

Editorial: Reconciliation, Welcoming of the Wild, and the Desire to Turn Back Time

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The theme of this special issue is People-Nature Reconciliation. Reconciliation has been defined in different ways across disciplinary contexts. In this particular context we understand reconciliation as, first, the desire to restore that which has been lost – a quality, a relationship, or a state of being (Doxtader, 2003; Murdock, 2016). Secondly, reconciliation involves bringing back together entities that have been estranged (from its Latin roots).

In a Marxist perspective, the estrangement refers to workers' alienation from the roots of their own reproduction caused by the capitalist mode of production (Sayers, 2011). In an environmental context, the estranged entities refer to the modern divide between man and nature. One can juxtapose the modern divide with the Marxist concept of alienation through the term reconciliation and through the increased social consciousness globally on the disconnection between culture and nature leading to a number of sustainability-related crises. Together the disconnection between nature and culture have increased the awareness about our own vulnerability and guilt in relation to the environment, leading to a dystopic perspective on the future as something to be avoided. Indeed, entire societies in the post-industrial west are currently threatened by extinction, exacerbated by loss of connection to nature (Soga & Gaston, 2016). Unfortunately there is little antidote to these threats and the lack of political response on a societal level is alarming. In response to the dystopic future human

beings seek reconciliation with nature through coping strategies on individual as well as collective levels. Examples of such coping strategies are various forms of animal-based recreation and ecotourism, rewilding, urban agriculture, back-to-the-land movements, simple living, the Tiny House movement, paleo-diets and naturalistic lifestyles to name a few.

In other words, the need for nature reconciliation is deeply grounded in the disillusionment of Modernity in which people look for alternatives in, among several places, past states of being which they see as more unified with nature and as more sustainable (Franklin & White, 2001). In this special issue, we ask to what extent reconciliation is a valid pursuit in modernity. We ask: what or whom exactly is being reconciled? Can we, or should we, try to approximate states in an idealized past?

What unites our six authors, Laura Tolnov Clausen, David Rudolph, Lara Tickle, Julia Rouet-Leduc, Erica von Essen and Michael Allen, is that they all show how means of nature reconciliation, while delivering some benefits, end up reproducing alienation on other levels. Rather than reconcile two alienated entities, such as nature and man, the attempt ultimately widen the gap between them.

The deliverer of reconciliation, be it the wildlife ecologist, the hunting outfitter industry or a wind power corporation supplying renewable energy

to a community, is an agent that offers sought-after reconciliation in modernity. But she is also one who demands something in return. As Laura Tolnov Clausen and David Rudolph frame it in (Dis)Embedding the Wind – on People-Climate Reconciliation in Danish Wind Power Planning, the provider shows up “like death walking around knocking on doors with a contract”. Reconciliation is thus a well-meaning project, but can in practice entail making a deal with the devil.

In Lara Tickle’s *The Practice of Hunting as a Way to Transcend Alienation from Nature*, a phenomenological study of Swedish hunters seeking to reclaim their natural heritage as hunters of wildlife, participants genuinely experience an individual level reconciliation to primal, atavistic and long-lost forms of predation in the natural world. They respond against a societal process of alienation of people from the sources and modes of production by entering an embodied, intimate relationship with the material base from which they have been separated. In the process of doing so, nature is paradoxically reproduced as an ‘other’. In reacting against capitalism and industrialization seeking the authentic and natural, whole industries now cater to a commodified nature reconciliation experience tailored to the convenience and consumptive preferences of the modern sport hunter. Indeed, claims of authenticity in hunting become tenuous when an app for Stockholm hunters matches their preferences to select regions and hunts where everything has been taken care of by the outfitter. Game fully stocked, tracked, fed, and ushered in the right direction, and at the end of the day, the paying customer returns to the comforts of her city home while the meat is processed and sold by someone else. To Lara Tickle, this sort of development to reconcile man with her ancient heritage means that the hunter is still “alienated from significant parts of the work process and their own reproductive efforts.” Humans are not then reconciled with a wild, primal nature, but to a commodified version of it. This version of nature is predicated on the separation between nature and culture, and people and animals, in order to motivate its existence and not on a deeper reconciliation with the reproductive basis of ourselves.

Julia Rouet-Leduc & Erica von Essen, and Erica von Essen & Michael P. Allen, look at the practice of rewilding as means of restoring lost ecosystems

and natural habitats, through an empirical and theoretical approach respectively. They both declare that efforts to restore degraded nature can end up inviting new forms of alienation both in relation to the local community’s attachment to their environments, and to their relationship with state authority. Indeed, conservation directives now alienate local communities through conservation (Bauer, Wallner, & Hunziker, 2009). In Julia Rouet-Leduc & Erica von Essen’s contribution *The Compromises of Rewilding*, the indigenous Sami are examined as a community who do not at present think of themselves as in need of reconciliation to their local environment, akin to what is being suggested in the proposed conservation initiative ‘Rewilding Lapland’. They have been living closely to it and used it for many centuries through reindeer herding. What they instead, desire, may be a political and social reconciliation to the Swedish state. This is the dimension perceived responsible for harms and wrongs, and in need of remediation - not the natural environment.

Erica von Essen & Michael P. Allen’s *Political Deliberation and Compromise: Why People-Nature Reconciliation Must be about People-People Reconciliation*, addresses the problems of top-down, state-implemented or internationally ordained rewilding schemes in local communities and the estrangement of citizens from authorities from whom directives are issued. The means by which rewilding is to be delivered are also paradoxical when presented as overcoming the inauthenticity of modernity and the harms of industrialization and capitalism: indeed, ecosystems services and natural capital framework by which rewilding is to be realized serve to further commoditize nature.

Finally, Laura Tolnov Clausen and David Rudolph argue that modern developments and rationalization have eroded community ties, infrastructure and culture in their case study region. They find that the residents are alienated from their local economy through the imposition of a series of capitalistic disembedding mechanisms, not unlike ecosystem services noted above. There is no economic connection to the material basis of the land, and hence no ‘living economy’. They show how renewable energy transition in the form of a wind power energy enterprise in Denmark acts as both the poison and the antidote to their alienation. It is pitched as a local

investment in community ownership that can reconcile people with their land, place and economy, but reality betrays an increased alienation of people from the latter. Indeed, the green energy investment ends up benefiting large landowners and the corporation, resulting in the further loss of control by local people over their environment and economy.

This special issue shows that although a well-meaning project, nature reconciliation is often conceptually incoherent, by reproducing alienation. This may be intuitive, inasmuch as reconciliation is sustained by alienation. Thus reconciliation initiatives cannot ever 'cure' feelings of estrangement from the natural world, otherwise they will cease to be thought of as reconciliation and merely become the status quo. To this end, when reconciliation markedly fails, it can breed counter-resistance by those subjected to it, as in Laura Tolnov Clausen & David Rudolph's wind power opponents or skeptics to rewilding in Julia Rouet-Leduc & Erica von Essen and Erica von Essen & Michael P. Allen.

Reconciliation is useful as a concept, Erica von Essen & Michael P. Allen argue, because it reveals shared ideals and norms of what society wants and aspires to. From here, we can engage in democratic processes that translate ideals into concrete actions and policies. This means that reconciliation is not just a concept borne out of dystopic societal conditions, in terms of reflecting a collective environmental and existential anxiety in the modern world. It also has an important transformative potential in moving forward the kind of world we want, and the relations with nature and each other we seek to return to or promote in the future. The important issues are

what and whom should be reconciled, and in what ways, and must be put to deliberative proceedings so that the reconciliation project does not become a top-down implementation of the vision of elites or a privatization and marketization of common societal challenges.

The contribution of our special issue is to demonstrate the diverse and evolving directions that nature reconciliation is currently taking. This means we identify contexts that become experimental arenas for initiatives aimed at overcoming alienation from nature, and what they can and cannot offer for the prospect of individual and societal reconciliation. We ultimately call for more research on this topic and how the apparent need for reconciliation can be transformed from individual fragmented coping strategies, as a response to a dystopic future, to a societal mission for the sustainable future needed for the survival of humankind. While it is evident that no sustainable future exist beyond our everyday life practices, it is also evident, that the societal mission for a more sustainable future will not be accomplished by turning back time and searching for lost states of being. Only by confronting the future together, through a deliberative, cultural and political transformation, integrating human values and knowledge, we will be able to create the change needed for a better future.

Our humble hope is that this special issue can be one of many contributions to the development of a scholarship of alternative futures and changes as a response to all the 'crises disciplines' dominating scholarship today.

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