moving between the positive and the negative, between extremes and polarities. Paradoxes, besides inviting questioning and, in a way, embracing not-knowing, encourage us to think with greater subtlety. They bring movement and vitality to our thinking, allowing conversations to become richer and more profound. Part of thinking critically and of maintaining philosophical health, requires us to hold dialectical reflection with both rigour and humour.

Holding paradox in the middle of thought vulgarisation, political correctness, and post-truth is a tantric skill, one that requires practice, listening, curiosity, and open-mindedness. It is especially relevant in these times, when smooth and polished discourses dominate, where *logos* prevails, and where it is easier to take refuge in our preferred pole and ease our anxiety by discrediting the other. Paradox can only be embodied (every contradiction is also self-contradiction), and in the soul of the artist, it becomes translatable into word, thought, and creation.

In the course *Art, Ethics and Politics*, part of the Master's in Art, Education and Culture at UPN —a joint course taught by three lecturers— I recently proposed four activities that connect with the ideas we have been discussing. 1) A media-biographical exhibition,²² 2) a game for thinking through paradoxes, 3) a podcast on a community-based artistic experience, and 4) a theoretical seminar linking philosophical texts with films.²³ In the first semester of 2024, four games were designed to explore paradoxes and taboo topics within educational settings. Three of them were card games, titled *Paradox*, *ContraNexus*, and *Found Enigmas*, along with a role-playing game called *La Madre y la Muerte* (The Mother and Death).

Paradox is a game designed to address complex themes for humanity —such as death, evil, love, and sexuality— through playfulness, teamwork, and a certain level of discomfort. It also aims to foster a dialogical, reflective, and participatory process where different perspectives and beliefs on these topics can be expressed.

ContraNexus is a deck of cards featuring paradoxical, uncomfortable, and contradictory phrases, divided into four categories: society, life, love, and discomfort. It includes a spinning wheel with the four categories and a six-sided die with the following actions: mime, drawing, modelling, debating, body expression, and storytelling.

22 Ritual of Abundance (Installations/Media-biographies) Available at: <https://ciberciudadanias.blogspot.com/2024/02/ritual-de-la-abundancia-instalaciones.html>

23 These recent and award-winning films are powerful resources for exploring paradoxes and ethical dilemmas in educational and reflective settings. Among them are *Les choses humaines* by Yvan Attal, *Poor Things* by Yorgos Lanthimos, *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* by Radu Jude, *Queen of Hearts* by May el-Toukhy, *Paulina (La Patota)* by Santiago Mitre, *Maixabel* by Iciar Bollain, *Killing Jesús* by Laura Mora, *Anatomy of a Fall* by Justine Triet, *The Beasts (As Bestas)* by Rodrigo Sorogoyen, and *The Good Boss* by Fernando León de Aranoa. These films offer rich narrative terrain to think through moral complexity, human contradictions, social taboos, and the tension between justice, power, and vulnerability.

Found Enigmas is a creative game that starts by choosing a word. Players are invited to find the letters of the word in objects around them and document them through photographs. Next comes an *exquisite corpse* writing exercise, using the chosen word as a title, reflecting elements from the surroundings. Players then create a recipe inspired by the word and gathered objects, compose a song based on the *exquisite corpse*, and complete two final tasks: a stop-motion video representing the theme, and a defence of the work by taking on a role such as a lawyer, scientist, shaman, archaeologist, or doctor. In both education and art, just as it is crucial to engage with ambiguity and paradoxes, it is also essential to play with the body, the senses, emotions, our shadows, and spiritual experiences. In what follows, we will explore the will to transcend and offer some reflections on how to rethink religion and spirituality through a perspective informed by science, perennial wisdom, and mysticism.

Will to Transcendence: Notes on Religion and Spirituality

Not every moment or aspect of life can truly be “spiritual” ...
but all of us always have some kind of “religion” ...
instead of trying to be “spiritual but not religious”,
we should acknowledge that, from the beginning,
we have been “religious but not (always) spiritual”.

HANZI FREINACHT

Seeing the scepticism and cynicism of my generation when it comes to religion, I have, in recent years, felt drawn to study and understand the subject more deeply to recognise the roots of both the rejection and hatred, as well as the excess of affirmation. What I find most stimulating in exploring religion comes from a more pragmatic tone, an existential, artistic, and meta-religious gesture. An immanent love of life, joined with an awareness of its fragility and finitude and of what we can do together forms part of the religious impulse I wish to share.

Today, my relationship with religion—even though I didn’t understand it as a child, rejected it as a young person, and grew curious about it as an adult— shows a singular trajectory: from not-knowing and lack of interest (linked to dependence on family values), to rejection (linked to independence and breaking away), and now to curiosity (linked to interdependence and a renewed integration of lived experience). This desire to reconnect continues to grow and evolve, and I now relate it more to an attitude and commitment towards the things that matter to me. My beliefs, ideals, practices of connection and transcendence, as well as those ecstatic states, and above all, the things that make me feel alive.

Speaking about religion often provokes allergy, apathy, or conflict. It seems like an outdated word, associated with fixed beliefs, institutions, churches, doctrines, gods, behavioural codes linked to the past and to conservative people, to a system of rules, ways of life and ethical precepts

that tell us how to behave.²⁴ From an ontological perspective, religion can be seen as an existential need a search for meaning. From a sociological point of view, it encompasses the values that hold a community together (*re-ligare*). And from a psychological perspective, the focus as William James (1994) points out in “*las variedades de la experiencia religiosa*” (The varieties of religious experience).

Let us consider the historical patterns often associated with religious faith. Religions have met various vital human needs: the search for life’s meaning; guidance on how to act, what to believe, whom to trust, where to belong, how to transcend our limitations, and where to place what is most sacred in life. Religion seeks to answer questions about the most essential truths the ultimate truths. Religious experiences are often linked to moments of deep transformation, feelings of conversion, peace, *metanoia*, mysticism, intuition, and clarity.

As a common thread, many religions associate faith with transcendence, eternity, salvation, detachment, and the idea of infinite life. A contrasting view comes from Swedish philosopher Martin Hägglund (2022), who offers a refreshing perspective that confronts us with the reality of finite life, its fragility, and the way this awareness of death acts as a limit that urges us to commit, to care, and to act responsibly. According to Hägglund, having secular faith means recognising our dependence on others, our lack of self-sufficiency, and embracing life as a continuous space of choices, freedoms, failures, and risks.

As a common thread, many religions connect religious faith with transcendence, eternity, salvation, detachment, and infinite life. A perspective that contrasts this view is that of Swedish philosopher Martin Hägglund (2022), who brings a breath of fresh air by confronting us with the finitude of life with its fragility and the way this condition, that we will die, sets a boundary that motivates us to commit, to care, and to act responsibly. Secular faith, according to Hägglund, involves recognising our dependence on others, the fact that we are not self-sufficient, and understanding that life is a constant space of choices, freedoms, failures, and risks.

Another important aspect of Hägglund’s work is that spiritual freedom (and life itself) is bound up with the material world, not separate from suffering, anxiety, negativity, finitude, and death. In one of the final passages of *This Life*, he challenges us to “transform our social conditions so that people no longer need to rely on the opium of religion and can instead affirm the undeniable value of their own lives” (Hägglund, 2022, p. 424). His project for secular faith and spiritual freedom calls us to build a truly free society one where we recognise our commitment to the common good as a necessary condition for our own freedom.

Thus, even if religion (or more precisely, dogmatic religious attitudes) has triggered wars, crusades, exclusions, abuse, torture, and other horrors throughout history, the practice of religion is not inherently bad nor is it healthy to discard it altogether. Religious faith has often served as a collective expression of solidarity, a means of overcoming addiction, a grounding force for life transformation, and a framework for valuing dignity, equity, and justice. As a social

²⁴ Etymologically, the word *religion* comes from *religare*: “to reconnect with someone or something —to re-establish a bond between those who, for one reason or another, have lost contact but still wish to belong together.”

and existential function, we still have much to learn from this connection with the divine. It is therefore worthwhile to understand its historical meaning both its strengths and distortions its deep significance in people's lives and communities, and to study the spiritual core of the world's mystical traditions and their relevance to our present and to the education of future generations.

Even if we carry many prejudices or reject religion (and there are good reasons to do so), it remains, as I've mentioned, a central theme in our culture shaping life orientation, offering meaning, and connecting people to the sacred, to compassionate and wise living, to practices of self-knowledge, clarity of life purpose, and the sense of belonging to communities —of being part of something greater than ourselves.

Religion can offer an opportunity to nurture processes of community-building, social self-organisation, and collective rituals of planetary initiation. It helps a society define and prioritise values, collaborate, encourage more compassionate behaviour, set healthy boundaries, move beyond egotism and narcissism, and foster the development of moral and interpersonal intelligence across our species.

The common name for the fruits of spirituality is embodied virtues how they are perceived, not when someone speaks about them. When we are with people who have cultivated a spiritual life, we often sense in the atmosphere qualities such as serenity, openness, humility, generosity, deep listening, non-judgement, presence, humour, service, and equanimity. The relationships where we nurture these fruits and the spaces where we practise and cultivate them with others form the ecosystem in which our religiosity operates.

Even when we identify as anarchists or atheists (“non-believers”) in religious matters, all people whether they realise it or not follow a set of guiding principles that shape and give meaning to their lives: a collection of values, rituals, and symbols shared with others. It is better, then, to become aware of the religiosity we each take part in and not be afraid to express it. As Bard and Söderqvist wrote: “Everything is religion and everyone is a believer. Anyone who claims otherwise is, quite literally, blinded by their own faith [...] The truth is, everyone —whether they admit it or not— is necessarily a believer” (2014, p. 181).

What becomes harmful when we deny the value of religiosity and dismiss it from our cultural landscape is

that religions don't disappear but bad religions emerge. For example, we begin to worship fashion, individualism, eternal youth, capitalism, communism, fascism, New Age cults, celebrity worship, the cult of immortality (eternity) in transhumanist sects, narcissism, scientism, the false prophets of the wellness industry, online mob justice, ideologies of far-left or far-right politics, bitter self-appointed “righteous” judges acting maliciously, conspiracy theories, and fanatics of every stripe.

To close these reflections which I hope have been thought-provoking and personally meaningful, I offer a few warnings and a moment of catharsis:

Be wary of those constantly seeking to convert or change others (as Amos Oz noted, this is a trait of the fanatic); of those who think, “If the world were like me, it would be a better place.” Be wary of those who deny suffering (the first noble truth —*dukkha*— in Buddhism). False prophets are those who are obsessed with their beliefs and deny the tragic nature of existence. Be cautious of those who sell spirituality as a fix for emotional pain, who offer psychological comfort or magical solutions for complex problems, or who exploit vulnerability for selfish purposes. Let's not follow religious myths literally, nor overinflate the power of symbols, the fetishism of objects, or worship images and deities. Let's do away with harmful ideas (for ourselves and the planet) such as “life after death” and make the most of each day to become better people and to create a better world. Be sceptical of those who equate spirituality with denial of the body, sexuality, rationality, or disconnection from worldly life they often become disembodied (too much transcendence, too little immanence). Beware of those who speak badly of the ego or deny the personal altogether; and of those who justify events by saying “everything happens for a reason.” Instead, let's say: not everything happens for a reason, but we can learn from everything. Be cautious of those who seek dignity through frantic activity and showiness; of those who wish to abolish religion; and of those who say they are “spiritual but not religious” (a contradiction in terms). Be wary of those who overstate the positive and believe that anger or difficult emotions are signs of spiritual failure. Avoid those who try to grasp spiritual truths through intellect alone this often gives a false sense of having understood something too quickly and superficially, as if one has reached the summit of a mountain without ever moving. (Spirituality is not fast food.) Stay away from closed cults that resist change

and difference, that promote “guru-centrism.” Don’t idolise people or project magical powers onto those who claim to be enlightened. We live in paradox, between wisdom and madness. After all these warnings, I believe we are in a good moment to end our honeymoon with spirituality and begin to shape new forms of religiosity and spirituality that are more mature, contemporary, and integrative.

Conclusions

The concept of *symbiotic intelligence* has helped clarify some underlying ideas about relationality, expanding it to both inner and outer territories, both personal and collective ones. The global crisis we are currently experiencing is, at heart, a crisis in relationships. It affects all our modes of symbiosis, prioritising disconnection over connection, and isolation over cooperation. For this reason, we believe it is essential to discover the marvellous stories of symbiosis and Eros in action across biological, cultural, epistemic, aesthetic and spiritual contexts, to inspire new pedagogical practices and the design of educational institutions.

To bring education into the 21st century, we must revisit not only the epistemic frameworks that underpin how we construct knowledge, but also a broader web of relationships expressed in the five intrinsic and cooperative forms of connection we refer to as *symphonic symbiosis: our relationship with our inner world, including emotions and mind, our modes of relating to technology, to non-human beings, and to the sacred*.²⁵ Any comprehensive educational and curricular proposal must, at the very least, articulate a coherent epistemology, a worldview (cosmology), an arche-typology, a phenomenology, as well as ethical and political dimensions, convivial technologies and physical infrastructures, an aesthetic framework and a (syn)theology.

Systems thinking must complement critical thinking, as it allows us to observe relationships between systems, understand in more detail how our actions and omissions shape the whole, and uncover how a single decision connects with others, setting off a chain of consequences. In times dominated by technological solutionism and a flattening of worldviews, it is vital that we adopt the tools of these more holistic visions to rethink the world and ourselves, and to respond with full-spectrum, conscious answers.

A deepening in one mode of relationship or symbiosis directly affects all other forms of connection. For instance, when a person is more present and attentive, engages regularly in inner hygiene practices, and maintains flexibility in both body and mind, this will lead to better relationships and conversations. It also creates the conditions to use technologies more imaginatively and to experience the transcendent in a more integrated way.

Although there is an organic movement from the inner to the outer, from the personal to the collective, and from the rational to the transcendent (or trans-rational), it is worth noting that an experience with the non-human can broaden intellectual curiosity, harmonise emotions, and open new ways of problem-solving. Such encounters may even lead to technologies that inspire connection, curiosity, and learning. However, given the recent resurgence of interest in religion and spirituality, we must remain alert to *spiritual bypassing*—the tendency to use spiritual ideas or practices to avoid dealing with emotional challenges or to disconnect from reality. In education, we must learn to face negativity, darkness and the monstrous. In politics, we must go beyond the constant search for scapegoats and approach New Age or conspiratorial theories with caution, recognising how they can offer false comfort in times of chaos and anxiety.

In recent decades, there has been a marked deterioration in mental health across the population. For this reason, the integral development of all citizens must become a priority at both educational and political levels. We need to foster spaces that strengthen social capital and networks of affection, expand rights and responsibilities, improve self-care and self-love, nurture compassionate civic virtues, and develop the capacity to live with ambiguity and complexity.

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²⁵ We have not explicitly addressed the body (although there are some references within the *3C pedagogy* framework related to the process of connection), for two main reasons: due to space limitations, and because we wanted to focus the discussion on intelligence, emotions, and the mind.

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