

This piece was written on a sailing ship, when part of an international group exploring the concept of 'wild pedagogy' through journeying in the Western Isles of Scotland. It was written for and adapted for the book coming out of that experience.

Crex Crex Collective: Hebrides, I., Affifi, R., Blenkinsop, S., Gelter, H., Gilbert, D., Gilbert, J., Irwin, R., Jensen, A., Jickling, B., Knowlton Cockett, P., Morse, M., Sitka-Sage, M.,

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Re-membering

Re-membering: an evocation, and a call to action which exposes and challenges the forces of dis-membering, or dismemberment. It asserts the need for integration, for complexity and sustainable systems, for wholeness, for putting things back together. And it assumes increasing importance in a world where communities, nature, and people are torn apart, put asunder, and their integrity compromised. In the process of re-membering, we find ourselves engaged, more whole, and more fully present.

The word seems to hold both richness and power, implying both critique and healing. Let's look at a few possible meanings or implications, which – I suggest – suggest a unitive pattern.

First perhaps, is the subtle emergence of trust and communication amongst our colloquium group members, building a level of shared meaning and purpose, which embraces both the individual and collective levels.

Second, this experience, of being a member of the group - and of immersion in the awe-inspiring landscape of Argyll - invites a gradual re-membering of ourselves as whole persons – cognitive, affective, emotional, spiritual, practical – that hints at a state of being that is so often distorted and squashed by the pressures of what we refer to as 'ordinary life'.

Re-membering also connotes re-learning – opening to the practicality and wisdom of previous generations, particularly evoked in this beautiful but stark landscape where the ghosts of once-lived cultures whisper through Gaelic place-names.

Re-membering invites – in fact necessitates – sensitivity and receptivity to the Other, such that identity – who we are at that moment – is affected by our engagement.

Re-membering is seeing with new eyes, is renewal, is wonderment, requiring an extended ethical sensibility. And so it also carries pain and sadness for that which is lost without the hope of retrieval, anger for senseless and structural violence against people and nature.

Yet it also carries a vision and lays down a challenge – to defend human and natural community, to build cultural and ecological diversity, to value and recognise wholeness and integrity. It asks us to re-integrate humanity and nature, and points to the illusion – delusion – that humans can survive without striving for the mutual flourishing of both; without recognising our crucial co-dependency.

The concept of re-membering offers a kind of coherence to our diverse efforts to heal, and to our critique of the dominant pathologies of our culture that through intent or default, tend towards simplification, increasing dependency, and vulnerability at all levels.

Stephen Sterling

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