

Radical Relationalism: Restorative Justice with the Earth

by Valerie Luna Serrels

“A human being is a part of the whole universe. He [sic] experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness....

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison, by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” ~ Albert Einstein

Environmental crises and conflicts are escalating and could trigger the greatest global security disaster the world has known.¹ The increasing threat to life demands that we ask every institution, system and field to consider what each is called to do to change the course of this destruction. The environmental movement has battled for protections and conservation of biosystems, awakening people to our symbiotic connection with the Earth. Yet the crisis continues to threaten life as we know it. In the midst of a time of collapse, a new culture is emerging, shaped not by a vision of industrialization and constant growth, but by co-creating a living society in relationship with the Earth.

This crisis presents an opening in the cultural fabric for change. During prolonged crises, we are asked to look beneath the surface to unveil hidden assumptions and values at the core of

¹ The Department of Defense has released reports naming climate change as a serious national security risk, and the World Economic Forum has named the global water crisis as the “biggest threat facing the planet over the next decade.” See National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate. Submitted in response to a request contained in Senate Report 113-211, accompanying H.R 4870, the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill, 2015. Also Ganter, Carl. “Water crises are a top global risk.” *World Economic Forum*. 16 (January 2015). <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/01/why-world-water-crises-are-a-top-global-risk/>

the problem. This chapter focuses on how restorative justice is well positioned to address the core problem beneath the environmental crisis, namely the illusion of separation between humanity and nature. As such it will be guided by a new valuation framework termed *radical relationalism*.² Einstein called the idea of a separate self an “optical delusion of consciousness,”³ and Martin Luther King, Jr. noted that we are all connected in an “inescapable network of mutuality.”⁴ If King were alive today, I imagine he would expand this to include the whole community of the natural world.

This framework of radical relationalism would “mark an alternative understanding of our relation to ‘nature,’ and thus a different way of addressing the ecological crisis...that would assemble around the idea of cooperation, Gestaltung, interaction, co-creation, transformation, and ultimately inhabitation of a common, shared world.”⁵ Guided by such a framework, practices and processes could catalyze restoration and justice for all members of society, human and non-human, rooted in a kindred relationship with the Earth. Restorative justice is already oriented toward relationalism, as it addresses harm by valuing all members related to an incident, including the wider community, based on a view of interconnectedness. The environmental crisis compels the inclusion of all victims and members of the living world into processes of addressing harm, and to imagine new and expanded processes and roles for environmental conflict prevention.

² The concept of radical relationalism upon which this chapter is based is gleaned from an academic paper by Dr. Barbara Muraca, Oregon State University, who calls for a new environmental axiology framework that she terms *radical relationalism*, to replace the dichotomy of the usual instrumental and intrinsic valuations.

³ Calaprice, Alice, ed., *The New Quotable Einstein*, 206.

⁴ King, Martin Luther, Jr. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

⁵ Muraca, Barbara. “Relational Values: A Whiteheadian Alternative for Environmental Philosophy and Global Environmental Justice.” *Balkan Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2016.

Underlying Environmental Valuation Frameworks

The industrialization of our planet derives from a particular seed of thought about what we value and why we value the same, as do many strategies that seek to protect this worldview, namely that ‘nature’ is a backdrop for human affairs, useful for our economy, our health, or our enjoyment. A society built on the perception of humans as somehow being other than and above nature leads to objectification, with the resulting commodification and colonization of ‘resources.’ A shift from industrial society to living society is not possible from this worldview.

Environmental conflicts, and the enfolding crises, are basically conflicts of value. There are two frameworks of value, *instrumental* and *intrinsic*, that generally guide the global justice movement as well as environmental law and policy. Instrumentalism views nature as ‘natural resources,’ as a means to an end, which leads to the protection of the land solely for the benefit of humans. Intrinsic frameworks view the protection of water, land, and living beings for their own benefit, by virtue of their inherent worth. While this framework might seem more inclusive, it also positions the rest of the world as separate from human, as if human interaction with nature has no value or relevance. As Barbara Muraca noted,

The language of intrinsic value is not the opposite of instrumental language, but shares a kinship relationship with it. Both are rooted in the concept of a bifurcated nature and the myth of an independent, separate subject, and in the neglect of the fundamental relationality that constitutes it.⁶

⁶ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 33.

In both cases, nature is viewed as “something separated, distinct, and independent from humans.”⁷ Evidence of how embedded this valuation is in our culture is revealed in our language. No pronouns exist for nature aside from the inanimate ‘it’ which frames ‘natural resources’ as objects to be used or protected, monitored or destroyed. “Using ‘it’ absolves us of moral relational responsibility and opens the door to exploitation.”⁸ This language, in turn, reveals the faulty underlying axiology, that is, the story of separation between the human and non-human world.

Catholic priest and eco-theologian, Thomas Berry, wrote of his vision of “The New Story” based on his understanding that the ecological crisis was rooted in examining and changing our underlying worldview.

In Berry’s view, a central cause of the West’s ecological hostility was its separation from nature—a separation that was at once spiritual, religious, psychological, emotional, intellectual, and philosophical. The root of the eco-destruction was an anthropocentric Western worldview that saw an existential gulf, a ‘radical discontinuity,’ between human and the natural worlds.⁹

Radical relationalism flips this ‘radical discontinuity,’ and offers the foundation for crafting a new story that many in the ecological movement have been envisioning for decades. This new story is needed—a shift in consciousness shaped by radical relationalism to restore humans to our primary identity as people of the Earth, transformed by and transforming nature in a reciprocal relationship. There is good synergy between restorative justice and radical

⁷ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 32.

⁸ Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2.

⁹ Dellinger, “Change the Worldview,” 30-34.

relationalism, with similar roots in indigenous worldviews, and by virtue of the relational values descriptive of both. For restorative justice, this story can 1) expand processes of addressing environmental harms and conflicts to restore whole communities, including nature, and 2) shape practices of healing and experiential kindred relationship with the land as conflict prevention.¹⁰

A Look at the Root Cause of Illusion of Separation

“Our origins are of the earth. And so there is in us a deeply seated response to the natural universe, which is part of our humanity.” ~ Rachel Carson

Our language and worldview are shaped by the accepted science, language and experiences of our culture and how we understand the human relationship with the earth. For hundreds of thousands of years before industrial civilization, ‘science’ was simply understanding the technologies of nature. Humans lived in rhythm with the natural world, interdependent and connected at the most primal level, shaped on a daily basis by the forces of nature: the call of coyote, the circling of raven, the rains, rivers and rock formations. These experiences “were integral not only to our own survival, but also to the very shaping of our souls. Now, in the shortest wisp of a moment, the perennial conversation has been silenced for the vast majority of us.”¹¹

Gradually, beginning in the Agricultural Revolution and culminating in the Industrial Revolution, our innate interdependence with the natural world shifted toward people claiming

¹⁰ “The land” is a term used to describe the waters, lands, living beings, biosystems, elements that support life on this planet. I will use this term throughout the chapter in this way.

¹¹ Weller, *Wild Edge*, 50.

sole subjectivity in the universe, being separate from all other beings. This shift emerged as populations grew and tribes became empires, which required economic and political dominance to maintain their power, especially the disdain and subjugation of the feminine, including the natural world and indigenous cultures. “In the Industrial Revolution...a similar dramatic transition took place. These weren’t just changes in the small details of people’s lives. The whole basis of society was transformed, including people’s relationship with one another and with Earth.”¹² As people were dominated, they became subjects of overlords; as land and waters were dominated, they became commodified as objects, or, to be more politically correct now, as “resources” or “capital” to be managed, used and appropriated for financial gain. The “sensuous intimacy with the wind, rivers, rainfall, and birdsong”¹³ became a threat to the agenda of empire that sought to control subjects’ lives, including their natural working and living relationship with the land.

At the dawn of the Western tradition of thought, modern sciences, driven by the urgent need to rely on ‘irreducible and stubborn facts’ in order to face the threat coming from the ecclesial authority, started stripping nature of all those elements that could not be observed by measuring instruments and did not fit the picture of bits of matter wandering through an empty universe of mechanic relations.¹⁴

Systemic disconnection from the rest of the natural world continues today. Our economy is based on extraction and use of impersonal ‘resources’ for financial gain, regardless of consequences.

¹² Macy, “The Great Turning”, 2-6.

¹³ Weller, *Wild Edge of Sorrow*, 49.

¹⁴ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 22.

American energy systems and lifestyles remain tied to a fossil fuel, profit-driven, pro-growth agenda, resulting in many threats to our planet's viability to sustain life.

In the early 1960's, Rachel Carson was moved to write the classic *Silent Spring* after years of witnessing the destruction of crops and killing off of birds due to pesticides, the pollution of water with chemical runoff, and the effects on her beloved forests, awakening the American conscience further, and spearheading the environmental movement. Carson has been described as...

...a Copernicus of biology who ejected the human animal from its hubristic place at the center of Earth's ecological cosmos and recast it as one of myriad organisms, all worthy of wonder, all imbued with life and reality. Her lyrical writing rendered her not a mere translator of the natural world, but an alchemist transmuting the steel of science into the gold of wonder.¹⁵

Her writings catapulted public pressure which resulted in the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, let alone the creation of regulatory agencies to monitor and regulate industrial activity affecting the environment. The legislation and the related agencies that developed were landmarks of a government taking responsibility to regulate industrial pollution for the benefit of citizens. These policies and agencies are based on an instrumental valuation ethic. Again, instrumental value refers to an ethic of understanding the Earth's organisms and systems as things to be protected (the means) for the benefit of human beings (ends).

¹⁵ Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*. ADD page?

Ironically, the environmental laws and regulatory agencies established to regulate industrial interests for the common good ended up continuing the same results of pollution and destruction. The situation has become more dire with the dismantling of government regulatory agencies and the unraveling vital protections of “natural resources.” Mary Woods, environmental attorney, notes that environmental agencies set up to protect natural resources wind up doing the opposite. “Despite a cadre of hardworking and well-intentioned people in many agencies today, perversely, the very system intended to restore nature actually kills nature, while delivering a heavy dose of death and despair to innocent citizens.”¹⁶ Neither have courts awarded justice for the devastating harms committed against the Earth, indigenous people, people of color, and the poor who suffer most from the ecological consequences of a market-centric worldview. Very little has been done to prevent harm against future generations and biosystems. In fact, government regulatory agencies are authorized by statutes to “issue permits to damage Nature.” “Despite its elaborate environmental laws, the United States has wiped out more than half (53%) of its wetlands and nearly all (90%) of its old-growth forests...nearly half (44%) of all rivers and streams are unfit for fishing, recreation, and other public uses.”¹⁷ This correlation between an increase in destruction following the establishment of policies to prevent such destruction is a clue that something is amiss.

The entrenchment of industrial interests within an instrumental ethic that values the natural world for her “resources,” and relates to them as such, manifests a culture based on the illusion of separation. This framework, and the predominant philosophies that shape our society, are based on Newtonian physics with its isolated, mechanical, reductionist paradigm deepening

¹⁶ Woods, *Nature's Trust*, 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

the fissure at the root of the crisis. There is very little hope that the dominant culture will lead to the changes necessary to alleviate the environmental crisis without a different underlying ethic that includes the interconnectedness of all life. What happens to the temperature of the ocean affects the clam that affects other sea life that affects humans that affects communities that affects nations. Life is a web of interrelationships, one affecting the other. *How* we relate in these relationships is what will determine continued cycles of destruction or cycles of life-sustaining reciprocity.

Radical Relationalism - The New Story

“The Universe is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects.” ~ Thomas Berry

The dramatic shift from the pre-modern world to industrialization is equal to the emerging shift from post-industrialization to a radical relationalism. The old reductionist Newtonian physics of the 17th century that still inform our culture are based on the human as a separate and independent being in a mechanical and disconnected cosmos, and nature as a lifeless machine. The emerging ontology, on the other hand, is based on the interdependence not only between all humans, but between all living beings, the Earth, and the universe. Termed *The Great Turning* by deep ecologist and scholar Joanna Macy, and *The Great Work* by Thomas Berry,¹⁸ this new story integrates a return to our indigenous selves, affirming the ancient spiritual truth that all life forms are interconnected in a web of life—conscious, animate and inspired. Radical relationalism leads us to consider that all matter is intricately connected, as subjects, not

¹⁸ Macy, Joanna, *The Great Turning*; Berry, Thomas, *The Great Work*.

as objects, emphasizing that all beings exist because of the relationships between them, not as isolated lifeless objects. In a quantum world, matter is defined by relationships between and among other corresponding entities, replacing classical physics with “a world that is more profoundly and mysteriously interconnected place than we ever imagined.”¹⁹

Radical relationalism is supported by 21st century quantum and systems sciences that recognize the whole of life as interconnected, where “organisms can no longer be seen as disconnected entities.”²⁰ These emergent sciences affirm that the web of life and the process of evolution are the result of a highly organized, symbiotic collaboration. David Bohm, credited with advancing quantum theory, noted that “The notion of a separate organism is clearly an abstraction, as is also its boundary. Underlying all this is unbroken wholeness even though our civilization has developed in such a way as to strongly emphasize the separation into parts.”²¹ And Albert Einstein, even though he maintained a suspicion of quantum physics, said that “we do not live in a universe with discrete, physical objects separated by dead space. The Universe is *one indivisible, dynamic whole* in which energy and matter are so deeply entangled it is impossible to consider them as independent elements.”²²

Dr. Barbara Muraca, professor of philosophy at Oregon State University, proposes German philosopher Gernot Böhme’s term *ecological fabric* to describe this emerging way of viewing nature, not as an object or concept, but as a whole *fabric of being* that includes all of us,

...in which—to use a Whiteheadian expression—a *buzzing world* of activities,

interactions, communication, voices, forms, colors is at work. Ecological fabrics are

¹⁹ Ananthaswamy, “Reality Check,” 10.

²⁰ Lipton, *Biology of Belief*, 14.

²¹ Bohm, David. (Complete citation.)

²² Lipton, *Biology of Belief*, 89.

communication fields in which the self-world relation is disassembled in a complex relational field encompassing multiple voices.²³

In other words, this framework is not about “managing natural resources” well, nor conserving or protecting “nature” out there, but about understanding ourselves as part of nature, a continuous stream of changing, living interrelated beings. We need a larger story such as this to move beyond our narrow, individualistic, race-centric, and species-centric hierarchies.

Radical Relationalism Supporting Restorative Justice

“Wrongdoing is more than simply a violation of law; it is a wound in the community, a tear in the web of relationships.” ~ Howard Zehr

Radical relationalism rightly expands restorative justice, as the human/nature relationship is not separate from our communities or ourselves. This approach, which affirms a whole ecology, extends the innate human connection with the rest of the living world, recalling the worldview of indigenous peoples. When valuation shifts from instrumental or intrinsic to relational, the “other” is no longer completely external to us. The other can no longer be objectified, and therefore can no longer be commodified. “What has been constructed as ‘external nature’—the other of reason and culture—could easily be kept at a distance as an object of scientific observation, use, and exploitation.”²⁴

²³ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 35.

²⁴ Ibid., 32.

Restorative justice is nimble enough, and rooted enough, to expand its branches much further, outside of courtrooms and schools, and into forests and shores and into the hearts of people in relationship with a real place. Its guiding principles of respect, connection and dialogue with the other, along with an unspoken foundation of kinship in the broadest sense of the word, already reflect an underlying relationalism. Restorative justice offers...

...a renewed understanding of environmental violations. It does not take the allegations lightly, but allows us to look at them in a different light. Howard Zehr, the grandfather of restorative justice, points out that wrongdoing is more than simply a violation of law; it is “a wound in the community, a tear in the web of relationships.” A similar notion could be applied to environmental wrongs, so that they could be looked at as harm done to the web of relationships—including the earth at large and vulnerable populations such as future generations.²⁵

Restorative justice has found its way into environmental contexts mostly in New Zealand and Australia, expanding relationalism within dialogue processes. For example, The New South Wales Land and Environment Court in New Zealand revises processes to take place within the local harmed jurisdiction, to include interviews with aboriginal councils and other affected stakeholders, and to result in orders to restore harmed ecosystems and provide restitution for victims. Opportunity is also afforded for the defendant to meet with victims in order to listen and to apologize. New Zealand stakeholders have learned that addressing environmental harms presents problems and opportunities to advance relationalism around the important and

²⁵ Motupalli, “Intergenerational Justice,” 19-20.

sometimes intricate issue of identifying all of the victims of environmental harm, and then including those voices in processes and outcomes. The opportunity lies in the need to include the voices of rivers, meadows, forests, and salamanders, and the resulting possible shift of consciousness that comes from listening and being changed by this experience. Justice Preston, of the New South Wales court shares a solution:

Where the environment and non-human biota are the victims, the surrogate victim needs to be able to bring to the restorative process an ecocentric and not anthropocentric perspective. As with future generations, the fact that the environment and non-human biota are not able to vocalise their claims and concerns is not an insuperable problem. A representative can be appointed to speak on their behalf.²⁶

Radical Relationalism in Legal Restorative Justice Processes

Changing culture requires shaping the principles and values of a field to align with what is emerging. Restorative justice needs to expand its already aligned values with radical relationalism to apply to all of the natural world, emphasizing the value of *interconnectedness*. Howard Zehr notes that “Although we are connected, we are not the same. Particularity appreciates diversity.”²⁷ This definition invites an expanding view of relationality across a

²⁶ Preston, Brian. “The Use of Restorative Justice in Environmental Crime.” A paper presented to: EPA Victoria Seminar on Restorative Environmental Justice. March 22, 2011. 8.

²⁷ Zehr, *The Little Book*, 35.

diverse spectrum of human and non-human creatures and ecosystems. Another hallmark value is *respect* “for all, even those who are different from us.”²⁸

Restorative justice, shaped by radical relationalism, is oriented to deepen a shift from an *I-It* exchange to an *I-Thou* experience. The hope of such a movement toward restoration of primary relationships between all members of living ecosystems is embodied in a restoration of justice following harm, as well as measures to prevent environmental harm. These values must inform practices within legal environmental cases of harm, extending to include all of the natural world in all phases of the process. These processes can help nurture a new culture based on restoring the human/nature relationship.

In New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and here and there in the United States, restorative justice has begun to expand its branches to address environmental harm. The following norms have been the topic of dialogue, research and writing in terms of how each part of the process presents problems and opportunities within environmental contexts. There are already seeds of radical relationalism emerging from those leading the way. Five areas with the field of restorative justice can serve to redefine traditional norms with expanded inclusion for environmental contexts: *inclusion of all stakeholders, victim-centered process, encountering one another, acknowledging and healing harms, and making amends.*

Inclusion of all stakeholders. Restorative justice processes include all stakeholders to a given harm or grievance, namely the victims, offenders and the community. In environmental conflicts, this would include the harmed community, which could be humans who interact with the environment, as well as frogs, salmon, rivers, oaks, owls, prairies, etc., within the affected

²⁸ Zehr, *The Little Book*, 36.

watershed, along with the indigenous community who may live within that ecosystem. Radical relationalism also prioritizes the automatic inclusion of all affected non-human kin and representatives of local indigenous peoples.

Victim-centered process. All affected victims, whether human or non-human, need to be given voice, protection and priority within environmental cases. Radical relationalism shifts the perspective on other-than-human victims, away from viewing them as “resources,” or as “others” separate from humans, to viewing them as uniquely diverse, yet intimately connected living beings in an interdependent web springing from the same tree of life as us. Indigenous peoples are also victims in most environmental conflicts or harms, since their land and livelihoods were stolen by colonial powers. Indigenous peoples should have an automatic voice as a stakeholder regarding environmental matters, particularly when harms affect original tribal land.

The issue has been raised regarding the difficulty of identifying and including the concerns of non-human victims at the table. This is overcome by appointing representatives to speak on behalf of those subjects without voice.²⁹ Representatives could include locally dedicated environmental group leaders, concerned members of the public, conservationists, or indigenous people who live close with the land. Ideally, this service could be offered by restorative justice practitioners who have grounded themselves in relationship with their watersheds. One of the suggested practices I bring in later in the chapter can be implemented in this context: learning to listen to the Earth and her creatures in order to speak eco-centrally into processes.

²⁹ Preston, “The Use of Restorative Justice in Environmental Crime,” also Pain, “Restorative Justice for Environmental Crime: An Antipodean Experience.”

Encountering one another. Applied radical relationalism expands the room for both traditional and environmental processes, and perhaps gets rid of the room altogether. Proceedings should lead to encounters between all stakeholders, or as many as possible within the contested or harmed ecosystem. “Face-to-face” encounters with a tree or a river or salmon may sound stretching, and indeed it should. It is this kind of stretching and immersion that is necessary to plant seeds of radical relationalism. “Nature is often seen as being distinct from humanity and history, simply a backdrop for human events. Encounters with alternative ontological systems can be disruptive to strict categorical distinctions such as those between human/animal or culture/nature.”³⁰ Encounters with a tree or other beings can be transformative, an opening into the cultural fabric of nature to experience life beyond one’s own construct. Having wise guides can help facilitate these encounters.

Acknowledging and healing harms. Environmental harms and conflicts will require that people include non-humans as well as the relationships between them, in processes of acknowledgment, apology and healing. It is the responsibility of humans, including representatives of government and business, to acknowledge harm and restore relationships to injured ecosystems, including creatures, soil, air, rivers and waterways. The faulty paradigm that leads to objectifying, destroying and harming the natural world must be acknowledged, grieved and healed, making room for the emerging, and ancient, story of interconnection and interdependence.

This acknowledgment is vital to a successful process and to addressing the root causes of much of the crises we face, which is a powerful paradigm-shifting endeavor. Acknowledging

³⁰ Reichert, *Transformative Encounters*, 32.

harms to nature as a harm to indigenous peoples and others who live with deep relationship and kinship with the natural world is a necessary and healing opportunity for addressing the violence of our country's history. Acknowledging harms to nature as harms against ourselves helps realign the human/nature disconnect. Grief processes, which I refer to later, can be part of the healing that is necessary for moving forward.

Making amends. Making amends is a pivotal action that holds possibility for healing ecosystems and their inhabitants and communities further, taking responsibility for actions that cause harm. While traditional restitution is important, reconciliation and restoring relationship are primary. Sentencing could include apology, stopping a harmful environmental practice that puts water at risk, restoring a destroyed habitat, planting trees, or reorienting a company's bottom-line to prioritize environmental, and therefore human, wellness. Offenders could spend a number of days out in the natural world, connecting with the harmed ecosystem. Restoring people to our true origins as people of the Earth is not only the goal of these processes; it is a primary root strategy for the transformation needed to stop the trajectory toward the looming environmental and climate crises.

Restorative Justice as Cultural Change Practices

Aside from court-based cases of harm, restorative justice can also reimagine its contribution to cultural change by expanding its role from arbiter or mediator of justice to something else—a facilitator of restorative ecology. Outside of the limited number of court-based environmental justice processes, there are examples of individuals and groups in North America who may or may not identify their work as “restorative justice,” yet their work

very much aligns with the same principles and values, guided by radical relationalism. I will highlight four of them here, two of which are within the scope of the restorative justice field, and two of which have an indirect connection.

Dr. Elaine Enns has taken new strides into ecological territory, practicing a land-based restorative justice process with groups of indigenous and settler peoples throughout North America, addressing the tragic history of traumatic land conflict. Her 25-year experience with restorative justice has expanded to include the land itself and indigenous peoples through workshops, writings, and facilitated experiences of reconciliation. She specifically seeks “restorative solidarity” between descendants of settlers/colonizers and indigenous peoples, working mostly with faith communities, advocating for white descendants to do their own work of recognizing and honestly constructing their own family narratives of settlement, and also to be open to learning from indigenous communities.

We need to listen to how indigenous communities are identifying harms, needs, and responsibilities, and investigate our past and present complicity. The just-completed Canadian Truth and Reconciliation process gave us an extraordinary opportunity to do this. Then our churches can covenant to become true “Treaty People,” working with First Nations to make things as right as possible. This can include covenants of accountability, restitution, reparation, and (ideally) reconciliation.³¹

Enns’ work is based on an innate understanding of the interconnection between people and land, specifically a lived-out history of traumatic conflict based on very different values of

³¹ Enns, “Settler Response-ability,” 37.

land. A white colonizing orientation could be summarized as being rooted in the seeds of instrumentalism—land to be developed and owned and used—whereas an indigenous people’s orientation is rooted in the seeds of radical relationalism—land as sacred relationship. This conflict of values led ultimately to the theft of land and subjugation and genocide of indigenous peoples that characterize early American history. Enns is offering us not only the opportunity of coming to terms with our complicity in the violence that dispossessed an entire people group, but to open ourselves to alternative ways of living into the future shaped by relations with indigenous peoples and their distinctly relational ontologies with the Earth.

Radical Joy for Hard Times is a worldwide community that is based in the United States, dedicated to “bringing meaning, beauty, and value to places that have been damaged by human or natural acts.”³² This is an example of work that is not named as restorative justice, yet is deeply aligned with its values within a radical relationalism paradigm. Radical Joy seeks to restore wounded places through embodied relationship and listening, reconnecting community and repairing harm. “Rad Joy educates, supports, and connects communities around the world to create Earth Exchanges, experiential gatherings in which we visit wounded places, get to know them as they are now, share our stories of what they mean to us, and make a simple, spontaneous work of art there.”³³ This initiative is deeply restorative, providing a means for community to develop around renewed relationship with the Earth; this is a beautiful example of work inviting people to *re-member* themselves directly within the ecological fabric of life. As Dr. Muraca

³² Radical Joy for Hard Times, 1-2.

³³ Ibid., 4-5.

points out regarding radical relationalism, “By understanding our own experience we gain access to the understanding of *actual, constitutive relatedness*.”³⁴

Center for Restorative Practices is located in Santa Rosa, California, offering resources and trainings based on restorative justice principles. Their mission is to implement “restorative practices and the way of council to the places we work and live.”³⁵ This includes a program specifically with the natural world, focused on “sustainability rooted in right relationships with the world around us.”³⁶ The Center partners with The Association of Nature & Forest Therapy to train practitioners in opening doors for people to enter into relationship with nature, not only for healing and wellness, but to be open “to what happens when people remember that we are a part of nature, not separate from it, and are related to all other beings in fundamental ways.”³⁷ This work is an ideal example of radical relationalism in practice, representing restorative justice as an agent of cultural change and conflict/crisis prevention and transformation.

The Work That Reconnects Network provides a set of resources and activities associated with Joanna Macy. The ethos of restoring and re-membering our primary relationship with the Earth is shared both by restorative justice and Joanna Macy’s work during a time she names as “The Great Turning.” This turning is the passage that defines the new emerging story governed by radical relationalism which she defines as, “...a shift from Industrial Growth Society to life-sustaining civilization.” The purpose of this work is to “bring us back into relationship with each other and with the self-healing powers in the web of life, motivating and empowering

³⁴ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 21.

³⁵ Center for Restorative Process, <http://www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com/>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Association for Nature & Forest Therapy, 6-7.

us to reclaim our lives, our communities, and our planet from corporate and colonial rule.”³⁸

Through writings, online resources, and workshops, Macy and her colleagues offer practices for experiential group processes designed to reconnect people with “our mutual belonging in a relational universe,”³⁹ awaken us to the injustice of our Industrial Growth Society, and to affirm “that our intention to act for the sake of all beings, and to become allies to all oppressed or marginalized people, can become organizing principles of our lives.”⁴⁰

More Suggestions for Restorative Justice with the Earth

The following are ideas for potential restorative practices to help practitioners who want to facilitate environmental conflict processes and/or work toward prevention of continued environmental harm to transform worldview, embody practice, and create processes to reconnect people with the reality of their relatedness with the Earth. These examples are just a few of many other possibilities that could be explored, developed, and integrated into a movement toward restoring justice, which means restoring relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. This is prevention work, building a new culture, as Muraca says, “in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures.”⁴¹

This framework challenges the Western idea of ‘nature’ as something external to society to be—depending on the dominant paradigm—preserved (nature & wilderness conservation), exploited (eco-efficiency, green economy, weak sustainability), or

³⁸ Macy, “Foundations of the Work,” 25-26.

³⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ Muraca, “Relational Values,” 35.

managed (strong sustainability, wise use). It shifts attention to a radically different understanding of the relation to the ‘territory,’ with all its inhabitants included in what can be best called a *cosmo-anthropo-vision*, in which interconnection among different levels of the real (biophysical, human, and supernatural) leads to specific society-nature relations and nature-culture regimes.⁴²

Family Constellations Work

Although most people are disconnected from their ancestral history beyond a few generations, we are at the same time deeply affected by the DNA we carry from those who walked even centuries before us.⁴³ This disconnection to both the people who were our forebears, and to the Earth in which we have been formed over the centuries, is a factor in the continuing destruction of our planetary home.

To access the wisdom needed during a time of planetary emergency, and to address complex conflicts originating in the human domination of the natural world, we need access to our own indigenous knowing. We are all native to some place, embedded within a certain family of ancestors, both human and non-human, connected by generations to land, water, and ecosystem. We can reconnect to this wisdom. Addressing and healing our ancestral roots often equates to addressing our complicity in the theft of land and displacement of Native Americans, in slaveholding, and in genocide.

⁴² Ibid., 35.

⁴³ Relethford, John, *Reflections of Our Past: How Human History is Revealed in our Genes*.

Family and human systems constellation work is specifically geared toward ancestral healing, influenced by indigenous worldviews and traditions.⁴⁴ Constellation work involves circle processes where participants are moved from a “noun-oriented” process to a “verb-oriented” process,⁴⁵ initiating a response rooted more from innate instinct and embodied connection with people and the natural world, than in our reductionist, rational mindset. The importance of this work intersects with the importance of trauma work within cases of harm, including environmental. “Victims and perpetrators at times share, at a deep soul level, the experience of their shared horror, and subsequent generations may incorporate one or both aspects of that experience.”⁴⁶ This dynamic includes the land.

Family and human constellations work can be done for individuals, families, and communities, and nature constellation work is intentionally focused on cross-species and cross-group relationships in natural systems. In circles, the people doing the work choose representatives to act as members of their family, their ancestors, and/or as non-human members of the natural world. When people enter roles in a nature constellation, “they experience in their own bodies what membership in the Greater Family means, in a specific context.”⁴⁷ Each representative will then share their experience of living out the person’s story with remarkable ability to “know things about the family system that reveal the core of an individual’s fear and symptoms.”⁴⁸ These experiences have the capacity to heal people, families and communities, even ecosystems, as they embody the practice of an underlying radical relationalism.

⁴⁴ Boring, Francesca Mason. *Connecting to Our Ancestral Past: Healing through Family Constellations, Ceremony, and Ritual*.

⁴⁵ Ibid., page #?

⁴⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

Grief Work

Restorative justice processes need to include practices that create space for tending to grief, both individually and communally, as an important element of healing wounds and relationships, developing empathy, and preventing conflict. Psychotherapist and writer Francis Weller identifies the loss of our connection with the living earth as one of the most important gateways of expressing grief. Especially during environmental conflicts or when addressing environmental harms, this gateway brings us to “directly experience the soul of the world, the *anima mundi*,”⁴⁹ as part of our own. During these times, perhaps our psyches experience not just our own grief, but that of the land or ecosystem itself.

What if, however, the feelings we have when we pass through these zones of destruction are actually arising from the land itself? What if it is the grief of the forest registering in our bodies and psyches – the sorrow of the redwoods, voles, sorrel, fern, owls, and deer, all those who lost their homes and lives as a result of this plunder of living beings? What if we are not separate from the world at all? It is our spiritual responsibility to acknowledge these losses.⁵⁰

Another way is to learn how to listen to the land’s suffering directly, as Trebbe Johnson and her group, Radical Joy for Hard Times, demonstrate in their work to grieve and restore ecologically devastated places. These experiences can move underlying valuation paradigms from instrumental or intrinsic to relational in a process of listening to the voices of the land or water or tree and the voices of people who are part of that nature.

⁴⁹ Weller, *Wild Edge*, 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

Tending to our grief is both an act of restoration and a step toward preventing harm. When grief is repressed or denied, it hides in our shadow self, but it “doesn’t sit there passively waiting to be reclaimed and redeemed; it regresses and becomes more primitive. Consequently, death rattles through our streets daily, in school shootings, suicides, murders, overdoses, gang violence, or through sanctioned sacrifice of war dead.”⁵¹ Creating space for grief during emotionally heightened times of conflict, harm and injustice is an important component of restorative processes and conflict prevention. Facilitated processes providing space to connect our grief with the sorrow of the natural world can be powerful and deeply restoring for both human and non-human.

Conversation With the Wild

Every leap across paradigms requires some kind of new training or education. Personally reconnecting in and with nature is the backbone of preparing for the work of facilitating processes and guiding others. This time in history calls us to remember how to listen to the Earth and to bring about restoration, not only to the land, but with the land.

It’s not just the land that is broken, but more importantly, our relationship with the land....We can’t meaningfully proceed with healing, with restoration, without ‘re-story-ation.’ In other words, our relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories. But who will tell them?⁵²

⁵¹ Weller, *Wild Edge*, xviii.

⁵² Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9.

Our unconscious valuation of the natural world as ‘objects’ or ‘resources’ can become apparent in this process, and can change when we encounter them in a new way. Peter Wohlleben tells about his change of heart that influenced his practices as a forester who assessed trees for their market value for many years before his perception was changed. His job working with trees as commodities had distorted the way he saw them. Ultimately, he began to remember his love of nature as a child, and cultivated his relationship to trees, leading him to write *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, a New York Times Bestseller. From his writing, we learn that trees ‘talk,’ feel, care for their young and the elderly, cooperate, and have memories. He notes, “when the capabilities of vegetative beings become known, and their emotional lives and needs are recognized, then the way we treat plants will gradually change as well.”⁵³

To have a conversation with a tree or other being, or to imagine a way out of the current crises of disconnection, requires this kind of awareness rooted in experience. Or perhaps it is the other way around. This awareness comes as we learn to converse with a tree. In the process, we cultivate our own native human wholeness. “Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life. Every path leads homeward...”⁵⁴

Radical relationalism is a deeply spiritual framework pointing to a unity among all life forms, and it stands at the heart of most religions. A small emerging movement of churches popping up across North America is leaving behind traditional church buildings and meeting

⁵³ Wohlleben, *Hidden Life of Trees*, 244.

⁵⁴ Hesse, *Wandering*, 67.

outside in their watersheds, as pre-Christian peoples did, in relationship with stars and moon, forest and crops, sea and sky. I am one of many coalition members of The Wild Church Network, representing a diverse span of Christian denominations as well as non-denominational, integrating a kind of restorative justice in the wild as spiritual practice. These ‘churches’ gather together with their local ecosystems to enlarge community. Some of them offer acknowledgment and relationship to those members (human and more-than-human) who have been traumatized by human colonization and destruction. These examples of emerging spiritual ecology offer another form of restorative justice-oriented radical relationalism.

Where Do We Go From Here?

In the shift from industrial society to living society, reconnection and relationship with the rest of the living world is called forth from a deep understanding that human destiny is radically intertwined with all natural systems and beings. A radical relationalism framework for restorative justice can help us challenge old assumptions about who and what we are in the whole ecology of life. A new story is emerging to help us re-member ourselves back into those core relationships that formed us, bringing with it new language and practices to contextualize them.

In this current 21st century, the relevance of any philosophy, practice or institution will be determined by its acknowledgment of the human connection with ecosystems and non-human species of Earth. Perhaps what we are witnessing in the world, namely the chaos of society in

crisis, is also grounds for hope, as “breakdown is a necessary part of collectively waking up from the painful illusion of separation.”⁵⁵

A new story is being born and lived out in the thoughts and lived experiences of ecotheologians, ecopsychologists, ecologists, permaculturists, beekeepers, food sovereignty farmers, poets, writers, along with cultural and spiritual leaders. Practitioners who have interest in environmental conflicts and/or concern for the planetary crisis need to have access to spaces in order to meet together to share ideas and questions. They need to create or participate in trainings tailored to implementing practices, and imaging new ones, are which rooted in radical relationalism. While resources and practices exist to address the root problems beneath the urgent ecological crises before us, there is yet much work to be done to translate these practices into conflict transformation, law and justice, and peacebuilding.

The truth is that we are already in relationship with all-that-is, even if we are not aware of it. So the question becomes, *what kind* of relationship will we choose to have with the Earth that formed us and keeps re-forming us? In an age of disconnection and destruction, radical relationalism challenges us to re-member ourselves as being intimately related with the natural world, as being part of the same ecology. We are nature. Nature is us. A restorative justice that is aligned with the Earth can create practices that listen to all stakeholders, furry and four-legged, swimming and flowing, flying, stationary, slithering, crawling, or walking on two legs, and thereby create meaningful and healing paths to bring about a holistic justice.

⁵⁵ Rich, “Recognizing the Wounds” 4.

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