



## Stepping Out of The Game

What Does Freedom Feel Like?

*Natural life will only remain viable if we collectively step out of the game and forge a path towards healing ourselves and the earth.*

Alison McDowell

**Abstract:** What follows, *Stepping Out of the Game, What Does Freedom Feel Like?* defines culture and its function as a conservative set of relative and abstract filters or beliefs designed to limit and constrain human behavior. Implicit is a biological-cultural conflict between our authentic nature and those behaviors predetermined and accepted by the limited set of behaviors approved by culture. The primary role of enculturation is imprinting each new human being with the approved set of acceptable behaviors. This is accomplished by the child building an internal image of themselves, the social-ego, by comparing and mirroring their degree of conformity. Once created, most effectively with the unfolding and development of verbal language, the internal social image is updated, moment by moment, by parent approval or punishments, and by various cultural institutions, such as compulsory schooling, the church, and other social hierarchies. Understanding the reciprocal and mirroring dynamic between the outer culture and inner image, we discover that they are one process, viewed from two perspectives, inner and outer, micro and macro, and share the same essential function, to predict, limit and control human behavior, at the exclusion of humanity's vast and unknowable innate capacities. The primary means of cultural-control is through the image. Having an insight into the nature and function of the social image, or personal ego, is like seeing behind trick of a magician. The illusion loses its power. This translates into a quality of freedom that few ever experience. Complete attention is given to meeting the challenge *de jure*, rather than splitting attention between conforming to cultural expectations, winning, for example, or not failing, and pure learning and performance for its own, intrinsic value and pleasure, not prejudged by culture. Athletes call this state of freedom the *Zone*, researchers call it *Flow* and children call this state *Play*. The common factor is freedom from the limitations and constraints imposed by the cultural image. No longer being defined by culture, we reset our default state of consciousness to express our true authentic nature, which is nature in its vast, fullest potential. This fundamental reset to the natural order of the mind, how it redefines thought and imagination as tools in the service of our authentic nature, is now a matter of species survival.

Being in the game demands allegiance, and allegiance takes the form of identifying with the game. Stepping out of the game, part of the process of healing ourselves, involves a fundamental change in identity, who we think we are. By negating our identity with the cultural categories that form our social identity, we break the chains of allegiance that each category imposes. I am not a Republican or Democrat, not a Christian or a Buddhist, a PhD or student, rich or poor, black or white. I am a human being, entangled with every other human being, and with the larger web of life. My identity and allegiance is embedded in my true nature, not my gang, my club, nationality, gender, career or race. But we don't conceive of ourselves as entangled living changing process, as verbs. We cling to images of ourselves as individuals, as nouns. One of David Bohm's most thought-provoking observations highlights our challenge:

We are faced with a breakdown of general social order and human values that threatens stability throughout the world. Existing knowledge cannot meet this challenge. Something much deeper is needed,

a completely new approach. I am suggesting that the very means by which we try to solve our problems is the problem. The source of our problems is within the structure of thought itself.

What is it about the structure of our thinking that is the source of our problems? So enchanting is the show that we imagine that we are blind to the structure that produces our mental images.

Lacking what David called 'proprioception of thought,' we falsely reify our abstractions, including our identity, treating them as a concrete reality, independent and separate from the structure that creates the image. Self-deceptions abound, and spread like pollen between people and now are broadcast instantly around the world, infecting the global brain. We create the prison we find ourselves trapped in and don't realize we are doing it. As the trap set by technocracy tightens, the question rises; what can we do?

**Prerequisite:** Each of us must look deeply and discover that we are the enemy, by our lack of attention and awareness of the very processes that define who we think we are. This deep enquiry begins by realizing that culture is a toxic machine. Culture is a mechanical meme, a contagious constellation of abstract mental images that infect and erode the unique qualities that make us human, causing us to behave in ways that are harmful to our own wellbeing, to the wellbeing of the species, every species and the natural world. The strange behaviors this meme induce are conformity and obedience to authority, with its hierarchy.

To play the game, we must pay the price of belonging with allegiance, with our identity. But we are not actually who or what culture pretends. That image is an illusion created by culture to predict and control our behavior. Without the image there is nothing for the counterfeit culture to hold, to compare, to judge, to reward or punish. Nor is culture that creates and defines that image a means of safety, self-discovery, or lasting security, tokens it falsely trades in the belonging bargain. On the contrary. We are robbed by belonging, by pledging our allegiance.

Culture creates toxic counterfeits of natural nurturing experiences; punishing rather than playful, egalitarian parents, poison pills instead of prevention, intellect instead of living intelligence, commercial media instead of imagination, standardized tests in place of inquiry, wonder and inspired mentors, poisoned, genetically-altered food instead of organic crops, organized beliefs in place of spirit. Cultural counterfeits poison directly. They also harm by displacing authentic nurturing experiences. Being born, planted into a counterfeit culture, that is what we see, and assume the counterfeit is the real thing. Breaking and awakening from this counterfeit enchantment challenges core assumptions that sustain the counterfeit. We begin by awakening. Only then can we ask what real freedom feels like.

Belonging is a primal necessity. Not belonging means abandonment, exile, even death. The mythic hero's journey invites this transformation from identifying with culture to embodying our true authentic nature. The novel and film *Dances with Wolves* described a young lieutenant's realization that the mind of western culture was mad, as he migrated his identity and soul to the native mind and reality. Look around, is the contemporary mind of humanity any less mad?

What follows are practical practices. Each, in its own way, breaks the identity-allegiance ball-and-chain that empowers culture to predict, control and enslave. The sin that civilization imposes, with the formation of the social ego or cultural identity, is a false, mistaken bond. Culture demands that we bond with culture, not identify with our true nature. We, as mystics and fully realized teachers have done throughout the ages, must now step out of culture's game and break free from the prison our false identity creates.

**First:** Be born and raised in the evolved nest.

Higher; empathic, egalitarian, compassionate, holistic, transpersonal capacities, are developmental, emerging spontaneously from sensitive, engaged, curious, playful, affectionate, pleasurable, attached and nurturing primary relationships. In the absence of these primary experiences, consciousness, and therefore reality-identity and the cultures they produce, remain trapped in primitive, selfish-defensive fight-flight brain centers. Experiencing deep, affectionate, nurturing relationships with our primary care givers transforms our primitive impulses into the service of higher, more evolved capacities. And that is what we identify with. Not the selfish, defensive fight-flight amygdala.

Humanity's developmental system, the evolved developmental niche (EDN; Narvaez, 2014; Narvaez, Panksepp et al., 2013) is provisioned by a community, not solely by mothers and/or fathers (Hewlett & Lamb, 2005). The EDN for young children includes: (1) soothing perinatal experiences; (2) extensive breastfeeding on request; (3) positive touch; (4) responsive attention—prompt and appropriate responses to needs, keeping the young child optimally aroused; (5) multiple allomothers, that is, frequent care by responsive individuals other than mothers (fathers and grandmothers, typically); and (6) self-directed multiage, free play in nature. Converging evidence from developmental psychology (Kim et al., 2011), neuroscience (Schore, 2003), evolutionary biology (Carter, 2004) and epigenetics (Champagne, 2018) suggests that the components of the EDN are vital for shaping neurobiological processes.

The Missing Mind: Contrasting Civilization with Non-Civilization Development and Functioning,  
Darcia Narvaez and Mary S. Tarsha,  
see: <https://evolvednest.org/>

**Second:** Discover the difference between conditioned memory; including thought and simple imagination, culture, science and grasping spirituality, and true empathic intelligence. See for and in oneself that intellect, thought and knowledge, and our images of self and other based on these abstractions, is not intelligence, that conditioned knowledge represents a small corner of a vast field, and we *are* that vast field, not the limited corner. Model this for all of our children.

Reality and its identity is not fixed. Reality-identity is developmental, epigenetically determined. Changing the environment changes the brain. The rapid emergence of the neocortex, with its overpowering capacity for expanded memory and imagined mental images, trampled other centers, negating their fields of meaning in the construction of reality and identity. Conscious awareness became localized in cognitive self-centered thought, at the neglect of more holistic, empathic and entangled perceptions of self and the natural world. The default state of human consciousness shifted from identification with we to me, a shift now compounded and magnified by technology. Correcting this fundamental misconception is, using Krishnamurti's phrase, *The Only Revolution*. With it, everything changes. Without it, nothing changes.

See; David Bohm, *The Limitations of Thought and Knowledge and Insight*.  
<https://www.tffuture.org/academy/david-bohm/david-bohm>

**Third:** Reset our default state of conscious awareness from verbal, self-generated, mostly reflexive imagined mental images, to quiet, sensitive, empathic communion with all of nature and the living world, a state that spontaneously calls upon creative imagination and conditioned knowledge as tools that serve wholeness and wellness in our expansive, entangled, transpersonal reality. Model this for all our children.

If we believe the conditioned reality thought produces is the only reality, we are stuck, trapped. To discover the limitations of our imagined reality we must experience a bigger reality, a state of heart-and-mind that is not conditioned. As the saying goes; a problem can't be solved at the level of the problem. Something much deeper is needed, a completely new approach. Only from this more expansive, inclusive, unconditioned point-of-view can we see the structure and the source of our prison as David Bohm described.

Hint: What emerged as a creative tool, imagination, without notice, like the sorcerer's apprentice, took over and assumed mastery of human consciousness and behavior. The small corner, now exponentially magnified by technology, falsely assumed that *it* is the vast field. The first step is becoming aware of the hubris and implicit self-deception that is taking place, followed by the systematic deconstruction of the limitations of thought and knowledge. Media literacy involves practices that allow us to critically evaluate and protect ourselves from being manipulated by media. In the same way, with cognitive literacy it is possible to reveal, examine, and protect ourselves and others from the self-deceptions that arise in our thoughts. A prerequisite for cognitive literacy is to experience more than one state of consciousness.

A species *typical* human being, from all accounts, resides primarily in the love and play modes, rather than the fear, rage or panic modes, and uses higher order thinking rooted in positive social emotions to imagine and cooperate with others (Liedloff, 1972; Sorenson, 1998; Wolff, 2000). To be human is to be deeply capable of getting along skillfully and positively with other humans and with other than humans. Species-atypical human beings tend to live with forms of fear and rage (resentment, contempt), necessarily

resorting to more evolutionarily primitive forms of interaction such as dominance hierarchies, territoriality, routines and rules, with a lack of ability to relationally attune to others as equals, making cooperation and compassionate morality more difficult (Narvaez, 2008, 2014).

It is important to also point out that nomadic foragers or small-band hunter-gatherers, SBHG, and those who live with similar habits, have more than Aristotelian virtue. They are also bonded to and cooperative with their landscapes; they feel integrated with the natural world (e.g., Cajete, 2001; Deloria, 2006; Descola, 2013). They live as if all of nature is alive, sentient, and animate (Harvey, 2017). Senses are tuned to receiving the personhood of the other than human. Appetites are controlled in relation to sustaining the biocommunity's wellbeing. Rationality is rooted in living on the earth, according to its laws, not against them. To be fully human in a species-typical manner means to be a communal, earth-respecting creature. In contrast, the species-atypical human beings common today demonstrate a lack of fittedness with the local landscape and often display a mindless or even destructive attitude toward nature.

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**Fourth:** Free ourselves from the deception that compulsory schooling is learning, necessary, in our children's best interest or the best interest of humanity and the living earth. With care and insight, we discover that compulsory schooling is a machine that serves the machine called culture, by negating our essential humanity and creative intelligence. Model this for all of our children.

Growing up inside the machine called schooling blinds most to the difference between conditioning and learning, between capacity and data. Learning is what the brain does, exploding 700 new neurons per-second in the early brain, 42,000 each minute, 2,520,000 each hour, 60,480,000 new neurons each with the capacity to connect with 10,000 other neurons every day. What remains hidden is summarized by the phrase; form is content. The structure we call schooling is the primary content being learned. Curriculum is the bait used to trap parents and children in the system.

The hidden agenda the structure induces is conformity and obedience to authority, for parents and children. To be in the system predetermines what time you get up, what and when you eat, how you dress, who and how you engage, when you speak, when you stand in line, when and what you think, who is in control, what standards everything you do is compared, judged, rewarded and punished, what you do before and after the bell ring, in the halls and at home, from age three to five, and for the next twelve years, and often far beyond. To accomplish what? To belong and become an obedient cog or slave in the culture-corporate machine?

Only five-percent of lifelong learning is acquired through formal instruction, training, schooling. Of that five-percent, only three-to-five-percent is remembered for any length of time. The challenge every parent faces is first realizing that the rusting machine called compulsory schooling cannot possibly keep up with the exponential rate of change taking place. The dullness the system induces prevents our children from opening and developing the very capacities needed to meet and solve the compounding social, environmental and human challenges we face. Each parent and family must shake off the assumption that the state certified clerks, (a term used by Teacher of the Year, John Taylor Gatto's, not mine), will provide their child with the inspired, creative models they need to fly high, with vision and purpose.

Much of the current debate about educational standards and reforms, however, is driven by the belief that we must prepare the young only to compete effectively in the global economy. That done, all will be well, or so it is assumed. But there are better reasons to reform education, which have to do with the rapid decline in the habitability of the earth. The kind of discipline-centric education that enabled us to industrialize the earth will not necessarily help us heal the damage caused by industrialization. Yale University historian Paul Kennedy (1993), after surveying the century ahead, reached broadly similar conclusions, calling for "nothing less than the re-education of humankind."

If today is a typical day on planet earth, we will lose 116 square miles of rain forest, or about an acre a second. We will lose another 72 square miles to encroaching deserts, the results of human mismanagement and overpopulation. We will lose 40 to 250 species, and no one knows whether the number is 40 or 250. Today the human population will increase by 250,000. And today we will add 2,700 tons of chlorofluoro-carbons and 15 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Tonight the earth will be a little hotter, its waters more acidic, and the fabric of life more threadbare. By year's end the numbers are staggering: The total loss of rain forest will equal an area the size of the state of Washington; expanding deserts will equal an area the size of the state of West Virginia; and the global population will have risen by more than 90,000,000. By the year 2000 perhaps as much as 20% of the life forms existing on the planet in the year 1900 will be extinct. (Note; this was in 1994. Today these numbers are far worse.)

It is worth noting that this is not the work of ignorant people. Rather, it is largely the results of work by people with BAs, BSs, LLBs, MBAs, and PhDs. Elie Wiesel once made the same point, noting that the designers and perpetrators of Auschwitz, Dachau, and Buchenwald-the Holocaust-were the heirs of Kant and Goethe, widely thought to be the best educated people on earth. But their education did not serve as an adequate barrier to barbarity. What was wrong with their education? In Wiesel's (1990) words,

It emphasized theories instead of values, concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, answers instead of questions, ideology and efficiency rather than conscience.

I believe that the same could be said of our education. Toward the natural world it too emphasizes theories, not values; abstraction rather than consciousness; neat answers instead of questions; and technical efficiency over conscience. It is a matter of no small consequence that the only people who have lived sustainably on the planet for any length of time could not read, or like the Amish do not make a fetish of reading. My point is simply that education is no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom. *More of the same kind of education will only compound our problems.* This is not an argument for ignorance but rather a statement that *the worth of education must now be measured against the standards of decency and human survival-the issues now looming so large before us in the twenty-first century.*

*It is not education, but education of a certain kind, that will save us.*

David Orr, *Earth in Mind*

We are responsible for our children and their education, not the state. Accepting this opens new doors of creative perception. If only five percent of lifelong learning is acquired by formal training, how will we reenvision what we call schooling to align with nature's design for lifelong learning? Knowledge as a commodity is worthless in a world lost in data, and so are systems that broker at that level. The focus shifts to capacity, self-understanding and mastery. Take the time and resources wasted conforming to 'the system' and invest these priceless resources in rich, expansive, life-empowering experiences that open, develop and expand those capacities that make each child uniquely human, and sustainable. Begin by defining what kind of human being we hope for our child and surround them in the experiences that will open those qualities. Or, send them to school. That is the choice.

See: *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, by Peter Grey, *Learning all the Time*, by John Holt, *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*, by David Orr, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, by John Taylor Gatto

**Fifth:** R. W. Emerson circa 1860, "Machinery is aggressive. The weaver becomes a web, the machinist a machine." See the truth that technology is fundamentally and everlastingly dead, anti-nature, and how a psyche embedded in, and enchanted by technology, grows increasingly indifferent, callous and hostile to the natural world, which is our true nature. See the contradiction. End it, and model that for our children.

Ashley Montagu in *The Dehumanization of Man*, argues that the tipping point was the 1600s, with the evolution of the mechanical clock. With the clock humanity's attention became enchanted and increasingly shaped by technology. The machine, not the sun, defined the time of day. Prior, a person's identity was his or her place in the commons, the community, a Copper or a Smith. The steady growth of technology fundamentally changed how human beings experienced themselves, including how they perceive and relate to nature.

The new imperatives (machines and technology), were not only external, imposed from without, they were also nonhuman, “alien,” detached from human beings, and in a real sense “against nature.” Henceforth human life would not move with the tides, but proceed like clockwork.

The victory of the mechanical equation over the organic principle was only the start of the modern process of dehumanization.

The mechanization of life could be complete only with the mechanization of man, that is, with his total and willing absorption into the system as a functional unit, a smoothly working part. The human subject, as an end in itself, must become an object, a means to other ends.

The last refuge of the secret self, the deepest hidden recesses of spontaneity and freedom, must be infiltrated, subjected, and recycled into conformity, within a technological society.

The dehumanization of man, initiated from without, would be finally accomplished when the individual accepted this fate and completed the process from within, by a voluntary act of compliance and conversion.

The exponential growth of technology not only changes the brain, it implicitly diminishes and negates the unique qualities that define being human. This change is implicit in the very nature and structure of the technology. Form is content.

The more our waking consciousness is occupied by abstract thought, which is nature’s equivalence of data, now compounded by digital-thought as data, the less available attention there is for other states or sources of insight-intelligence. Machine data, or abstract thought-data, is not intelligent or intelligence. Not having any direct perception of this disconnect however, the observer assumes that the clever manipulation of thought-data is intelligent or intelligence. They have no other reference, which leads inevitably to the transhumanist agenda.

See: *The Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, by Jerry Mander, *The Dehumanization of Man*, by Ashley Montagu

**Sixth:** Realize that public media is addictive, hypnotic, and habituating, an evocative and mechanical form of conditioning and manipulation. Like compulsory schooling, the function of corporate media is to shape and condition the global mind to obey authority and conform to increasingly narrow patterns that serve those who control process. By comparison, the small information platforms that challenge this basic mind-behavior-control function are graffiti on the subway wall. Break the addiction and model this for all of our children.

See *The Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, by Jerry Mander, *Childhood Under Siege: How Big Business Targets Children*, by Joel Bakan, and the documentary, *The Social Dilemma*.

**Seventh:** Appreciate, and deeply, that centralized control, including governments, media, the internet, commerce, i.e., Amazon, education, agriculture, healthcare, banking, etc., are all fundamentally dehumanizing. Shun globalization and return to the cooperative-local. Involve our children in deeply human, cooperative, life sustaining activities and local commerce as a way of living that is simple, clean, healthy, and sane, activities that implicitly and simultaneously defunds globalization.

Alison McDowell is a mom and independent researcher in Philadelphia. She began her activist journey by questioning standardized testing, which led to the pervasive and nefarious ways technology was being used in education. She discovered how global finance institutions were turning everything, including our children, into data for digital surveillance and profit. This led to a wide range of related topics; block chain identity, machine learning, predictive analytics derived from Internet of Things sensors, social impact bond, global poverty management and how virtual game technologies are being applied to control individuals and entire populations. Here is a summary of what Alison discovered.

*I believe natural life will only remain viable if we collectively step out of the game and forge a path towards healing ourselves and the earth.*

Stepping out of the game involves all of the above; not identifying with institutions that centralize, dehumanize and control what we think in education, in commerce, food production, banking, communication, social networking, energy, health care, the environment and more. Deeper still, breaking free from our cultural identity prison invites the discovery that our true nature is not what we imagine, not a mental image. Our authentic nature is empathic, entangled nature, not technology, not media, not what we are taught in schools, or commerce, not genetically engineered food, and certainly not genetically engineered and controlled people. By embracing and protecting nature, as Emerson described; 'the weaver, indeed, becomes the web.'

*See: Be So Far Away That They Can't Find You  
J. Krishnamurti on Culture*

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