

Part V

Unlearning: The Source of Creativity

If there is a single source of creativity then 'Unlearning' would be a good candidate, the question is 'what are we unlearning'? Questioning is a way we unlearn and often the best sources of creativity are those questions which do not provide easy answers.

Emotional Machines

Emotions are what separate us from machines; it is why the lens can see all but it cannot decide when to take the photograph. The camera is a machine without emotion, the lens is dispassionate and does not recoil at images of war, nor angers at the waste of lives due to child slavery, neither does it fear street gangs or feel joy at the birth of a child, or the sense of belonging at a wedding – the lens sees them all in the same objective stare.

For the lens, no single image is different from another it can not make choices and it will not take a photograph. Only an emotional being can take a photograph because emotions quite literally MOVE us to acTION - the motion in emotion.

A camera is a tool to capture a scene but it is also a problem-solving tool to understand the way the world works. The thought processes, which lead us to imagine different functions for the camera, are critical to creativity.

Shock and Longevity

Our minds feed on sensation and a photograph provides this – all the images we make are by definition personal to us. One of the most magical aspects of photography is holding in your hand a photograph of a time or place which is personal to you, perhaps something that you have forgotten which is rapidly evoked by the image. However there will be some photographs which will also

communicate to others. Some will communicate on design alone; the technical skill exhibited in some photographs can be awe inspiring, whilst those that connect emotionally keep your attention.

We see this in advertising where images compete for your attention with colour, size, strong lines and the psychology of sex. Where the models are unknown to us what draws attention is their beauty, however advertisers know that we are more likely to be influenced by images if they contain individuals who are known to us. The advertisers find these people amongst celebrities and the famous, who endorse products; people who we may identify with. But it soon becomes familiar and the advertising agencies are locked in an arms race for ever more novel and new images and the latest 'it' person so that they can compete for and win our attention. An image that shocks today loses its ability to shock tomorrow.

Images that last, including those which have as their subject people we do not know or places we have not seen, are those that result in some form of emotional resonance with the subject – we become attached to the photograph. We judge a photograph on how it moves us. The closer we move to the photograph the deeper it is etched in our memory. The best images can change our values, shape our attitudes and reveal the human condition.

Longevity arises when a photograph communicates an emotion or an idea or story which we can return to time and again. Emotions are crucial in forming attachments, including those we have with photographs.

Conformity Corrodes Creativity

The opposite of creativity is conformity – uncritical acceptance of what is. If we conform then, as the word suggests, we alter what we are - our authentic form - into what is expected. Conformity requires us to bend and this deformation can cause stress and we can rapidly feel de-motivated. Conversely when we feel free to be creative we become energised and nothing seems too much trouble.

Emotions are not wholly independent of ourselves as they arise from the interaction of the values we hold, our experiences, pre-dispositions and, of course, the social setting. Can we control emotions or do they control us? If you have ever tried to force yourself to like a photograph, other works of art or even

a person, it is likely you will find it unsatisfactory. Even if you are able to conjure up an emotion, it is unconvincing because it will not be genuine.

What we understand is usually handed down to us by parents, teachers and others in authority. Through assimilating society's norms we see them as solid, unchanging and natural. However we only need to cross a road to see subtle differences and these become more apparent as we cross national boundaries or even when we visit the next city. Is anything ever truly solid or everlasting? Can you really be sure that what you think is that which you have been told or that which you have found out for yourself?

Disinvest in Ignorance

The unlearning is of that which leads us away from finding the truth ourselves. We need to navigate around those things that confuse or keep us ignorant. This can be seen in the way language is used to either narrow our world or to help us see its vastness.

Words can be used to direct, dictate, tell and assume authority by promising a single right way as opposed to helping us widen our gaze, seek understanding and recognise that there may be a range of right ways of doing things.

Unlearning that which has been handed down to us can be difficult and yet many people do not even get to the first stage: The first stage is acknowledging that what we have been taught is a version of someone else's reality and it may or may not suit the way you see the world. Knowing what question to ask, is the second step towards unshackling ourselves from ill-conceived convention and into creative spaces. Paradoxically this is a question for which we may never find the answer; it explains why the journey is more important than the arrival.

Emotions are a way of expressing that which is outside of the reach of language or rational thought. Just as we have an internal dialogue when we think things through then emotions appear to be the conclusions of a similar dialogue which is below our level of consciousness and so hidden from us. A kiss may be sharing of DNA and with the sample inside us our body goes to work on whether we are a genetic match: but we do not get a read out, rather we receive a rush of emotion.

When we see a photograph that moves us to an emotion what exactly is being