

“Earthbound geographies” and Land-Based Activism:
An Investigation of Relationships and Land Reform on the Isle of Eigg

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*For my parents and Rosie,
who taught me about unconditional love and finding joy in the simple things.*

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the political possibilities opened up on Scotland's Isle of Eigg in 1997 when the then-landlord-owned island was bought out in a community ownership scheme that has empowered islanders to step outside of conventional western property ownership, and begin to engage with the island as what Asch calls a relational other. I argue the island is best understood as a Deleuzian assemblage, an entity greater than the sum of its parts, that is perceived and related to by the islanders as an agential companion deserving of love and care. This perception engenders a rejection of western dominance-based thinking and generates more productive ways of moving forward, in the face of irreversible human-generated climate change, for western humans. The mode of relating to land on Eigg is reminiscent of indigenous lifeways and offers hope that more just relationships to the land may be possible for us all.

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Note: The first phrase of my title, “Earthbound geographies,” is taken from Hayden Lorimer’s seminal essay “Herding Memories of Humans and Animals” (2006, p. 499), which, though rarely cited directly, is reflected everywhere throughout this thesis in its invaluable contribution to my way of thinking about the Isle of Eigg and its stories.

Chapter 1: Introduction

*Who owns this landscape?
has owning anything to do with love?
For it and I have a love-affair, so nearly human
we even have quarrels. —
When I intrude too confidently
it rebuffs me with a wind like a hand
or puts in my way
a quaking bog or a loch
where no loch should be. Or I turn stonily
away, refusing to notice
the rouged rocks, the mascara
under a dripping ledge, even
the tossed, the stony limbs waiting...*

*Who owns this landscape? —
The millionaire who bought it or
the poacher staggering downhill in the early morning
with a deer on his back?*

*Who possesses this landscape? —
The man who bought it or
I who am possessed by it?*

*False questions, for
this landscape is
masterless
and intractable in any terms
that are human...*

*Or has it come to this,
that this dying landscape belongs
to the dead, the crofters and fighters
and fishermen whose larochs
sink into the bracken
by Loch Assynt and Loch Crocach? —
to men trampled under the hoofs of sheep
and driven by deer to
the ends of the earth — to men whose loyalty
was so great it accepted their own betrayal
by their own chiefs and whose descendants now
are kept in their place
by English businessmen and the indifference
of a remote and ignorant government.*

—Norman MacCaig, excerpt from *A Man in Assynt* (1967; a shorter excerpt is found on a banner displayed in the Isle of Eigg community hall) (Scottish Poetry Library, 2014)

This thesis is the product of my attempt to understand how one island community thinks about its island (and, I might even dare to say, vice versa, though this latter notion is one I am unable to address here in the way it deserves). The particular community and the particular island, Scotland's Isle of Eigg, are of interest because of a landmark community buyout that 17 years ago saw the "land" of Eigg pass into ownership not of any individuals, but of a community trust that holds it in common and makes decisions based on the interests of the community. Since then, the island and its humans have together made remarkable progress in establishing a relationship of care and support that is overall not harmful to the physical island. In the process, as many of the people I interviewed were quick to point out, they have also managed to improve the economy (though jobs are still a concern) and imbue the island with a sense of "vitality" it had, the consensus goes, lost as job opportunities deteriorated and out-migration increased post-World War II.

Suddenly, with the buyout and a lot of hard work, the fusty Scottish island community that had once been dragged through the forward march of time by an eccentric and constantly struggling collection of old crofting families and new crofting hippies became, by virtue of the efforts of that same collection of people, a vibrant locus of innovation and creativity. Today's community, born of a happy convergence of love of the island and determination to find a way of making a livelihood there, is not quite like anywhere else. The crofting ethos and history, as well as the model of community ownership of previously landlord-owned land, Eigg shares with a growing number of communities elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Because the crofting system itself is unique to that part of the world, such community ownership schemes are

unique too. I believe they offer a productive site for questioning what Tully describes (citing Karl Polanyi) as “the privatization of land and other resources as if they are commodities like any other commodity” (2011, p. 29) and all the processes of enclosure and the disembedding of humans from their land that go along with that kind of thinking. This is a worldview Pignarre and Stengers would characterize as “captured” by the spell of capitalism, which bewitches us as a society into thinking there are no other alternatives (2011).

The community action on the Isle of Eigg, in stark opposition to this view, has created a living, breathing example of how western humans might choose, to do and be otherwise and be successful in this enterprise. In this project, I wanted to figure out how the people of Eigg made such a vast and promising change happen. I tried to approach my project as what Tully calls an “eco-citizen,” a “co-operative citizen,” or a “Gaia citizen” myself: to “disregard the culture-nature divide at the base of Western citizenship [and]... derive the fundamental duties and rights of democracy in the first instance from [my] membership in the webs of ecological relationships in which democracy takes place and on which all forms of life depend” (Tully, 2011, p. 29). I came to this research, then, with the intention of engaging democratically not just with the people of the Isle of Eigg, but with the island itself, refusing the dichotomy between nature and culture and choosing not to prioritize the “human” in matters of agency. Instead I centred my inquiry on relationships—giving, with Tully (2011), Stengers (2012), Asch (2011), Haraway (2007) and a host of other scholars, “primordial importance to the making of relations” (Stengers, 2012, p. 8).

Aside from my basic theoretical understanding that webbed relationships underlie

all life, what I found was that the relationship on which the actions of the human members of the Eigg community depend is that with the island itself. The isle, itself the product of an ongoing web of relations between all kinds of individuals, is an entity with a distinct identity different and greater than the simple sum of all its parts. The relationship, which I'll examine later through ethnographic analysis, is akin to what anthropologists normally imagine as "indigenous" relationships to the land, but unlike the conventional perception of such relationships, it was not so much spiritual (though spirituality was certainly a component of it) but companionable. I found the language with which to think about this relationship, and write about it, in Haraway's (2007) and Tsing's (2012) work on companion species relations. The island as an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) becomes an entity possible to imagine as a companion, and it is this, I argue, that inspires the care with which its humans relate to it. Part of what makes this possible, I'll suggest, is people's attentiveness to the island in the here-and-now, which grounds their concerns about the future, both pragmatic (having enough fresh water to last the summer) and abstract (not ending up covered by rising ocean waters in the next few decades). Tully's concept of the "co-operative citizen" is useful to describe the islanders' way of being in the world. He explains this concept as a name for people who

step *out* of the progressive temporality that has defined modernity since the eighteenth century and *into* the spatial-temporality of the here and now—the present moment—as the locale of politics and ethics. This revolutionary step, which, as Pierre Hadot has argued, was thought to be possible only for mystics and monks on the margins of modernity, is shown to be realizable in the most ordinary practices of everyday life. (2011, p. 33-34)

I think the perception of the island-as-companion has allowed the humans of Eigg

to expand their capacity for familial love to include the island itself, as Tsing shows western humans are able to do with animal companions (2012). It is on this premise that I focus my analysis, in the hopes of illuminating the practices of everyday life that make the “eco-citizen” (Tully, 2011, p. 29) of Eigg, so that we might, as a global human community, better understand both the practices that make possible one ecologically just human community, and the ways of thinking that lie beneath these practices. The two, of course, are intertwined—and sometimes inverted, with practices underlying thinking.

Lorimer’s brief literature review on gardening is a good example of such a scenario:

Creativity and texture are most compelling and expressive as they emerge in practice (or at least during people’s descriptions of practice). In the ‘lay geographies’ of the allotment [Crouch] discloses how the repetitive doing of things is affirmative of, and can impel, a powerful sense of being, or ‘practice ontology’... Terrestrial activities on the vegetable patch offer access to metaphysical concerns, not least the spatialities of doing and the sensuous nature of becoming. Crouch explores how far versions of ritualized and habitual performance allow for the openness in conduct and unexpected potentials in our performativities, and how the unremarkable labour and physical proximities of gardening can have a remarkable currency for the individual subject, allowing for periods of ease in life where we ‘hold on’ and moments when we reach out and ‘go further’... Hitchings and Cloke and Jones... are more obviously attentive to the intimacies and intersubjectivities shared between planets, trees and people. These entangled relationships, that are found to incorporate love, care, need and (commercial) demand, are also a means to consider place-making agencies and therapeutic feelings of dwelling. (2005, p. 85)

Practices, in this conceptualization, can be the impetus for people reaching out and “going further”; we might encounter and befriend the island-companion in the process of caring for it, or perhaps the island-companion is that which inspires care. My exploratory research on the Isle of Eigg was not intensive enough to determine which came first: the care, the companionship, or the community buyout. I am not even sure if that is a question that can be answered. Instead, it is my hope to offer as vivid a picture as

possible of the here-and-now on Eigg; the practice of eco-citizenship, after all, is located as much or more in the going-about of daily life as it is in the factors leading to the community buyout itself. The buyout was a momentous event that makes many of the cooperative citizenship practices on Eigg today possible, but the feelings, practices and relationships that allow it to persist run even deeper.

My main research question, when I started my project, was: *What do crofter relations and histories tell us of the kinds of relationships, thinking, experiences and everyday conditions that are behind moves to collective land ownership?* I realized soon after I arrived on Eigg that I would need to revise my focus slightly, and shift my perspective more towards the present: the day-to-day enactment of the choice of collective land ownership, versus the initial move to it. Daily life on Eigg today offers a great many insights in response to my question, but I realized that it is more fruitful to think about how the present is lived than how a past event was made—though I do discuss this briefly near the end of this thesis. Either way, what matters is that on Eigg, a small but strong group of western people chose, formally and informally, to reject capitalist notions of land ownership and both embrace and grow a different way of existing in relation to the non-human.

Throughout my discussion, I also investigate two secondary research questions. First, what characterizes the “indigeneity” that both Kenrick (2011b) and Hunter (1995) attribute to crofters, and does it challenge our assumptions about how western people relate to land? Second, Kenrick argues that the discourses of indigeneity that underlie the crofters’ movement have a “generative potential” because they allow people to recognize their interdependence with their surroundings (2011b, p. 201). My third question, then, is:

how might the crofters' movements advance, inform, or act as an example for other movements towards social and ecological justice—what is their *generative potential*?

Justin Kenrick, the Scottish anthropologist and activist who is in part the inspiration for this project—and who himself called Eigg home for a period of time—asserts that part of what makes the community buyouts on the West Coast of Scotland particularly special, like that of Eigg, is that the people involved have captured “one important skill for rebuilding political, community, and personal resilience: the ability to think in a Commons way” (2009, p. 1). For him, that means assuming that we live in a world of abundance, upon which we all depend and which will always provide enough for all; and assuming, as well, that the world is made up of relations. “Any problems stem from a breakdown in relations, and solutions are primarily about restoring those relationships” (2009, p. 3). Commons thinking is in contrast with the *dominance* perspective present in most of the West, which assumes “a world of scarcity where discreet entities are brought into relationship through processes of control and competition,” and in which “well-being ultimately depends on controlling the devalued other (whether other life forms, other humans, or other aspects of oneself).” The mythical “Tragedy of the Commons” is, rather, a “Tragedy of Open Access” (as Garrett Hardin, who invented the original term, admits) (2009, p. 3) or in Tully’s words, “a tragedy of privatization”: the process of privatization abstracts natural resources from the webs of interdependence in which we all already exist and re-embeds them in the capitalist free market—resulting in the destruction of those webs of interdependence, and the subsequent ecological crisis we are now living (2011, p. 29).

In contrast to the models that most of us recognize as providing “plenty for

everyone,” the islanders of Eigg go about their modern lives *without* exerting much harmful impact on the island itself. I argue here that this is because they have extended their capacity to love so that they are able to love the island itself, and to relate to it as a companion. I imagine the island at the meeting point of the Deleuzian assemblage and the companion species; as a mind-permeating entity that becomes perceptible when anthropomorphism is put to work to produce care for the island-as-companion. Here, geographies of material knowing and cross-species friendship weave a shared human-nonhuman path through the present, to a future expanded by new relational-political possibilities made thinkable once the idea of total human sovereignty over land has been discredited. What is exciting in all of this is not just all that Eigg has accomplished, but the symbol of hope and possibility it offers—in this, our time of drastic and potentially irreversible climate change, and of a free market economy that pushes for growth at the expense of the planet and all its inhabitants—for all of us: that things might yet change.

This is why responses like the Eigg buyout are so interesting and important. I invite my reader to imagine with me, for a moment, a society in which children are brought up to understand that we are all already and always entangled in a web of relationships, and that each person’s, animal’s and plant’s wellbeing depends on that of all the others. This is a worldview that’s taken for granted in many indigenous societies, yet is entirely foreign to most western-born people. How would such a worldview change our decisions about how to exploit natural resources? Might it make us more likely to provide for Others (human or non-human) in need, and might any increased propensity to help Others inspire us to trust that, we, too, will be provided for? I invite you to imagine a world in which exploitation for accumulation is no longer relevant, and to imagine the

possibilities for regeneration such a shift in thinking might open up.

The story of Eigg is not the only example of a model that might move us in that direction, but it is a starting point, a way into thinking about systems that change, and people who regain hope for their own future happiness and security as well as harmony of their lives with the land. Here, I attempt to shed some light on how such a thing came to pass—and how it continues to come to pass, in every day and each moment, the constant renewals that make a life of harmony possible—and offer some reflections on how similar processes might be set in motion in other communities. I attempt to do so through my own and others' stories of lived interaction with the land and with one another, and to pull out, at the end, some of the threads that connect these stories, in order to spread some of their wisdom that may support other movements for ecological justice. I believe, with Donna Haraway, that we “live with each other in the flesh in ways not exhausted by our ideologies. Stories are much bigger than ideologies. In that is our hope” (2003, p. 17).

This project is, at its heart, about trying to tease out the feelings and lived experiences—willful and unconscious—that characterize the non-exploitative relationship with the land that has emerged on Eigg. I do this through a discussion and line of thought that interweaves what I've learned by reading academic theory in the study of anthropology with what I learned throughout three weeks' worth of slow and satisfying days working on a croft, several conversations over tea with people who live on Eigg, and a series of long, romantic walks on the beach with a little girl named Rosie—half border collie, half bearded collie, all love. Rosie is present throughout this thesis, an animal familiar who helped to show me the magic of Eigg in her constant and

pure delight, her sharing of the secrets of the island's topography, and her faithful companionship—a steady reminder that I was never alone that persisted even during times when I was exploring the island without her.

My conversations over tea (which I refer to throughout—more conventionally—as interviews) all took place in September of 2013. I interviewed Maggie Fyffe, who spearheaded the Eigg buyout and today is instrumental in making the Isle of Eigg Trust work, on September 18th; Camille Dressler, the island historian and a passionate social entrepreneur, on September 22nd; Lucy Conway on September 25th and her partner Eddie Scott on September 28th; Neil Robertson and Sue Hollands, my hosts, on, respectively, September 27th and 29th; Karen Helliwell also on the 27th; and Stuart Miller or “Scruff” in his polytunnel on September 26th. The informal conversations, a part of my participant observation, and anonymous interviews I cite throughout, all also took place during September 2013. In the body of this thesis, as the dates are very close to one another, I have chosen not to include specific dates with each quotation in order to avoid interrupting the narrative flow. I do make it clear, wherever I refer to these interviews, that I am referring to an interview and whom the interview was with (where I have permission to share people's names).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I have two goals. First, I offer the reader a glimpse into the long human heritage of the isle and its community, which is important both to give context for understanding the present and, on a deeper level, to show some of the reverence for nature that is deeply rooted in Celtic culture in general, and Highland Scotland culture in particular. The latter is a history that seems to seep out of the island. It's present in the low-lying stone croft houses and fences, the round ruins of a humble

monastery on the hillside, and the rows of bumpy pastureland: evidence of farming practices designed to once in a while give the fields a break from productivity to recuperate and regenerate. It is present, also, in the rich sunsets, the moss-lined caves, and the sleepy sheep that seem to set the pace of life for everyone.

The second goal of my next chapter is to offer the reader a taste of what it feels like to be on Eigg. I try to accomplish this through the inclusion of more fanciful, less academic writing and storytelling, and the juxtaposition of my historical discussion with thick description of the present. Many scholars have remarked on the socially constructed nature of the western idea of “wilderness”; no deep forest, they say, is truly untouched by human influence (see, for example, Cronon, 1996). When I am in the expanses of such so-called constructed “wildness” that make me fall in love over and over again with my own country, Canada, I find it easy to forget this, at least on a visceral level. Not so in Highland Scotland, a landscape that for me feels as if the ghosts of human history are everywhere. I hope to show a little bit of this feeling of the presence of history in the first chapter of this thesis; as well as, of course, offering—in the first chapter and throughout—as vivid an account as possible of my own experiences wandering, working and whiling away the time on the Isle of Eigg.

Following these pages of storied invitation to “speculative fabulation” (Stengers, 2012, p. 15), I move to a more conventional formulation of a thesis, beginning in Chapters 3 and 4 by situating my thinking in, respectively, the scholarly substantive and theoretical work with which I engaged throughout this project. In Chapter 3 I explore the current body of literature on land reform in Highland Scotland, and point out a gap in scholarly engagement with land reform activists concerns’ around sustainability, as well

as with the lived experiences of community ownership. In Chapter 4, I take some time to explain my theoretical background, which consists of the relational and affect-oriented perspectives I hinted at above. I touch on “islandness”—the idea that there is a certain essence of small islands experienced by people who live on them, which has a strong influence on their actions and their way of life. I conclude Chapter 4 with an in-depth examination of the conceptualization that I have come up with to think through people’s experiences of *this* island, specifically the idea of the island as companion.

I go on with a chapter explaining my multi-species methods, Chapter 5, and then move into ethnographic analysis in Chapters 6 through 9. Chapter 6 explores the potential of careful attentiveness to the nonhuman world (which I observed on Eigg) for achieving respectful human-nonhuman relationships. Chapter 7 uses detailed ethnographic accounts to substantiate my claim that the people of Eigg imagine their island as a companion, while Chapter 8 explores their deep-seated pragmatism with relation to their concerns about sustainability. In Chapter 9, I recapitulate the main themes in my ethnographic analysis, as well as noting several points that I did not have the capacity or space to analyze in detail, but that I think may be of interest to readers who are curious about the factors people identified as contributing to Eigg’s success. I conclude with reflections on my third research question, offering some modest and preliminary thought on what kinds of “generative potential” we might tease out of these discussions, and how the rhizomes of the good relationships on Eigg might reach out to the rest of the world.

What follows in Chapter 2 can, perhaps, operate as one of the accounts of “the densely felt textures of sensory worlding” that, in Kathleen Stewart’s words, have the capacity to “fuel generativity” (2011, p. 451). The latter is my utmost and final goal with

this thesis as a whole. I take seriously Stengers' assertion of the potential and the necessity of ideas to address the problem of what she calls Gaia's intrusion, and most of us would give the deceptively neutral name of "climate change":

The power of ideas is not to be downplayed... to activate the possibility to resist and reclaim what this capture [by capitalist logic] has systematically attacked or poisoned. This idea is not transcending the particularity of the so-called modern tradition, rather thinking with this particularity, rather trying to induce the capacity to imagine a possibility that it can be regenerated, or civilized. Which does not mean universalized. Rather, on the contrary, it means thinking with its own specific and dangerous, never innocent, ways of weaving relations, with the resources, imaginative, scientific and political, it may be able to activate in order to think with other Peoples and Natures...

We do not know if and how we will be able to compose with Gaia but we have no other option than to trust that we can make a difference, however small, a difference that is calling for other differences to be made elsewhere... for a weaving of regenerative, slightly transgressive imaginations. Such a weaving might indeed make a difference as it brings with it a possibility of sharing and cooperating, that is, a certainly not sufficient but maybe necessary, condition to reclaim a future worth living. (2012, p. 14)

It is this possibility that I hope to activate in thinking through the relations and histories that weave the present on Eigg; and I hope the first chapter will help engage my readers' imaginations, so that they will join me in the process of trying to "think with other Peoples and Natures" in order "to reclaim a future worth living."

Chapter 2: Getting Oriented: Stories of History and Context

Delightful I think it to be in the bosom of an isle, on the peak of a rock that I might often see there is the calm of a sea.

That I might see its heavy waves over the glittering ocean, as they chant a melody to their father on their eternal course.

That I might see its smooth strand of clear headlands, no gloomy thing; that I might hear the voice of the wondrous birds, a joyful tune.

That I might hear the sound of the shallow waves against the rocks; that I might hear the cry by the graveyard, the noise of the sea.

That I might see its splendid flocks of birds over the fullwatered ocean; that I might see its mighty whales, greatest of wonders.

— Poem by anonymous Celtic monk on the Isle of North Rona, ~500 CE (cited in Hunter, 1995, p. 44)

In a dimly lit room at the monastery of St. Donnan on the Isle of Eigg, a lone man sits at his window. He regards the fiery sunset and the fierce sea with a mixture of trepidation and awe. The scene before him is majestic, truly a sign that God can see the Scottish Highlands too. But the ocean also holds the possibility of storms; the land, of famine; its people, of war. His mentor, St. Columba of Ireland, has warned him that “red martyrdom” awaits him here (Martins, 2004, p. 15). Yet nestled into the fertile, sloping hillside of the tiny island, somehow St. Donnan is sure he’s made the right decision. He and the 52 monks who accompanied him here have found a home in the humble, circular stone structure they have built, and are trusted by the islanders who share this land. “We can imagine the little community living in their stone huts roofed with turves on their rocky site commanding a view across to the mainland and over the harbour below” (Martins, 2004, p. 15).

On the other edge of the Atlantic at the northern tip of my own island, Nova Scotia’s Cape Breton, listening to the crashing waves outside and remembering the time I

spent on Eigg, I can also imagine the peace and, I like to think, contentment that the Celtic monks felt in their solitude. It was not unlike the solitudes of the lone shepherds who, a millennium later, would follow Eigg's sheep and cows to its higher, less-used areas to live with the animals for the summer, making butter and cheese (2004, p. 25). Nor was it entirely alien from my own solitude on Eigg, sitting on the beach or tucked into one of the nooks in the mountainside I couldn't help imagining as a fairy-hole. In those moments, I could not have felt less alone.

Camille Dressler, fondly referred to on the island as Eigg's resident historian (and, intermittently, folklorist, anthropologist, sociologist, journalist, or just plain writer), says of St. Donnan:

The message that he would have preached was that nature in all its entirety, including human beings, was part of a single immense whole, to which religious man turned and sang his gratitude. It was the triumphant aspect of Christ rather than the suffering one, as in the Roman church, which was emphasized. With the veneration of Mary, it combined well with the Celtic worship of nature as the dwelling of the gods and goddesses, and was readily accepted. (2007, p. 6)

Little survives from any monastic writings penned on the Isle of Eigg, but the poetry that was being written elsewhere in Scotland during the same period, such as the piece I quoted above, is telling. The landscape, bustling with people in those days, was in this writing a friend and both the subject and object of love, if one with a volatile and sometimes fearful temperament. Iain Crichton Smith proposes for Scotland the usefulness of "a kind of history lived on the bone rather than an intellectual creation, which is why I think that poets and writers are better historians, often, than the professionals" (cited in Hunter, 1995, p. 26). In this first section of my thesis, I attempt to weave such a history "lived on the bone," working through the main ideas that lie within my argument in a

way that I hope will allow my readers themselves to walk along the hillsides and dance at the ceilidhs with those who, over the centuries, have contributed to building the Scottish crofting communities of the present.

In his book *On the Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands*, James Hunter tells of the Celtic monks' unique and deep connection with their surroundings, a tale well-worth repeating:

The way in which the Celtic church's hermits identified with birds, with mammals, even with insects, is... indicative of their ability to shake off the constraints of their own time... They lived so much among the wild creatures... that they became almost one with them, almost own brother to them, as it were hardly conscious that there was any distinction of genus... In contrast to the Protestant teachings that nature existed for the sole purposes of human exploitation... the Celtic church... held an altogether less utilitarian, less exploitative view of nature. Remarking that the weather of 917 had been so bad as to cause much 'mortality of cattle,' one Gaelic-speaking chronicler of that remote period takes care to add—with an evident sense of regret—that 'the sound of a blackbird or thrush was scarcely heard that year'... Columba is said to have cared for an injured crane. Comgall is trusted by the swans who come to him when he calls. Ciaran makes friends with a fox and a badger. (Hunter, 1995, p. 56-57)

The politics of Donnan's time were as volatile as the raging sea. St. Columba's prophecy of St. Donnan's "red martyrdom" would become reality in the year 617, when, legend has it, St. Donnan was killed by pirates just after Easter Sunday mass in the third week of April. It would have still been chilly on Eigg in that season, and likely rainy, though the climate there is temperate for most of the year. The temperature rarely dips below zero degrees Celsius in the winter, or above twenty in the summer. The wind almost always blows cool.

St. Donnan's death ushered several successive abbots into his place over the next century or two. But his monastery on the hillside did not survive the Norse occupation, which began near the end of the 700s and lasted into the mid-1200s. The archaeological

site of the old monastery was finally unearthed in 2012 by a group of local volunteers working with students from several Scottish universities.

History weaves itself into the present. After centuries of movement *away* from the communal farming models that would have existed in the time of St. Donnan and his monks, and decades of abuse by corrupt landlords and then landowners, the Isle of Eigg again became formally a community effort after a landmark community buyout in 1997. After years of hard work on the part of a determined group of islanders, Eigg has been under ownership (if one can call it that in anything but the most superficial of ways—and most of the islanders would not) of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust for 17 years. Now it is at the forefront of the movement, in Scotland and throughout the world, toward a human mode of living that is in harmony with our earthly surroundings, which echoes Donnan’s teachings of a human existence intertwined with that of a wondrous “nature” for which we should be humbly grateful. These days, organic gardens sprawl across the lawns of homes that use only five kilowatts of the island’s renewable-sourced electricity at a time; a bustling community centre houses a general store, tearoom, and craft shop; plump sheep and cattle wander the common grazings while artists and volunteers of all stripes journey to Eigg to be inspired by the natural beauty of the place and be part of an innovative way of being human. Unlike centuries past, plagued by famine, fighting and scarcity, here and now there is plenty for everyone.

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After the age of the monks, life on Eigg continued to be difficult, in a variety of compelling and sometimes tantalizingly curious ways. Famine came and went, and the island’s population, which peaked at around 500 in the late 18th century, was virtually

wiped out twice during the 1500s, the first time in a spectacular massacre. Preserved by oral history, the tale tells of a fateful day when all of the islanders hid from an invading clan in a large cave, but were discovered and smothered to death by way of a fire lit in the cave's small mouth. Their bones lay arranged in the family groups in which they had died until the late 19th century. A second massacre, by another enemy clan chief and his men, depleted the island's population again in 1588 (Dressler, 2007).

During the century or two after the second massacre, battling famine almost every spring before the new harvest, the islanders of Eigg would sometimes resort to “the practice of bleeding their animals for blood to mix with their oats in an effort to eke their food out a bit further” (Dressler, 2007, p. 29). I first learned of this practice from my host on Eigg, Sue Hollands, when discussing food waste—to which her opposition (which extends to scraping bread dough off the bowl so thoroughly the dish hardly needs washing) is inspiring. At the time, I tried to imagine living with such scarcity. I couldn't, and still can't; and, indeed, trying to conjure up such experiences also suggests to me the idea that the processes of privatization I critique throughout this thesis were tempting *because* people were accustomed to hardship; the notion of hoarding away all the resources you need—taking Kenrick's “dominance perspective”—when you have the privilege of being able to do so, is not unattractive (a story that may be the same for newly-converted capitalists, past and present, around the globe). I do not wish to argue that such a perspective is not perfectly human and understandable. I wish, rather, to suggest that the “every man for himself” model of hoarding and exploitation has proven itself destined to do great harm to the planet and to those people who are the *exploited* rather than the exploiters. There are better ways of doing things.

In any case, scarcity and hardship are crucial elements of any human history of the Scottish Highlands. Potatoes made up a huge part of people's diets from the late 1500s when they were first introduced in Britain until at least the 1900s, and any reduction in the root vegetable's harvest was devastating. In the 19th century, when kelping became for several decades the basis of the economy in the Hebrides, people avoided using workhorses because they didn't have the land and resources to spare to keep the animals. Instead, they carted the sopping loads of seaweed from the beach to dry land on their own backs (Martins, 2004, p. 35).

Eigg is a small and isolated island, but the forces of history have never been any less powerful there than they are on the mainland. For example, a number of men from the island fought at the infamous Battle of Culloden in 1746, the last great battle for Scots to keep the Scottish throne and a precursor to the Highland Clearances. The Highlanders lost, and Eigg was among the coastal communities ravaged by the British Navy in the aftermath of the battle, since it was a suspected hiding place for officers of the rebellion trying to flee the authorities. The thirty-eight men—most of the island's community leaders—who were discovered to be loyal to Bonnie Prince Charlie, the leader of the rebellion, were marched off to London. Half of them died along the way, and the other half were sent to live out their lives as slaves on Jamaican plantations, leaving many island families fatherless, farms without farmers (or tacksmen, as the leaders among them were called), and communities torn apart (Dressler, 2007, p. 33-35).

The defeat at Culloden ushered in the infamous period of "improvements," enclosures, and mass evictions known as the Highland Clearances, whose intellectual backbone was the Scottish Enlightenment. The nobility and other authorities of the time

believed that while England and Lowland Scotland had reached Adam Smith's final stage of advancement, the Age of Commerce, Highland Scotland had not, and that was a problem that must be remedied (Dalglish, 2001, p. 19). The Clearances culminated in the eviction of half a million Scottish people from their land in the name of agricultural expansion, primarily sheep farming. On Eigg, the processes mainly involved the reorganization and decollectivization of land use and thus of the economy.

As new tacksmen took over the old farms, chiefs on Eigg and across the Highlands were transformed, by the new laws, into landlords. The new title, and the corresponding new attitude, completely changed the relationship between the leaders and the people. Loyal clan members were reduced to mere tenants who were expected to meet certain quotas; fatherly chiefs became enforcers of the rent. Spurred by the imperial government in the south, the new landlords increased rents, insisted on commercial leases and evicted any tacksmen too quick to provide for "unproductive dependents" (Dressler, 2007, p. 37). The tacksmen, who were responsible for collecting whatever rent they could from their subtenants (usually their kin) and handing it over to the chiefs (usually their closest kin [Symonds, 1999, p. 112]) were suddenly faced with the threat of eviction if the other clan members could not pay what was judged their individual due. Where before the tacksmen had functioned primarily as soldiers, available should the need arise for defence and therefore permitted to pay rents far below the "economic value" (McKerrell, 1947, p. 11), now the landlords insisted on receiving what they considered market prices in rent—and hardly anyone was able to pay. The tacksmen and their subtenants had believed the "verbal arrangement known as *duthchas*—kindness to the land—was enough to give them an inalienable right to a land they considered as much

their inheritance as the chief's. But now that chiefs were no more than landlords, all concept of their kindred's interest in the land was cast aside" (Dressler, 2007, p. 37).

Meanwhile, the "commons thinking" (Kenrick, 2009) of the clan system was slowly eviscerated by capitalism:

the 'commoners' who held the land in joint-tenancy or were the tacksmen's subtenants were criticized for their lack of ambition which led them 'to be satisfied with the bare necessities of life which they could procure themselves.' Such was the conclusion of the 1764 report on the Hebrides compiled by a government official, Dr. Walker, who had found Eigg, for example, 'tolerably fertile but full of idleness.' However, in this largely self-sufficient economy, when cattle provided food, drink, utensils, tallow for candles, heat, footwear, leather for bagpipes and money to pay the rent, which islander needed more than the few luxuries that trading of cattle could procure? Strangers to the clan system often failed to understand the close-knit structure of Gaelic communities where whatever money was obtained from agriculture was immediately redistributed at the level of the extended family so that more could subsist. (Dressler, 2007, p. 37)

The pre-"improvements" style of social organization had been a system based on the welfare of the whole, not of the individual, and rooted in kin relations (the word "clan" comes from the Gaelic "clann," meaning family [Kay, 1996, p. 4]). As Dressler (2007) shows, this society operated through a mode of kin-based redistribution not unlike that seen in many indigenous societies: founded in relationships and supported by reciprocity within clans and even between them. "The community was the immediate family" and land tenure was hereditary (Dalgligh, 2001, p. 4). The collective heritage of a clan was closely tied to the land on which the clan lived, and if a particular clan expanded its territory, the distribution of tenure was based on kin relations. Tasks such as ploughing, herding sheep, taking care of livestock (even that which was individually owned), planting and cutting of peat were all communal (Dalgligh, 2001, p. 15).

In contrast, the new system demanded hard labour, individualism and capital

gain—and it couldn't support the population that had been subsisting on oats, blood, simplicity and sharing. So as the farms were reorganized and the kelp market collapsed, the evictions that characterized the Clearances came into force. Many who left Eigg did so voluntarily, in the hope of a better life; the first documented forced eviction on Eigg, of the townships of Upper and Lower Grulin, took place in 1853. For those who remained in Highland Scotland—pushed onto infertile crofting land—the Clearances did not represent a wholesale transformation to capitalism or individualism. Using the Highlands improvements as an example, Dalglish notes that as scholars, we must hold to a distinction between *capitalism*, the ideology of individualism, and *capitalist societies*, “where capitalism is widespread but not necessarily universal” and pockets of resistance remain and even thrive (2001, p. 23). Further:

The cultivation of routine practices that made an ideology of the individual knowable was the basis of Improvement in the Scottish Highlands. Improvement was instigated by the landlord and accepted by a variety of groups within the rural population. However, other groups rejected aspects of Improvement in maintaining alternative conceptions of land tenure that did not emphasise the individual. Capitalist society in the Highlands was thus constituted of diverse social practices of which capitalism was one. This variation in the constitution of capitalist society is therefore fundamental to our understanding of the recent history of the Highlands and, thus, to contemporary discussions of questions such as land rights, considering that private property is not and has not been a universally accepted concept. (Dalglish, 2001, p. 23)

After the Grulins had been cleared, “it was said that the pasture [there] was so good that for the first years all the ewes produced twins” (Martins, 2004, p. 40). Such high levels of production may have been true for the first few years of the “improved” style of farming. But, on Eigg at least, ultimately the changes proved detrimental to the land, which would require a great deal of restoration when it returned, centuries later, to local control. That is, they proved detrimental to the island as *arable* land, an important

distinction for Highlanders: the ethos of crofting is entwined with one of care (Hunter, 1995). For crofters, as I learned from Neil Robertson, the crofter for whom I volunteered while on Eigg, care implies judicious use, not simply leaving land untouched. Brown (2007) also points out this ethics of use; in her case study, crofters expressed both the belief that using land instead of leaving it to its own devices was beneficial to the community and the idea that those community members who make use of the land on which they live should have more priority in communal decision-making processes. Such use has always gone hand-in-hand with restrictions based on inherited knowledge of the limits of the land. In contrast, on post-Clearances Eigg, in trying to make the islanders *efficient*—cutting up the land into small crofts, discouraging communal work, insisting on people taking outside employment, and demanding constant use of all fertile land, every season, in the name of productivity (Dressler, 2007)—the landlords made the land itself inefficient, and it would need many years to recover. The centuries throughout which the people of the Scottish Highlands had honed their methods of agriculture to suit the needs of the land and not *overuse* it—thus ensuring future crops—meant nothing.

The refusal to acknowledge the Highlanders' understanding of the ecosystem of which they were a part was one small element of the trend that emerged in the powerful south—England as well as Lowland Scotland—wherein Highlanders and Islanders the country over were decried by virtually all of the authority figures they encountered as being lazy, unintelligent, and backwards—arguments backed, again, by Enlightenment notions of progress and the individualistic basis of the capitalist ideology, both of which strongly rejected the Highland ethos of communal life (Dalglish, 2001, p. 19). As Hunter (1995) notes, this stereotype continued its residence until very recently in the British

popular imagination—including in the minds and psyches of Highlanders themselves. On Eigg, people “dyed their tartan plaids and cut them into breeches” (Dressler, 2007, p. 35). They listened to comments like Samuel Johnson’s assessment of their native tongue, Gaelic, as “only the rude speech of a barbarous people who have but few thoughts to express” (1816, p. 177). They submitted to degradations of their intelligence and capacity such as new laws that revoked their right to process their own grains at home or use salt to preserve food for themselves. In the words of a land reform activist in the late 1800s:

The language and lore of the Highlanders being treated with despite [contempt] has tended to crush their self-respect and to repress that self-reliance without which no people can advance. When a man was convinced that his language was a barbarism, his lore as filthy rags, and that the only good thing about him—his land—was, because of his general worthlessness, to go to a man of another race, what remained... that he should fight for? (Murdoch, 1883; cited in Hunter, 1995, p. 33)

Even reading about it from the comfortable vantage point of a future in which things have (at least somewhat) turned around, the matter of the salt sounds particularly offensive. As Dressler tells it, if people wanted any salt at all, they had to go see state officials on another island to get it, and it could only be used for fish for commercial purposes. Then,

they had to return to the custom house and show their barrels of saltfish and bring back any left-over salt... under severe penalty if any salt was found in their homes for unauthorized use. [This]... obliged them to use seaweed ashes to preserve their cheese for winter and deprived them of curing fish as a reliable source of food in the winter months (2007, p. 56).

In these conditions of hardship and constant shortage, it is little surprise that the tides of emigration flowed strong throughout the 1800s, encouraged and in many cases enforced by the government. The Duke of Argyll, for example, blamed the crofting system—which, we must not forget, was a creation of the institution he represented,

undesired by the people on whom it was imposed—for a couple of particularly bad harvests in 1835 and 1836 which resulted in widespread famine and a cholera epidemic. The only way to save the region, he said, was to remove “the redundant unemployed population and... the squatters who had no land and paid no rent” (as cited in Dressler, 2007, p. 77).

Let’s turn for a moment to the visceral aspects of these injustices. My stomach turns and I flush with a quiet sense of righteous anger whenever I think about them—and, while my heritage is Scottish and I would not exist were it not for the political realities of 19th century Scotland (my mother’s family came to Nova Scotia from Benbecula, the island where those trying to escape the boats to the New World were hunted down by dogs [Dressler, 2007, p. 83]), *I am not a Highlander*. I did not grow up bound and surrounded by the oppressions of this history. As Camille Dressler was quick to point out in our interview last September, such a history is extremely difficult to overcome. Before even thinking of local community empowerment, Highlanders must move past the ingrained cultural notion that they are not smart, worthy, or capable; that they would not be able to manage the land for themselves. The latter was the narrative invoked by many of the elderly people on Eigg when the idea of buying the island as a community began to circulate. This was the story that the landowner of the time, Keith Schellenberg, and many others told the newspapers. This is what Scots and others who are in opposition to their upcoming independence referendum are saying. But the story didn’t hold true on Eigg.

Writing about eviction for conservation, Kato (2006) shows that in the long-term, outside institutions taking over land management from local populations serve only to

make the situation worse, alienating local people from their sense of care for the land and their very sense of self-worth, often deeply linked to their capacity for stewardship. *And*, as countless cases (see Kato, 2006; Hawken & Granoff, 2010; Overton, 1979; Fortin & Gagnon, 1999) including that of Highlands agriculture attest, such takeovers usually aren't as effective as they could be, because in most cases—as with Eigg—people who live in a place, work with its soil, fish its waters, and depend on those resources for survival, know better than anyone how to take care of it. And when they are told by someone who has power over them that actually they don't know much at all—the classic colonial standby—it's a hard blow to accept and probably an even harder one from which to recover. In this context, that twenty-three crofting communities have now moved to community ownership and over two dozen more are in the process of doing so (Community Land Scotland, 2014) seems amazing, even incredible. While such moves are supported today, socially and (since 2003) in legislation, this support is new and not yet ubiquitous; as I mentioned above, many of the voices who oppose Scottish independence seem to have preserved the attitude that Scots are not quite capable of ruling Scotland.

Life on Eigg had improved slightly by the early 1900s. The island's turn-of-the-century landowners were wealthy and relatively conscientious. The Clearances had made a little bit of room for those who remained to breathe and to subsist, though it wouldn't be long before *depopulation* would become a major problem. Midcentury,

it was a constant and strenuous struggle to keep just above poverty level as the type of farming crofters were engaged in was very labour intensive for its return. It was still little more than subsistence farming, yet compared with the poverty experienced... a few generations before, their situation was one of great improvement. In today's terms, the islanders would be congratulated for having achieved almost complete self-sufficiency.

(Dressler, 2007, p. 141)

Interestingly, the same could be said today. Everyone I spoke with on Eigg pointed out that the island life is by no means an easy one, physically, financially, or mentally. Crofting cannot—and was not designed to—make anyone a living; that’s why so many crofters use WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) volunteers, among whose ranks I count myself. Today, though, the islanders understand that such hardship is their choice, and most agree that it pays off. While nearly everyone mentioned the social, physical and financial hardships of island life, only one questioned whether such hardships were worth the reward of living on Eigg—and she quickly changed her mind when, a couple of minutes later, she started to ruminate on the quality of the island’s sunsets. Today, the islanders *are* congratulated by environmentalists the world over for the level of self-sufficiency and sustainability they have achieved over the course of seventeen short years.

In the decades after the Clearances, though, after watching their loved ones disappear across the ocean to faraway lands like Nova Scotia, the question was more of survival than social acclaim. Meanwhile, as Tsing outlines, all across the globe a waterfall of western philosophical thought cut people off from their lands and their communities, as the accepted boundaries of human love shrank to accommodate only a single nuclear family (2012, p. 150-151). Scotland was no exception to this; the new system, “crofting,” permitted each family access to the common grazings and tenancy on a small strip of land, just big enough to provide the family with food—in theory—but not big enough to produce any extra to sell. And since the communal kin-based methods of social organization had been abolished, there was less and less physical space for

extended families and their children, providing even more motivation for the younger children who did not inherit crofts to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The crofts were designed to oppress, just a little bit too small to grow a comfortable surplus. And in many of the crofting townships that cropped up all across the Scottish Highlands, the areas of land designated for crofts were the least fertile. The best land, after all, must be reserved for the wealthy landowners (some former clan chiefs, some who had purchased land from clan chiefs-cum-landlords) who now owned practically the whole country, to make room for sport hunting and the booming business of sheep husbandry. During cold winters, people starved.

The crofters did not accept such hardships passively. A variety of Crofting Acts came into law over the next two centuries, “providing security to crofters, protecting them from being unfairly removed from their land, guaranteeing fair rents and allowing them to claim compensation for improvements should their tenancy come to an end” (Scottish Crofting Federation, n.d.). But the basic story remains the same: crofting people have no control over their land. They don't own their homes. And the often absentee landlords—these days wealthy businesspeople of all stripes who share little more than an interest in vacationing or making money in the Highlands—have, over the years, tended to be less concerned about conditions in their townships than about property value on the market, the potential for exploitation of natural resources like pastures and oil, and the opportunity to shoot some deer during a weekend retreat to the countryside.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Isle of Eigg passed through the hands of several landlords until 1975, when it was purchased by its ninth laird, the infamous Keith Schellenberg—a former Olympic bobsledder and the then-husband of a

member of the Royal Family, Lady Margaret de Hauteville Hamilton, who was frequently featured in fashion magazines. He's known to have commented—as he refused anyone leases on any land or the right to build a house, forcing many islanders to cram their families into tiny caravans without electricity—that he kept the island rustic-looking on purpose. Schelley, as today's islanders call him almost fondly, eventually realized that if he wanted the beautiful island estate he'd dreamed of, he would need some staff: gardeners, people to keep his accounts in order, someone to run the island's tiny store. He put some advertisements out in newspapers around Scotland, advertising for young people with “enterprise and initiative” to live and work on an “idyllic Hebridean island,” remembered Neil Robertson, my host on Eigg and a former estate employee. That, one of the islanders I interviewed told me, was his first mistake. Schellenberg recruited a group of young and energetic employees from across the UK who had “enterprise and initiative” galore. They fell in love with the island, and used their enterprise and initiative to engineer Schelley's downfall.

Keith Schellenberg made quite a few more mistakes in his two-decade reign on Eigg. A key error many islanders pointed out was his seemingly random decision to evict a dearly loved local resident who had been his faithful employee for many years. A fire of rebellion had been smoldering for some time at that point, but this was the final burst of indignity that truly ignited it. Who did Keith Schellenberg think he was? Suddenly his power on the island seemed unsteady. People started phoning the newspapers. One day he arrived on Eigg to find his Rolls Royce alight with flames. (No charges were ever laid for the incident.) He went through a nasty divorce, and when his ex-wife threatened to force him to sell Eigg, he immediately purchased her half of the island. But for those who

lived in the community, during the brief moments when Eigg was again up for grabs—after the divorce and then twice again in the next several years, when the Rolls Royce fire finally convinced Schellenberg to leave and then when the subsequent owner went bankrupt—the idea of buying the island stuck. It would take a couple of years (1995-1997) in the hands of another landowner, the eccentric German artist Marlin Eckhard Maruma, before the community trust managed to scrape together the island's market value; and in the end, things came together only because Maruma defaulted on a loan and an anonymous—female—donor contributed nearly a million pounds. Eigg was touched by the convergence of circumstances; these days, its success and the success of other community buyouts have led to governmental supports in legislation and financial aid.

The idea for the Isle of Eigg Trust was first floated publicly in 1991, but it wasn't until 1997 that it finally gained control of the island, and the years since haven't been easy. The Trust makes very little money and spends most of it on insurance; jobs on the island are still scarce; seven of the island's seventeen crofts lie unworked; and sometimes it seems like more young people are leaving than coming. Despite all that,

We've got lots of young people here now, it's really vibrant, and with a lot of hard work people *are* managing to make a living. We had a visitor the year before last who's been going to Rum [a neighbouring island], Rum is his place and he's been going every year, and for some reason he decided to come to Eigg instead. He was completely gobsmacked by the whole thing and said 'I'm just going to tell all my friends to stop visiting that dead island and come to one that's alive!' The whole *place* is vibrant, there's people doing things, people starting their own businesses, it just gives it a completely different feel! And to me that is a statement of the success of the buyout: although it's been a lot of hard work and will continue to be a lot of hard work, it *has* enabled people to get to grips with their future and do something positive. It is a struggle, but it is amazing.

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My last weekend on Eigg was glorious, a real salute from the island. I felt more

than ever, on this weekend, the otherworldly sensation I often had when experiencing the island on my own during my leisure time: the dreamlike feeling that I had stumbled upon a magical fairy-world, in which shiny fluttering pixies were peeking at me from every tree; selkies were surely sunning themselves on the rocks around every corner of the coast, just out of my line of sight; and a rabbit or a robin might just welcome me into a hollow for tea, if I listened carefully enough for the invitation. (Of course, for the most part this feeling left me when—for example—I was obliged to spend hours on end hacking through bracken in order to repair the polytunnel, plagued by midges and my newfound enemy, stinging nettles.) That last weekend, the sun came out in full force and the thermostat hit twenty degrees Celsius, both rarities in this part of Scotland and near-unheard of in early October.

I interviewed Eddie Scott on the Saturday morning of my last weekend. It was a particularly invigorating interview because Eddie was so inspiring (or maybe because I was enjoying the first cup of real brewed coffee I'd had in a month, made on some mysterious "old-fashioned" – his words – contraption on Eddie's stovetop). At one point during the conversation, when we were chatting about what he thought might have motivated people to initiate the buyout campaign, Eddie commented that he felt all the researchers who came here, among whom he included me, didn't give the island itself "enough credit" in their thinking:

Eddie: That's another little niggle. I don't think Eigg itself gets mentioned enough or gets enough credit... I think where you live shapes you as much as anything and... I think people talk a lot about the community of Eigg as opposed to actually what the island gives the community...

Me: What does the island give the community?

Eddie: A home [laughs]. And all that entails, you know. Back to the smell

of it maybe.

Earlier he had told me it was the smell of Eigg that made him move here, that made him realize he was home. I went on to ask: “When you say Eigg doesn’t get enough credit, is that in terms of providing for people, a home and crops and stuff like that, or is it in guiding what the people do? Do you know what I mean?” His answer, in his slow, rolling accent, was:

Yeah, yes I do, yeah. I think probably the latter... I don’t think I can say much about that except that’s how I feel, I can’t put my finger on it. Just the *shape* of it. But not just the shape of it. Just everything about it... [several minutes later] I suppose it’s a bit like, well I only know bits about it, but not much, but like in Amer-Indian philosophy about how you treat the land you live on... And that goes back to what you were saying about making decisions that are sustainable. You care about where you live.

Coming from the theoretical perspective, however vague, with which I’d oriented this project (and to which I’ll return a little later), at this point my heart was in my throat, because this was exactly the kind of dialogue I’d wanted to have on Eigg, but had thus far only heard such things implicitly in what I was discussing with people—which made me worry that it was I who was hearing them, rather than my interlocutors *saying* them. This conversation solidified my desire to focus, in my analysis, on the ways in which the island acts as an agent or, I will suggest, a *companion* in the lives, choices and activism of those who live on and visit Eigg. To elaborate on this a little more, I’ll share a scenario I wrote about in my field notes, in which I felt this sense of island-as-companion quite strongly.

Eddie left to meet the noontime ferry, and I scrambled down the bracken- and bramble-laden hill that separated his croft from the one on which I was living. An excerpt from my typed field notes reads:

It's midday and I've just gotten back from interviewing Eddie. It was amazing, he was so interesting. It's mild and wonderful out today. I'm going to hike up the ridge right after lunch. Right now I was going to work on the painting of Rosie [a gift I was working on to give my host family when I left], but Mickey [the cat] is curled up in my lap. I have no idea how he knew I was in the caravan (or if he just came to check) but a few minutes after I got here I saw him coming purposefully across the field, and when I opened the door he came right in and jumped up on the bed and looked for attention. I feel a bit terrible leaving him on Monday! I think we've really become friends.

Poignantly, that turns out to be the last thing I wrote in the long (16 000-word) typed file I updated nearly daily during my stay on Eigg: “I think [the cat and I] have really become friends.” I hope and believe it shows, to some extent, my academic and social efforts to engage with the non-humans of Eigg. My notes from my subsequent hike also reflect this orientation; I include an excerpt from these in an effort to take seriously Thrift’s injunction to think about movement to understand experience, a tenet of geography’s non-representational theory which anthropologist Ingold (2011) shares. As Thrift writes:

Movement captures the joy – I will not say simple – of living as a succession of luminous or mundane instants. Though it is possible, even easy, to get carried away by an emphasis on presence, closeness, and tangibility, and by a corresponding desire to do more than simply squeeze meaning from the world, still we can think of the leitmotif of movement as a desire for a presence which escapes a consciousness-centred core of self-reference; ‘Rather than have to think, always and endlessly, what else there could be, we sometimes seem to connect with a layer in our existence that simply wants the things of the world close to our skin’ (Gumbrecht 2004: 106). And, finally and relatedly, movement captures a certain attitude to life as potential... Non-representational theory takes the leitmotif of movement and works with it as a means of going beyond constructivism. (2007, p. 5)

Before my hike, I made a quick sandwich for lunch, and then set off on the excursion that Neil, one of my hosts, had referred to as “going up the cliff.” The cliff is the plateau that divides the northern side of Eigg—where I was living, in the township of

Cleadale—from the southern one, where lies the island’s other township, Galmisdale. It’s about 340 metres of elevation, and if you look at Eigg from near the water or on the water it would appear as though someone took a giant spoon and scooped out the lowland that contains the dozen or so scattered homes of Cleadale. What’s left is a high, gently curving wall of mossy basalt shaped like the widespread arms of a person greeting an old friend with the invitation to hug. The rock is not vertical, but rather sloped at the angle at which person’s neck meets his or her shoulder: inviting, but still upright enough that it’s difficult, if certainly possible, to scale it. The idea, Neil had explained, was to scale the cliff at one end, walk along the ridge at the top—a great, barren plateau from which one looks down not only on Cleadale, but also across Galmisdale, a couple of the other Small Isles (definitely Rum and Canna; I’m not sure about the others), mainland Scotland and even the Isle of Skye—and then follow it down the slightly gentler slope at its northwesternmost reach. Then I was instructed to continue through the common grazings, hoping I would stumble on the path the cows had forged through the thick bracken, until I met the main road on Eigg, which I could follow back home, thus completing the circle.

The instructions for finding the first path up the cliff were to locate a particular clothesline and walk under it. From there, somehow, I would recognize the path. In doing this I felt a bit like I was walking into an old wardrobe looking for Narnia, but it worked out fine. Here is an excerpt from that wonderful Saturday’s handwritten field notes:

Second last day on Eigg. Almost at the top of the cliff. Had to stop and enjoy this spot for a few minutes. I am in a small scoop cut out of the wider scoop that is the ridge/”cliff” ... I feel like a fairy in an old story, perched high up on the rock overlooking the village, waiting for someone’s true love to come along the winding road far below so I can bewitch them. It is cozy, peaceful. The sea is like glass, that old glass that isn’t totally smooth. Rum is the colour of the ocean, only two shades darker, pastel blue with the slightest hint of green...

The village below me looks small, but even on a Saturday afternoon it does not slumber—I can hear the bang of an axe momentarily and the occasional conversation. Once in awhile there is the low moo of a cow or the baa of a sheep, and one or two bumblebees. A spider is building her web on the cliff beside me, softly swaying in the gentle breeze...

I have the feeling of being supported by the cliff—by the island—and thus enveloped in it. It is textured and many coloured, from the deep Payne’s grey of the basalt to the dove-grey of the lichens. The texture is porous, lumpy, old...

There is a seemingly man-made rock fence going across my little hollow beside me, and I wonder who made it—how long ago—why? Elves? I have a sudden sense of understanding why old British authors wrote about elves and faeries living in hollows in the hillside—because, of course they do, whether we see them or not, it’s obvious that they are there. Obvious, too, that the animals of the island consider it home—know a sense of home—the sheep, the buzzing bee who just swept beside my head; the tiny, fat copper-coloured spider. How could they not?

The sun has just come out again and cast the valley in a wonderful golden glow, though my hollow remains in shade.

I have the obviously romantic feeling—have had all day (the warm grey morning; the exhilaration after my interview with Eddie; the simple joy with which Rosie and I played in the yard)—that this incredible day, this hug from the cliffside, this “Indian summer” (Sue’s words), is the island saying goodbye to me. Saying, as Lucy did, “I suspect you’ll be back.”

The sense of goodbye—and my unwillingness to leave, such was the extent to which I had fused myself with the island—was heightened when, the next day, I became (having eaten no food that wasn’t shared, and been exposed to no one who was sick) violently ill with a stomach flu that followed me off the island and across Europe to a friend’s home in the Czech Republic, where I emerged several days later pale, thin, and exhausted. I felt that I was being physically ripped away from Eigg, and my body and the weather seemed to confirm my beliefs. It was as if the sun was asking me to stay, and my body, asking me not to go.

I really felt, while walking across the ridge on that beautiful sunny day, as if I was in some region of Fairyland. I mention this for a couple of reasons: first, because it’s

problematic. Hunter, among others, writes of the variety of ways in which the romanticism of writers like Sir Walter Scott is both painful and oppressive for Scottish people who bear the legacy of the Highland Clearances (Hunter, 1995). Before this period, much of Highland Scotland was actually crowded with people—Eigg’s population was five times what it is now in the mid-1800s—and the bare mountains the poets extoll were covered in forests, since decimated by logging and sheep. The empty, “romantic” landscape is, for many people, but a sad reminder of what was once there, haunted by the ghosts of their evicted ancestors. Do I imagine faeries because of the physical traces—the crumbling rock fences; the low croft houses—of past Scots who one walked the pasture above the cliff, now sparsely populated by a few scruffy sheep? Or is it simply my cultural reality? As a half-Scottish, half-Irish daughter of a folk artist mother who raised me on Beatrix Potter, Hans Christian Anderson, C.S. Lewis, and tea parties in the forest, when I’m in the right temperament (and on Eigg it seemed I almost always was) I see Narnia behind every door, and hobbit holes in every tree.

I do believe that—at least in a context of sustained present-day peace as is the situation in Scotland—if you can move past the hard memories of history, there is a certain sense of groundedness in the visible evidence of lives once lived, and other lives now being lived. As Hunter also points out, modern-day crofting is grounded in a heritage of love of the land (1995). The broken-down stone fence winding along the cliffside can be a *positive* reminder of those lives once lived, and their respectful relationship with the land. Those were also days of great famine and hardship; but the one does not cancel out the other. If “the organism (animal or human) should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement

of lines in fluid space” (Ingold, 2011, p. 64), then I could feel this reality in my bones as I sat on the cliff, and the entanglement was not just with the basalt wall and the buzzing bees, it was also with the long human history—of which, at the time, I actually *knew* very little beyond a basic understanding of the Highland Clearances—that seemed to emanate from the island’s every pore.

Haraway writes:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such... I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions... I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with* many. (2007, p. 4)

The sense of literal and radical interdependence and, crucially, radical *intimacy* with that interdependence hits me in certain special moments, usually when alone in beautiful places. Eigg radiated this feeling. Perhaps my imagination’s immediate voyage into other worlds is a reflection of some unconscious awareness of my human and non-human “messmates”; maybe it’s even a reflection of an awareness that these messmates, too, have their own worlds in which *my* existence is the afterthought, the shadow of another way of being.

It also shows, I think, the participation of the land in what was going through my mind, what I was doing and even what I was able to do. Writing of the experience of mountain climbing, Kwinter offers a powerful reflection on the participation of the mountain itself in the activity and, I would add, the thoughts it might have provoked in the climber:

The mineral shelf represents a flow whose timescale is nearly unfathomable from the scale of duration represented by the electrolytic and metabolic processes of muscle and nerves – but even at this timescale

– nanometric in relation to the millennia that measure geological flows – singularities abound: a three millimeter-wide fissure just wide enough to allow the placement of one finger, and anchored by sufficiently solid earth to permit but eighty pounds of pressure for, say, three seconds but no longer; an infinitesimally graded basin of sedimentary rock whose erratically ribbed surface (weathered unevenly by flows of wind and rain) offers enough friction to a spread palm to allow strategic placement of the other palm on an igneous ledge half a meter above. This very rock face, until recently considered virtually slick and featureless – an uninflected glacis even to classical pick and patio climbers – now swarms with individualized points, inhomogeneities, trajectories, complex relations... the climber's task is less to 'master' in the macho, form-imposing sense than to forge a morphogenetic figure in time, to insert himself into a seamless, streaming space and to become soft and fluid himself, which means momentarily to recover real time, and to engage the universe's wild and free unfolding through the morphogenetic capacities of the singularity. (2001, p. 31)

In this conceptualization, the climber is opened to a world beyond his own by his tactile engagement with the rock face. Kwinter is able to beautifully highlight the moment of embodied, preconscious experience, the fluidity of the present, and the fleeting possibilities for connectivity available to us in such moments (contingent, I suspect, on the human participants being in the right state of mind: attuned, attentive, interested, unoccupied with any other concerns—as I was on the mountaintop on Eigg). If the climber is unable to tell us just what happens in that moment, it is nonetheless an important element of the experience of being *here*, in a particular place at a given moment; and Kwinter's description is apt in pointing out the participation of the living land in making possible even the most basic aspects of daily life.

The second reason I mention my sprightly visions, and what I'd like to highlight the most about this element of my field diary, is my overwhelming sense, while on Eigg, that magic is around every turn; that the impossible is, indeed, possible; and that there exist possibilities for new ways of being, of doing and of relating to one another of which

we haven't yet even conceived. Somehow the island—by which I mean the unending dance between the living land, all its inhabitants, and the vibrant community that has yet another pulse all its own—incited these feelings in me. It gave me a sense of being embraced. And somehow, Eigg also drew others: eight out of nine people I interviewed directly mentioned being drawn (or as the case may be, retained) by the island itself in some way they could not explain. The one person I interviewed who did not directly mention this draw, Camille Dressler, writes about it (albeit generally) in her book *Eigg: The Story of an Island*:

Islands have always been the focus of desire. They invite yearnings and dreams, some more conspicuously so than others. Eigg is perhaps one of these, dominated by An Sgurr, the archetypal promontory, which an old island saying has turned into a metaphor of permanence. ‘*Bidh an Sgurr an sid 's bidh mis an sco*’ – the Sgurr will always be here and so will I. (2007, p. xii)

The story I am about to tell is one that is particular to this island. Not every place in the world reaches out its tentacles and pulls people into it. Yet there are other places which do, also, have that effect, and I doubt the human-place love story is a monogamous one. There are many corners of the earth which are in relationships of love with the humans who inhabit them. But those relationships are often oppressed—as they were until very recently on Eigg and in other collectively-owned communities in Scotland—by the institutional-capitalist reality in which they exist. On Eigg, forces converged to overcome this oppression, and they continue to overcome it each day that the land lies in the caring hands of the community trust, and every day that wind, water and sun work together to provide energy so the islanders are able work and live in ways that are up-to-speed with the rest of the world, without harming the island. The force on which I am focusing is the relationship of care, companionship and even love between the island and

the community. I cannot say for certain that such a sense existed before the buyout (though my educated guess is that it did), but I do believe it has been sufficiently cultivated since then to be, 17 years later, quite evident when you ask a few of the right questions.

This story is a result of certain specific circumstances: a bad landlord, some really determined people, a few lucky breaks—all of which the people I met on Eigg were quick to point out. But I think there are lessons from the story of Eigg that can reach beyond the island's shores. Tully's co-operative citizenship, after all, "while it is grounded in local practices of direct democratic participation... has the capacity to generate modes of conditional representation and to extend from the local to the global" (2011, p. 8). We may find within this tale concrete examples of solutions to problems other communities share; we may also find those more ephemeral (yet, I think, equally important) qualities: inspiration, hope, optimism, passion, care. We might begin to imagine systems that work with the planet, not against it; we might find in our dreams of harmony a beacon of plausibility shining anew. Such rhizomatic connections and affective shifts, no matter how subtle, matter. A smile on a rainy day, from a person or from a mountain, could make the difference between someone choosing to step outside his or her comfort zone, or staying in bed while the world slips by.

I like to think of the big maple and birch trees in the river valleys of the southern Cape Breton Highlands, perched on top of huge boulders as tall as I am, their roots wrapping tightly around the boulders, woven together as if hanging on for dear life—and remaining woven together like that for decades, until the trees grow big enough so the roots can penetrate the soil. Some bead of inspiration, some tiny mass of soil, persuaded

each tree this was a worthwhile place to try to grow. As the tree grew, more soil accumulated around the roots; eventually those roots had to find a way around the big boulders left there by glaciers millennia ago, a task that to an outside observer might seem impossible, but there those trees still stand—helped by the dozens of other organisms that created the soil, by the millions of microorganisms that allow the trees themselves to subsist, and even, in the end, by the rocks themselves. Might the story of Eigg provide that bead of inspiration, that connective tissue, that lichen that grows where before there was only bare rock? Might other human communities, like the tree, trust that there is a better, more stable future waiting to be built, if only we push past the obstacles, and trust, too, that, like the roots, we can hold onto one another to get there?

Chapter 3: Current Perspectives on Land Reform

When the Land Reform (Scotland) Act of 2003, which supports crofting communities “right to buy” their land and was inspired by buyouts like that on Eigg, was in its nascent stage at the Scottish Parliament, the government-appointed Land Reform Policy Group commented in their recommendations that “the vision for land reform is to remove the land-based barriers to the sustainable development of communities” (as cited in Hoffman, 2013, p. 292). Sociologist Matthew Hoffman notes that this comment has been criticized for its vagueness, but suggests that whatever the exact intentions of the policy group, their point was that land reform is mainly about rural development (2013). A large portion of existing literature on the subject of land reform takes economic, legal or development-based perspectives, examining what land reform might allow communities to *do*, what it means in terms of the law and the economic reasons why governments might choose to favour it (e.g. MacMillan, 2000; Brown, 2007; Bryden & Geisler, 2007).

The crucial point that Hoffman misses is that land reform, for the policy group, is not necessarily mainly about rural development; it’s about rural *sustainable* development. Development in rural Scotland is arguably possible under capitalist terms; sustainable development in rural Scotland is not. When the people *did* begin to own and control some land in Scotland, they made it clear that sustainability was key to their visions for their communities. Development would not be permitted to hurt the land on which they lived. Yet very little of the literature on land reform, which I explore throughout this chapter, looks specifically at this element of the process, and that which does (e.g. Kenrick, 2011a, 2011b; Mackenzie, 2006) is fairly broad. It is concerned largely with delineating

what's happening in communities where land reform is taking place, rather than with thinking through people's motivations and lived experiences. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to offer some insights on the latter, with the goals of both exploring the notion of human relationship to the land and being somewhat useful in thinking through what makes Eigg tick.

Geographer Fiona Mackenzie, one of few social scientists who have studied land reform, argues that crofters' relationships to the land are key in collective ownership movements (2006). The Scottish Crofters' Federation (n.d.) and Community Land Scotland (2014) concur. Mackenzie denotes the changes happening in these communities as changes in the way residents relate to land and position themselves with relation to it, calling the process one of "resubjectification" (2006). This is somewhat at odds with Hunter's proposition that crofters have *always* had a deep, "indigenous" connection with the land on which they lived (1995). I am inclined to lean towards a combination of the two: in all likelihood, as I proposed earlier, such a connection existed and was simply overwhelmed—though not completely stamped out—by capitalist ways of relating to land. Either way, as Mackenzie notes, the removal of land's status as a capitalist commodity works to open up space for non-capitalist relations to become visible and to become a guiding element of people's lives (2006).

The idea of relationship to the land is key here; many scholars (e.g. Kato, 2006) argue that a feeling of relatedness to land is crucial in people's motivation to act for the benefit of their earthly surroundings. It therefore should, in my opinion, be of great interest as an area of study. Yet it is often the case that in the anthropological literature on people's relations with the land or "nature," the focus is on indigenous people's

experiences. My research shifts the focus to a consideration of such relationships in a western group of people; and my findings challenge the notion that western people and indigenous people have fundamentally different ways of engaging with land (seen, for example, in Clammer, Poirier and Schwimmer's 2004 collection, tellingly entitled *Figured Worlds: Ontological Obstacles in Intercultural Relations*). In doing so, this story of Eigg may offer the hope that western people *are* capable of relationships of the kind that inspire care. Kenrick argues that the crofters' movements connect with global indigenous movements, which are both fundamentally about social and ecological justice and the right to assert care for the land, in their ways of making land claims (2011b). What's missing is a more thorough articulation of the feelings and experiences that preclude such claims, and that *successful* claims—like that on Eigg—permit to flourish even more.

In general, almost no ethnographic, or even anthropological, work has been done in the Scottish Highlands, let alone in communities that are collectively owned or specifically on Eigg; the only such study I have found is over two decades old and does not deal directly with land reform (Parman, 1990/2005). Similar works within anthropology are few and far between. Kenrick's body of work (e.g. 2011a) is one example; archaeologist Dalglish examines how modernization took place in the Highlands, but does not consider present-day alternatives to it (2003). There is a thorough, if not large, body of journalistic and historical documentation of the events surrounding land reform (e.g. MacAskill, 1999; Hunter, 1976, 2007, 2013). James Hunter has contributed extensively to this literature, with books on early crofting communities and early land reform (1976); on Highlanders' relationships to nature (1995); and on

contemporary community land ownership (2007, 2012). Some work has been done in geography and environmental planning, particularly within Scotland (e.g. Bryden & Geisler, 2007; Chevenix-Trench & Philip, 2001; Mackenzie, 2001, 2006; Warren & Birnie, 2009). In all of this literature, though, the same lack of in-depth engagement with lived experience persists. It is in response to this that I developed my three research questions, which I restate below for reference:

1. What do crofter relations and histories tell us of the kinds of relationships, thinking, experiences and everyday conditions that are behind moves to collective land ownership?
2. What characterizes the “indigeneity” that both Kenrick and Hunter attribute to crofters, and does it challenge our assumptions about how western people relate to land?
3. How might the crofters’ movements advance, inform, or act as an example towards other movements towards social and ecological justice—what is their “*generative potential*” (Kenrick, 2011b, p. 201)?

Many of the authors who discuss land reform approach it as a question of democracy and local economic justice (e.g. Bryden & Hart, 2000). They cite it as an important reinstatement of local control. This is in a context that, as a result of the Clearances, echoes many contemporary concerns around distribution of wealth: Scotland has the most concentrated land ownership of any westernized country, with three-quarters of its private land being owned by 0.01% of the population (Bryden & Hart, 2000)—in simpler terms, 608 people own half of Scotland (Cameron, 2013), which has a population of around 5.3 million. For Bryden and Hart, land reform is primarily about changes in the

way people relate to the state through both private property and their communities (2000). They imagine Highlands land reform as an important “social experiment” which directly responds to and rejects state capitalism, and argue that its central tenet is the question of stewardship, of care (2000).

The stewardship concept, Bryden and Hart point out, is evoked by almost all of the parties involved in land reform, but as they argue, competing notions and uses of the term “stewardship” combined with competing notions of “community,” while garnering popular support, may serve simply to confuse matters and undermine the inherent project of land reform—which is (for them), democracy and local control. Yet they also point out that the notion of stewardship, which implies care, is a longstanding one in the Scottish Highlands (2000)—and it’s certainly one I often heard on Eigg. McCrone argues that land reform symbolizes the addition of a third category to public debates over land—along with the economic and scientific perceptions of land, it is now seen as political or democratic (1998, p. 3). In this way, it brings cultural relationships to the land into the realm of the political in an attempt to bring people’s feelings about land (they care deeply for it) in line with the ways in which land is governed, that is—for McCrone—to democratize it (1998).

For my purposes, this combined with the notion of stewardship is important because it shows land reform is associated with notions of care. It also affirms the connection between democracy and local “stewardship” of land—implying that when given their say democratically, people (at least in Highland Scotland) will choose to care for the land. In my own research, I attempt to move beyond the simple understanding of caring for the land as a “choice” and imagine, instead, the human actions behind land

reform as projects of deep, intricate and intimate collaboration between species, between humans and island, and between friends. I try to accomplish this with a determined perspective of radical relationality, which I hope comes through in my analysis. It—radical relationality—is certainly something I *felt*.

Eddie's concern for "giving the island credit," which I cited above, lends to my commitment to the situated relationship between person and place which gives rise to events—the mundane series of events that constitutes everyday life, as well as momentous events such as a community getting together and collectively buying its island. This is understood both in the emergent fields of the scholarly thinking of affect, such as human geography's school of "non-representational theory," as well as in more classical understandings of socially constructed space/places, as in Arturo Escobar's work. Lamenting what he characterizes as social science's neglect of the primacy of place in human experience, Escobar notes:

It is our inevitable immersion in place, and not the absoluteness of space, that has ontological priority in the generation of life and the real. It certainly does so in the accounts and practices of most cultures, echoed in the phenomenological assertion that, given the primacy of embodied perception, we always find ourselves in places. We are, in short, placelings. (2001, p. 143)

Escobar also fluently articulates some of the concerns I attempt to address throughout this thesis:

Anthropology, political geography and political ecology can contribute to re-state the critique of current hegemonies as a question of the utopian imagination: Can the world be reconceived and reconstructed from the perspective of the multiplicity of place-based practices of culture, nature and economy? Which forms of "the global" can be imagined from multiple place-based perspectives? Which counter-structures can be set into place to make them viable and productive? What notions of politics, democracy and the economy are needed to release the effectivity of the local in all of its multiplicity and contradictions? ... Some of these questions will have to be

given serious consideration in our efforts to give shape to the imagination of alternatives to the current order of things. (2001, p. 143)

At the same time, my hope is to open up some of these discourses to examine the role of places as both actors in the unfolding of such possibilities, and as agential Others to which (or, if I may be so bold, to whom) we relate in similar ways in which we relate to human Others; in my particular study, I highlight the possibility of place-as-companion or the companion-place.

MacPherson writes:

In the case of landscape, the half-second delay between stimulus and response means that we are not simply confined to a culturally constructed set of ingrained, reflective responses to landscape, rather our individual embodied experience of landscape harbours the possibility of change of a different response. For Thrift (2004c), the half-second delay between stimulus and response is described as the space of the ‘simple living body’ or ‘bare life’ ... Our actions and conscious thoughts in any given environment may be the result of pre-conscious thought shaped by... contexts and cues of a particular landscape... Physical landscape contexts are implicated in what the body is and what the body is likely to do in any given moment. (2010, p. 3)

Why think about these myriad ways in which a landscape might influence action?

For the proponents of this understanding, like Nigel Thrift (the father of non-representational theory) (2007) and Tim Ingold (2006, 2011)—whose particular philosophies differ in nuance and language, but who agree on the basic understanding of the mutual becoming of humans and their worlds, and the necessity of sense experience in the social scientific study of either—the consideration of landscape as an agent and the rejection of the language of simple, conscious “choice” are not just more accurate ways of thinking the world and theorizing human experience, but also allow for heightened sensitivity to how things might be different, and greater potential for theorizing this.

Thrift writes that such study is

portentous because it involves taking some of the small signs of everyday life for wonders and this involves all manner of risks, and not least pretentiousness. All I can say is that I think the risk is worth it in order to achieve a diagnosis of the present which is simultaneously a carrier wave for new ways of doing things. (2007, p. 2)

Though I will not be so pretentious as to consider myself capable of “diagnosing” the present, I do hope, in the following pages, to activate the possibility of Thrift’s latter suggestion: “a carrier wave for new ways of doing things,” in which we might, in attuning ourselves to our earthly surroundings, find in our moments of connection to those surroundings a path into a more just future. With these thoughts in mind, I turn now to a more thorough elucidation of the theoretical background that informs my thinking.

Chapter 4: Setting the Stage

That is the land out there, under the sleet, churned and pelted there in the dark, the long rigs upturning their clayey faces to the spear-onset of the sleet. That is the Land, a dim vision this night of laggard fences and long stretching rigs. And the voice of it—the true and unforgettable voice—you can hear even on such a night as this as the dark comes down, the immemorial plaint of the peewit, flying lost. That is the Land—though not quite all. Those folk in the byre whose lattern light is a glimmer through the sleet as they much and bed and tend the kye, and milk the milk into thin pails, in curling froth—they are The Land in as great a measure. (Gibbon, as cited in McCrone, 1998, p. 1)

So writes the early twentieth-century Scottish poet Lewis Grassie Gibbon, discussing the people of his community in northeast Scotland. Referring to this quote, David McCrone comments in a 1998 article that Gibbon's words have become much more significant, "because in Scotland we stand at the threshold of a new parliament in a new millennium. The Land of Scotland is what we are dealing with here, not simply its rural parts" (1998, p. 1). I have attempted to reflect this perspective in my theoretical choices. The authors to whom I turned in this effort almost unanimously reject the classic separation between theory and method, on much the same basis—its inaccuracy in reflecting actual experience—as they reject the dichotomy between "culture" and "nature." Therefore I think of this chapter and the next in simpler terms. This chapter explains the background that informs my analysis; in this sense, it is also a form of positioning myself both as a researcher in the field and a writer with specific ways of thinking about things, and also as a student of particular ways of knowing. This chapter goes on to explore the academic literature to which I was drawn *after* I did my research. More importantly than its role as an analytical lens, the material I cite here also offers a political worldview that I think will be productive.

In the following chapter, Chapter 5, I'll explain my methods—what it was that I

did while in the field, which has allowed me to stake both my claims as to what's happening on Eigg and my suggestions, however tentative, about where and how the story of Eigg might be applicable elsewhere. In a broader sense, Chapter 5 also reflects my engagement with Latour's imperative to "stop taking nonhumans as objects [and]... allow them to be entities that hesitate, quake, and induce perplexity" (2004, p. 76) and what happens if we begin to do this.

In my honours thesis, I explored the ways in which eviction from land and outside regulations on the use of it could be oppressive. Then, I was studying how the 1930s expropriation of land to create a national park in Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Highlands—the 19th-century refuge for many Highland Scots who were evicted from their homeland during the Clearances—affected the ways in which the descendants of expropriated families related to the land and made decisions on whether and how to care for it. I found that, having 80 years previously disempowered these people's ancestors from caring for the land, the imposition of a national park and the corresponding land use regulations continued to make people living near park borders feel alienated from their physical surroundings.

Now I am, in a sense, researching the opposite: empowerment at the other end of such oppression. Yet I think my theoretical perspective here will benefit from the same guiding understanding I followed in my honours project, which I took not from a social theorist but from conservation writer and nature photographer Subhankar Banerjee. He wrote, when embarking on a project in the Arctic, of his struggles in trying to figure out how "to frame the American Arctic in the American mind" (2007, p. 1). What he came up with was

to frame the American Arctic neither as a god-forsaken wasteland, nor as a pristine wilderness, untouched by man, but as a real place, a land that embodies the contradictions and complications of our human society. My indigenous friends of the North at times talk about the land, “it’s just home. To us, it’s home,” and that is all. I will frame the Arctic not from aesthetic or intellectual considerations but as *home* that supports communities of our species as well as many other species we share this planet with. (Banerjee, 2007, p. 2)

It is with this orientation, which I think is fair to all of these human and non-human communities as well as to the specificities of place and history, that I’ve approached my engagement with anything I could call theory.

Such a theoretical standpoint is also a political perspective, inherent in any argument that rests on the understanding that we share the earth with other species—an understanding that is profoundly lacking in much Western thought, and that I think is most appropriate for thinking through land reform in Scotland. This is a perspective that advocates local control, respect for others, just ecological stewardship, and an understanding of a collective good which *includes* the land and the nonhuman animals who live on it. In short, my theoretical perspective advances the understanding that everyone who shares the earth should play a part in the building of a common and more just world (Latour, 2004), and that “another world is possible” (Pignarre and Stengers, 2011, p. 3). Thus, the resources I draw on here focus on care, responsiveness, relationality and the inclusion of the nonhuman as social actors in social scientific thinking.

“As theory ends,” writes Nigel Thrift, “something else takes its place. What that something is I do not know, and I am not sure that it matters. But that it is different, that it is lively, and that it represents a challenge to the still elite practices of the current rather cloying hegemony of the cultural turn, I am sure” (2007, p. 148). Deborah Bird Rose

describes it as “ecological existentialism [, which] responds to the two big shifts in Western thought that define our current moment: the shift into uncertainty and the shift into connectivity” (2011, p. 42). Both these shifts emerged not just from the review of academic literature I completed before I went to Eigg, but also from what I heard from the people there. Many people I spoke with pointed out the fact that nearly every aspect of how Eigg works is a big experiment that could yet fail. They also emphasized the necessity of caring for and about your neighbours and the island itself.

Though I had a distinct political orientation – which could also be called a theoretical orientation, but I’m resisting the notion of theory and I think “political” is a more honest term – before I went into the field, I’ve tried hard to tailor the specific literature I refer here to that which is directly applicable to what I heard and experienced on Eigg, and to keep myself open to new academic and non-academic perspectives that have the potential to create useful dialogue in context. That being said, most of the “theoretical” work I employ is work with which I was already engaged. My refining during my analysis and writing has been a process of narrowing down, and effecting slight shifts in focus that illuminate the worlds I discovered on Eigg, allowing me to play with my experiences in the most productive way. For example, since my focus on the outset has been on relationships, and I wanted to give equal weight to human-nonhuman relationships, I read a great deal of literature on the need for social scientists (and everyone else) to stop neglecting and start paying attention to the non-human world, and on why and how to do so. Feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway’s (2003; 2007) and anthropologist Anna Tsing’s (2012) writing on companion species was extremely informative. What didn’t occur to me before I set out was that this concept

might be applicable also to relationships with the island itself—that the island, too, could be a companion. Nor did it occur to me to think through, in the academic literature, what it really means to live on *and with* an island, and what that ever-changing, many-faceted, composite thing we uncritically call “island” is to begin with.

I. Theoretical mentors for a political perspective

My theoretical mentors—among whom I count Thrift (2007), Haraway (2007), Ingold (2011), Latour (2004), Bennett (2010), Stewart (2011), and Lorimer (2006)—share the understanding that life is a messy experience, so research should be too. These scholars come from diverse backgrounds: Thrift and Lorimer bring perspectives from geography’s “non-representational theory,” a term coined by Thrift in his efforts to return the phenomenological to human geographical study and to add to the discipline engagements with the unconscious or the pre-conscious—and, specifically, the understanding that the non-human and the un/pre-conscious have agency and highly influence human experience. Stewart and Ingold propose similar projects for anthropology, while Bennett, a political theorist, works to show the agency of the material world. No matter what their specific focus, these scholars concur on the belief that in order to even come close to accurately understanding human experience, we must also take seriously the non-human. Human experience is full of webbed relationships with nonhuman others, and living it and studying it well demand a kind of responsiveness that we in the West have not been brought up to believe in, socially or academically, although some of us—like, I argue, many of the people who live on Eigg—may be living it anyway, to varying extents.

The most basic and obvious difference between the community on Eigg and any

other community in the West is the way property ownership works. Since 1997, Eigg has been owned not by any individual, but by a community heritage trust that acts as an agent of the collective. It was useful to engage both with traditional anthropological thinking on property, as well as how that has been expanded by more recent, affect-oriented scholarship—perhaps in a similar way the folks on Eigg expanded the ways in which Scottish people are able to think about how to own, or engage with, the Scottish land.

My political-theoretical perspective rejects capitalist notions of property: of alienable things, alienable sections of land, and irrational animals. It understands the things we might once have considered property to be agents (Thrift, 2007; Raffles, 2002; Tilley & Bennett, 2004), actants (Bennett, 2010; Latour, 2004), and/or social actors (Latour, 2004). Reindeer who will become food are guides and friends (Lorimer, 2006); dogs are “partners” rather than property; and the word “owner” is banished, cited as uncomfortable and inaccurate (Haraway, 2008). Hann, citing Davis, notes that “you cannot sue an acre” (1998, p. 5). In this relational paradigm, one would be hard-pressed to *own* an acre either. This is not only because “places are never still [or] finished, [but]... always in process, always ‘in the flow of becoming’” (Raffles, 2002, p. 27), but also because each thing and being of “the land” is also an actant deserving of a voice in democracy (Latour, 2004).

In this conceptualization, rather than owning or controlling what we would once have called property, we must *respond* to it. For Rose, in thinking about ecological catastrophe, “Western philosophy is limited because the catastrophe concerns animals and plants, life forms that for long had been held to be outside the bounds of ethical consideration” (2011, p. 61)—but, for me, for Rose, for other scholars and for the people

of Eigg, this makes little sense. And placing these life forms within the bounds of ethics—or, rather, erasing the boundaries of ethics completely—may allow humans to think as Gaia citizens (Tully, 2011) in the way that we need to in order to quite literally save the planet. Indeed, as Bennett argues, the idea of dead matter feeds human hubris and environmental destruction (2010); therefore, we are in need of a new idea.

“Landscape can be *reanimated* by intimacy in conduct and encounter” (Lorimer, 2006, p. 515), and this would work to instill in humans the ecological ethos we so desperately need (Bennett, 2010).

Responsive/relational approaches free us from our narrow understandings of how the west knows the world, and they also allow us to think *beyond* these understandings. Popke writes that non-representational work has the potential to “expand the kinds of affects of which we are capable” (2008, p. 82), something Thrift, citing Deleuze, also echoes (2007, p. 178). Affects, after all, are a kind of intelligence, and intelligences can be developed (Thrift, 2007). Thrift argues that the affective atmosphere resulting from extensive military training could have been a contributing factor to an actual war (2007, p. 182). What if the training were different? As a national park interpreter, I am trained in the art of “transformative experience”—guiding people to have experiences of nature that transform how they think about the world. I’ve also been trained to look at the non-human world carefully, to think about it slowly, to give observation of and engagement with the world around me the time they deserve. This isn’t always easy or even possible, and my practice of it is a constant work in progress. But I think my history of *thinking* not only about nature, but how to interpret and facilitate experiences of it, gives me a healthy background in certain kinds of attentiveness that are useful in deploying the thinking I

outline above.

As Popke notes, non-representational scholarship allows us to see the world differently, and to see alternatives to present situations (2008). The focus on affect, on relationships and connections, and on the agency of nonhumans requires an attunement to elements of the world we are not used to paying attention to, to atmospheres that may not be immediately available to conscious understanding (Stewart, 2011). Is this an attunement gained in the classroom, or in the woods? Non-representational methods and park interpreter training “give space to the event of the world”; through them, I am committed to “being open to new possibilities, a kind of witnessing through which we are exposed to the potential for being-otherwise” (Popke, 2008, p. 82-3). On Eigg, that potential is being realized every day. I encountered a few rolled eyes when I explained my academic interest in the island; after all, people wondered, why write about it instead of just *doing* it? I frequently ask this question of myself, but I remain committed to the belief that there is value in exposition, and that inspiring stories have power. I also strongly believe that small changes are expansive, in ways we probably can’t even imagine—and surely somewhere within that capacity for expansion is the capacity to use mere master’s theses as a vehicle for moving useful ideas around.

II. Zooming In: What an Island Tells of the World

There’s something special about small islands. Academics and islanders agree: there is an essence of place—what Vannini calls a “sensescape” (2011, p. 256)—that is purely unique to each small island, and it resides in the very air of such places. When I asked people on Eigg what they thought were the reasons the community had worked so hard to achieve a sustainable way of living, overwhelmingly at least part of the response

would be “because we live on an island.” The island made people conscious of the limitedness of resources; the island made commodities more expensive and more difficult to acquire; the island’s beauty made you want to preserve it. The island, as Eddie said, deserves credit for the community’s many achievements. Physically, being on an island ties you to a place; emotionally, you become part of the island (Brinklow, 2013, p. 42). The size of a small island allows you to get to know it better. Writing about the characteristics of small island art, Brinklow tells us:

living on an even smaller, more distilled island than the mainland island appeals to those who seek connection with place as inspiration for their art... This heightened knowledge and attachment to place and ‘heightened sense of physical containment’ (Hay, 2002, p. 22) have an immeasurable imprint on humans. (2013, p. 49)

These feelings add up to what a growing group of scholars call “islandness,” characterized by Philip Conkling of Maine’s Island Institute as a “deeply held feeling of a sacred connectedness to place that blurs the sense of time, since the connections to the past feel so omnipresent” (2007, p. 199). Others add that islandness also involves deep cooperation and interdependence. For Bourgeault, “what counts on islands is that a community has to work together” (1990, p. 36); Putz calls this “vigilant cooperation!—the other side of the coin of a belligerent sense of competition” (as cited in Conkling, 2007, p. 199).

Island living is immediate, specific, and necessarily a community effort (Vannini, 2011; Bourgeault, 1990); and, because of the fluid nature of relations and the constantly changing nature of any rock in the sea, it can be characterized only through the study of movement and interaction (Vannini and Taggart, 2012; Vannini, 2011). Baldacchino and Clark “propose island as a verb, islanding as an action” (2013, p. 129). Vannini and

Taggart capture the prominence of movement by again using language to effect a shift in perspective:

As soon as we transform the question – from the notion of ‘what is an island?’ to the practice of ‘how do you do your island?’ – islandness changes from a representation inside our heads to a set of tasks unfolding in front of its inhabitants.

This *Gestalt* shift in the way we understand islandness demands we view inhabitants and islands as one and the same. Both places and place-makers are nothing without the relations that constitute them... The life of your island is the sum total of the sensations it gives rise to, the cumulative incorporation of those feelings carved into its soils and shores, and the embodiment of its affective spaces on its dwellers. (2013, p. 235-236)

This is a highly useful perspective for thinking about the lives of human island communities and those who live in them; as a holistic study, however, I think it misses the crucial element of the island *itself*, which has a life far beyond what humans do to it and how it makes humans feel. This lack is characterized to some extent in Baldacchino and Clark’s critique that “often, an island just a *locus*... the self-evident island as *focus*... vanishes from... scholarly endeavour” (2013, p. 131). And yet, especially on a small island like Eigg, the island is *everywhere*. It’s difficult to lose sight of the ocean, and—for me anyway—nearly impossible to lose that sense of containment, of living in a place that operates on a slightly different plane of space, time, weather and priorities than the rest of the world.

Here, I orient towards the island as focus, both for analysis (why does the island deserve credit? How does it act on the people of Eigg and how do they relate to it?) and for proposition. It might seem that by taking such a deliberate stance on the island as a highly influential actant and, therefore, a *determinant* when it comes to human life, I risk alienating my study from mainland communities in terms of its relevance. I don’t believe

this is the case. As Mette Tiensuu of Bornholm, Denmark's "Bright Green Island," comments, "we as islands can act as role models... If we can copy-paste our solutions to other communities... perhaps then we can start believing in a truly sustainable future" (Business Centre Bornholm, 2013).

Many see islands as loci of innovation, and consider this innovation to be both rhizomatic and expansive. Citing the pioneering island work of Darwin and Malinowski, Baldacchino argues the study of islands provides "crucial new insights" necessary to the growth of knowledge (2007, p. 167). Islands have been essential in "spawning biocultural diversity" and are "sites of social experimentation" (Baldacchino and Clark, 2013, p. 129). Lucy Conway, who I interviewed on Eigg, commented that the connection with the physical she found on Eigg "seeps into you, and therefore your response to living is affected by that seepiness." I want to also suggest that these ethereal elements of islandness can seep off islands, especially in our ever-more technologically connected world. Lucy, for one, blogs about the creative community on Eigg and posts about it on various forms of social media, making a serious and sustained effort to connect with the wider community of eco-conscious creative people in Scotland and across the globe—and it works. And in the realm of the affective sensescapes that probably seep into people like me who travel to Eigg, who knows what elements of islandness I am seeping out all across Nova Scotia?

Such connections, though they can't be quantified, matter. If "islands act as advance indicators for what will occur in the future, or as extreme renditions of what exists elsewhere in less exceptional form" (Baldacchino, 2007, p. 167), then my study is a crucial and timely contribution to our understanding of how human societies might yet

avert the potentially disastrous consequences of unchallenged climate change—so that we can, through policy and practice, encourage such processes elsewhere. And if the community ethos on these islands is an “extreme rendition” of what may exist in other rural communities, this, too, is important: knowledge about this sense of community and the drivers of *sustainable* social and economic revitalization on islands will help to encourage it elsewhere.

I want to suggest, finally, that somehow small islands crystallize, in the human psyche, what matters. As Vannini and Taggart write of their island, on the West Coast of Canada instead of the West Coast of Scotland:

Skimpy beach fashion has given way to colorful gumboots for women and hiking shoes for men this year. And last year. And the next. But no one cares about looking the part, since the eyes have so much more to fixate on...

Imagine letting your mind wonder not about the finiteness of your rock, but about its mundane fragility. Where is that plume of smoke coming from – is it a wildfire? ... Is that a plastic bottle sitting on the shore? How could they have given a permit to those people to build over there? And why do they think that an ocean view gives one the right to cut down so many trees? (2012, p. 232-233)

Here, the western cultural focus on material consumption that has been so harmful to the earth is deprioritized in favour of appreciation of that earth, and concern for it. Zita Cobb, passionate revitalizer of Newfoundland’s Fogo Island, remarks that when you’re on Little Fogo Island, “nature doesn’t have any artifice... it takes a nanosecond when you’re out there to just—everything becomes clear” (as cited in Brinklow, 2013, p. 49). For me, being in, on or near the ocean has always put things in perspective. In simple terms, it makes me feel small; in more complicated terms, it gives me an appreciation of the world outside myself, and invokes in me the desire to be gentle in my relationship with it. Brinklow refers to the work of poet Victoria King, which reflects

her commitment to giving voice to the [island] she feels privileged to call home: ‘There needed to be some laying down, drawing of the line, that this land is a sanctuary now, and some respect needs to be paid’... Her giving voice to the land is reminiscent of the Goethean principles of giving service to a phenomenon, ‘intuiting the responsibility that accompanies coming to know another being from the inside’ (Cameron, 2005, p. 188)... [S]he has formed an intimate relationship with Bruny Island; and... she feels a deep psychological connection to the island and wishes to communicate that for the good of the land. ‘This is the first time in my life I’ve really felt that the practice has come together with my life. It’s so integrated, the content is not separated from myself’ (King, 2011, np).

It’s this kind of feeling of connection, resulting in passion and care, that makes the feelings and choices that result from islandness important for the rest of us too. In the words of poet, scholar and islander Theresa Teaiwa: “Let us... make island a verb. It is a way of living that could save our lives” (2007, p. 514).

III. Theorizing the Isle of Eigg

*Who possesses this landscape?
the man who bought it?
or I, who am possessed by it?*

*False question
For this landscape is masterless
and intractable
in terms that are human.*

- Norman MacCaig (poem found on a banner prominently displayed in the Eigg community hall) (Scottish Poetry Library, 2014)

In *When Species Meet* (which is mostly about when dogs and humans meet), feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway rejects the conventional understanding of humans as dogs’ owners or masters. Instead, she chooses to use the language of partnership. She and her dog are partners. And although she acknowledges there is an (almost) necessary power relation between herself and Cayenne in their day-to-day life, she is at least able to be more democratic in her writing and theorizing (2007). If we were

talking about land—which I am, though Haraway is not—we might reconsider the conventional relationship of dominance as, instead, one of stewardship. Remembering, again, the quote in the community hall—summarized by Eigg resident Lucy Conway as “you don’t own the land, the land owns you”—I think the ideas behind this love-based “partnership,” if not the exact language, can also be useful when thinking about islands. Eigg, like a dog, has a spirit all its own; as Eddie pointed out, it does things; as many people who live there believe, it can’t exactly be owned, at least not in the way we in the West are habituated to conceptualizing ownership.

Haraway writes:

Somebody is at home in the animals [we] work with. Just *who* is at home must permanently be in question. The recognition that one cannot *know* the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all of time who and what are emerging in relationship, is the key. That is so for all true lovers, of whatever species. Theologians describe the power of the ‘negative way of knowing’ God. Because Who/What Is is infinite, a finite being, without idolatry, can only specify what is not; i.e., not the projection of one’s own self. Another name for that kind of ‘negative’ knowing is love. I believe those theological considerations are powerful for knowing dogs, especially for entering into a relationship, like training, worthy of the name of love. (2003, p. 50)

In the same way, somebody/some essence is at home on any given island just as it is in any given dog. Scholars of islandness know this; so, too, do those who have spent time on islands. It is especially visible on small ones, without bridges. And in that being on an island prompts a person to find more interesting things to fix one’s eyes on than last year’s boots (Vannini and Taggart, 2012, p. 232), it has the same “negative knowing” effect that Haraway describes, and the same result: love. I argue that the island is a companion; if this is not in exactly the same way a dog is, the experiences (dog-companion, island-companion) have enough in common to make it extremely useful to

think through the island-companion in similar ways. And since islands are much less conventional companions than dogs, doing so is both revealing and potentially helpful; as Bennett writes,

the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even ‘respect’... The figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption. (2010, p. ix)

Here, though, it is not *only* a matter of bringing the island to life, but of bringing it to life as an agent that influences human action *through* a highly personal and emotional relationship of what I argue is close kin to companionship.

And yet our conventional understanding of what “companion” means is not enough. Bennett critiques her own philosophy of “thing-power” for its “latent individualism... the way in which the figure of ‘thing’ lends itself to an atomistic rather than a congregational understanding of agency” (2010, p. 20). I would propose a similar critique of Haraway’s work on companion species and love. Haraway acknowledges—and celebrates—a broad range of companion species with whom we humans are “messmates,” but she does not really move beyond the animal (except in the case of bacteria); and while she revels in multiplicity, for the most part her work does not consider that which is *created* when species—and other things—meet. She focuses on the relationship between a trainer and a dog, and between one discrete species and another; I am interested, here, in the greater entity that exists in the trainer-dog-playing field-leash-onlookers together: Bennett’s *congregational*, rather than individual, agency (2010).

Haraway's (2003, 2007) work on companion species is apt to put words to the relationships I witnessed on Eigg, but these were relationships not just between people and one another, or people and their companion species (dogs, chickens, shellfish, broad beans), but between humans and the island itself. In order to understand these relationships, we need to go further. Here I conceptualize the Isle of Eigg as a Deleuzian assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that is also a companion. As an assemblage, it is a specific combination of things, plants, forces, non-human animals, colour, iridescence... and the list goes on. Yet the language of assemblages alone cannot understand it, either, for what I found on Eigg was that the island was, for its humans, first and foremost a subject of love.

My guide here is political philosopher Jane Bennett, who takes her operationalization of the "assemblage" concept first from Spinoza. From him she takes the understanding that

bodies enhance their power *in or as a heterogeneous assemblage*. What this suggests for the concept of *agency* is that the efficacy or effectivity to which that term has traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts. (2010, p. 23)

The assemblage, whose use as a philosophical concept comes initially from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is useful because it permits us to think about the collective—or, to use Bennett's term, congregational—agency of things together. Material things, immaterial forces, ideas, patterns, animals—all can converge in an infinite variety of ways, and when a particular convergence starts to exert power and *do* things, it becomes an assemblage. While some elements of a given assemblage may be more powerful than others, the whole is always more than and different from the sum of

any or all of the parts. “Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency *of* the assemblage” (Bennett, 2010, p. 24).

In all the discussion of islandness, what fails to emerge is the answer to the simple question: What *is* an island? It is clear, from the scholarly literature, from everyone I spoke to on Eigg, and from my experiences there and on my own island—Cape Breton—that the island is more than the sum of its parts: rocks, animals, birds, vegetation, erosion, wind, fishing boats, mosquitoes, age-old volcanoes. It is also clear that islands effect an agency of their own; and it is for this reason that the assemblage is a helpful concept. It gives weight to the notion that the island is also an actor. It makes space for the island as such. But, again, it can only tell part of the story; to properly speak of the emotional attachments the island evokes—and who knows, maybe Eigg gets attached to its people too—we also need to tell stories of companionship and love. Haraway writes: “If I have a dog, my dog has a human; what that means concretely is at stake” (2003, p. 54). Alongside Vannini and Taggart’s “How do you do your island?” (2012, p. 235), I attempt to push the thinking even further to ask “How does your island do *you*?” What is at stake, in all of this, is a different kind of relationship between humans and “our” things, humans and the land, and—perhaps—our actions and the future of planet Earth.

Chapter 5: Being on Eigg: Stories about the Research Process

I spent just over three weeks on the Isle of Eigg in September of 2013. The tourist season was beginning to wane and we heard threats of fall gales, which resulted in a nearly weeklong period during which the ferries didn't run. I watched in wonder as the fronds of the bracken fern turned rusty brown, seemingly overnight, while the heather remained a deep, soulful mauve.

I'd left home about a week before I arrived on Eigg. During this week, I'd become thoroughly sick of London, and had been relieved to hop on my pre-booked trains to Glasgow and then northwards along Scotland's breathtaking west coast. Even so, at the final stop of the West Highlands Line—the train line used to film the journey of the Hogwarts Express in the Harry Potter films—I felt rather abandoned. The train deposited me in Mallaig, a tiny fishing village in what seemed to be the middle of nowhere. My hosts on Eigg would later tell me the village had just enough substance to entertain the tourists whose scheduled stop there was an hour-long break from the Harry Potter steam train. After the hour, you ran out of things to do, but since the Potter fans were the main tourist demographic that visited Mallaig, it didn't matter and people went away thinking the town bustling and lively. Around the same time I was discovering that this image was a bit off the mark, I was also beginning to experience a panicked onslaught of feelings of homesickness and incapacity. Suddenly everything seemed overwhelming. I ate a dismal piece of toast with melted cheese and red onions at a restaurant and considered changing my plane ticket.

When I finally got on the ferry to Eigg the following day (after the one I'd planned to take was cancelled due to weather conditions), everything changed. The rain and wind

that had cancelled the morning ferry let up, and the sun emerged. I found Sue Hollands, my host who was picking me up, quite easily when I got off the ferry, and—to my sheer delight—she was in the company of Rosie, the half-border collie, half-bearded collie who made me feel welcome in the totally genuine way only a dog can. And when we arrived at Sue and her husband Neil’s croft, where I was staying—having made arrangements to volunteer there through WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms, which organizes a host-volunteer exchange of accommodations and food for labour)—I knew I was in the right place. It's hard to explain the sudden sense of peace I felt on the island, but it was something like a huge sigh of relief combined with the greatest stroke of awe I've ever experienced. The island was beautiful. A single one-way road wound its way through hills and gardens, and I hadn't yet been out of sight of the ocean and, beyond it, the pointy, purple-glazed mountains of the next island over.

I was on Eigg for almost a month, and I walked around the entire time in a constant state of wonder. One of the people I interviewed had been living on Eigg for forty years. I asked her why she thinks the community there has been so determined to preserve the physical island. She laughed. “You go out there and watch the sunset and you tell me.”

Somehow, of all the answers I heard to that question throughout my time on Eigg, that one made the most sense.

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The first order of business, speaking in terms of research, was to obtain the clear permission of Sue and Neil that I could write about my time on their croft. I had already discussed this with Sue via email, but I had to make sure everything I was doing, and

their consent, was crystal-clear. I chose to use consent forms for my project, with the option of oral consent, which would be confirmed and signed by me; or written consent, confirmed and signed by the participant. I had been concerned that, since my research would be with farmers, people might have differing levels of ability and willingness to understand and sign formal documents. I also wondered if past negative experiences with bureaucracy—previous landowners, for example—might make them distrustful of such documents. In hindsight, these concerns were unnecessary. The farmers on Eigg are a well-spoken and well-educated bunch; to some extent, they *had* to be those things, as well as to be articulate in the language of documents, in order to have bought the island in the first place. When I look now at the explanation I gave for offering oral consent in my ethics application, it seems stiff and condescending. No one I did research with, nor Sue and Neil, my participant observation research hosts, had any qualms about signing the written form themselves nor any difficulty in understanding it.

I did participant observation with Sue and Neil, and completed nine interviews. Broadly speaking, all of the people I interviewed are crofters, in that they are tenants of crofts. They have varying levels of engagement with the land, mostly depending on time and physical ability, but all keep either gardens, farm animals or both. All are engaged community members who have been living on Eigg for at least several years, ranging from four decades to one. Before beginning each interview, I read through the consent form out loud—sometimes re-wording or contextualizing so that the language made sense in conversation—and then handed the form to the participant to read through. Not everyone did, though a few people said they would read the copy I was leaving with them later, and they appreciated having access to my contact information. I asked my

participants:

- if they wanted me to use their real name or a pseudonym and disguised identity (a concept I explained as changing or not revealing any identifying personal details, though I emphasized the risk that their identity might be discovered anyway, given the small and close-knit nature of the community on Eigg);
- if they were willing to be quoted in my final paper;
- if they would like a copy of passages in which they were quoted or mentioned for review before I submitted my final paper; and
- if they would like to be contacted if I wished to use the information I gained from them in future studies (five years or more in the future); or if they were simply unwilling to have this information used in any other studies.

The complete text of my consent forms can be found in Appendices I and II.

For the human side of my participant observation research, I lived with Sue and Neil, their son on weekends, and a few other occasional guests, participating in preparation and cleanup (and of course eating) of meals and some other family activities. Sue and Neil and whoever was around their home also comprised my main social life, which mostly involved dinner and hanging around after dinner to have a cup of coffee and chat. And, I worked from around 9am-4pm each day on the croft with Neil. Sometimes I worked directly with him, but I also often worked on tasks he set for me to do on my own, like weeding or harvesting a particular patch of garden. This worked out perfectly for me, because it was an opportunity for me to get my hands dirty in the work of being on Eigg, and to be in direct contact with the earthly elements of the island as they related to work, not just to pleasure. When I was with Neil, I also asked lots of

questions—how does this element of the community work, why are we doing this this way, where are the cows, whose house is that—and his answers were not only patient and thorough, but (if I'm not mistaken) enthusiastic. I couldn't have asked for a more productive setup for participant observation, and for this reason I felt and feel both lucky and grateful to have had this opportunity.

Neil and Sue were also my main point of contact for finding other people to interview, though my subsequent contacts were also helpful in suggesting more. I set up my first interview, with Maggie Fyffe, on the basis of Neil's suggestion. In his words (when talking about the community buyout), "some of my facts are guesses. Maggie's facts are facts." With the exception of one interviewee who seemed a bit rushed during our interview, everyone I interviewed was amazingly welcoming, was more than willing to give of themselves and their time, and went out of their way to help me. Camille Dressler, for example, who other islanders affectionately call their island historian, invited me to her home for an interview early one Sunday afternoon. We chatted (and I recorded) for a couple of hours, and then she proceeded to take me into her main living area, sit me down with a cup of tea, and make lunch for both of us. Afterwards, we walked to the crofting museum, where she gave me a guided tour. Then we stopped off at the home of someone else she thought I should interview, where we spent an hour sipping a couple of different Scottish wines while Camille and her friend discussed their memories of the buyout, and their theories about why it was successful.

The willingness of Camille and the other people I interviewed to participate in my study was particularly generous because, especially since the island's pioneering electricity scheme became a reality in 2007, the many innovations of the community have

made it a focus for all manner of social, environmental and scientific research. While the islanders seem to be happy to contribute to such studies, there is some risk of research fatigue. The constant questions must be at least a little bit wearying. Whether the repeat participants in these studies actually believe the research will do some good is unclear, but I can attest to the real desire of both myself and those I interviewed to make this happen.

My interviews were an average length of around an hour, with some being closer to forty minutes and some nearly two hours. They were loosely structured, much more so than I had outlined in my interview guide (see Appendix III). I kept the interview guide in mind in case I ran out of things to say, and also had a general checklist of the topics I wanted to cover in each interview. The checklist included the general categories from my interview guide: experiences of the buyout and how the community has changed since then; connection to the land; and commitment to sustainability. But I realized quickly that the questions I had planned were too formal to be conducive to real conversation, and I didn't want the scripted answers participants might be accustomed to giving other researchers as well as tourists and friends. Ultimately, each conversation went in a different direction. But I tried to work in the following questions/topics:

- Were you born on Eigg, and if not, how did you end up here?
- Why did you choose to live here?
- What are your memories of life before and after the buyout; or, for those who came after, did community ownership influence your decision to come here?
- How does community ownership affects the community/how the community works?

- Do people make their daily life decisions based on their environmental impact, and why?
- Why has the community taken such a strong environmental focus?
- Do you think there are things on Eigg that would work as a model in other communities, and if so what?
- What's special about Eigg?

My interviews took place in people's homes. A couple of my interviews, with Camille and with Scruff, who I'll introduce later, also included a walking-and-talking wander around the participants' gardens. I would have liked to do more of the latter kind of interview, but time, space and weather didn't permit it. Nonetheless, doing interviews in people's homes helped ensure they felt comfortable chatting with me.

It also gave me some extra insight into the workings of everyday life on Eigg, which I would describe as busy, content and perennially casual; I quickly learned that showering and replacing my work jeans with my nice jeans to prepare for an interview was quite unnecessary. On Eigg what you do is everything, what you say is second, and how you look, as far as I can tell, doesn't even factor into the equation. The old croft houses where I did interviews were low and unassuming, with their thick, dark stone walls; long kitchen tables; and squat shelves housing all manner of teas and preserves tucked into corners and under the eaves. The newer homes I glimpsed varied in style, but shared a stark deference to the ocean scenery outside their windows in favour of any elaborate decoration within. Without fail, I was offered tea, a general word which also seems to imply coffee, hot cocoa and sometimes light snacks. I think I drank more tea in three weeks on Eigg than I did in the three years previous.

Before I move on to discussion of my work in trying to deploy a multi-species form of ethnography, I want to briefly position myself as a researcher on Eigg. I am a young woman, tall and blonde. I don't know much about farming, but I have a relatively high level of education otherwise. I am, as soon as I open my mouth, clearly not Scottish. I feel I got along well with everyone I interviewed and mostly everyone I was in contact with, but I did have a sense that sometimes people felt I was naïve. I was too young and delicate to grasp the tough stuff, or—and this is the critique that hit home most, because in many ways it is true—I was, as someone in the general category of “researcher,” wasting my time talking to people and writing about what they said when I could have been out changing the world.

However, though it is possible, I didn't get the sense that the people I interviewed held anything back because I was perceived as young or my work as impractical. The effect of this was rather that people (both women and men), most of whom were around my parents' age, seemed to feel protective of me. Some warned me away from other community members. As far as I could tell, this was because they didn't want me to have my feelings hurt by jaded West Coasters, not because there was any real possibility for harm. They also roundly wanted to help me succeed and wanted me to have a good time on Eigg, recommending both places to visit and people to meet. In my experience, Scottish people also have a soft spot for people from Cape Breton—I can't count the number of times I heard a variation of: “oh, you're more Scottish than me, then!”—which may have also contributed to people's amiability and their desire to ensure my research and my visit went well.

I am fairly quiet, and getting friendly with strangers is not my strong suit. These

traits, combined with the fact that as a habit I don't drink alcohol much—not in the heavy, habitual and inhibition-banishing way that is the culture of the western Scottish Highlands and (probably as a result) also the culture of my own home, Cape Breton—were a bit of a problem. Some people I spoke with warned that not getting drunk at the pier at least once or twice would make me seem snobby or standoffish, and would make it impossible for me to gain the community's trust or get an accurate picture of life on Eigg. Others simply couldn't comprehend why I didn't, which baffled me, especially given that even if I had wanted to, I was a fifteen-minute drive or one and a half hour's walk from the Pier, and I didn't have access to a car or a bicycle.

So I didn't manage to become close friends with any of the people, many closer to my own age, who liked to drink at the Pier, and a couple of them called me out on it. The result is that the demographic I ended up interviewing was older, which worked well for my research, because I wanted to talk to people who could remember, and had been involved in, the buyout. I was comforted in my last interview, during which Sue assured me that though the people who are in it may think the Eigg drinking-at-the-Pier culture is the heart of the community, actually there's a lot more to it. For this particular project, the interviews I did do can offer enough exciting, if exploratory, insights to keep me bogged in analysis for years.

This is especially true because I spent even more time than I did soliciting and completing interviews engaging with the non-human residents of Eigg. As I mentioned, before I went to Eigg I read a variety of social scientific literature that engaged seriously with non-humans (see, for example, Lorimer, 2006; Raffles, 2010; Haraway, 2003, 2007; Tsing, 2012). The method these authors use is simple, because, except in subject, it isn't

that different from conventional ethnographic methods. It's essentially participant observation, except that since your companions don't respond to you verbally, it takes a little more effort, and some engagement with one's other senses.

Moving around slowly and on foot, for example, is key. Raffles quotes Walter Benjamin, famous scholar of *flânerie* and perhaps the first non-representational geographer: "Only he who walks the road on foot learns of *the power it commands*, and of how...it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns" (2002, p. 3). This latter point could not be more evocative of my experience on Eigg, both in the way I conceptualized my method and the way my practice of it played out. Walking was essential to my grasp of what it is like to live on Eigg. The ground beneath your feet—its texture, its give, the sounds your footsteps provokes—speaks volumes. The ocean and the mountains of Rum take on a different sheen every day, every hour. And walking permits one to be a part of all of it.

Anna Tsing's work is an eloquent example of the power of walking. Writing of mushrooms, she says:

Wandering and love of mushrooms engender each other. Walking is the speed of bodily pleasure and contemplation; it is also just the speed to look for mushrooms. After the rains, the air smells fresh with ozone, sap, and leaf litter, and my senses are alive with curiosity. What better than to encounter the orange folds of chanterelles pushing through the dark wet or the warm muffins of kind boletes popping up through crumbly earth? The excitement of color, fragrance, and design... I am alight with the sweetness of life itself. (2012, p. 142)

This walking is not so much a walking for transportation, although that can be a part of it, but for observation and for life-sustaining peace. It allows moments of pause. There is also the component of *working* with land that offers insights on how the land—as assemblage—is, and how it works. Again, I reach for Lorimer's words: "Creativity and

texture are most compelling and expressive as they emerge in practice... the repetitive doing of things is affirmative of, and can impel, a powerful sense of being, or 'practice ontology'... Terrestrial activities on the vegetable patch offer access to metaphysical concerns" (2005, p. 85). Walking, stopping and working were all part of my research on Eigg. They involved careful observation; touching; peering into crevasses; holding my breath in the hopes that the sheep, for once, would not notice me; and the multitude of other tiny wonders that emerge when one pays attention, and one marvels, and one pays attention some more.

Tsing also draws out an important component I've avoided thus far in my discussion of method: pleasure. Love and fun were, for me, two prominent results of my determination to engage with the non-human of Eigg. I came to love the island, its sheep, its plants, its soil, even—as I bravely stood on the beach facing the beating rain and the raging ocean, as the island reddened my cheeks and chilled me to the bone, as I felt myself filled with a sense of awe that far overcame any physical discomfort—its violent gales. I loved the sheep and chickens I fed each morning. I loved Rosie from the moment I met her. In our daily walks/wanders/rambles/sometime-runs, Rosie and I had a *lot* of fun. And the joy I experienced in my love of and fun on the island made a major contribution to my ability to engage with these nonhuman elements of the island, and my openness to them. Love and fun should not be underestimated in this kind of research, because they are yet another tool for opening oneself to experience—and creating space for new understandings, observations and relationships, and the hatching of new ideas.

One day, for example, as I was walking on the beach with Rosie and watching as she ran to random points in the sand and dug frantically, it occurred to me to wonder

what it would be like to do what *she* does. Alone on the beach with the dog, I took off my shoes and started kicking in the sand the way she did, running back and forth, creating explosions of sand into the air and kicking up a whole variety of new smells and sensations. Rosie went into a joyful frenzy when I joined her, and we spent an exhilarating half an hour alternately kicking and digging into the sand. I went back to the croft house for dinner feeling elated, somewhat rebellious and as if I had discovered a whole new world, and I spent the next several days experimenting with acting like Rosie—an interesting experiment, impossible to conduct in the presence of other humans, as well as a twist on the traditional human-dog relationship that left Rosie both delighted and, I think, a little bit confused.

Trying to take Rosie's perspective allowed me to slightly shift my own perception of the island, and create a more robust experience of it for me as a researcher. So did other methods for engaging with the nonhuman. I walked, I sniffed, I looked, I explored, I drew pictures and took field notes while perched on rocks, on cliffs, in the grass. I could go on for another five pages delimiting the many ways in which one can, and I tried to, experience a landscape over the course of a month spent immersed in it. None of these methods are definite and they cannot really be circumscribed. But that doesn't make them any less important or exciting, and in some ways the method is in the experiment. Experimentation is the best way to figure out something you didn't know before, especially when what you want to know may only be answerable by things who and which cannot respond to questions. Considering the sensory and the more-than-human allowed me to connect to the island in ways I otherwise may not have been able to, and to walk, with someone who knew the island better than any human companions, on paths to

places, ideas and feelings I didn't expect. In the analysis that follows, my experimentation with more-than-linguistic methods and multi-species investigation productively informs what I am able to say about the island as home, the island as relational actor, and its human community as a model for the kinds of innovation our world needs if we are ever to live up to the standard in which every living being has a fair chance at self-fulfillment.

Chapter 6: Noticing, Joy, Care

I arrived on Eigg on a weekend. Struan, the 12-year-old son of my hosts on Eigg, was going back to the mainland late in the day on Sunday, to go to school for the week (Eigg has a primary school, but once students hit what we would call junior high, they board across the water in Mallaig). Still unsure of my position in the household, I sat by at lunch as the family decided where they should go walking before Struan had to catch the ferry. Walking, I discovered, was a common pastime on Eigg: not walking to get somewhere or do something, but walking to walk, a node in the larger culture of hillwalking in Scotland. In Scotland there is the “right to roam,” which means you can walk anywhere you want to. Sue told me on one of my first days on Eigg that it was fine to open people’s gates and walk across their yards, and I noticed others doing just that. It is, I suppose, an assertion of the adage posted in the hall. It is also a rejection of the western notion of property ownership, of land as a setting on which life is staged, of which everyone needs a piece just large enough to satisfy his or her own goals; and in which attending to the larger picture of a planet or a community is not supposed to be an issue.

Struan’s position in the conversation unfurling at the big kitchen table was that he wanted to go walking “up the croft.” It went something like this (and this is from the notes I took down afterward, so it’s an approximation): “I like going up the croft. I thought we could go notice if we can see those non-native plants the man was talking about...” I still don’t know what the plants are or who the man was. But I am intrigued by Struan’s use of the word *notice*—why not look for, or look at?—and by the notion of walking to do so.

Let's return to my earlier point on the importance of walking; let's imagine that walking unveils things for noticing. And let's imagine the idea of "noticing" as linked both to curiosity and to ethical response. *Look* is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "direct one's gaze in a specific direction." To look is to gaze, to observe, to lay one's eyes upon—it is not to *attend*. Noticing, meanwhile, involves attention: as a noun, it's "the fact of observing or paying attention to something." As a verb, it's "become aware of" or "treat (someone) as worthy of recognition or attention" (2014). The difference is subtle but powerful. I would point also to popular use of the word. When we tell someone we've noticed something, it often precludes a recommendation for response. "I notice someone left a water bottle in the classroom, therefore I should drop it off at Lost and Found." To look is to impartially observe. To notice, I would argue, is to become involved. And once you're involved, you start to care. It is this, perhaps, which differentiates the community of Eigg from western stories of domination. The western property owner and even the western romantic (think of Hunter's [1995] critique of the romantic poets as simple observers of the Highland landscape, who didn't notice the people and trees missing from it) simply look without response. This is the colonial gaze. What are the possibilities within the practice of its opposite—of thinking of the histories and the relationships within the naturecultures (Haraway, 2007) to which we bear witness; of considering their needs, their ability or lack thereof to flourish; of acting on what we notice? Might we thus build a relationship to the land in which it is a relational Other with which we are in respectful conversation, versus an oppositional Other (Asch, 2011) which we dominate?

"Noticing" in the way that I conceptualize it, and operationalize it here, is not

intrusive or demanding, but gentle, attentive, respectful and inquisitive. It is just the attitude I observed in the relationship to the land on Eigg. The conservation ethos was not one of preserving the land by not touching it, but rather one of interaction. At a resident's meeting, attendees expressed concern that some people picking apples from the common orchard didn't know how to tell when the apples were ripe enough. The concern was not with taking the apples, but with taking them without first noticing what was going on: thinking through the broader implications for the community and for the trees.

I believe noticing reveals relationality. Stengers gives

primordial importance to the making of relations... even identifying the relation making capacity as synonymous to civilization... This capacity is a testing one. It means a constraint on the way one presents oneself, and indeed, thinks of oneself. No presentation should entail a static, naturalized attribute which results in insulting the other whom one addresses. (2012, p. 14)

Real relation-making (and relation-keeping) involves constraint. Noticing the apples and constraining how you act on them in favour of the greater good, which everyone at the meeting agreed was important, results in making or strengthening relations, or *acknowledging* our being-in-relation with the apples. And once you start noticing the web of relationships you're always already entwined in, suddenly these relationships pop up everywhere—and suddenly we are called to start reconsidering the way we think about what we can dominate. We move away from dominance thinking into commons thinking (Kenrick, 2009).

James Tully said in a presentation that we must do the work of reconnecting ourselves to the earth and to one another, and doing so complexifies the world (2014). It's not *easy* to reformulate our dominance ways of thinking and being, and after you do, the way forward isn't always obvious. I would, however, call on a more ephemeral result

that seems to emerge when one embraces these relations: happiness. When I was on Eigg, I was sleeping in a cold caravan that I'm sure wasn't watertight, without electricity (though I had access to the fully equipped croft house) and without an attached bathroom. I missed my partner and my cats dreadfully and I was constantly craving refined sugar, which the family with whom I was living and eating didn't have on the menu. I was also doing a good deal of manual farm labour (which, to my surprise, I found I enjoyed). Despite these material discomforts, I was *happy*: not a euphoric kind of happiness, but a perfect contentment. I had a sense of oneness with my surroundings that I think I have personally experienced elsewhere—in the Cape Breton Highlands—but never in common with a whole community, which seemed to be the case on Eigg.

It would—as lots of people pointed out—have been different if I lived there full time. I believe that. But I also noticed a certain quality of contentedness in many of the people I met on Eigg that is missing in many people I've encountered elsewhere. And it's a quality that they talk about (as I'll show in my analysis a little later) and that they write about. Johnny Lynch, an Eigg resident and musician who goes by the name of The Pictish Trail, has this to say of his experiences living on Eigg (he's been there several years):

It's great here. No noise, or distractions. Incredible scenery. Dodgy mobile network access. Bliss... I find that the journey [home] itself is part of the island psyche. As the Scotrail carriage creaks and moans, wheezes and shudders into Highland stations, I always make sure I sit facing away from the direction of travel, so that it feels like my life is rewinding back. Rewinding to a happier me, a calmer me. (2014)

I came across the particular article in which he made that comment through my Twitter connection with Lucy Conway, another Eigg resident (and one of the people I interviewed), who shared it with the caption: “Apart from the beard... @pictishtrail has

captured, perfectly, my ‘why’ I live on Eigg. #mindreader” (2014). Most of the people I met had chosen to be on Eigg—moved there, or moved away and returned—and they wanted to make it a good place to live, and they worked to make it so, and it is (basically, most of the time) so. They made simple, contented lives for themselves and are now in the business of living them... and of noticing those lives, rather than slipping through them.

Indeed, nothing moves quickly on Eigg. The ferry is never on time, but you get there twenty minutes early for it anyway, because you’ve left forty minutes early, because—as Neil said—“it’s okay to be the first person heading for the ferry, but it’s not good to be the last one, because then if you break down along the way no one will be coming along to pick you up until you’ve missed it.” People have cell phones for when they’re on the mainland, but on most of the island there’s no service. The dog comes to work with you if she wants to. The cat rides on your shoulders, and if he slows you down a little, so be it. Potatoes should be soaked for several hours before eating them. Convincing a cow to do anything requires time and patience, and so does convincing a chicken *not* to do anything, or to be quiet and stop following you. Vegetables get eaten when they’re ripe, and before they go bad. It’s simple; it makes sense. Eddie, an Irish musician who moved to Eigg after getting involved in the buyout 16 years ago by playing fundraising gigs, said when he acquired his croft he intended to have a couple of cows and some vegetables. But then he realized bluebells were already growing there, in abundance, so he decided there must be some way of adding more varieties and making some money from selling their seeds. Ten years later, the bluebells continue to grow on

their own, but Eddie's still at the "thinking about it" stage. In his words: "I didn't move here to hurry up."

I found echoes of these observations in the words of April Cumming, vice-chair of the Scottish Fabians (a UK socialist organization). In fruitful dialogue with my own thoughts, she writes of a visit to Eigg:

What we found there was a community of equals, resolute in their determination to achieve self-sufficiency and a cohesive sense of "oneness" in a changing world. This was not about denying progress or trying to recapture some ethereal myth of crofting life. This was no Brigadoon in the mist. Here we found... a pervasive sense of positivity and direction unlike any I have experienced before... they have achieved an island that... has recovered something of the commune; a reaffirmation of the value of human relationships and the self-determination to direct change in a manner that benefits all. (2013)

Cumming is referring to Eigg as an example to back up her affirmation of the importance of Oxfam's Humankind Index, which

demonstrates through their large sample that, after these basics [of life] are achieved, what makes us most "happy" is not our accumulated list of possessions but instead the quality of human relationships around us and our connection to the environment, both internal and external. Nothing is more detrimental to our quality of life than loneliness. We do not wish for a "brave new world" where individuals spend their time alone, staring at various forms of screens, in isolated boxes for all of their days. And yet the policy decisions of western powers over previous tens of decades have led in exactly that direction. (2013)

I would revise Cummings' view slightly, to deprivilege her emphasis on *human* relationships—more a sleight of semantics, I suspect, than an intentional exclusion—and open up this thinking to an appreciation of relationality between all species, and the possibilities for human fulfillment and happiness that emerges from it. Indeed, Cummings herself makes this point indirectly in her beginning paragraph:

Earlier this year, on a gloriously sunny day in Holyrood, Judith Robertson, the head of Oxfam Scotland, addressed a packed room at The Scottish

Futures Forum. I listened to her wise words as I watched the crows swooping and soaring over the craggy peaks of Arthur's Seat, riding the swell of warm spring air as the hill stood watch over the city. I am often struck by how such simple pleasures as the humble appreciation of natural beauty can make our day a little less mediocre. (2013)

Such is, I think, the experience on Eigg for many of those who go there and who live there. It may also be linked to the uncomplicated appreciation of natural beauty. The Scottish landscape was, as Hunter (1995) and Dressler (2007) note and as I mentioned earlier, experienced as a haunted landscape after the Highland Clearances and into the present day. On Eigg, though, and in other communities where collective ownership has taken hold, the injustices of the past have begun to be addressed and remedied. The land is again in the hands of the people who are connected to it enough to care for it, empowering communities to choose their own destinies and, remarkably, resulting also in the protection of the interests of the land. I spent lots of time by myself alone walking the hills of Eigg, but I never felt I was alone. Instead, I had the sense of being always accompanied by the island, touched by it; there was some sense, as in Lynch's words, of things being fresher there, somehow clear.

Hugh Miller, a geologist who visited Eigg in the mid-nineteenth century, offers an evocative description of his breakfast on Eigg, which speaks volumes to the *sharpness* of what I am clumsily trying to describe about Eigg:

We had rich tea this morning. The minister was among his people; and our first evidence of the fact came in the agreeable form of three bottles of fine fresh cream from the shore. Then followed an ample baking of nice oaten cakes. The material out of which the cakes were manufactured had been sent from the minister's store aboard,—for oatmeal in Eigg is rather a scarce commodity in the middle of July; but they had borrowed a crispness and flavor from the island, that the meal, left to its own resources, could scarcely have communicated; and the golden-colored cylinder of fresh butter which accompanied them was all the island's own. There was an ample supply of eggs too, as one not quite a conjuror might have expected

from a country bearing such a name,—eggs with the milk in them; and, with cream, butter, oaten cakes, eggs, and tea, all of the best, and with sharp-set sea-air appetites to boot, we fared sumptuously. (1862, p. 32)

Eigg, Miller wrote later in his piece, is “one of those scenes in which man feels that he is little, and that nature is great” (1862, p. 89). While I empathize strongly with this position—and believe it is an important one in creating change in the way we as western humans think about nature—it misses a crucial shift in thought, which I think is—if not already the status quo—becoming more popular on Eigg: the shift from seeing humans as separate from nature to understanding our species to be a *part* of what we call the “natural.” It is Rose’s “shift to connectivity” (2011, p. 42).

This, I think, is one component of human existence on Eigg. For Struan, noticing the plants that were *not* native also implies a prior relationship not just with the old species who were there already, but with these species’ home: the place—in this case, the island—as it usually is. As Tsing writes, “You visit the spot often enough, and you know its seasonal flowers and its animal disturbances; you have made a familiar *place* in the landscape. Familiar places are the beginning of appreciation for multi-species interactions” (2012, p. 142). Perhaps, too, multi-species interactions add up to familiar places. I would like to consider the sum of the series of multi-species interactions that create familiar places. Apart from discrete, organism-to-organism or species-to-species relationships, I wonder: Might familiar places also become companions? And might the relationship of person-to-*place* be, for some people, more powerful than the relationship of person-to-Other (plant, animal, rock)?

Crystallizing this possibility, Lynch writes:

I suppose it’s fair to say I am a bit of a dullard when it comes to appreciating my habitat. Sure, I’d like to say that I want to be the sort of

person who is more in tune with the intricacies of the flora, fauna and assorted fabrics of society...

Although I might not be the most environmentally minded person, since moving to the Hebridean isle of Eigg four years ago, I've never felt so alive and in love. She's heart-stoppingly beautiful. [My girlfriend] Sarah's not bad, either.

... Eigg is home.

At no point do I feel I made a conscious decision to call it that. I just visited, fell in love with a girl, and realised that everything worked. From that point onwards it wasn't really a question of choice; from that point onwards, there was no good reason not to live here. I get the feeling this is how most of the 86 other inhabitants came to settle. (The Pictish Trail, 2014)

There is a wide variety of academic literature, mostly within human geography, on what it is like to experience a landscape: on how humans and landscapes constitute one another (see Wylie, 2007; Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2007, etc.). Yet little has been written about what form, in the range of human experiences, these relationships take; here, I would offer the invitation to play with the possibilities that might lie in imagining the land as more than an animate element of life, as more than an agent like any other (after all, we're not *friends* with many of the agential entities that influence our lives)—but as a friend or companion. What possibilities might lie in the sense that your home is your friend, and might we open up even more new possibilities by effecting a shift in thought to consider it as such?

In elucidating what it is like to experience a companion in a western life, Haraway and Tsing write not just of species interdependence, but of deliberate practices that affirm, support and take joy in this interdependence. You follow mushrooms. You slow down on purpose (Tsing, 2012). You reject the notion of owning a dog and instead call your canine friend your partner (Haraway, 2007). In this way, you slowly begin the move to a human way of life that takes the world around us not as a thing to alternatively

gut with abandon or leave, in tiny pockets, untouched, but as an entity with which we are always in relation; to which we owe care, response, and love; and which will also offer response to us, as a companion.

Chapter 7: The Island as Companion

[On the Isle of Eigg] the mind is not so full of images, the soul is receptive, therefore, and quiet, the facility of perceiving truth is not yet fully atrophied. . . . The islefolk may not be a pack of saints, but remoteness and the inevitability of being often alone and quiet, do give them a chance, too rare in the predominantly urban population, to live with their eyes beyond the world. They may be seldom able to put words to what they see, but it is immanent in their capacity to act intuitively. (Scott-Moncrieff, as cited in Dressler 2007, p. 145).

In my interviews as well as my experiences on Eigg, there was a clear sense that life on a small island is different from life on the mainland. I grew up on Cape Breton Island, whose northernmost reaches, surrounded on all edges by mountains or ocean, have the same small island-like feel as Eigg. But somehow Eigg's lack of physical connection to the mainland—which Cape Breton has in the form of the Canso Causeway, built decades before I was born—clarifies things. During my first storm on Eigg, I asked Sue and Neil if it was likely that the power would go out, which happens almost without fail in Nova Scotia each time we have snow or rain accompanied by high winds. Sue laughed. “No,” she said. “We have more electricity when it storms. Because we get it from the wind and the waves, yeah?”

We did, however, lose our internet connection briefly, and since there was no cell service on our side of the island, it dawned on me that my lines of communication with home had been cut. Instead of feeling worried as I normally would, I felt somehow secure. Here I was on a tiny island in the middle of what was forecast to be a big storm, with no physical or virtual connection to the outside world, and yet I felt safe, and at peace. We had power, and wood for the woodstove, and even if we ran out of off-island products like milk, the crofts produced plenty of vegetables and if need be the crofters would slaughter their own meat. I have never felt so contained. It was as if the island had

cupped its hands around me to remind me I would be taken care of.

The ferry didn't come for days after that storm, but the internet came back within a couple of hours. And all over Eigg, I heard echoes of my feeling that the island was comforting me, and caring for me. People spoke of deep attachments to the island. One person I interviewed, Lucy Conway—who also mentioned the poem from the hall that says, to use her summary: “you don't own the land, the land owns you”—said you don't choose to live on Eigg; the island chooses you. Over and over, when I asked people why they came to Eigg, I heard the simple explanation that the island had drawn them here, and with every splendid sunset over Rum it made them stay.

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The island, my friends suggested, is not just a companion and caregiver, and not just a home; it is also the glue that binds the community together. As I mentioned earlier, some people also suggested—hitting very close to the mark of the theorists I had been reading—that it was false and unuseful to try to differentiate Eigg, the community from Eigg, the island. The two were, it seemed, one and the same. The island Eigg was part of the community, and the community was part of the island, and I think that this is precisely the reason—the major one, though not the only one—why the community works so well. It also returns to the theoretical arguments I cited earlier, which make the seemingly obvious point that humans *are* part of our environments, and it doesn't make sense to separate ourselves from them in our thinking or our decision-making.

Eddie Scott, for example, made an effort to articulate a feeling he compared to “Amer-Indian philosophy about how you treat the land you live on.” I asked if he thought those feelings were coming out here. “Well, I think so, yeah, yeah. I don't really know

that sort of thing but parallel sort of... And that goes back to what you were saying about making decisions that are sustainable. Yeah, you care about where you live, or, yeah.” It was clear, over our mugs of coffee that bright morning, that Eddie cared deeply about what he was saying, but didn’t entirely have the words to explain it. I pushed the conversation forward by mentioning that part of what my project was about was bringing western people into scholarly discussions about relating to the land, of which, in my experience, they often got left out. Eddie rolled his eyes when the western perception of land came up—“yeah like silly inanimate objects”—and scoffed, as if that was the most ridiculous idea he’d heard all year.

It had been clear to me on arriving that Eigg and all of its aspects *are* animate, and buzzing with life. In places like that, you can’t avoid this knowledge; and now I wonder, sitting at my small wooden desk at the tip of my own island, with the wind rattling my window panes and mice scratching at the walls, how any of us ever manage to *forget* the animacy of the world. The thing is, though, that it’s an easy thing to remember in places like this: Eigg, Ingonish (my seaside village in Cape Breton). In such places, I am so overwhelmed with the presence of the *other*—the great Atlantic ocean, in these cases—that I can only become immersed in it. This isn’t the case everywhere in our world. But I would like to suggest that this attentiveness to the other—this noticing, as I mentioned above—is fundamentally *expansive*, self-replicating. When you start looking, somehow the world opens its arms.

Haraway writes:

I believe that all ethical relating, within or between species, is knit from the silk-strong thread of ongoing alertness to otherness-in-relation. We are not one, and being depends on getting on together. The obligation is to ask who are present and who are emergent... Dogs’ survival in species and

individual time regularly depends on their reading humans well. Would that we were as sure that most humans respond at better than chance levels of what dogs tell them. (2003, p. 50)

Somehow, it seems that on Eigg, the humans have figured this out. It is not as clear that an island responds to the demands of humans as it is that a dog does; I would point, however, to the multitudes of small and large adaptations islands and other “environments” have made in their efforts to survive a variety of onslaughts of resource exploitation. More resilient species take hold in the place of those who could not stand the assault; insect species evolve so future generations can withstand pesticides; the oceans rise; the quarried mountains cave in to protect themselves. It is possible these are negative results; but in many cases, we have given our earthly surroundings no other choice. Such are their responses. With Haraway, I wish more of us could turn the tables.

My friends on Eigg described the island as a subject of both compulsion and love. I had conversations with several women of the island about the importance of their children’s ability to leave and come back, instead of feeling compelled to stay. One must, Sue and Karen argued, feel one has the opportunity to live elsewhere if one chooses. Nothing good comes from feeling stuck. Partly, some said, that was one factor in the buyout: the people who spearheaded the movement had moved to Eigg, and stayed, because they *wanted* to, whereas some people who had grown up on the island felt they had nowhere else to go. In nearly the same breath, however, these women and others also spoke of feeling compelled to stay. Sue described a long, wet winter during which she and Neil had seriously considered leaving Eigg. “And then one morning I woke up and I just looked at the view and I just thought, well—you know. After that I’ve stayed and been fine. I think it was the fact that I knew I could leave, Neil would leave, whereas

before I wasn't sure. Once I knew that, I thought, no: this is my home."

Two things are of interest in this comment: first, Sue's belief that she needs to believe she *could* leave—to possess the agency to leave—in order to be content staying. Second is Sue's suggestion that somehow, simply by virtue of being on the island, I would understand why she had looked out the window and realized she needed to stay. Certainly there was what we might conventionally call the natural beauty of the place, but for the people with whom I spoke on Eigg, there was also something more: a kind of connection that, as with Eddie's ambiguities, Maggie's sunsets, and Sue's "you know," could not quite be articulated but was no less powerful for it. My thinking here is rooted in my experience on the island, and I can explain it only by saying the island was a friend to these people, in a similar way, perhaps, as a dog can be a friend to a human. In a wordless language everyone understands, dogs communicate. They call to us, connect with us, express their feelings, and they very often love us. I am not sure the island can feel love in the same way that a dog can, but neither am I at all convinced that it cannot. Either way, I do believe that what the islanders were trying to articulate to me was that, in a similar way a dog does, the island offers a call to those who stay—a call that takes the form of love.

Karen Helliwell described her first encounter of Eigg as a falling in love: "When we came out to look at [the island] I just lost my heart to the place completely. I just wanted to be here. Simon said he would give it five years maximum... 37 years ago." Is it possible to fall in love with an entity that can't love you back? (Certainly some entities, including our fellow humans, *won't* love you back, but I think that is a different thing.) Neil Robertson, Sue's husband, recalled his motivations to stay on Eigg during the hard

buyout times:

I do remember thinking a couple of times, I want to stay here *despite* the people, not because of the people. I thought *no*, I'm staying, I'm not going, I'll try and figure it out how I'll stay and I'll fit in, and I want to stay here. So it was *Eigg* that I wanted to stay for, not the community in the beginning. Definitely not.

Here, again, in nuances of tone and language we can't quite figure out, Eigg is articulated as agential, as a companion—and as something more than the sum of its parts.

At an event on the theme of “Shared Futures” at Dalhousie University in March of 2014, James Tully, after an inspiring lecture about the potential in reconnecting the human race with its knowledge of Gaia, was asked a question about time. The audience member asked what the point was of reconciling our relationships with indigenous peoples and with the land when most of the life in the ocean might be dead by 2048. Dr. Tully ruminated peacefully on the subject for a moment, in silence, and then he pointed out that the question itself was rooted in what he called “market time”: the western, linear model of time, built to make sense in the context of fast “progress” and economic growth, that we have been brought up to take as given. We do not know that there is not another way. He went on to suggest that if we, as a species, could begin to respect Gaia—to acknowledge and respond to the earth's needs and its limits, to live with Gaia instead of in defiance of her—maybe Gaia would notice. Maybe time doesn't work along the models we have fashioned, *and maybe the earth would answer us*, if only we started speaking its language. This is a language of slowing down, paying attention, slipping out of market time and moving with, instead, the rhythms of the seasons, the soft swell of the ocean's waves, enjoying the bounty of the autumn apple harvest and doing without some conveniences in the scarcity of winter.

And this is life on Eigg. Our days were organized, always, around the weather. If a task needed more time, Neil showed me, we gave it happily; if another task proved fruitless, we gave up. We religiously ate whatever needed to be used up. Neil would lament waste, but then comment that really there was none here—whatever could not be eaten by us went to Rosie, and the small amount of food that could not be eaten by Rosie went to one of the many, ever-rotating bins of compost, to settle back into its life as earth, and spend the winter quietly mutating into nourishment for next spring's garden. When Sue and Neil first moved to Eigg, Sue told me, they turned the ground over for their first garden using pigs. Each morning she would walk the pigs down to the yard and offer up a different piece of the future garden for their scuffling. Each afternoon she walked them back to what's now the potato field, and eventually the garden got cleared and the earth turned over. I had been operating on the several-week deadline time scale of the university undergraduate degree for several years at this point, and to me this process seemed impossibly long and tedious. To Sue, it was simply how things got done. Speed is nearly always the enemy of the persistence and flourishing capacity of life on earth; and, as the long-fought achievements of the Eigg Heritage Trust demonstrate, there is a different perception—maybe even a different *experience*—of time on offer, and within it is great potential. People, plants and dogs fall in love with humans when we give them the time they deserve. Sue spent three years giving the island the slow and gentle work of her hands, and in response, it offered her love, or the perception of an offer of love—and for my purposes, it makes no difference which.

When Maggie Fyffe told me about how bad things were on Eigg before the buyout—the lack of any reliable electricity; the inability to build infrastructure, buy or

even improve a home; the constant threat of upheaval at the hands of another arbitrary landlord—I asked her why people stayed. “Because they loved it here,” she answered simply. “In the main, what people want for Eigg is the same. You know, it’s like—whatever it is about Eigg, you want to keep it that way, so that you can still enjoy it. Like we do.”

“So that’s what they want, to keep it the same?” I asked.

“Yeah, develop it in ways that don’t sort of impinge on the natural environment, do things with that in mind anyway... I’m not saying people have to struggle to live here,” she appended thoughtfully. “But in some ways if they do want to stay they’ll put up with things they might not otherwise put up with.” Karen Helliwell shared similar sentiments when she spoke of the challenges young people face when it comes to having friends on the mainland. City people with professional jobs, she pointed out, had a good deal more spending capacity for a night on the town than people on Eigg, who mostly cobbled together various mixes of crofting and unstable, often part-time work on the island. If you lived on Eigg, Karen said, it didn’t matter if you were poor, because you could always go take a walk. I pointed out, as the conversation went on, that much of the world—Westerners, primarily—needs to learn to live with less than what we’ve been brought up to want, because the planet simply cannot support our current standard of living. “But you need some compensation,” Karen interjected.

*That is the difference... I could live here on peanuts. We had twenty years where you were stitching one patch to another on your jeans, because we weren’t working for Schelley, we didn’t have enough money. And yet you could live here because the *environment* is so beautiful... It’s easy for us. There’s physical hardship a lot of people in cities don’t come across. But to me the compensation of a wonderful and beautiful environment and just getting outside every day enables you to deal with that. In a city, in deprived circumstances, then I would want the attractions that only money*

can buy because you need some way out of that ghastly [environment]. For Karen, in the same way that Eigg could love you, the city could be indifferent and alienating. She lamented the seeming progression of humanity towards a life disconnected from the earth, and therefore from what she considered the source of real happiness, “the peace that you carry within you in a place like this.”

Neil commented during our recorded chat that:

There’s all sorts of people here for all sorts of different reasons and where it *does* work is... when people *want* to be on Eigg. When it doesn’t work is when people don’t want to be on the mainland. If they’re runnin’ away from there and coming here because they think Eigg’s some sort of Utopia, then it can’t... And over the years I’ve seen that a few times: people turn up and say oh it’s just *terrible* over there, and it’s so lovely here, but it’s lovely here *because* it’s horrible there. And it’s not horrible there, you know, it’s life... There’s always romance when you come to somewhere like this. Even the first winter. People say the winter’s hard and it is. But if you’ve sat through a force 12, it’s *amazing*, it’s absolutely amazing. The *power* of the storm is phenomenal. I think it can be quite exciting, the first winter. It’s when you get to the second winter, you realize it happens *every bloody year*... And you know, you think, that’s what life’s gonna be like, it’s not actually that exciting, after a few years of sitting through a big storm.

What Neil is describing here is clearly a relationship, and it involves love as well as forbearance. Living on the island, like a relationship with a human friend, lover or dog, means you have to love Eigg for itself. It’s common wisdom that rebound relationships are unhealthy, and Neil’s use of very similar language to describe a relationship with that island that will “work” shows not just that the islanders *are* in a relationship with Eigg—as Ingold (2011) and others would argue, we’re all, always, in relationships with everything that surrounds us—but that the islanders are more or less *conscious* of their existence in-relation with Eigg. It’s not just that Eigg, the assemblage, is an actant and an influence in the islanders’ lives. It’s also that the island seems to be actively perceived as

a companion—evidenced in comments like Eddie’s about giving the island credit, and Lynch’s about falling in love with a girl, as well as other people’s thoughts which I’ll cite a little later. I think it is this perception that allows the islanders to take such a pragmatically progressive stance on issues of ecological justice. If such actions do loop back to simple relationships, those relationships are of friendship and love (involving patience, hard work, and determination) as much as or more than they are about unconscious affect.

Further, the people I met on Eigg are aware of the influence of the affective as much as I am, though they do not use that term. When I asked Lucy Conway, Eddie’s partner, what drew her to the island, she said: “I have no idea... I just felt that, when we were here, every time we left, I felt that leaving was wrong.” I made what I thought was a joke about the mystique of the island. But Lucy answered, “It’s not mysterious, it’s just an instinct. There’s nothing romantic about it... I did think, when we moved here, that at some point I would think, *oh shit*, that was a really bad idea... even for a moment... but I never have... There’s not one... one thing. It just felt right.” I had mentioned earlier that I wondered if there was something in what the community on Eigg had achieved that might work as a model for communities elsewhere, who also hoped to move towards more sustainable lifestyles. Lucy didn’t like this idea. She went on:

I think in terms of your model thing I think that’s part of it, that’s why I don’t think there is a model. I think that the one thing that makes Eigg work is because the people who live here love the place, and they don’t work to a model, they... work to a belief that where they are living is the right place for them and they want to be here and they’ll just do whatever it takes to make that work.

I am not sure that I agree with Lucy on this; many of the other islanders with whom I spoke also disagree. Yet inherent in what she is saying may be a different kind of

model along the lines of Isabelle Stengers' approach of "speculative fabulation": the "constructivist, pragmatist and speculative" (2012, p. 2) act of acknowledging what is at stake; recognizing the harm the West's hegemonic way of being in the world does to a variety of actors, human and otherwise; and working outward from that harm, trying to find new ways of going about human life on earth without really knowing what those might be. In Stengers' vision, we would reclaim and then remake the modern, trusting in "the adventure of ideas, and here, centrally... the idea of civilization" (2012, p. 6) to permit us to create "a different, positive definition of [ourselves] and of civilization, in order to regain relevance and begin to weave different relations with peoples and natures" (2012, p. 5).

Lucy's point also speaks to love, to the specificities of a relationship of love, and to the notion of doing whatever it takes for a friend, a community, and an island. This is different from conventional western understandings of what and how we love. Tsing tells the tale of the slow shrinkage of western humans' capacity for care, as we retreated away from communal modes of living into insulated family homes:

The boundaries of the home became the expected boundaries of love. With the fetishization of the home as a space of purity and interdependence, extra-domestic intimacies, whether within or between species, seem archaic fantasies (the community, the small farmer) or passing affairs (feminism, animal rights). Outside the home, the domain of economic rationality and conflicting individual interests reigned. Moreover, this kind of family fetish reappeared in mid-20th century U.S. mass culture—and once again in our times now... Here love is just not expected outside family walls. Within the family, other species can be accepted; pets are models for family devotion. But the model of the loving and beloved pet does not spread love; it holds it tight inside the family.

U.S. publics learn to imagine themselves as compassionate, moral people because they love their children and their pets. They learn that this love makes them "good people"... Under this tutelage, our species being is realigned to stop Others at home's door. (2012, p. 150-151)

In Lucy's story and that of many others I spoke with on Eigg, while the family is certainly important, it is not the stopping point for love. People give more than that, and they expect others to give more as well. The difference from contemporary conventional Western communities, in this narrative, is the *extension* of that relationship of love out of the nuclear family and onto a wider island as a companion in itself. The very act of inviting a rotation of volunteers to share your home and your table is a rejection of these simple boundaries between home and Other. So are so many crucial elements of life on Eigg: small farming, the renewable electricity source of which everyone has agreed to limit their use so everyone can have enough (and the island doesn't get harmed by fossil fuels), the concern I heard at the residents' meeting about people picking apples from the community orchard too early, the fact that there is a community orchard, and of course, the community ownership scheme itself. And in re-opening the boundaries of what we can consider "home" to include a whole island, small as it may be, the people of Eigg simultaneously reject the narrative of human domination over nature and open themselves to a worldview that better reflects real lived experience.

Lucy is the mastermind behind the entity known as EiggBox, a planned shared workspace for artists and craftspeople on Eigg. Before our interview, I had checked out the EiggBox blog she runs, and found a quote that piqued my interest. It was about Fogo Island, in Newfoundland, and spoke of

the importance of specificity of places, and importance of holding onto that specificity. There is a plague of sameness that is killing joy, and that hasn't happened here.

Living in the tangle of the north Atlantic, with the natural world, breeds an acute awareness of the natural, and that makes you quick: quick to a solution, quick to a response. You could call that entrepreneurial, but the ingenuity is all here. (Zita Cobb; cited in Dobies, 2014)

I mentioned the quote to Lucy, and asked what connection she found in it to Eigg.

She answered:

It just really rang a bell... I think it's to do with connectedness to the physical. In the same way that we know where our electricity comes from. And I don't think you have to be exactly a natural-world lover or appreciator or know your birds or be a natural heritage expert to *feel* that. I recognize some birds and I understand some plants and I understand a little bit about Gaelic culture, but I'm no expert and if I wanted to find out more I would've found out more by now. But my connection with [the natural] is a lot more acute than if I were living in Inverness or Edinburgh. It sort of *seeps* into you. And therefore your response to living is affected by that seepiness.

Of EiggBox, Lucy added "I don't know that I have a vision [for it] other than that after a period of time people will be earning their living and being able to live sustainably by being creative... It's not an arts centre, it's not about a particular kind of art or a particular aesthetic or any of those things. It's just about being there and doing that." It's a specific relationship with a specific place—a place that has unique characteristics like any other companion, a companion you can know and engage with and appreciate. Once you open yourself to it, it seeps in, and for Lucy, "what seems useful or authentic, I think, is affected by this environment." As in Vannini and Taggart's study (2012), its unique islandness changes your priorities—"what seems useful or authentic"—and pushes you to focus on what really matters.

Another person I interviewed remarked that although she can find fault with the small-town politics of the community,

At the end of the day I would say everyone on Eigg is really *good*. They're *good people*, wanting to do good... It's hard to explain... The folk that are here now just have been in for the long slog and they'll probably be here forever and ever. I can't really see them going. And in some ways you kind of feel like it's the island that chooses them... I do believe that places and countries and things like that have an identity as well—like a spiritual identity. And I think there's something really, really special about Eigg,

that's obviously working its way out in people, or through the people that are here.

Eigg is special, and the model of Eigg *is* specific. But the world is a conglomerate of special and unique places and, I believe, people who want to make change and don't quite know what to do. As particular as the circumstances are, Eigg offers proof that western modes of being in the world can change—and a concrete example of a situation in which they have. It shows the world that our relationships to one another and to the places in which we live can change, and so can the infrastructure within which we enact them; it shows that there are possibilities, even in societies deeply entrenched in western capitalism, outside of the hegemony of capitalism and private property. It offers the hope that we may find within them a different future than that written by the Enlightenment scholars who were so determined to find a model of linear progression. Stengers writes:

We know that everywhere the same disempowering processes are at work. Everywhere a similar cut off from capacity to envisage, that is also, to feel, think and imagine, is produced. If there is a fight to be consented to, today, it might well be the fight for reclaiming this capacity, or even for reclaiming the capacity to envisage the possibility of reclaiming it. (2012, p. 5)

Might the story of Eigg offer such a possibility to those of us who are outside the situation, looking in? Again, Dalglish's differentiation between "capitalism" (the entrenched mindset) and "capitalist societies," in which there may often be pockets of direct or indirect resistance—drawing on the resources of rich histories, tight social and family bonds, and a strong connection with the land (2001, p. 23)—becomes relevant. What kind of future could we build if we not only recognized, but nourished those pockets of resistance; if, instead of assuming capitalism's dominance, we recognized its hold on us as a kind of sorcery (Pignarre and Stengers, 2011), and in naming our bewitchment, began to break the spell?

In that particular interview, I commented that I often feel extremely homesick when I'm in a new place alone, but somehow I didn't on Eigg. "It might be *dramatic* to say I feel like it's the right place to be, but it feels like *some* right place to be," I remark on the recording. My friend heartily agreed: "And it's hard to put your finger on it, isn't it? It's like it has a pulse. The island has a pulse!" At that precise moment, appropriately, her cat jumped onto my lap and started rubbing my chin, purring, demanding attention. She laughed. "He's right in your face. He's saying, 'I am going to *make* you love me!'"

I remember smiling. Of course I did love the cat, had loved him immediately upon our meeting. "Maybe that's what the island does as well," I offered.

"Yeeeah!" said my human friend. My feline friend kept purring.

Chapter 8: “Being There and Doing That”

Once you’ve accepted the island as your friend, and as an agent in its own right, and opened the boundaries of your home and your care to include it (and it’s very possible that this all happened *before* the buyout, and the buyout merely formalized it, and brought it into public view), what comes next? How do you move into a just relationship with the (is)land?

I. The Story

The community on Eigg did not buy their island because they wanted to tread lighter on the earth, or because they were ideologically opposed to private property or even landlord ownership. They bought the island because it was the only way they could think of (and they didn’t even think of it—the scheme was proposed by an outside group of environmentalists) to stay on Eigg and survive with a standard of living they felt they could stand. This was a sentiment that was echoed by everyone I spoke with who had been on the island when the buyout happened: *We had to buy the island. There was nothing else we could do.* People were hunting and picking berries to survive; their homes were falling apart because the landlord, Keith Schellenberg, wouldn’t give them any security in leases; many people were living in caravans (trailers) because Schellenberg wouldn’t permit them to *build* homes; no one had reliable electricity; and there was the constant threat of being sold to some other wealthy landlord with different whims.

In some ways, this is the classic Marxist narrative of desperation: the disadvantaged group will rise up only if they have hit rock bottom, and can perceive themselves as having nothing left to lose. And yet everyone on Eigg *could* have moved

elsewhere; many people seriously considered doing so. Somehow they felt compelled to stay. This is different than a desperation without options, a point of no return; their determination to stay and to make it work was a determination of a different kind, one not of a stuck people but of a people in love with an island. I don't think they did everything they did *for* the island, but I do think—and some of them told me—they did it *because of* the island. And in a world of constant intermingling, of rhizomatic connections and constant becoming, and in the context of a relationship of love, I am not sure that, in the big picture, “for” and “because of” are really all that different. What is important is that while the people of Eigg articulate that they bought the island because they had no other choice, they are at the same time fully aware that they could have left. They *wanted* to stay, badly enough that many gave to the buyout project several years of their lives and labour, and most of their money, with no guarantee of any return.

I offer here a brief sketch of some of the ideas that emerged about why and how the buyout happened. It is brief because it is not my main focus. I am less interested in why the buyout happened than the affectual lives that were involved in it, and that are still going on on Eigg; I realized over the course of my fieldwork that what's interesting to me is not the “why” or the “what” of the buyout itself, or even the “how.” What's interesting is what has happened since, and the way in which community ownership has been articulated in theory and in practice. The islanders could have fought their way out of landlord ownership and moved into private property ownership; or they could have bought the island collectively and turned it into a fossil fuel-guzzling resort. They could have continued using the diesel generators they always had used for electricity, or maybe they could have dug deep into the island looking for some natural resource or other to

mine and sell. But they didn't, and they continue to choose to respect the island's integrity.

As I mentioned, the most prominent idea about why the buyout happened was that people had no other choice. There was, as Neil told me, a time when the old landlords gave jobs to everyone in the community just because they felt it was the right thing to do. "But having spoken to one of the guys who's very old now, his job was sweeping leaves out of the woodland. So it wasn't a useful job, it was a rubbish job... You can't spend your life sweeping leaves out of a woodland." And in the same vein, the people on Eigg couldn't spend their lives patching their jeans and their old croft homes. As Camille Dressler put it:

It was getting so painful it was not a life, it was an existence. Brian was getting frustrated, such a big bloke and living in the confined space of a caravan with two children... I was getting very depressed because I couldn't do any work... it was just getting to be too much. And it was at that point we kind of cracked up and said if we couldn't get a piece of land to buy a house we would have to leave... We [all the islanders] were stuck in a no-man's land where nothing could progress.

Karen Helliwell said the difference in the community on Eigg since the buyout is "huge":

The biggest difference is actually in the mindset of the people that were under that great black cloud of oppression. I mean it sounds ridiculous... harping back to the Clearances and things... but it was like, you know, when you're actually *living* with that level of insecurity... you become inward-looking as a community, and one person's despair affects you... I think Simon and I were both driven to it by the fact that the only way out of this situation was that we have to find a way out of it ourselves. And it'll probably be hell, but at least it'll be hell of our own making and our own control.

While just about everyone I spoke with pointed to the direness of the situation as the motivation for the buyout, many also referred to the event I mentioned earlier—the

landlord's arbitrary eviction of one of the island's most prominent and well-loved families.

The other interesting factor in the buyout, besides the sheer volume of heart and hard work everyone put into the project, was the outside influence that contributed to making it happen. For one thing, there was the influx of people Schellenberg had hired to work on his estate. As I mentioned, he had advertised for people with "enterprise and initiative"; that was what he got, and in Karen's words, "we used it." She laments some resulting loss of Gaelic culture as the island's indigenous population has dwindled, but she and several others agree that the energy, ambition and determination of the young people who came to work for Schellenberg were instrumental in his demise and in the eventual purchase of the island.

Karen, Camille, and (to a lesser extent) Maggie all pointed to the significance for the Eigg buyout of a forum they attended called the Highlands and Islands Community Development Forum, which Camille considers "one of the most important things we did." The theme, according to Camille, was community empowerment and organizing, and working from the grassroots up. For the delegation from Eigg, she told me, it "created a fair amount of interest and knowledge and helped us raise our consciousness in getting out of the box that we were stuck in and saying that's what's happening, that's what people are doing." It also helped by pointing the islanders to other resources and forms of support they could draw on, and showing them that they weren't alone.

Karen points to a presentation they heard at the Highlands and Islands Forum by someone who was instrumental in a rural revitalization project on the Isle of Foula. That was what "made it seem that it could be done, that it was possible for us to achieve this...

Isabelle’s presentation and her conviction that ordinary people can achieve amazing results if they all—if they’re really committed to it and work together... that was the first indication that it might be possible.”

The other important outside influence on the Eigg buyout was that the idea of the buyout itself was concocted by a group of young academics who were interested in community empowerment and land reform, spearheaded by Alastair MacIntosh, who has also been a key figure in many of the Scottish land reform movements since. The four members of the original Isle of Eigg Trust (now the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust) presented the idea to community members in 1991. The idea was slow in catching on. As Scruff told it:

The trust was formed without asking anybody on Eigg... Certainly I was aggrieved that they went and did it without asking us, it’s a bit damn cheeky to say the least, and that’s what pissed off most of the people. But the thing is, because they had done that, I was then of the opinion like, they’ve done it, we can’t go back and change the fact that they’ve done it, let’s make it into something, let’s make a go of it... as a democratic republic of Eigg... They were quite a *dangerous* lot to say the least... They’d already achieved quite a lot of things, they were quite a good lot for doing things... I mean, these people write things in the paper! Not saying they were writing the wrong things, but they could have. It’s better to keep them and use them in our favour.

The islanders took the plan, for a trust that would buy the island collectively, and adapted it according to their own preferences—creating a membership structure whose directors included and still include four elected islanders (organized through the Eigg Residents’ Association) as well as one representative each from the Highland Council (the regional government) and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. After a couple of failed attempts to raise enough money to buy the island, the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust finally purchased it on June 12, 1997 (with the aid, of course, of the anonymous million-pound

donor). Things were hard at first; money, resources and jobs were scarce, and no one quite knew what to do. But, despite all the concerns about how, in fact, a community goes about running an island, they figured it out fairly quickly.

One key theme I heard repeated by several people, who had been around at the time of the buyout as well as those who have moved to Eigg since, was that of responsibility. “It’s a big leap!” Maggie told me. “But I think we took that leap because things were so bad here... Folks were like, well what can we do that’s any worse than what this guy’s doing?” Eddie Scott, a musician who had toured to fundraise for the buyout but didn’t move to Eigg full-time until several years after its success, said:

What was scary was when they got it—it was like, fuck! What’ll we do now! Yeah—yeah there’s that thing you gotta get though... Where we lived before there was some lovely old Pictish carvings that were found on a bit of farmland there. And up until recently most stuff like that, cause it’d be quite valuable and stuff, goes to a museum in Edinburgh... Someone asked if we wanted to display it locally but the amount of people at that community residents’ meeting that were like, ‘Oh no, we couldn’t possibly take care of that!’ [Big laugh.] But you’re just the same as the person in Edinburgh who’s gonna do it! It’s like the people who want to vote no for Scotland being independent. They’re sort of scared, they don’t think that they’re mature enough or whatever.

In the end, though, who could know better how to care for an island than those who have invested their life, heart and work into it? Echoing several others, Neil pointed out to me more than once that what makes Eigg special—and livable for a very diverse group of inhabitants (I was introduced to a crofter from Calgary, for example—I’m sure because everyone on Eigg had a niggling feeling two Canadians must surely, somehow, know one another)—is that the islanders share a goal: they want to make Eigg a good place to live.

II. Pragmatics: What came next

Sixteen years later, while there's still instability related to employment and population maintenance, making Eigg a good place to live has been overall a resounding success. That success is related to infrastructure, housing, economy, tourism, and a variety of other elements; what I am most interested in here is the community's determination to proceed with their efforts in a way that is respectful of the land.

Two main themes, which are themselves interwoven, ran through the responses I received when I asked people this question. First was the point that, particularly on a small island, it makes sense to conserve resources and use renewable ones when you can. It costs less, and it means you have to bring fewer outside materials onto the island. Living on an island means you have a heightened consciousness of what resources you have and what you are using. When I asked Neil why he chooses to do organic gardening, he answered, simply:

It's just the right way to do it... I think people tended to be green on Eigg anyway. Although that's a hugely sweeping statement, having said everybody is different and they are different... But life was much, and is much simpler—there was always less waste—for instance, there was no refuse collection at all when I came to Eigg. You dealt with everything yourself. And that, as far as reducing waste went, was brilliant, because if nobody's taking a bag away, you're having to deal with it. You don't put all your food waste in that—you have a pig or you have chickens or somebody else's chickens or your dog... When we got the chance of our own electricity scheme, everybody said we wanted it to be renewable if possible. It's just the way people think is the best way forward. On a small island, if you bugger up your land, you're the one that suffers.

Eddie Scott downright laughed at me when I asked why the community keeps sustainability in mind when it makes decisions. “*Why?*” he asked. “Because that's the way to do it! Because it makes sense!” He laughed again and continued: “Yeah, in a way the whole green thing *bugs* me, the fact that you have to call it something else, that you're *green*—I find that irritating. I mean you get people going *shopping* because they

want to be green. That kind of contradicts itself.”

We went on to chat about the variety of researchers who’ve come to Eigg to figure out how “being green” on the island works. “That kind of shits me sometimes,” said Eddie, laughing. “It’s like fuck off! You know? You don’t need to *say* it, you need to *be* it, or whatever... [Other islanders] were suggesting having green evenings and all this. Well, why don’t you just have a fucking evening?... This’ll be like going to church. Why—it doesn’t need to be separate from what you do...” Eddie trails off here in the recording of our conversation, but it’s clear he sees no use in talking about being “green,” or theorizing about it, both charges to which I plead guilty as both a scholar and a human being. For him, sustainable should just be how you do things, not out of ideology or fear but because it makes sense.

This attitude was echoed—though in somewhat less colourful language—by nearly everyone I spoke to on Eigg. For Lucy, ecologically sound lifestyles are “just a practical response... A lot of the things which are sustainable and good practice also happen to work very well if you are on an island... It comes down to pragmatism maybe.” For her, it’s not just the pragmatics of living on an island, but also of living as part of a community—a notion that, perhaps, is linked to my argument of the island-as-companion. Maybe living with the island and living with the community are one and the same. Lucy said:

It’s about living and working together as a community and that implies a more sustainable approach, because unless you accept that you are part of a community and therefore what you do affects your neighbour and vice versa... then things aren’t sustainable in the long term. If you just think of yourself, in your own bubble, and you don’t relate to people on the other side, then that’s a less sustainable path. I’m not talking about just environmental sustainability. I’m talking about the whole—social and political and environmental... People just use the word ‘sustainability’ as

a shorthand for environmental action... I'm just saying, if you plough a solo furrow, then in the long term it isn't sustainable... And I think it's more visible because we're on an island.

The use of resources and the need to work together as a community may be clearer on an island, but the islanders have also chosen to live within a heightened awareness of their environmental impact. As I mentioned earlier, the pioneering electricity scheme—a grid developed in 2007 that combined, for the first time ever, wind, hydro and solar energy and that powers the island with around 90% renewable energy—only permits each household to use five kilowatts of energy at any given time. It's plenty, Sue and Neil explained to me during my first couple of days on Eigg, but it just means we can't run the washing machine and the dishwasher at the same time. On Eigg, Lucy explained,

If it's the height of summer and it's not rained for days and days and days, you know—you think about using water more than you would in the city because it's coming up from the spring in the ground and you know it might be drying up. In the same way that you know that if it's not really windy and it's not very sunny and it's not rained for ages there's not going to be much electricity around... If you say well, to hell with that, I'll still leave all my lights on, that means there's more diesel being burned in the generators. If you actually don't care about the environment and climate change and all that, you *might* care about the fact that the more diesel that's used the more that's going to put the cost of electricity up, because we don't pay for wind and water and sun but we do pay for diesel.

Everyone I interviewed expressed the belief that the motivations of the community on Eigg in their march towards a sustainable future were deeply rooted far more in the local than in the global, and in the realm of pragmatism more than that of ideology—even when they were talking not about the commonsense logic of saving money and resources, but the emotional logic of the love of the place. Several people said they also had concerns about global climate change; most, however, felt these concerns

were more or less useless, though not unfounded. Maggie, for example, said she thinks a bit about the global scale of climate change, but qualified this with a laugh: “I don’t get upset about it because it’s too depressing. It’s this idea you do as you want others to do, or do what you think might make a difference.”

With this belief, it would seem, comes a sense of clarity and purpose. You do what makes sense on Eigg, for the community and for the island, and you send tendrils of good work out into the world to see where they might catch on—a rhizomatic system of feeling-out and seeing where you might be able to make connections. As Maggie as well as Sue Hollands mentioned, it’s easy to get lost in despair in the face of irreversible climate change moving at an ever more alarming speed. Yet both women work calmly and steadily, along with many others in their community, to both make Eigg a good place to live and make it sustainable for a long-term, ecologically just future. It would seem that focusing on your garden, your community and your own place in the world helps with the problems of despair and of scale. I would add that this is especially pertinent given that, on a grand scale of resource exploitation and carbon emissions, the globalization and expansion of such practices have exponentially increased their harm. As the proponents of localizing movements like Slow Food argue, zooming back into a local level may be the only way to effectively address climate change; although that “adventure of ideas” (Stengers, 2012), too, needs testing, in places like Eigg, where it has been implemented, it seems to be working. Focusing on one’s own community could be the most fruitful strategy available to us, alongside the capacity of such a focus to empower those of us who might be daunted and debilitated if we worried too much about the big picture.

The ethos of pragmatism that is evident here also translates to an ethos of stewardship or custodianship—the idea that it also makes sense for those who interact with the land on a daily basis to be the ones who make decisions that affect it. During my conversations with the people who live on Eigg, there was a clear sense—perhaps relating back to the sense of the island as companion—that the community is responsible for the land, and that makes taking care of it well. When I asked Camille why she thought people have been so focused on ecological justice, she said she thinks it’s a result of finally having power over the environment. “The principles we had when we bought the island was that the people who are living on the land are the people to be custodians of that land. Because the landlords are not living on the land—they’ve got a passing interest, only marginal,” whereas (she implied) the investment, interest and care of those who live on the land is much deeper as a result of close connection to it. Neil pointed out that “on Eigg there’s no real wildness anymore, everything has been altered by people. And I think people now have the responsibility of looking after the land to the best of their abilities in an environmentally sound way.”

As Sue explained,

Eigg is responsible, and what matters is how much people actually feel responsible for their own environment and... future. There have been studies done, not that you needed any to prove it, in which you have communities... where people are responsible for their environment, and that environment flourishes. If you have a landowner who makes the decisions about what happens and people feel they’ve got no control, they begin to lose interest and the communities tend to die. It’s not rocket science. You’ve got to feel that you personally can make a difference.

I asked Lucy if the fact that the island is community owned changes how the community works. “I think it does change things,” she answered.

It makes it much easier for us to be able to develop some kind of

consensus about what's the most important thing to be done, because you've got that collective sense of ownership of—*stewardship's* a better word... I think that's a better word for what happens day to day. Ownership is that classic—you know, like it says in the hall: You don't own the land. The land owns you.

III. Back to Land

“That is the Land,” wrote Lewis Grassie Gibbon, “though not quite all. Those folk in the byre... they are The Land in as great a measure” (as cited in McCrone, 1998, p. 1). The theoretical perspective I've taken throughout this thesis is that, quite simply, the “folk in the byre” are *never* separate from the land. We are always participating in always evolving relationships with everything around us. This is why, as I researcher, I should take the land into account as a social actor; this is why the study of the non-human matters in trying to illuminate matters of the human. From the more pragmatic perspective of the people I interviewed, however—who probably would laugh heartily and agree with me if I were to broach such topics, but would still consider such discussions rather beside the point (and would probably be right)—the land, while certainly being an agential entity in its own right, is also a site of empowerment or disempowerment, and a space for the embodiment of responsibility. On the brink of an independence referendum that could usher Scotland into a whole new era, McCrone writes that “the Land of Scotland is what we are dealing with here, not simply its rural parts... Our visions of who we are, our identity and culture, are bound up with the land” (1998, p. 1).

I want to suggest that what both McCrone and the islanders with whom I spoke on Eigg are trying to get at is the same notion the poet was trying to explain, and the same notion of essential relationality I am trying to explain when I cite the non-representational

geographers and my other theoretical mentors. In the context of the western tradition in which all of the above parties have grown up, this isn't always easy. But, in the context both of the community empowerment that's currently under way in crofting townships across the Highland Scotland, and the broader project of repairing our species' calamitous relationship with the land, we need to be thinking with, working with, and *encouraging* these discussions. As Chamberlin writes, "in all our conflicts, we need to find a ceremony that will sanctify the land for everyone who lives on it" (2003, p. 227). One such "ceremony," I think, is the pragmatic and collective working through of day-to-day life in ways that, for the love of the island, don't harm the island. And, as I'll argue later – amidst some discord of islanders themselves on the question – I do think it's a ceremony that offers useful lessons and relevance elsewhere.

I would like to conclude this chapter, then, with a nod to the other prominent theme people mentioned when I asked about their motivations to live in harmony with the land: the simple fact that they live in a beautiful and special place and they want to keep it that way. It's easy to get lost in theorizing about connectivity and deep historical rootedness in land, and the necessity of action in the face of global climate change. But it's also important to remember that beautiful places move people. They're not just important for their ecosystems; they're important for the comfort, awe and perspective they offer. One of the women I interviewed described several magical moments on Eigg, including a "moon bow," a meteor shower, and a half an hour spent talking to her uncle on the beach:

We were down at the church of St. Donnan's down here and I said to him why don't we go for a walk on the beach. And we went down and sat on the sand dunes and just had a really close chat and he told me about things in his life that had touched him and hurt him and it was fairly cathartic...

All this stuff poured out of him and he went away that day a changed man... [He said] it was one of the most amazing experiences he'd ever had and that was just from the atmosphere of sitting down there on the beach. And I quite often feel that if you could bottle it, it would be great.

She reminisced a little more:

I can remember a couple years ago I was looking out the window there, towards Rum? And I've been looking out there for 30 years, but suddenly this ray of light came down onto the southern tip of Rum and I realized there was lots of little bays that went into it really deeply, and I just went, 'aaaaahhh!' Because I'd never really noticed it before. And to think you've been looking at something for 30 years and you finally realized it wasn't just a round mass, it actually had all these crevasses in it... And just all the amazing sunsets over Rum—that's my little fix every day.

Such sentiments were echoed by everyone I spoke with on Eigg, and they're certainly echoed in my field notes. Eigg is magical, a special place not untouched by humanity or paused in time, but the result of a number of processes converging to form the present—a volcano under the sea, a mountain that grew on top of a forest, ocean waves carving out a beach, the salty wind blowing across the Highlands, the clans sailing from isle to isle, the Gulf of Mexico warming the air as it slips along the shores, a cave made for a massacre. Not least of the factors that make Eigg what it is today is a different way of moving forward on the part of the humans who live there.

Chapter 9: Rounding-up: The Generative Ootential of the Island-Companion

Tis a time of strange changes... I thought to have lived and died in that house, and found a quiet grave in the burying-ground yonder beside the ruin; but my path was a clear though a rugged one; and from almost the moment that it opened up to me, I saw what I had to expect. (The minister on Eigg to Hugh Miller, 1862 [Miller, p. 62])

In this chapter I attempt to retrace the threads I have woven throughout the preceding pages, to offer some thought on the question that originally pulled me to the Isle of Eigg: of whether, within all that the islanders have accomplished—community empowerment and a more just relationship with the land—there are useful lessons for other communities who have similar goals. Here I reflect on the themes that emerged throughout my fieldwork and analysis, and most of all, through the generous and insightful conversations I had with the people who made it all happen.

1. Eigg was inspired by community action elsewhere, and Eigg may, in turn, become an inspiration.

I should begin by noting that not everyone I spoke with liked the idea of Eigg being a “model” for anywhere. Lucy Conway, for example, said that she disliked the idea because places and circumstances are too specific. She pointed out that there are lots of perfectly functional communities where the landlord system is still in place and people are quite happy. She and Maggie Fyffe both seemed to feel deeply uncomfortable with the idea of anything prescriptive. That being said, both of these interviews were within my first few; it’s possible that my wording of the question had an effect on how they answered me. I specifically used the word “model” and I think I would have both more accurately reflected my own feelings as well as created a more open conversation if I had worded my question differently—perhaps using the language of “lessons,” which I have

adopted here, partly out of respect for the opposition I encountered at the idea of a model. For her part, Maggie was quite firm in this opposition, though she immediately contradicted herself:

I hate it being held up as a sort of model for people to follow or something. But yeah, definitely, people who come to visit... people on Gigha [where there was a more recent community buyout] came here before they bought out and they reckon that that their visit here were definitely instrumental in deciding that they were going to go for it. So I suppose the answer to that is yes.

Maggie sighed, and I asked why she didn't like the notion of Eigg being a model. "Och, just, you set yourself up and then you fall down, don't ya?" I laughed and pointed out that it's been sixteen years since the buyout and Eigg has certainly not fallen down. "But you know what I mean!" Maggie answered. "I don't like the idea of telling folk this is the way you should be doing it. I just don't think there's an overall sort of step-by-step guide. I think it depends on the place, the people, and how much work folk are prepared to put into it. Because it's not easy, that's for sure."

This is a fair perspective, and what I am attempting to sketch here is far from a step-by-step guide. Rather, it is a collection of the bits of wisdom I gathered on Eigg, about the process of becoming sustainable, that I think may be helpful to other such efforts. And, indeed, the Eigg buyout itself was, as I mentioned earlier, inspired by community action on the Isle of Foula that several of the islanders had heard about at the Highlands and Islands Community Development Forum. Such rhizomatic connections— affective shifts, perhaps, in people's thinking and in what they are willing and able to think—as were made there and as I am trying to weave here are fruitful.

It's also worth noting that Scottish people have a cultural habit of self-deprecation, one that I've inherited from the Scots on this side of the ocean and that I

recognize well from my life in Nova Scotia. Camille told me about the differences she saw in the people on Eigg and the people on Bornholm, a Danish island that refers to itself as “The Bright Green Island” and promotes itself quite vigorously as a model for the world (see Business Centre Bornholm, 2013). “Scotland’s mentality is not quite like that, we just tend to be quite shy and lacking in confidence. Although the people on Eigg are quite proud of what’s been achieved, they are not necessarily ready to clamour it from the rooftops.” Nonetheless, “by showing that we were capable of running our own affairs, from being a test case we’ve become an example.” For Camille, there’s also some potential for economic growth in the willingness to self-promote as a model. In her words: “What we need to do is carry on inspiring people. We need to be a community that has to invest in being innovative and dynamic because our survival itself rests on these two qualities.”

Sue, who came to Eigg after the buyout, firmly believes there’s value in models.

I would like more people to be able to feel they could... it sounds really patronizing to say this, but I would like people to feel they could grow and eat their own food, and do with less, and be organic. And that’s *why* we ought to say, come out and live here and do it... I’m in the Eigg Green Group, which does work on environmental issues. And we do lots of good stuff, but I tend to feel what we do is all local... and I think we ought to be supporting the global as well.

2. *The islanders believe cooperation is the key to their success..*

Many of the people I spoke with on Eigg were quick to point out that none of what they achieved would have been possible if they hadn’t worked together, and played up to everyone’s unique strengths. Karen mentioned that when she and her husband moved to Eigg, people would say ““oh, you’re opting out and moving to the Isle of Eigg.’ But... we didn’t opt out to come here, we’ve opted in, and the level of input we’ve put in

to make the place what it is now is enormous.”

In Scruff’s words:

You need a really brainy person behind it, and the way of getting a really brainy person is to not have one, but have lots of people. You end up making proper decisions... [when you] pick everybody’s brain... [Otherwise] Eigg Electric never would have happened. That project, that took a lot of brains. John Booth, who did the fabulous overseeing of all the work and never charged a penny for doing it, did a fantastic job there. But John Booth would never have been able to raise the money. [Someone else] raised all the money, cause he’s good at that. Everybody had all these different jobs. Maggie’s good at balancing the books, it’s just something she seems to be fantastic at.

3. *Not everyone has to move at the same pace.*

During our (non-recorded) chat over wine with another neighbour, Camille made the important point that “a machine can only move as fast as the slowest cog.” Her friend agreed. In some ways, they told me, the buyout had to move slowly because if you go faster than the slowest person, you’ll lose people. I wrote in my field notes that this reminded me of a number of conversations I’ve had with my mother in Cape Breton about her arguments with my father over buying expensive free range meat. If it were up to her, my mom would buy nothing but free range meat; my dad thought for a long time that the idea was, if not utterly ridiculous, financially not feasible. Then he discovered the German sausages at the Cape Breton Farmers’ Market, and made friends with the people who make them. One day he brought home a pound of free range beef. A couple of months later, he made more friends, this time with the chicken farmers, and started bringing home chickens. Slowly, my parents are incorporating more ethical, local (expensive) meat into their weekly groceries. But, according to my mom, it never would have been possible if she had tried to insist on a complete and immediate switch. People accept change at their own pace, however urgent and inspiring the need for it may be.

And sometimes, those of us who are desperate for change *now* may have to be patient, lest we risk alienating people entirely and weakening the power of the whole.

At the same time, though, not everyone had or has to be totally invested in the project in order for it to work. Eigg needed to have everyone on board in order for the buyout to happen, but they didn't and don't need everyone to invest *everything* in it. As a variety of my friends on Eigg pointed out, some people are simply less interested; some don't care; and others' priorities change over the years. Responsibilities rotate between whoever is more interested in a given task at a given time. As long as the group as a whole is strong enough, it will carry the stragglers, and it will care for the land. Scruff, for example, told me he chooses to use pesticides on some of his fields because he simply doesn't have time to do everything organically. It's all very well for Neil, he pointed out, who has a constant rotation of volunteers ready to spend days on end clearing the pesty bracken ferns (which, contrary to my experiences of them in Cape Breton, a landscape that gets blanketed with snow for several months a year, in the more temperate climate on Eigg will grow to be taller than me if left unchecked). Not everyone has that luxury.

I am not totally convinced by Scruff's argument and I don't know if many of the other islanders would be either. But, despite Scruff's resistance to ecologically sound farming practices, he did—as he tells it—invest a great deal in the buyout project at the outset, even though he has reduced his involvement in recent years. The island still flourishes; I suspect it is resilient enough to handle *some* pesticides—otherwise we would probably not have any successful gardens left on planet Earth. And, although Scruff uses pesticides and for reasons unknown has about eight old vehicles sitting in a row in his yard, he still, by virtue of living on the island, gets most of his electricity from renewable

sources; his ecological footprint is probably a good deal lighter than that of someone like me, who does try to live in an ecologically sustainable way but lives in a province powered by coal and oil. In my post-interview notes from my chat with Scruff, I wrote:

So it's important to point out that there are people who either don't care or simply don't bother, and yet the island still moves forward as, indeed, the rest of the world must—and in fact if everyone was a back-to-the-lander eco-activist hippie, there would be no point to my project really. The important part of my project is that for the most part these are normal people and yet they've still achieved something great. (I said to Neil today that I don't think people realize how amazing what they've done its, and he said 'You're right, it's just life,' and then he said that it probably wouldn't work if they did realize how amazing it all was.)

4. *The islanders weren't scared of innovation.*

Almost without exception, everyone I spoke to who had been on Eigg when the buyout happened pointed out that they had no idea what they were doing. That didn't stop them, in the same way that it didn't stop them when they decided they wanted an underground power grid that seamlessly combined three kinds of renewable energy—a feat never before accomplished. Now their community buyout *and* their electricity scheme are cited the world over for their ingenuity, and other communities are catching onto—and even improving, as in other community heritage trusts which not only produce, but also sell renewable energy—these schemes. The collectively owned community of Gigha, for example, has a quite lucrative scheme of selling energy from its three wind turbines (nicknamed the “dancing ladies”) to the national grid (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 386). The dancing ladies provide the Trust with a source of income—to the tune of roughly £150 000 yearly, over and above providing two-thirds of the island's own electricity needs—to provide community services as well as the ability to create jobs (Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust, 2014). The Knoydart Foundation, meanwhile, makes money

from a variety of schemes, one of which is deer stalking—visitors pay upwards of £450 for the opportunity to hunt a stag, which in turn keeps the deer population under control with the lack of natural predators (Knoydart Foundation, 2014).

5. *The community of Eigg does what makes sense, for the present and for the future. For them, what makes sense pragmatically also seems to be what will take care of the island.*

I won't say too much about this here, because I think I've already covered it well in my previous chapter. But it's worth repeating that common sense goes a long way. If you can step away from naturalized understandings of "progress" and figure out what really works, for the good of the whole community in the long term, usually that will be the best idea for both the people and the land. It makes practical, financial, and long-term sense, for example, to use renewable energy found on the island instead of importing diesel; it also makes sense to use seaweed, which you can shovel into your truck yourself just a few minutes away from home, as fertilizer.

It's also important not to get bogged down in concerns that are so big they'd weigh you down. As one person said, "With all the buyouts and world-breaking events and things like that, to us it's just like, you don't think you're really doing something very special. You're just trying to get through life." On Eigg, this "getting through life"—figuring out how to get what the community needs from the resources the island has, without depleting those resources or disabling their capacity to regenerate for the future—has engendered a community which operates, on every level, in a way that is almost entirely what we would call "sustainable." The people of Eigg jumped into their community buyout feet first, and like I said, no one had any idea what to do once they

had been successful. But they trusted themselves and one another, and perhaps the island itself, and they worked everything out.

Likewise, if you achieve something good, the formalities will probably follow. Too often one hears people saying they would do this or that if they were “allowed,” and I suspect that much good is prevented from happening because of bureaucracy. Such an attitude is not tolerated well on Eigg. Eigg was the second crofting community buyout in history, and at the time that it happened there was no formal infrastructure whatsoever available to support it. The islanders didn’t let that stop them; they ploughed ahead. Like Tully’s co-operative citizens, “rather than trying to reform from the inside the institutional structure that limits democratic citizenship, they themselves [exercised] their capacities of self-government cooperatively” (2011, p. 7). Now, in part *because* of their success, legislation exists to support other buyouts. As Kenrick writes, the initial buyouts “led to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act in 2003, which created the political space for many more crofting communities to take back control of their land... Local action has mobilized public sympathy and so created the political space and legislative changes in which it can flourish” (2011a, p. 195).

6. *Green spaces and beautiful places matter.*

Over and over on Eigg, I heard the comment that the physical beauty of the island sustains people. It’s what makes you get up in the morning, what inspires you to push through the day, the reason you stayed on the island in the first place, perhaps even the single most important factor in people’s willingness to move mountains in order to preserve Eigg’s mountains.

I disagree with Karen Helliwell’s belief, which I mentioned above, that the city

cannot bring happiness. Beauty, like everything else, is relational. The landscape of the Highlands was once seen as haunted by nearly everyone who lived there; the mountains of England's Lake District, now world-famous for their majesty, were once popularly believed to be cold and cruel (Hargan, 2008). Yet the one understanding that is consistent among both the people I spoke with on Eigg and the academic literature with which I have engaged is that people need access to safe and plentiful green spaces—spaces where things grow, including, I believe, ideas, and love—and a feeling of connection to where they live if they are going to care enough to try to improve anything, especially if the improvements at stake include a movement towards ecological justice (see, for example, Kato, 2006; Kaltenborn and Williams, 2002; Adams, 2004).

William Carlos Williams wrote that “It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there” (1955, p. 39) The same, I think, can be said of beautiful green spaces. It's nearly impossible to quantify their benefits for our sense of place and worth in the world, but they are essential. And, as Lucy Conway said, being in places like Eigg—places that make you “*want* to love them,” like the cat who wouldn't leave my lap—changes one's priorities. I think it's safe to say that in our world, a shift in priorities is important and even essential, and public access to places that inspire care may be one way to effect such a shift.

7. The actions of the community of Eigg as well as the individual islanders are marked by keen awareness of and respect for relationships of all kinds, human and otherwise.

Deborah Bird Rose writes, of the global conquest of indigenous peoples:

Conquest is based on desire, and on the illusion of winners and losers. One wins by disabling not only the opposition but the very life systems in which the opposition is embedded. This is a fatal error, for there are no other life systems... a failure of intersubjectivity which damages life-

sustaining relationships and which must, therefore, eventually rebound.
(1992, p. 191)

In a later work, she reminds us: “There is no position outside of connection. What happens to one has effects on the well-being of others... To care for others is to care for one’s self” (2011, p. 27). It is this message I find most strong in what I learned on Eigg. The people who live there really take this seriously, and herein, I suspect, lies their success: they succeed because they care about one another, and as Kenrick (2009) proposes, if you allow yourself to have faith that there will be enough to go around, and adopt a relational understanding of survival, everyone ensures everyone else has enough, and so it works out that they all do. The people’s relationship with the island allows them to care for it; the island in turn (I believe) cares for them. “Possession—property—is about reciprocity and rights of access” (Haraway, 2003, p. 53). Once you understand that, I believe, innumerable possibilities open up—possibilities for change leading to social and ecological justice, and for the happiness that comes from the awareness of your own special place in a world of relational becoming.

Chapter 10: Conclusion: On indigeneity, Freedom and the Collision of Ideas

We must look to examples of best practice and embrace the need to be radical in our thinking. A cohesive community is not one where the gross output of the individual is the only hallmark of success. The ability to work with and influence our external environment so that the local economy is more responsive to the needs to the locality is essential. While brownfield sites lay vacant, while children do not have space to grow vegetables, while access to community halls remains insufficient, while our civic spaces take second place in the priorities of successive local councils and while our central policy fails to reflect the real human value in our society, we shall remain in a state of great mass disillusionment. The time to embrace a new paradigm is now. (Cumming, 2013)

Though I have thus far chosen not to draw attention to them—I wanted to weave my argument independently before trying to make comparisons—many threads through this thesis resonate with the experiences, feelings and worldviews of the indigenous teachings that, in some ways, have inspired my own interest in the notion of human relationships to the land. Here, I am working to respond to my secondary research questions: first, on what characterizes the “indigeneity” Kenrick (2011b) and Hunter (1995) attribute to crofters, and how it might challenge our assumptions about how western people relate to land; and second, around what might be the generative potential of all this. I explore these threads in order to illuminate both the possibility for relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, and the potential that I think lies within each of us to find something that resembles an indigenous relationship to the land, wherever we may be. In turn, within both of these possibilities lies, too, the hope that we may one day change the harmful western relationships with the land many of us now take for granted.

Of course, no two communities are alike, and the parallels I draw will not be exact—nor should they be. In his 2002 book *In Amazonia*, Hugh Raffles wrote the

following about the specificity of place:

neither Amazonia nor its nature is... easily contained. The natures I describe... are dynamic and heterogeneous, formed again and again from presences that are cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic, and social. They are natures deep within everyday life: affect-saturated affinities, unreliable and wary intimacies... This is less a history of nature than a way of writing the present as a condensation of multiple natures and their differences... Such natures, it should be clear, resist abstraction from the worlds in which they participate (2002, p. 7).

Yet Raffles is also the master of productive juxtapositions. His second book, *Insectopedia* (2010), is a series of short essays about insects and humans and their interactions all across the globe. The collection offers very little explanation of itself, but lends the understanding that there is probably some good to be found in looking at different settings and relationships side by side, even within a worldview of radical particularity and of natures so deeply embedded in places and cultures they are impossible to extract. It would seem, then, that despite radical particularity, juxtapositions are useful, and they make visible interesting and potentially productive things that might otherwise have remained hidden.

The worldview of Raffles and the other scholars I've cited here—of relationality, of the animacy of the non-human and our actions' embeddedness in our environments, of “naturecultures” (Haraway, 2003; 2007) and “earthbound geographies” (Lorimer, 2006)—is well-placed to support movements toward social and ecological justice. This, as Kenrick argues, is not just because it advocates ethical response and respect for otherness, but because it works to decolonize our (by which I mean, speaking for myself, western peoples' or western researchers') relationships with indigenous peoples *and* our relationships with ourselves and the world we inhabit. These perspectives propose a model of human existence that comes closer to describing what human experience

actually entails, as well as who is involved in such worldly experience: what other actors are at stake, the ways in which we relate to them, and the good reasons why they deserve our respect. And it is a model that indigenous people already understand. Kenrick (2011b) argues that Tim Ingold's deliberately apolitical writing (see Ingold 2006, 2011) is decolonial because of Ingold's insistence that, as indigenous people believe—despite the efforts of colonizing nations to convince them and everyone else otherwise—we *are* all connected to and influenced by one another and the non-human beings of the world around us. In Kenrick's view, if more of us could recognize our essential interconnectivity, we would act differently, in ways more sensitive to the needs of others and the planet. He writes:

The egalitarian indigenous peoples referred to in the anthropological literature are indeed no different to those of us who have grown up in the societies that have given rise to the social sciences, not because they are like us; but because their perception of the world, their ways of relating to other persons (including non-human others) is a far better representation of our own experience than the dualistic and atomistic epistemology that still dominates anthropology, sociology and Wallerstein's 'other dubious disciplines.' (2011b, p. 13)

The feelings of connection to the land, the recognition of the land as an agential influence in their lives, and the determination to be good stewards of the land that I witnessed in the people on Eigg is surely, too, a recognition of the falseness of this “dualistic and atomistic epistemology.”

In another piece, Kenrick briefly documents the parallels between the ways in which indigenous peoples outside of Europe, and those involved in the crofters' movements in Scotland, have made their claims for land (2011a). “In both cases,” he writes,

marginalized minority groups use shared public notions of their having

been historically dispossessed by incoming powerful land owners, and of their seeking to persist with socially and ecologically sustainable practices, to secure support for their attempts to reclaim community control over land and over their political processes. (2011a, p. 195)

Kenrick does an excellent job of defining indigenous people's movements against the claims of their opponents, who argue that such movements are made out of a racial-exclusivist desire to further capitalist self-interest. Instead, Kenrick deftly shows—echoing Pignarre and Stengers' (2012) proposition that we have all been bewitched, and not without harm, by capitalism—“such campaigns implicitly argue that we are all indigenous, in the sense that we all suffer from a dominant and destructive economic system exterior to local communities” (2011a, p. 197); this position, he asserts, is a starting point for making alternative social and economic systems possible for everyone (2011a). In “the actually existing relations amongst egalitarian indigenous peoples... the world over... being indigenous—having the right to belong and to have a say—is established through demonstrating an ability to care for one's own interests in a way that sustains rather than harms others” (2011a, p. 201).

I believe—and I suspect Kenrick would agree—that there is more at stake here, however, than a series of parallels in how claims are made. There are also parallels in experiences, not just the historical relationship to land demonstrated by Hunter (1995) or the Clearances-era dispossession, but in the present as well. The people who live on Eigg seem to have a relationship with their island that is far more similar to indigenous worldviews than to conventional western ones. Indeed, they have staked their lives and livelihoods on the belief that land is better off when it is shared by a community rather than owned, in pieces, by individuals. Their community functions—meetings, ceilidhs, celebrations, any tasks that need a lot of square footage to accomplish—all happen under

a watercolour-washed, handmade banner asking “Who possesses this landscape?/the man who bought it?/or I who am possessed by it?” and answering: “False question” (MacCaig, as cited by Scottish Poetry Library, 2014).

This is deeply reflective of the indigenous perspective of “belonging” in land rather than owning it. Both are perspectives of relationships instead of dominance (Noble, 2008). In this “belonging” worldview “one is part of creation and is always being cared for by others, so one needs to take care of them” (Noble, 2008, p. 470). This echoes both the theoretical perspectives I mentioned above and what I heard on Eigg. And those from whom I heard it are well aware of it; both Lucy and Eddie mentioned indigenous-like relationships to the land, and several people made reference to a mid-1990s visit to Eigg made by a Nova Scotian Mi’kmaq chief, Chief Stone Eagle. They told me his visit was both inspiring and empowering, since he told the people of Eigg: “You are all indigenous, even those of you who have moved here”—and that they were responsible for taking care of the land (interview with Camille Dressler, 2013).

For me, all of this offers hope, on a personal and a political level. As a settler-descendant Canadian, I am sometimes overwhelmed by what can feel like a crippling inadequacy of heritage, tradition, and even the simple right to live where I do. I am unable to address the latter issue here, except to say that in the light of Kenrick’s work, maybe we (settler-descendants) would all feel more comfortable living on this land if we could shift our perspective to acknowledging that we must live, rather, *with* the land. In this and in the question of the inadequacy of the western tradition, the fully modern, fully western, at least partially indigenous people on the Isle of Eigg and their Gaelic tradition (my own heritage all around, though some of it comes from another British isle) should

be all the proof we need to at least try to move forward.

Mi'kmaq Elder Kerry Prosper said in a recent presentation, "you know, we're all indigenous, you're all indigenous, we often talk that we're indigenous and no one else is indigenous but we're all indigenous somewhere." He was referring to places in which generations are connected to the land, saying to a predominantly settler audience "if you ever go to that place, you will feel what we feel, and when you experience that you begin to know what we're talking about" (2014). For me, whose family has been solidly rooted in Cape Breton for four or so generations but beyond that is a mishmash of Irish, Scottish, some French and some who knows what else (some of my relatives say there's even a little bit of Mi'kmaq in there), this is confusing. Though I felt a powerful, visceral connection to the land during my time on Eigg, the feeling was no more powerful than what I experience here in Ingonish, wandering through the meadow where my great-grandparents and their children once laid out their fish to dry (the feeling, I'll admit, is not quite so potent while wandering my ancestors' farmland, which was transformed into a golf course when a national park arrived here in 1936). And while my father grew up in Ingonish and I've spent many summers here, I wasn't born here; and neither of us could be called *indigenous* to this place in the traditional understanding of the word.

Yet, while there's no way of knowing for sure, when indigenous people like Kerry Prosper speak of the sense of having a relationship to the land, I *do* feel like I know what they're talking about, though I lack their deep ancestral knowledge of it, and my engagements with it are very different. As a child of generations of settlers, all from different places, that's probably as close as I'm going to come. But I can learn more. Can non-indigenous people reconcile our relationships to the land in ways that result in deep

experiences of care and connection to it? As Borrows (2012), Tully (2014) and many others argue, of course we can.

Indeed, in the “blood and soil” terms Kenrick decries (2011a), the people of Eigg are not *that* indigenous—both because the population includes a large percentage of people who moved to the island from elsewhere, and because the island’s total population was wiped out a couple of times a mere five or so centuries ago, only a few generations before some of my ancestors started trickling across the ocean to Atlantic Canada. As Miller bluntly puts it, describing a brutal, mid-16th-century massacre in which the several hundred islanders were suffocated to death in a cave:

The traditional history of Eigg... compared with that of some of the neighboring islands, presents a decapitated aspect: the M’Leods cut it off by the neck. Most of the present inhabitants can tell which of their ancestors, grandfather, or great-grandfather, or great- great-grandfather, first settled in the place, and where they came from; and, with the exception of a few vague legends about St. Donnan and his grave, which were preserved apparently among the people of the other Small Isles, the island has no early traditional history. (1862, p. 50)

To be sure, those who resettled Eigg after the massacre and the subsequent famine would have come from other nearby areas not so different from Eigg, though their descendants make up only about half or less of the island’s current population (in the estimation of several people I asked, whose numbers are admittedly unclear).

Cape Breton, settled largely by Gaelic people from Scotland and Ireland, is remarkably similar to the Scottish Highlands and Islands in its geography. Here, too, our mountains reach towards the sea, rounded by the long-ago passage of glaciers. Here, too, the bumps along our rocky coastline are smoothed by the soft façade of low-lying plants like the bracken fern, whose skin is tough and leathery like that of our fishermen. Here, too, the majestic caribou once roamed amongst wolves; here, too, we extirpated both, the

former out of greed and the latter out of fear. Who is to say just *what* are the ties of place that bind? Could a sense of connectivity to mountains, for example, follow a people across the ocean? Gillis and Lowenthal write:

Mountains and islands are... analogous. Many islands are submerged mountains, or remnants of them. Like islands, mountains connote isolation and remoteness, their obdurate inhabitants set apart and clannish. Constrained and fragile ecologies and economies foster customary ways that are deeply conservative, yet resourcefully thrifty. Communal needs and cooperative action overrule individual claims in mountain and island societies alike. (2007, p. V)

I do not pretend these cross-Atlantic, inter-island connections are the same kinds of connections with the land Canadian indigenous people have; after all, “natures... resist abstraction from the worlds in which they participate” (Raffles, 2002, p. 7). But they are connections nonetheless, and they are starting points. For me, tracing my roots through communal land ownership tocrofting to Clearances, and through national park expropriation later on in the New World, has been an entry point to connecting more deeply to the land on which I live today. There are many, many other such entry points. We need not prevent ourselves from developing an indigenous relationship to the land, and we cannot afford to exclude anyone. If Eigg can do it, so can others. As Noble argues, “we all have experienced the connective social force of inalienable reciprocity... we *all* have a sense of... belonging... Most of us have the basic skills for developing mutual respect” (2008, p. 476). There’s no reason why Bennett’s scheme of reanimating the material for an ethic of care (2010) can’t work, why we can’t move to the ethic of connectivity for which Rose argues (2011).

I turn now to wise thoughts from John Borrows, a scholar I greatly admire, who I think is a living example of this understanding. I have had the good fortune to be present

at a number of talks Dr. Borrows offered in Halifax in 2012 and 2014, around the subject of reconciliation. Borrows, an Anishinabek scholar, suggested that true reconciliation can be achieved by listening to the earth's teachings, and paying attention to what it has to say. For him, we—all the people of the earth—are facing a moment in which we must reconcile with one another, with the other species of the earth, with the earth itself, and with *ourselves*. And what we need to do to achieve that reconciliation is to slow down and pay attention, learning in this way to envision ourselves as part of a whole—not just in the sense that we have a *duty* to the whole, to be respectful and caring, but in the sense that we are supported by the whole inasmuch as we must do our part to support it. We are part of a community that *includes* the earth, if only we would stop to notice it.

This position aligns with that of commons thinking—the notion that there is plenty, if we change our perspective on exploitation (Kenrick, 2009); with Stengers' assertion that relationality underlies everything (2012); and with Latour's insistence that his new collective (2004) will thrive only if humankind can be convinced to consider the implications of its actions on all the actors involved, not just humans. Borrows' perspective also helps to illuminate the islanders' perspective on what the land is, with his understanding, deeply rooted in indigenous philosophies, that the earth is a holistic entity which consists of more than just the sum of its parts; and that we are all always entangled in relationships with this entity as well as with its parts. Thus far I have used the concept of the assemblage to talk about the island, which is useful for analysis; in the practical terms of day-to-day life, though, this more spiritual perspective probably hits closer to the mark of how people think about the land they experience as their companion.

Borrows also shows why we should *want* to embrace this worldview of radical relationality. It's not just for a political or social good, or to help others: we need to do this to help ourselves. Borrows' words and comportment exude a peace and serenity often not present in the rushing, stressed-out Westerners with whom, and with whose values, beliefs and worldviews, I am most familiar. It's the same kind of serenity I saw and, I think, felt on Eigg. In the words of Sylvia Law, a musician who recently completed an artist's residency on Eigg, "There was something so beautiful about life on Eigg, the way everything was so vividly interconnected—each life was part of another" (2014). I think this feeling results from a recognition of relationality and a sense of wholeness in this recognition, as well as a the freedom that results from relinquishing one's participation in what Tully calls "market time" (2014) and what others would call simple materialism. It's not easy to step away from such things, but it's worth it; and if we can't all be convinced to do so on the basis of ethics, maybe some of us can be convinced on the basis of finding happiness and peace.

Anthropology is one assemblage that can help to do that. A variety of scholars advocate for the potential of anthropology and the other social sciences to propose and advance alternatives, to not only describe the present but also illuminate the possible. And while I have found far more anthropological articles advocating for us to practice such proposition than articles in which these scholars actually practice it (and I am, here and elsewhere, guilty of the same thing), I think this is a useful and important point. Anthropology, in Kenrick's words, can "challenge... processes of coercion and of negotiation, and... remake itself as a relational egalitarian field with its own distinct reality-making potential, through its ability to work with and support interlinking nodes

of resistance” (2011a, p. 190).

Along with “remaking itself as a relational field,” I think one of the great potentials of contemporary social science is to highlight the relationality and interdependence that underlies all of our experiences, and encourage awareness of it in whatever ways we can. Latour asks:

What if freedom consists in finding oneself not free of a greater number of beings but attached to an ever-increasing number of contradictory propositions? What if fraternity resides not in a front of civilization that would send the others back into barbarity but in the obligation to work with all the others to build a single common world? What if equality asks us to take responsibility for nonhumans without knowing in advance what belongs to the category of simple means and what belongs to the kingdom of ends? (2004, p. 227)

What if, indeed? As Tully writes, “democratic freedom” comes not from “being free from relationships of interdependency; but, rather, *within* these empowering social, ecological and spiritual relationships” (2011, p. 39). While doing away with the straightforward notion of owning alienable things, nonhuman animals or acres, the people and scholars who do so offer a richer, more nuanced and generally kinder—to the earth, to one another, to ourselves—way of viewing the world, one filled with wonder and wayfinding (Ingold, 2011), messmates (Haraway, 2007) and innumerable alternatives rather than one “infernal” one (Pignarre and Stengers, 2011). They offer to the academy and to the world a politics enhanced by robustness and robust and decolonial capability—a heightened sensitivity to differences, a growing and wondrous reality—which fortifies, enriches and encourages its scholars’ attempts to make a difference in the world. “Reality grows to precisely the same extent as the work done to become sensitive to differences” (Latour, 2004, p. 85).

Sometimes all we need to do is pay attention, and highlight the cool stuff—that

which brings us joy, whether it is a flower, a rainfall, or a whole island. Kenrick's argument that indigenous ways of thinking are truer to real experience than our own is gathered partly from scholars like Ingold (2000; 2011), but also, I suspect, from his experience of living in the world as a person who values the land and the community more than materialistic goals. If I stop and pay attention to the land, I start to realize that it's (1) fluid, constantly changing, and *alive*; and (2) constantly affecting my mood and what I do. On these basic levels, I believe that for almost anyone who can shift their focus away from the "dualistic and atomistic epistemology" we in the west have inherited (Kenrick, 2011a, p. 13)—even momentarily—we will realize that interdependence is the reality. And this is important: as Bennett writes, "there will be no greening of the economy, no redistribution of wealth, no enforcement or extension of rights without human dispositions, moods, and cultural ensembles hospitable to these effects" (2010, p. xxii).

Van Horn writes that his favourite naturalists all "know how to attend deeply, to open themselves fully to the presence of other beings, minds still, bodies poised and listening" (2010, p. 18). And "attention of this kind is about creating a conversation... The attentive disposition of the naturalist opens a back door into what has been known for aeons: the world is alive and constantly speaking" (2010, p. 18). Once one is open to the "being alive" of stones (Ingold, as cited in Lorimer, 2006, p. 511), anything is possible. As the non-representational geographers argue of their own work (Popke, 2008), a state of attention to the beyond-taken-for-granted opens us to alternatives others are not conditioned to be able to see.

What is the potential of the resubjectification (Mackenzie, 2006) of humankind as

beings conscious of our relationality? Margulis and Sagan argue that, “independence is a political, not a scientific term” (as cited in Van Horn, 2012). If interdependence is the more scientifically accurate term, though, this doesn’t make it apolitical; quite the contrary. If our political world could better recognize this interdependence and use it to replace individualism as our metaphor—then we would really be getting somewhere.

Let’s move back to the example of relationality. Let’s envision what a world based on a belief in essential relationality, rather than the current discourse of neoliberal self-interest and capitalist exploitation, might look like. Politics would recognize that, by virtue of our nature as relational beings and the single planet we share, it’s in their interests to get along. We would stop imagining the human as an atomized species existing above all others, untouchable by them and therefore invulnerable to planetary warfare, or Gaia’s intrusion (Stengers, 2012). Instead, if we began to understand ourselves individually, as communities and as a species, as always and necessarily existing only by virtue of other species—and of ourselves as a species on which many others’ lives depend, whether because of the powerful position we’ve eked out for ourselves in the world or because of literal symbiosis—we would, I hope and believe, begin to recognize that we are obligated to engage with these Others, whether human or not (if it even really matters), respectfully, as Asch’s (2001) “relational Others,” not oppositional ones.

Indeed, I think we would become co-operative citizens, “[exercising]... power-with instead of the standard form of power-over” (Tully, 2011, p. 7).

Cooperative citizens and many social scientists argue that social relationships of mutual cooperation and nonviolent conflict resolution are more basic and commonplace than relationships of antagonism and violent conflict... [They] also reject the view that the deeper ecological

relationships on which all forms of life depend are basically relationships of violent struggles for existence of species, as Darwin and his followers continue to claim. Rather, from Wallace and Kropotkin to Lyn Margulis, environmental and biological scientists argue that ecological relationships of mutual aid are more fundamental than conflict in the evolution of life on earth. (Tully, 2011, p. 37-39)

I think it is this worldview that has begun to take hold on Eigg—or, perhaps, that has grown from the deep roots of the Celtic monks, who centuries ago felt companionship and care for the animals and for the earth. On Eigg, I have argued, such co-operative citizenship is rooted in the deep feeling of the island as an entity greater than the sum of its parts, an entity knowable and relatable as a companion. I saw this slow, steady respect in Neil’s gentleness with a young chicken he needed to move—“will this freak you out?” he asked her, cooing softly to reassure her; I felt it in the reverence with which people spoke of the sunset; I heard it in Scruff’s simple question, “Have you met the bull?” It is a worldview that is rooted in history and culture and tied to age-old indigenous-like relationships to the land, yet it is also entirely new. No one is trying to romanticize the past; no one is trying to go backward, and no one is standing still. In Karen Helliwell’s words,

Most of us who moved here actually moved here because we loved the peace and the environment. You wouldn’t want it to turn into somewhere different, but you’ve got to adapt enough to sustain a viable population... Any community that’s standing still is actually moving backwards. You *have* to keep moving forward.

What is happening on Eigg is not a reversal of the highly unjust policies and processes that created the crofting system in the first place, but a remaking of that system so that it empowers instead of oppressing.

Hugh Raffles, anthropologist of insects and of people, demands his reader to

Stop. If you’re inside, go to a window. Throw it open and turn your face to

the sky. All that empty space, the deep vastness of the air, the heavens wide above you. The sky is full of insects, and all of them are going somewhere. Every day, above and around us, the collective voyage of billions of beings.

That's the letter *A*: the first thing not to forget. There are other worlds around us. Too often, we pass through them unknowing, seeing but blind, hearing but deaf, touching but not feeling, contained by the limits of our senses, the banality of our imaginations, our Ptolemaic certitudes. (2010, p. 12)

I would add that, once we have discovered the other worlds around us, we might begin to realize, too, that we also have the capacity for other worlds *within* us.

The world that has come into being on the Isle of Eigg is unique. No other landlord is quite the same as Keith Schellenberg was; no other population has quite the same nuances in backgrounds; no other island shares exactly the same historical trajectory—although, in all of the above examples, other communities share similar circumstances, similar histories, similar levels of devotion to the land. There are many factors that add up to what makes Eigg special: there is, for example, the way it feels to be on a small island, cut off from the world; there's the horridness of Schellenberg's rein. Then there are the pointy mountains of Rum that gaze at Eigg from across the sea, cutting an artistic silhouette into the sunsets; and the quartz sands of the Singing Sands beach, which "sing" when you tread on them. There's the legend of Sweeney, an ancient king who lived on Eigg during the time of St. Donnan, communing with the birds and animals while he lived in solitude in a cave; and there's the sheer beauty of everything around you when you're on the island. In this context, perhaps it's no wonder, really, that people were determined to figure out how to stay on the island; it's no wonder that they had fallen in love.

So, too, do people the world over fall in love with places. Aldo Leopold wrote

that “only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the cry of the wolf” (1987, p. 129). I am sure the watchful Sgurr, the great column of basalt that presides over the Isle of Eigg, could explain in a sentence just what is distinctive about the community of Eigg; I can offer here only an educated guess, based as much in what Rosie told me while I was on the island as in what the island’s humans said. I think that, like the slow sliding and colliding of continental plates that converge in slightly or drastically differing ways to make each physical place on our earth unique, Eigg is a product of a variety of factors that came together at just the right moment. Like every event, it’s a product of both opportunity and desire. It’s possible that the buyout never would have been suggested had it not been for the particular group of philanthropists who proposed it. It’s possible that the sense of the island-as-companion has existed all along, since the cave massacre of the 1500s and beyond. And indeed, while the community ownership of the land makes it possible—or at least a lot easier—for residents to make decisions in the interests of the land, no one cited the community trust as the reason they do so. The community trust is, rather, a means to an end. Is it too optimistic to suggest that, perhaps, what western humans lack is opportunity?; that, if “we are all indigenous in the sense that we all suffer from a dominant and destructive economic system external to local communities” (Kenrick, 2011a, p. 197), many more of us than one might be given to suspect might choose to live *with* the land rather than against it, if we felt we had a choice?; that the existence of the choice is, perhaps, the “generative potential” (Kenrick, 2011b, p. 201) Eigg offers to the world?

Why do the islanders, themselves, make that choice? Two strong opinions were presented to me: the first, that it simply makes sense. This emerges from the sense,

among the islanders, of deep pragmatism unmarred, somehow, by the transnational, made-in-China logic of production inherent to contemporary capitalism. The second was that somehow the physical isle was the cause of all the (in the words of one woman I interviewed) “world-breaking events” the people of Eigg insisted they didn’t even know were particularly interesting to anyone outside of themselves until people like me started turning up. In Eddie’s opinion, Eigg the island deserves most of the credit; Eigg the community was—more or less—just along for the ride.

Perhaps, then, it’s that sense of “seepiness” Lucy mentioned: that the island seeps into you, and this seepiness changes how people respond to the choices presented to them in daily life. And, if I am right in suggesting the people of Eigg perceive the island as their companion, maybe the seepiness can be explained in the simple terms of the old standby: the person whose physical appearance resembles that of his or her faithful companion, the dog. I certainly felt both the ever-joyful Rosie; and the ever-peaceful, breathtakingly beautiful, slow-moving Eigg seeping into me during my time on Eigg.

Certainly, I think, on Eigg and in the other community ownership schemes popping up all over the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, community ownership influences—sometimes subconsciously—how people think about land. Not owning one’s own land is a reminder both of the need for cooperation in all aspects of life, and of the simple falsity of the notion that (an is)land is the kind of thing that can be owned. Ridding the cultural imagination of this idea obliges people to come up with new ideas to live by—and compels them to work and live *with* the land, instead of merely on top of it. I heard this perspective, over and over, in people’s assertion of the importance of the community working together to solve problems; and in, for example, Neil’s casual

comment that he doesn't really care to own his croft, even though—even under the community trust—he *does* have the legal right to buy it, should he want to. I saw it when, to my amazement (and looking back, it seems rather sad that I was so shocked at a display of simple cooperation), the supply truck for the food shop at the Eigg Pier pulled off the ferry and thirty or so community members, who had been gathered around waiting for it, immediately got up and all set to work unloading the truck. Several people I interviewed pointed out that the islanders on Eigg all seem to have a common goal—in Neil's words, "to make Eigg a good place to live"—and although they don't directly attribute this to community ownership (and in fact it was also a factor in the buyout happening to begin with), the two elements have a definite interchange, a relationship of co-creation whose participants cannot be isolated from one another without losing the essence of each. This process has resulted in a successful community based on a just relationship between the islanders and their island that poses a serious challenge to how we in the West conventionally understand property and other relationships.

Eigg is not unlike other eco-communities—there's even a whole network of "eco-islands," who came together on Denmark's Bornholm Island just before I arrived on Eigg in September 2013—across the globe. It especially shares similarities, of course, with the other collectively owned crofting communities. Then there is the global network of "ecovillages," thousands of "intentional" communities where people have come together to live sustainably. The collectively owned crofting communities have similar goals to these ecovillages, but are different in their historic connection to the land as well as in the fact that the people there did not intentionally come together to retreat from the world (although more and more people are choosing to move to the Scottish Highlands, and the

waiting list for a croft is long), but were *already* together and collectively chose to make change in the world as they knew it.

Kato, after pointing out the importance of a feeling of connection to land for any kind of effective human response to climate change, ponders:

How such connectivity may be regained remains largely unanswered and is increasingly difficult today when many urban dwellers are far removed from the rest of the biosphere. The remark made by Said more than 20 years ago about the ‘generalized condition of homelessness’ has even clearer resonance today for human–nature relationships. (2006, p. 460)

She continues by proposing that, in response, we must:

recover and cultivate our own sensitivity to surroundings—to be sensitively in tune with nature’s state and its flow, and to build a community, both conceptual and geographical, which recognises distinct features of place with which they interact in their ordinary everyday life and generate shared meaning. Such a community may be defined as a terrain of consciousness, where the meaning of place is continuously constructed through interactions of human and non-human worlds... With an emphasis on sensitivity and community, this reciprocal relationship also becomes collective. (2006, p. 460)

This theoretical notion of the “terrain of consciousness,” which I have argued can be characterized on Eigg as the imaginary of the island-companion, has the potential, I think, to be an expansive topography. The word “terrain,” after all, does nothing to imply smoothness or uniformity. Terrains stretch across mountain ranges, wend through deep river valleys, even traverse cities. Might a terrain of consciousness like that on Eigg send its tendrils elsewhere, expand its territory, even—like continental plates—crash against other terrains, and perhaps, if the stars align, obduct?

The terrain of consciousness on Eigg is located more in the geographical than the conceptual, if we frame it using such a model. The people I spoke with there were firm in asserting their rootedness in the island, and their project’s specificity to the circumstances

surrounding it. Yet there is a conceptual terrain at play here as well, linking Eigg both to other communities that are making similar efforts now; to communities who wish to make similar efforts; to the diverse scatterplot of concerned “Gaia citizens” (Tully, 2011) everywhere else, who are trying to somehow make a difference in their world, who want to forge new relationships and new ways of being human because they believe in a better future. Tully’s Gaia citizens’

revolutionary response to the injustice of privatization of the natural world has given rise to the great co-operative and community-based ecology movements. These movements join hands with millions of Indigenous peoples who have related to and cared for mother earth in this reciprocal way for millennia. From Aldo Leopold, Albert Schweitzer, Rachel Carson and Vandana Shiva to the Chipko Movement and Earth Democracy in India and Asia, and on to Japanese fishing co-operatives, the water justice movement, Food Sovereignty and everyday ecological footprint initiatives, millions of Gaia citizens are reclaiming the commons and exercising their capabilities democratically in ethical relationships of stewardship in the commonwealth of all forms of life. (2011, p. 30-31)

I would propose that what is most interesting throughout this discussion—of that which makes Eigg special, and that which might enable it to connect to other communities—is the space between all of the factors I’ve considered; that what matters is the interchange, and the stories that weave history into the present, intertwining all of the elements of the island with one another to create a terrain of consciousness characterized by both acute awareness of, and love for, Eigg as an island with a personality; Eigg the companion. Within that space is space to think further, and to think with: to fabulate, as Stengers would say (2012). At the most basic level, I believe it’s the love of and sense of connectivity with Eigg-the-companion that spurred and continues to drive people’s determination to do well by their island; and it’s this expansive kind of love, and the willingness to be friends with the land, that those outside Eigg looking in might learn

from. After all, in Deborah Bird Rose's words, "*ethics within connectivity don't allow a person to give up*" (2011, p. 141).

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Appendix I: Informed Consent Form (**Participant observation**)

Informed Consent Form: Participant observation

For participation in the thesis research project, *“Earthbound geographies” and land-based activism: An investigation of relationships and land reform in Highland Scotland.*

Researcher:

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Thank you for taking a few minutes to chat with me. I am a Master’s student at Dalhousie University in Canada and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project about your experiences with collective land ownership in your community. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are welcome to ask me questions, change our approach to participation or end your involvement with my project at any time. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me, Amy Donovan

Purpose of study, study design, and participation

In my project, I want to figure out how collective land ownership became a reality in your community, because it’s an exciting and innovative change and I believe it would be useful to know how it happened— not just in the political or technical senses, but what made people like you decide to go through with it. To try to answer this question, for my master’s project at school, I’m interviewing ten to twenty people—any adults who see themselves as crofters and are involved with the community buyouts. I’m also spending some time in your community, participating in the daily work on one or two crofts, to help me learn more about what’s going on here. This is called participant observation and it’s the part of my project that I am inviting you to be a part of.

If you’re willing, I’d like to spend some time on your croft during your working day, helping out and participating in your daily life. If you say yes, I will spend several days working with you on the croft, or as much time as you can host me for (no more than two weeks). If you agree, you can change your mind or decide not to let me use what I learn from you at any time, even after I am finished my participant observation on your croft, and that won’t be a problem at all.

What you will be asked to do; possible risks, discomforts, and benefits

I do not expect my presence to make you feel uncomfortable; however, if by chance this happens, please let me know and I will leave temporarily or for good. You are under no obligation to host me and I am happy to stop my research with you at any time.

While I don’t anticipate this to be the case, there is also the unlikely possibility that if for some reason my study is perceived negatively in your community, and you are identified as being associated with it, that negative perception will transfer to you. I do not believe this will be the case, but I wanted to mention it, especially since we are in a small community; even if you don’t choose to be identified in my research, someone might see you with me or guess who you are from my report.

With your permission, I may quote you and discuss what I observe in the final written version of this study and possibly in other scholarly publications. You can ask not to be quoted on particular subjects that come

up while I am with you, and you can ask me not to mention certain things that happen; I will honour any requests of this nature.

You will not be compensated for your time. (If you end up providing me with necessities such as food, I will compensate you for these.) However, while you may not benefit directly from this study, you will be contributing to a better understanding of the processes that are behind land reform. My study might be useful for your community or others like it in moving forward. It might also be helpful for other communities elsewhere in the world, where people also want to establish local control and more environmentally friendly lifestyles. In this case, I hope you feel that in participating in my research, you're contributing to a larger and important cause, if only by helping to show how communities *can* successfully govern their own land and economies.

You may wish to give oral consent instead of signing this form. In either case, you will be given a copy of the consent form with my signature on it for your information.

Confidentiality and anonymity

If you do not want to be identified in my project, you can choose another name by which I refer to you, or if you'd prefer I can choose one for you. In this case, I will also do my best in my final project not to include, or to change, any personal details about you that might lead others to guess your identity. I will make sure no identifying information about you appears on my data, in my final report or in any other publications that result from this research. I cannot, however, completely guarantee anonymity. This is especially true given that I am only going to be doing participant observation on one or two crofts, and that due to the small number of communities that are similar to yours, I will be naming your community in my final report.

Again, if there is anything you want left out of the study, I will honour your request.

I am the only researcher working on this study. I will conduct, store, and analyze my observations about our time together. I am going to store any transcripts of my notes on an external hard drive that is password protected so only I can access it, and I'll keep my written notes in a locked box, which, again, only I can access.

If you are interested, I will share a copy of any passages from my report that mention you, for your approval, before I submit my final report. You will be invited to make any edits you see fit. A completed copy of the final thesis report will be made publicly available, and I will provide you with a personal copy if you request it.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about the research itself or about your participation in this study, you may contact me, my supervisor or the director of the Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity at Dalhousie University. **If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, ethics@dal.ca**

Your oral or signed consent indicates that you have been given time to read this document and that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

Consent Form (Participant observation)

For participation in the thesis research project, *“Earthbound geographies” and land-based activism: An investigation of relationships and land reform in Highland Scotland.*

You will receive a copy of this informed consent form signed and dated by the researcher. Your consent in no way obligates you to participate and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Oral Consent

I, Amy Donovan, confirm that has given oral consent to participate in this study and:

- _____ will allow real name to be used.
- _____ will not allow real name to be used, and instead request an alias.
- _____ would like a copy of passages in which participant observation is discussed for review.
- _____ would not like a copy of passages in which participant observation is discussed for review.
- _____ would like to be recontacted if research material is used in future (5 years +) studies.
- _____ will not allow use in future (5 years +) studies.

Written Consent

I, (PRINT YOUR NAME HERE) give consent to participate in this study and:

- _____ will allow real name to be used.
- _____ will not allow real name to be used, and instead request an alias.
- _____ would like a copy of passages in which participant observation is discussed for review.
- _____ would not like a copy of passages in which participant observation is discussed for review.
- _____ would like to be recontacted if research material is used in future (5 years +) studies.
- _____ will not allow use in future (5 years +) studies.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

Appendix II: Informed Consent Form (Interviews)

Informed Consent Form (Interviews)

For participation in the thesis research project, *“Earthbound geographies” and land-based activism: An investigation of relationships and land reform in Highland Scotland.*

Researcher:

Amy Donovan
 Master’s Student, Social Anthropology
 Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
 Dalhousie University
 6135 University Ave.
 Halifax, NS B3H 3P9
 Email: amy.donovan@dal.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Brian Noble
 Associate Professor
 Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
 Dalhousie University
 6135 University Ave.
 Halifax, NS B3H 3P9
 Email: bnoble@dal.c

Thank you for taking a few minutes to chat with me. I am a Master’s student at Dalhousie University in Canada and I would like to invite you to participate in my research project about your experiences with collective land ownership in your community. Your participation is completely voluntary and you are welcome to ask me questions, change our approach to participation or end your involvement with my project at any time. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me, Amy Donovan

Purpose of study, study design, and participation

In my project, I want to figure out how collective land ownership became a reality in your community, because it’s an exciting and innovative change and I believe it would be useful to know how it happened—not just in the political or technical senses, but what made people like you decide to go through with it. To try to answer this question, for my master’s project at school, I’m interviewing ten to twenty people—any adults who see themselves as crofters and are involved with the community buyouts. I’m also spending some time in your community, participating in the daily work on one or two crofts, to help me learn more about what’s going on here.

If you’re willing, I’d like to talk with you about your experiences in your community and with land reform, how you feel about nature and how you feel about dealing with climate change. If you say yes, the interview would take approximately one hour, depending on how much time you have and how much you have to say. We can do the interview anywhere you want to, as long as it’s a quiet space where we can chat. You can change your mind or decide not to let me use what you tell me at any time, even after the interview is finished, and that won’t be a problem at all. I have some guiding questions, but I want to know about what’s important to you and to hear your stories, so please feel free to share anything you think is interesting.

What you will be asked to do; possible risks, discomforts, and benefits

I do not expect any of my questions to make you feel uncomfortable; however, if by chance any do, please let me know and we can move onto another topic. You are under no obligation to answer any questions you don’t want to.

While I don’t anticipate this to be the case, there is also the unlikely possibility that if for some reason my study is perceived negatively in your community, and you are identified as being associated with it, that negative perception will transfer to you. I do not believe this will be the case, but I wanted to mention it, especially since we are in a small community; even if you don’t choose to be identified in my research, someone might see you with me or guess who you are from my report. (I will be naming your community

in my report.)

With your permission, I may quote you in the final written version of this study and possibly in other scholarly publications. You can ask not to be quoted on particular subjects that we discuss.

You will not be compensated for your time. However, while you may not benefit directly from this study, you will be contributing to a better understanding of the processes that are behind land reform. My study might be useful for your community or others like it in moving forward. It might also be helpful for other communities elsewhere in the world, where people also want to establish local control and more environmentally friendly lifestyles. In this case, I hope you feel that in participating in my research, you're contributing to a larger and important cause, if only by helping to show how communities *can* successfully govern their own land and economies.

You may wish to give oral consent instead of signing this form. In either case, you will be given a copy of the consent form with my signature on it for your information.

Confidentiality and anonymity

If you do not want to be identified in my project, you can choose another name by which I refer to you, or if you'd prefer I can choose one for you. In this case, I will also do my best in my final project not to include, or to change, any personal details about you that might lead others to guess your identity. Although I cannot completely guarantee anonymity, I will make sure no identifying information about you appears on my data, in my final report or in any other publications that result from this research.

With your permission, I will record our interview using an audio recorder. You may stop the interview or ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. If there is anything you want left out of the study, I will honour your request.

I am the only researcher working on this study. I will conduct, transcribe, store, and analyze the interview. I am going to store audio recordings on an external hard drive that is password protected so only I can access it, and I'll keep my written notes from our interview in a locked box, which, again, only I can access.

If you are interested, I will share a copy of any passages from my report that quote you, for your approval, before I submit my final report. You will be invited to make any edits you see fit. A completed copy of the final thesis report will be made publicly available, and I will provide you with a personal copy if you request it.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about the research itself or about your participation in this study, you may contact me, my supervisor or the director of the Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity at Dalhousie University. **If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, ethics@dal.ca**

Your oral or signed consent indicates that you have been given time to read this document and that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

Consent Form (Interviews)

For participation in the thesis research project, *“Earthbound geographies” and land-based activism: An investigation of relationships and land reform in Highland Scotland.*

You will receive a copy of this informed consent form signed and dated by the researcher. Your consent in no way obligates you to participate and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Oral Consent

I, Amy Donovan, confirm that has given oral consent to participate in this study and:

- _____ has agreed to be tape-recorded during the interview.
- _____ has not agreed to be tape-recorded during the interview.
- _____ will allow direct quotes from my interview to be used.
- _____ will not allow direct quotes to be used.
- _____ will allow real name to be used.
- _____ will not allow real name to be used, and instead request an alias.
- _____ would like a copy of passages in which quotes are used for review.
- _____ would not like a copy of passages in which quotes are used for review.
- _____ would like to be recontacted if research material is used in future (5 years +) studies.
- _____ will not allow use in future (5 years +) studies.

Written Consent

I, (PRINT YOUR NAME HERE) give consent to participate in this study and:

- _____ agree to have my interview tape-recorded.
- _____ do not agree to have my interview tape-recorded.
- _____ will allow direct quotes from my interview to be used.
- _____ will not allow direct quotes to be used.
- _____ will allow real name to be used.
- _____ will not allow real name to be used, and instead request an alias.
- _____ would like a copy of passages in which quotes are used for review.
- _____ would not like a copy of passages in which quotes are used for review.
- _____ would like to be recontacted if research material is used in future (5 years +) studies.
- _____ will not allow use in future (5 years +) studies.

Participant’s Signature **Date**

Researcher’s Signature **Date**

Appendix III: Semi-structured interview guide

Note: I may have to rethink my terminology once I arrive in Scotland and learn how people refer to collective ownership in the vernacular.

Basics

- Did you grow up in this community? If not, when and why did you move here?
- Livelihood—full-time crofter, or another job on the side?
 - What do you do with the land on your croft?
 - What is your other employment?
 - What is a typical day like for you in your work as a crofter?

Past experiences

- Do you remember what your life was like before people started talking about collective ownership? Can you tell me about your daily life?
- What do you think began the conversation / led people to start talking about collective ownership?
- Why did you decide to take part?
- What did you have to do in order to achieve collective ownership?
 - Was the government helpful in doing this? Why or why not?
- Do you remember what your life was like back then? Can you tell me about your daily life?
- What did you expect from collective ownership?
- Has your life changed since the trust took ownership? In what ways?

Collective land ownership and the community

- What do you think this new kind of ownership means for the community?
- Is your part in community life any different now? Do you sense any difference in how people engage with the community in general?
- How do people in your community make decisions about things that affect everyone?
 - Where do these decisions happen? Do you talk about these issues outside of formal meetings or events?
 - Can you tell me about a time when your community cooperated really well together on some issue or problem, or to achieve something?
 - Can you think of any examples of when there was conflict?
- What part do you feel you play in the community?
- How would you describe your relationships to other members of the community?
- Does your experience (with collective land ownership) now differ from what you expected would happen? If so, how?
- Do you see yourself as an activist? Why or why not? Are there people who are more “activist” than you in your community?
- How do you feel about the Land Reform Act? Is it useful? Why or why not? Are there ways in which it could be more useful?

Connection to the land

- Do you spend a lot of times outdoors? If so, why?
- How do you feel when you're in nature?
- How do you feel about nature/the land?
- Do you feel connected to the land in some way? How do you relate to it?

- How do you relate to animals?
- Do your feelings about the land and animals affect your life? In what ways? Do they affect the way you live your life?

Commitment to sustainability

- Do you think about nature in your daily life?
- How important is conservation to you? Why or why not?
- Do you make choices in your daily life based on how they affect the planet? (including other people)
 - What kinds of choices? How far will you go to try to limit your negative impact on the environment?
 - Has this changed since collective ownership?
 - To what extent do factors other than your own interests play into the choices you make, financially, socially or otherwise?