

Dr. Susan Mossman Riva
Creighton University
Taos Institute Conference, February 2026
Mercy University, New York City, New York

Co-Creating Social Worlds: Narrative Transformation as a Pathway to Integral Human Development and Wayfinding

Introduction: Narrative At-One-Ment and Autoethnography as Mediating Practice

This paper explores the transformative potential of autoethnography and narrative practices for co-creating social worlds in a time of global disruption and polycrisis. Drawing from methodological innovation, I introduce the *Transformagram Learning Model*, which employs new genres of autoethnography—most notably pedagogical and transformative autoethnography—as a means to reimagine our personal, public, and political lives. In conversation with the evocative and performative traditions established by Ellis and Bochner (2000), and inspired by Kenneth Gergen's call for future forming research, this paper argues that storying—when rooted in holistic, spiritual, and ecological reflexivity—can foster integral human development.

Grounded in both lived experience and interdisciplinary theory, the *Transformagram Learning Model* invites life-long learners to use methods of self-experimentation to cultivate moral imagination, resilience, and regenerative ways of being. This approach to autoethnography integrates creative expression, narrative inquiry, and pedagogical frameworks to support the co-construction of relationally attuned, ethically engaged, and spiritually grounded lifeways. It positions autoethnography as both a tool for *crafting peace*—through the transformation of conflict narratives—and a *practice of wayfinding* that helps individuals navigate complexity, uncertainty, and ecological disruption with deeper purpose and coherence.

Within a continuum of conflict resolution practices, autoethnography offers a distinctive method for *intra-personal* resolution, transforming inner tensions and unexamined narratives into sites of reflection and renewal. I propose an expanded application of autoethnographic practice that integrates the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and ecological dimensions of human experience into an interconnected continuum of *narrative mediation*. This continuum positions autoethnography not only as a recognized qualitative method, but also as a relational and transformational practice of mediation—one that aligns personal storytelling with processes of collective healing and ecological attunement. In this light, autoethnography becomes both a method and a way of being that supports the co-creation of more just, compassionate, and ecologically conscious social worlds.

In the face of escalating ecological crises, wars, social fragmentation, and personal disorientation, the search for meaning has become increasingly urgent. Autoethnography—a method that integrates personal narrative with cultural analysis—offers a fertile ground for transformation. This paper introduces the concept of *narrative at-one-ment*, a process by which disparate elements of our personal, public, and political lives are gathered into coherent storylines that offer both healing and direction. The hyphen in “at-one-ment”

signals a reconciliation of inner fragmentation and external alienation through narrative integration. Autoethnography, particularly when approached through a transformational, spiritual, ecological, and pedagogical lens, becomes a practice of narrative shapeshifting—one that allows us to reconfigure our life courses in meaningful ways.

Narrative Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding through Story Mandalas

Peace studies and narrative conflict resolution offer a rich context for applying pedagogical and transformative autoethnography. In my recent book *Crafting Peace Through Autoethnography: Reflexive Pedagogies for Navigating Difficult Times* (Riva, 2025), I illustrate how autoethnographic methods can be used to bear witness to conflict through mutual accompaniment while transforming personal and collective narratives. Examples from my courses at Creighton University show how autoethnography becomes a transformational method for crafting peace not only within but across social worlds.

The story mandala serves as a compass for navigating inner conflict, social rupture, and cultural trauma. It allows for aesthetic and emotional integration, reflecting a holistic vision of peace and well-being that fosters narrative coherency. This aesthetic form arises through a *methodological mandala*—a reflexive framework that interlaces interdisciplinary approaches to transformation, drawing from peace studies, narrative inquiry, spiritual practice, and ecological awareness. The methodological mandala provides the structural grounding from which the story mandala emerges, allowing theory, experience, and creativity to converge in a meaningful and restorative process.

In pedagogical contexts, this approach calls for a transformation of how we teach and research in the social sciences. Accompaniment becomes central—narrative accompaniment, research-as-accompaniment, and the co-creation of knowledge as a dialogical and participatory practice. By embedding peacebuilding into educational practice, we model ethical, future forming research that inspires learners to become agents of social transformation within their own lifeworlds.

Mediatorship and Narrative Transformation

An expanded vision of autoethnographic practice emerges through the concept of *mediatorship*, which enkindles conflict wisdom and guides integral human development. In *Autoethnography A Tool For Integral Human Development And Wayfinding* (S.Riva, 2026), I present mediatorship as extending beyond narrative conflict resolution to serve as an autoethnographic pathway toward transformation. The accompanying workbook offers a stepwise process culminating in a beautified story mandala, with narrative practices that emphasize the relational nature of life story. Here, the autoethnographic Self is not isolated, but actively engaged in dynamic exchange with social, historical, and ecological worlds through ritualized and creative writing.

Within this framework, *autoethnographicity* traces the lines of flight that emerge through transformational learning, revealing how identity, understanding, and relationship are continually reshaped through narrative inquiry. In this light, autoethnography becomes not only a reflective tool but a generative and reparative practice—capable of holding space for

the tensions of our time and contributing to the co-creation of more just, inclusive, and life-affirming social worlds.

Through autoethnographic practice, the multiple meaning-bearing threads of our life stories are gathered, honoured, and raised into coherence through *narrative atonement*—a process that sanctifies the lived experience. When these story threads are elevated with intention, they offer more than insight; they become pathways toward deeper understanding, reconciliation, and inner peacefulness. While narrative conflict resolution often focuses on interpersonal dynamics and the mediation of external disputes, autoethnography opens a mediating space for working through the *intra-personal* layers of tension—those inner fractures and unresolved experiences that shape how we relate to Self, others, and the world. By engaging conflict and illness narratives as dynamic templates for transformation, autoethnography allows us to alchemize suffering into meaning and to reconfigure the contours of our becoming. In this way, storytelling becomes a regenerative act—a movement toward wholeness.

Writing itself creates a tension. In the words of Henry James in the *Middle Years*, "We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art." (James, 1893, p. 11). Autoethnographic practice thus accepts the uncertainty that James describes, transforming doubt into a generative force through which narrative reflection mediates inner tensions and gradually reveals pathways toward reconciliation, healing, and narrative wholeness.

Transformative Autoethnography: Wayfinding through the Noosphere

A central feature of transformative autoethnography is the integration of ecological and spiritual dimensions of lived experience. The climate emergency and our growing sense of planetary disorientation demand more than empirical data or rational argumentation; they require narrative practices that activate *experiential knowledgeability*—a form of living wisdom grounded in embodied awareness, interconnection, and moral purpose.

Ecological autoethnography responds to this call by placing the Self in relation to the Earth Community and to more-than-human others. It invites us to "home in" to the inner compass that attunes us to the sacredness of life, the urgency of planetary regeneration, and a sense of belonging *in/on* Earthship. In my work, I refer to this as activating the *homing-in mechanism*—a sensibility that emerges through questing and iterative narrative practices of remembering, recounting, and repairing.

Spiritual autoethnography complements this ecological orientation by providing a contemplative space for meaning-making that reaches beyond the Self. Through dreams, visions, and synchronicities, the autoethnographer is invited into a dialogue with the noosphere—the planetary mind or collective consciousness that unites humanity. This narrative field allows for intuitive insight and the emergence of transpersonal guidance, making visible the hidden threads that link our personal crises with collective transformation. By combining ecological and spiritual reflexivity, autoethnographers become wayfinders—charting regenerative lifepaths through the dense terrain of contemporary challenges. This form of autoethnography not only heals the Self but also helps co-create lifeworlds that

honor the interconnectedness of all beings, echoing Berry's *dream of the Earth* and the call for a new story (Berry, 2015).

Conclusion: Toward Flourishing Lifeworlds and Integral Praxis

Autoethnography must now evolve beyond its methodological origins. It must become a *future forming* methodology—one that enables scholar-practitioners to show up more integrally in the face of global complexity. As the crises of our time deepen, we must develop methodologies that do not merely analyze or critique the world but participate in its transformation. Autoethnography supports this imperative by weaving together the inner and outer, the personal and political, the ecological and spiritual.

Through this work, I invite fellow participants in the Co-Creating Social Worlds Conference to explore how autoethnographic practice can serve as a collective vessel, or *storyship*, for reimagining our lives, our institutions, and our future. In the face of disconnection and fragmentation, may our life stories become acts of reweaving—threads of coherence, healing, and possibility.

References

- Berry, T. (2015). *The dream of the Earth*. Counterpoint. (Original work published 1988)
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Sage.
- Gergen, K. J. (2015). *From mirroring to world-making: Research as future forming*. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 45(3), 287–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12075>
- James, H. (1893, May). The middle years. *Scribner's Magazine*, 13, 507–517.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford
- Riva, S. M. (2025). *Crafting Peace Through Autoethnography: Reflexive Pedagogies for Navigating Difficult Times*. Emerald Publishing.
- Riva, S. M. (2026). *Autoethnography A Tool for Integral Human Development and Wayfinding*. IGI Global. (Accepted for publication).

Gutenberg Project link:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/32649/32649-h/32649-h.htm>