ner experience (by insisting on manualization). Thus, I see little reason to prefer "our modern way of life *originates* in our blindness to our own lived experience" over "our blindness to our own lived experience *originates* in our modern way of life." Indeed, I suspect that both directions of origination apply in a circular and reinforcing way: as society becomes more mechanistic, it loses more contact with inner experience; and as it loses more contact with inner experience, it becomes more mechanistic; and as it becomes more mechanistic it loses more contact with inner experience; and so on.

« 12 » In parallel, I see no reason to prefer "our only hope for reversing the ecological disaster is to retrieve contact with our lived experience" over "our only hope for reversing the ecological disaster is to become less mechanistic." Indeed, I suspect that both statements are circularly dependent on each other: the planet's hope, if hope there be, is for both to build on each other.

Funding

The author received no funding from any source for this project.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

References

Caracciolo M. & Hurlburt R. T. (2016) A passion for specificity: Confronting inner experience in literature and science. The Ohio State University Press, Columbus OH.

Hurlburt R. T. (1990) Sampling normal and schizophrenic inner experience. Plenum Press, New York.

Hurlburt R. T. (1993) Sampling inner experience in disturbed affect. Plenum Press, New York.

Hurlburt R. T. (2011) Investigating pristine inner experience: Moments of truth. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hurlburt R. T. & Akhter S. A. (2006) The Descriptive Experience Sampling method. Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences 5: 271–301.

Hurlburt R. T. & Heavey C. L. (2006) Exploring inner experience: The Descriptive Experience Sampling Method. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Hurlburt R. T., Heavey C. L. & Bensaheb A. (2009) Sensory awareness. Journal of Consciousness Studies 16(10–12): 231–251.

Hurlburt R. T. & Schwitzgebel E. (2007) Describing inner experience? Proponent meets skeptic. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

Petitmengin C. (2011) Describing the experience of describing? The blindspot of introspection. Journal of Consciousness Studies 18(1): 44–62. ▸ https://cepa.info/4445

Russ Hurlburt is Professor of Psychology at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is widely recognized as an innovative investigator of methods for exploring inner experience. He was the first to use beepers to explore experience and behavior, inventing, in 1973, the beeper that made such exploration possible, and was the first to undertake what is sometimes called "thought sampling," the random sampling of thoughts in natural environments. Since the early 1980s, he has focused his research efforts on the high-fidelity description of inner experience using the method he calls "Descriptive Experience Sampling."

Received: 28 February 2021
Revised: 6 March 2021
Accepted: 7 March 2021

Societal Change from within a Radically Transformed Mind?

Toma Strle
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
toma.strle/at/pef.uni-lj.si

> Abstract • I sympathize with Claire Petitmengin's idea that coming back into contact with the lived experience is important if we are to change the way we live our lives. However, on the path towards resolving the pressing problems of contemporary society through transforming the human mind, two worries emerge. First, it is not easy to imagine an ordinary person having a motive or desire to follow the path the author of the target article proposes. Second, it is possible that at the horizon of a radically transformed mind – where the distinctions between the subjective and the objective, between what is inside and outside, dissolve – the concern with concepts and discourse about the political, social or ecological fades away. Nevertheless, retrieving contact with the lived experience perhaps opens up space for the emergence of a more empathic society and is, as such, a goal worth pursuing.

« 1 » Retrieving contact with the lived experience, Claire Petitmengin argues, is an essential condition for breaking with our much ingrained habit of objectifying most of what we come into contact with, including ourselves and our experience. Moreover, she argues, if we are to transform the core of how consumption-driven societies function, we need to lift the veil that divides and differentiates me and it; the mind, body and environment; the subject and the object. We can do that, Petitmengin proposes, by practicing a different attitude or "directedness" towards the living, so to say. Only thus can we hope to avoid the catastrophic events, such as the ecological crisis, that appear to await us in the near future (e.g., §1, §20). I am sympathetic to Petitmengin's call that we, as individuals and as a society, must, if we are to change our way of life, come back into contact with what is closest to us – our lived experience. However, two worries about the author's proposal seem imminent.

« 2 » First, can a mere ordinary human being adhere to the rather demanding proposal of how to transform the very core of how society functions? Second, it seems to me that what Petitmengin proposes is nothing shy of a radical transformation of human consciousness (radical at least from the perspective of Western society). Would such a radically transformed mind – where the boundary between me, you and it, the subjective and objective, dissipates –, a profoundly different way of experiencing living, even occupy itself with the political, the economical or the ecological? Would there be any "motive" for such a consciousness to concern itself with the topics, concepts and discourse described in the target article? Let me first turn to the first, the more practical one.

« 3 » To change the way we live and to thus be able to transform the very core of how society functions, it does not seem enough for only a few dedicated individuals to attempt to retrieve contact with their lived experience. Petitmengin's approach

seems to presuppose that the practices necessary for recovering contact with the lived experience should become part and parcel of the lives of people on a larger scale. What is needed, it seems, is a relatively global (and radical) transformation of human minds and actions. (Arguably, it is possible that a certain number of individuals not too great would suffice to achieve the tipping point of significant change in society to enable the resolution of the imminent dangers we face today. Unfortunately, no such historic examples can be found, and it is not clear what arguments would support such a position.)

« 4 » However, where should this path begin? Who should have the motive or purpose to undertake it? Possibly the people in power? Yet how to convince them, "enlighten" them to forgo their comforts? Rather, it seems more reasonable that the path is to be undertaken by ordinary people. However, which "kinds" of ordinary people? Scholars, scientists or philosophers perhaps – ordinary people who are, admittedly, quite privileged compared to an average everyday person who might be without education, economic security or other means to commit to such a project? Be that who it may, it is not easy to imagine a less privileged and a less well situated person – perhaps a janitor with four children who needs a larger home or a businesswoman whose company went bankrupt due to the financial crisis and is left with a large debt – having the motive or desire to travel the path towards retrieving contact with her experience. For it seems to me that the path Petitmengin proposes is not a one-time act or experience but a lifelong practice, a continuous enactment of a different, non-dividing directedness towards the living that demands commitment, time, courage, and, to not forget the practical, the financial means, for instance, to be able to do so. Can a mere ordinary human being comply with the rather demanding proposal of how to transform the very core of how society functions? Q1 Admittedly, this might sound trivial or counterproductive, perhaps. However, if we are to solve the pressing problems we face as a society, we should not forget the practical side of the solution.

« 5 » The second worry I have with Petitmengin's proposal has a more "spiritual" quality to it. The root of our being unaware and habitually blind to the felt sense of the lived experience lies, at least partly, the author argues, in our "straining towards the objective or the content of the activity (the 'what'), which, by creating a narrow attentional tunnel, conceals the activity itself (the 'how')" (§3). The author keenly observes some examples of such absorption in the objective and the accompanying unawareness of the lived experience: she reports that when writing the article, the felt sense of an activity (such as writing or finding the right words to express her ideas), the contact with the lived experience is replaced by being absorbed "by the content of the ideas that I am trying to express" (§3). Moreover, in such a "state" one is unaware of the unawareness of the lived experience; one does not know one lacks the contact with one's experience. Much is missed, much remains unnoticed. More importantly, since the focus remains on the content, the objective and the subjective, the inside and the outside remain detached.

« 6 » Conversely, being in contact with one's experience leads to the dissolution of the divide between the subjective and objective, inner and outer, inside and outside, as is illustrated by reports Petitmengin shares (e.g., §6). What the mind orients itself towards is "felt, and this feeling dissolves the boundary between it and me" (§6). Such a state seems quite radically different and foreign to most people. The reports quoted in §6, for instance, closely resemble some aspects of reports on mystical experience (e.g., the dissolution of boundaries between inside and outside; oneness with what is experienced) that come from various spiritual traditions (see, e.g., William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* from 1902). From this perspective, it seems that what Petitmengin calls for is nothing shy of a radical transformation of our very conscious living and experiencing and is not simply a call for breaking with our ingrained and habitual attitudes towards ourselves, others and the environment.

« 7 » Yet, it is not clear whether such a radically transformed mind (living, more accurately, for the distinction between mind, body and environment dissolves when in contact with experience, as §8 suggests) would be concerned with the political, the social and ecological, or with the concepts and the discourse that accompany the debates thereof. Would not turning one's attention towards the experience of emergence of an idea about the ecological or the economical, for instance, and silently remaining there, in a "state" where I, you and it cannot be discerned anymore, dissolve the very concepts and discourse we were concerned with before a different way of experiencing emerged? How is one to discuss, think about and experience (?) the topics such as the environmental crisis, or the consequences of the consumption-driven capitalist and other social systems (here, science, at least for the better part, follows the same model), without remaining within the bounds of the content-, object-oriented attitude? Would such matters even be present at the horizon of such a radically transformed experiencing and living? Q2

« 8 » The worry here is not so much that an "enlightened" mind would care less about other beings or the environment. It is quite probable that it would care even more, as certain Buddhist traditions, for instance, indicate. Moreover, retrieving contact with the lived experience would perhaps, even within contemporary Western society, open up space for the emergence of more empathic minds and society and is, as such, a goal worth pursuing. Whether this would lead to solving the imminent problems we face today, remains unknown.

« 9 » Notwithstanding this conundrum, action towards resolving the pressing problems we nowadays face, such as the ecological crisis, seems to be urgently needed. And if coming into contact with the lived experience may help resolve them, we should not shy away from attempting to undertake this path towards transforming our way of living.

« 10 » If nothing else, practicing attentive observation of what is within us and of what surrounds us seems to hold promise as a way of bringing forth a society based on responsibility that does not reduce the subject ("its face," to borrow the idea of Emmanuel Levinas 1985) to an object. The question of whether society would succeed in resolving the imminent dangers it faces aside, perhaps it would at least come to be more based on ethics – of the non-moralist and non-detached kind (Varela 1999) – and less on consumption and exploitation. Francisco

Varela's insight that "ethics – tolerance and pluralism, detachment from our own perceptions and values to allow for those of others – is the very foundation of knowledge, and also its final point" (Varela 1984: 320) is, generally, quite foreign to contemporary Western society. It is an idea, however, that perhaps leads to a more caring way of living.

Funding

No external funding was used in work related to this article.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

References

James W. (1987) Writings 1902–1910. Library of America, New York.

Levinas E. (1985) Ethics and infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh.

Varela F. J. (1984) The creative circle: Sketches on the natural history of circularity. In: Watzlawick P. (ed.) The invented reality: Contributions to constructivism. W. W. Norton, New York: 309–325. ▸ http://cepa.info/2089

Varela F. J. (1999) Ethical know-how: Action, wisdom, and cognition. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA. ▸ https://cepa.info/2119

Toma Strle is an assistant professor at the Center for Cognitive Science of the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education. He holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in philosophy of cognitive science. His research interests include decision-making and how we experience it, consciousness, the relation between first- and third-person approaches to researching and understanding the mind, neurophenomenology, embodied cognition, and self-reference.

Received: 1 March 2021
Revised: 3 March 2021
Accepted: 4 March 2021

Renewing Experientially our Sense of Existence and Cultivating Seeds of Joy

Magali Ollagnier-Beldame
Laboratoire ICAR UMR CNRS 5191, France • magali.ollagnier-beldame/at/ens-lyon.fr

> Abstract • I provide some accounts showing similarities to Petitmengin's position. While being totally in line with the argument of anchoring in experience as an act of resistance facing the social and ecological crisis we are witnessing, I raise two main concerns: a first one regarding the question of unity and multiplicity as for humans and nature, in relation to the "how to live together?" question; a second one to challenge the author on the conditions under which her proposal can be implemented.

Resonances with other research

« 1 » In her target article, Claire Petitmengin very convincingly shows how the ecological disaster is intimately related to our being cut off from our lived experience. In this commentary, I will offer an overview of accounts taken from the fields of ecopsychology and environmental psychology and philosophy, which all show similarities to the position defended in the target article. Such an overview reinforces the need for developing a science investigating subjective experience in the first or second person, such as Petitmengin does, as an act of opposition to the plundering of the living. Petitmengin's position currently resonates with much research on the loss of human–nature interactions. Robert Pyle has termed this ongoing alienation of humans from nature "the extinction of experience." He has argued, in particular, that "this is not just about losing the personal benefits of the natural high. It also implies a cycle of disaffection that can have disastrous consequences" (Pyle 1993: 146).

« 2 » Petitmengin describes a rupture with our experience, which leads to the conclusion that "experiential destitution and ecological ravage are two inseparable faces" (§19). This experiential famine, in addition to depleting the Earth, leads to negative emotions, such as the psychoteratic emotions in the Anthropocene – emotions that people feel in relation to the Earth and its endangerment – described by Glenn Albrecht "so much that a type of emotional death with respect to nature is taking place" (Albrecht 2019: 67). Emotional death occurs when certain human beings no longer have a reaction to the end, death, or loss of nature, when they have no emotional presence anymore to bear witness, as all remaining biota are ignored because they are not relevant to their life projects.

« 3 » The previous rupture also has the effect of limiting our understanding of human modes of knowledge, by reducing these modes to disembodied mechanisms – such as categorizing or comparing. Indeed, these mechanisms do not make it possible to sufficiently account for the transformations that continuously take place in the living world, nor to understand them. By losing track of the ever-dynamic character of the world, as well as that of our relationship with it, this world comes to a standstill. François Jullien (2009) thus outlines the difficulties of Western culture in dealing with the silent transformations occurring within some living systems, showing how transitions – such as climate change or ageing – escape Western understanding. In contrast with this tendency, Petitmengin invites us to acknowledge and honor a way of knowing that is embodied and dynamic. Such a way of knowing is reminiscent of Hubert Reeves's "knowledge that does not know that it knows" (Reeves 1998: 169, my translation), which can be illustrated by migratory birds' knowledge as they orient themselves geographically. According to this author, this knowledge is much older and denser than "knowledge that knows that it knows," i.e., technical or scientific knowledge elaborated over the last centuries through a dialogue between observations, intuitions and theories – something that could amount to instruction manuals to learn to fly like a migratory bird.

« 4 » Such an impoverishment of the modes of attention to what lives within us is also outlined by Baptiste Morizot, for whom the ecological crisis is