

Article

Orkney Ecologies

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Abstract: Inspired by Felix Guattari's *Three Ecologies* ([1989] 2000), this article explores recent Orkney literature with an environmental focus (*Working the Map*—ed. J & F Cumming and M. MacInnes; *Ebban an' Flowan*—Finlay, A., Watts, L. and Peebles, A.; *The Outrun*—A. Liptrot; *Swimming With Seals*—V. Whitworth) in terms of Orkney ecologies—which are always personal, environmental and cultural. Informed by fieldwork carried out in Orkney, looking at discourse around the development of marine renewable energy in the islands, it argues for the use of ecological dialogism, an approach to language and communication which recognises meaning-making as embodied and emergent within a meshwork (Ingold 2011) of lived experience. It explores the texts as part of an ecology of meaning-making within the naturalcultural (Haraway 2007) world, in which environment, social relations and human subjectivity are inextricably entangled. In this view, literary texts can be approached, not as isolated examples of individual creative expression, but as moments of emergent meaning-making in the dialogue between individual, cultural and environmental ecologies, reaching beyond the page into a living meshwork, where we can think in terms of 'Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology' (Morton 2010). These Orkney ecologies entangle the natural, personal, cultural and technological, through and as, stories, emphasising interdependence and care for both human and more-than-human relationships. Such moments of connection offer hope of new narrative possibilities with which to face the uncertainty of an Anthropocene future.

Keywords: Orkney literature; ecological dialogism; environmental humanities; renewable energy; Bakhtin; care; dialogism

1. Introduction

What stories can we tell about the places we know, and love, and worry about, as we face the uncertainty of an Anthropocene future? In the face of human-made climate change and environmental degradation, how can we write about our relationship with the environment without naivety, arrogance, guilt or hopelessness?

Perhaps part of the answer lies in understanding texts not as a format through which to engage with ideas *about* the environment, but as *part* of it. This idea is explored by Timothy Morton in his article 'Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology', where he writes:

Text as ecology is a good metaphor. But thinking can go much further than this, since if the text has no thin, rigid boundary, what it includes, what it touches, must also consist of life forms, Earth itself, and so on. The difference between what counts as a mere metaphor and what counts as non-metaphorical reality collapses when thinking engages text seriously. (Morton 2010, pp. 1–17)

In this article, I want to suggest ecological dialogism as an approach to reading texts beyond the ecological metaphor, as part of a living 'meshwork' (Ingold 2011) of ecological relationships, which are always both physical and cultural. I will give an overview of the conceptual basis of ecological

dialogism and suggest how it can help us to explore the permeable boundaries between texts and their environments, applying this approach to a discussion of contemporary texts that focus on the Orkney environment.

Drawing on recent fieldwork exploring the cultural impact of renewable energy in Orkney, and using Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* as a guide, I will argue that ecological dialogism allows a fuller appreciation of these texts as part of Orkney's living ecology. I will explore how the texts emerge from the authors' embodied interactions with the Orkney landscape and people, shaped by relationships which are both personal and public. These texts are both informed by, and contribute to, shared cultural narratives that are part of community discourse in Orkney—which in turn influence, and are influenced by, actions and events in the everyday life of the islands. In their weaving together of individual and collective experiences, they have been weathered by an Orkney climate, they are situated in a particular physical and cultural place, but are also informed by a wider story of global ecological crisis.

In exploring the Orkney Ecologies within these texts, I want to extend the authors' invitation to their readers to engage—to consider not only the words but where they come from, how they have been written, the things and places and people and animals they know and want to share. I want to understand stories beyond the confines of literary criticism or linguistic analysis, as a living part of human ecology—for, in the words of Tim Ingold, 'the things of this world *are* their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations' (Ingold 2011, p. 160). As Donna Haraway, drawing on Marilyn Strathearn, has pointed out, 'It matters what stories tell stories' (Haraway 2016, p. 35), to which I would add it also matters *how* stories are told, where and by whom. When texts are understood as part of an ecology that includes all texts, from everyday conversations to official policy documents, it becomes clear that all these different texts are in dialogue as part of relationships of power, shaping both individual lives and communities. That is why these Orkney Ecologies are important. They are told with care, with an understanding of a relationship between author and audience which is ongoing, and will be changed by the text; they are told with an ear to the past and an eye to the future; they are told with an acknowledgement that they are not the whole story but only one of many. Ecological dialogism draws our attention to living processes and relationships, and it helps us to understand these as messy, complex, ongoing entanglements between the natural and the cultural—what Donna Haraway calls natureculture (Haraway 2016, 2007).

By showing how storytelling emerges through the process of community, a continual (re)making of relationships between people, place and the more-than-human¹ world, these Orkney Ecologies can offer an alternative to the utopian or dystopian excesses of some current cultural narratives. With an attention to interdependence, relationships and care they suggest how the practice of community might be developed and extended in a naturalcultural world which is always more than human, weaving stories of resilience to carry into an uncertain future.

2. An Orkney Tapestry

Orkney has long inspired the literary imagination. From the anonymous skalds of the Viking sagas, to the prominent twentieth-century literary figures of Edwin Muir and George Mackay Brown, the islands have become landmarks for readers navigating the landscape of Scottish literature. While Muir and Brown draw on the elemental forces of the environment to evoke a sense of timelessness, their imaginary Orkney is populated by archetypes, designed to give an impression of community as a continuation, rooted in place and 'haunted by time' (Brown 1969, p. 26). Brown explicitly roots

¹ The term more-than-human aims to avoid any sense of the natural world as separate from humans, and is widely used by those in the Environmental Humanities and beyond. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa in the introduction to *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, discusses why, while not entirely satisfying or without issues, she chooses to use this phrasing 'because it speaks in one breath of nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 1).

his work in a continuum of Orcadian cultural production; in what is for me his most revealing and under-appreciated work, *An Orkney Tapestry* (Brown 1969), the Viking skalds and saga writers are directly invoked, and provide the inspiration and framework for an exploration of Brown's native islands. Brown's work emerged from a relationship with an Orkney landscape which is at once physical, cultural, and personal; rooted in his lived experience of place and a spiritual understanding of community, shaped by his Catholic faith—explored in recent works by Linden Bicket (2017), Timothy Baker (2009), and Ron Ferguson (2011). In *An Orkney Tapestry* Brown clearly articulates his understanding of this relationship and its impact on his work, which will be woven into the ongoing meshwork of the community's life, becoming part of, 'the vision by which the people live, what Edwin Muir called their Fable' (Brown 1969, p. 11). The ability of Brown's writing to capture the essence of the Orkney landscape and people is still evident in the way it is so often used to promote the islands. Lines from his work can be read in any number of public places, from the Hamnavoe ferry to the Pickaquoy Sports Centre², and publications from tourist guides to colouring books; evidence that Brown's carefully crafted words have escaped the 'rigid boundary' of the original text and become part of the ecology of Orkney—including the physical environment, cultural narratives, and personal histories. The texts discussed in this article are, whether explicitly or not, in dialogue with the work of Brown and the cultural representations of Orkney he helped to shape.

3. Ecological Dialogism

Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1989) helps illuminate the relationship between Orkney writers and the islands which inspire their work. Guattari's text takes seriously the extension of the ecological metaphor into the naturalcultural world; exploring personal and cultural attitudes to, and relationships with, the environment. It argues that, in the face of humanity's inability to grasp the severity of 'the ecological disequilibrium', which 'threaten[s] the continuation of life on the planet's surface' (Guattari 2000, pp. 19–20), there needs to be a new 'ethico-political articulation [. . .] between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)'. This approach he calls ecosophy. First published in French in 1989 and only translated into English in 2000, the essay reads like a prophecy of the contemporary news cycle, where destructive climatic events, wildlife extinctions, marine plastic pollution, the growing international refugee crisis, and the increasingly violent expression of right-wing politics and religious fundamentalism, are reported as though entirely separate and unrelated phenomena. Guattari even refers to Donald Trump—likening him to a 'monstrous and mutant algae' (p. 29), in the way his property developments take over whole areas of cities.

Guattari's 'new ecosophy' calls for a 'move away from the old forms of political, religious and associative commitment' (p. 44), and for new stories which emphasise the 'permanent recreation of the world' to 'replace the narrative of biblical genesis'. He quotes Walter Benjamin from the essay 'The Storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov' in *Illuminations* (1968): 'Storytelling [. . .] does not aim to convey the pure essence of a thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again' (ibid.). This concern for storytelling within the three ecologies as means to reimagine our ecological relationships and responsibilities, resonates with attempts to analyse the role of narrative and storytelling in terms of 'ecological dialogism'.

Ecological dialogism brings Bakhtin's dialogism—an approach to language as always situated and interactional—together with Haraway's theory of natureculture and situated knowledges, to explore

² Lines from Brown's poem 'A Work for Poets' are carved into the stone floor of the Pickaquoy Leisure centre in Kirkwall, including the final stanza from which the title comes—'Here is a work for poets—/Carve the runes/Then be content with silence'—lines also carved into Brown's gravestone. The MV Hamnavoe has lines from Brown's work engraved into glass dividing walls in the passenger lounge, including the following, 'I like to think they come for what Orkney can truly give them: the dearest freshness deep down things.' Which comes from Brown's column in *The Orcadian* from 17/6/1971, published in *Letters from Hamnavoe* (2002).

the way in which our embodied interactions, their consequences, and our responsibilities for them, extend beyond the human into what Ingold describes as a 'meshwork of entangled lines of life, growth and movement' (Ingold 2011, p. 63). For Ingold, knowledge of the world is not something to be acquired 'ready-made' but is 'perpetually "under construction" within the field of relations established through the immersion of the actor-perceiver in a certain environmental context' (ibid., p. 159). Ingold's claim that 'moving is knowing' (Ingold 2010, p. 134) resonates with Bakhtin's observation of meaning as emerging through linguistic interaction:

Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293)

The 'borderline between oneself and the other' where meaning-making takes place, is characterised by movement, in the form of a constant flow of communicative potential between individuals, and between the individual and their environment. Dialogism offers a way to describe this flow, with its understanding of the situated and interactional nature of communication. As Per Linell argues, dialogism is 'first and foremost a meta-theoretical framework for the human sciences', offering, 'a theory for the meaningful world, seen as consisting of cognitions (ideas, thoughts), communicative processes and meaningful actions, all of which are anchored in both a sociocultural and a physical world' (Linell 2009, p. 28).

As someone carrying out research in the community in which I was born and continue to live, ecological dialogism helps me to reflect upon my own embodied experiences of place and people, to recognise how these situate me, and how they shape my understanding. Seeing the new technologies of wave and tidal energy being developed in my hometown of Stromness brought global narratives of climate change, energy and environment into a local context. With technology developers, policy makers and renewable energy experts from around the world visiting the islands, the Orkney community find themselves in dialogue with wider discourses around energy and environment, as part of the global story of climate change in the Anthropocene. Laura Watts weaves a richly creative telling of this story in her recently published *Energy at the End of the World: An Orkney Islands Saga* (Watts 2018), which reflects her deep relationship with Orkney as a place, and her commitment to the community of 'the energy islands' (ibid., p. 17).

In my fieldwork during the period 2015–2016, I spent time observing and interviewing a range of islanders whose lives have been impacted by the Marine Renewable Energy sector in Orkney, from employees at the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC), to local creel fishermen. I have sat in board rooms and stood on the decks of boats, learned about Orkney's electricity grid, and how to set a creel. I have been told a lot of stories, some of which I read in news reports and official documents, and some of which could only be told on the pier or in the pub. These stories revealed the entanglement of the personal and the public, of culture and technology, of local knowledge and global concerns, and helped me to understand the way in which narratives are woven into, and emerge from, the process of community. Recognising stories as lively participants in the daily interactions of people and place, ecological dialogism has brought my research into dialogue with the environmental humanities, as characterised by Rose et al. in their introduction to the first volume of the journal *Environmental Humanities*:

[...] the environmental humanities positions us as participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value, entangled within rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity that shape who we are and the ways in which we are able to 'become with' others (Haraway 2007). At the core of this approach is a focus on the underlying cultural and philosophical frameworks that are entangled with the ways in which diverse human cultures have made themselves at home in a more than human world. (Rose et al. 2012)

With this sense of entanglement in mind, this next section considers some contemporary Orkney texts, which illustrate the way responses to the islands' environment, are always personal and cultural, and in dialogue with more-than-human worlds.

4. Orkney Ecologies

Working the Map: islanders and a changing environment is a collaboration between Hansel Cooperative Press, Cape Farewell and the Orkney Nature Festival, gathering together a range of responses, including poetry, essays and diary entries from islanders in Orkney and Shetland. The foreword by Ruth Little, Associate Director of Cape Farewell, captures the role of stories in the naturalcultural and personal entanglements of island life:

The storytellers of Orkney and Shetland—the artists and scientists, fishers and crofters—remind us that only by ‘workan the map/thegither’ can we determine the true value of places and their tangible and intangible resources. *Working the Map* is both a gesture of testimony and an act of advocacy of community participation in the processes of change. It gives voice to the island’s becoming, and asserts the inextricable relationship between life, land, sea and air. (Cumming et al. 2015)

The phrase ‘workan the map’ comes from the opening poem by Morag MacInnes, ‘Mapmakkars,’ which in its opening line immediately brings themes of community and place into an individual focus of personal loss and specific location:

What a miss he is! I keep
thinkan it’s him on the road oot fae Dounby,
waitan in the passan place, big wave an a red
van fulla papers an fancies.

There a photo he wis prood o,
it wis
in the big snows
forty seven, him cairtan stuff
shugger an fodder lashed tae the deck.
Hid wis the only way, he said. No
question, hid tae be
the owld sea road, the beasts an bairns
hid tae be fed.

Too late I heard he hid anither map
no in his heed, a written een;
ivvery geo’s committed there, in
ink, hunners o them, peedie
or horrendous big an deep, the owld, the
usan, workan names.

Whit cam o the map? O, she said—still white as a sheet
fae the loss o him, O
we lent it oot, hid nivver
cam back.

Wur lent it oot. Hid’ll nivver come back, them
in the boat
takkan in close by the Stoos, an
the cairt an boys waitan in the smoor,
workan the map
thegither. (ibid., 2–3)

Through the use of dialect, MacInnes manages to weave the richness of relationships between people and place, as these are enacted through time. The specifics of place and date bring together the natural and the cultural—weather can become an historical event ('the big snows/forty seven'), while the practical need for 'shugger an fodder' to feed 'bairns and beasts' prompts a return to the local knowledge of 'the owld sea road', when modern road transport is halted by the snow. Members of the community are known to each other through the familiarity of everyday encounters—the poem recalls the Mapmakkar through the details of his 'big wave an a red/van fulla papers an fancies'. The environment is known and familiar in the same terms, the details of the coastline captured in the naming of the geos on the map comes from 'the owld, the/usan, workan names'. This is not a landscape labelled in terms of aesthetic appearances but known through the day-to-day activities needed to make a living and survive the challenges of island life.

The image of the map illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of separating out the personal from the natural or the cultural. In the poem, map-making is not an activity to assert power over a place and its people, unlike so many colonial mapping projects which represent the activities of external experts; cartographers whose attention to detail is guided by a specific agenda, usually relating to the intended audience of the map. Here, map-making is both personal and communal—the poet is surprised not that the mapmakkar had a mental map to guide his activities but that 'he hid anither map/no in his heed, a written een'. That this physical map has also been lost, just as the personal map has been lost along with its maker, could make the poem feel like an elegy, yet both map-maker and map live on as part of the poet's own experience, and have become part of a wider community narrative. The fact that the map was not kept for personal reference, but lent out into the community, illustrates the dialogical nature of texts that are written to be read, and written with an intended audience in mind. Indeed, MacInnes' act of writing the poem means that the map-maker and his world are now part of a text which can travel outside the islands, even become part of this academic article, reaching audiences who may not share the map-maker's local knowledge but will still seek to understand its importance.

Working the Map is as diverse as the islands themselves. Orkney and Shetland dialects sit without comment next to Standard English; factual essays on wildlife records and marine planning are interspersed with poems, diary entries and transcripts of conversations. In a text responding to climate change it is inevitable that the tone will often veer towards nostalgia for what has been lost, for changes that can be seen in the population of both the human and more-than-human inhabitants of the islands. Yet, the act of writing, the impetus for the book, is a desire to look to the future, to respond to the challenges of climate change not by mourning loss but by trying to remember what we have learned and may have forgotten. As one of the book's editors, John Cumming, puts it, 'All too often we turn to science for answers, while ignoring wisdom that is freely available in the voices of those who work the land and sea' (ibid., p. 90). Something which I heard many times in my fieldwork was the importance to the Marine Renewable Energy sector of working with local seafarers, who had years of knowledge and experience of the local waters, weather and sea conditions. The Orkney Vessel Trails Project was explicitly set up to demonstrate to marine energy developers the value of using the local support vessels and supply chain to improve outcomes and reduce costs, rather than employing larger work boats from outside Orkney (Ford, Rebecca 2015).

Cumming draws our attention to an issue that sits at the heart of our modern dilemma, but is often merely approached in terms of science vs folk wisdom, or popular opinion. The problem of engaging on a personal level with a 'hyperobject'—a thing that is 'massively distributed in time and space relative to humans' (Morton 2013, p. 1), such as climate change. It points to the tension sitting between Guattari's three ecologies: the question of how to balance our needs as individuals, as members of human society, and as members of one species among many sharing this planet's biosphere. Ecological dialogism asks us to consider the ways in which individual lives are affected by, and affect, others (both human and more-than-human) through our processes of understanding the world. We are invited to consider the authorship of the stories that we hear and tell, and in turn to question their authority, in Haraway's words, 'it matters what stories tell stories'. (Haraway 2016, p. 35)

Who gets to tell Orkney's stories, why, and how this matters for Orkney ecologies, is clearly articulated in *Working the Map* by Kate Johnson's piece, 'Boundaries without fences: dividing up the sea'. Thinking about the relationship between islanders and the seas that define them, Johnson focuses on how marine energy developments are bringing outside interests and global stories into this relationship, in the form of planning and policy legislation:

In Scotland, the European Draft Marine Spatial Planning Directive and the Marine Scotland Act 2010 introduce legislation requiring the planning of the marine commons which was, until very recently, thought to be unplannable. For planning to have effect somebody or some institution has to make a decision about what is to be allowed and what is not. The overarching question is one of governance, namely: *Who decides, and how do they do it?* [emphasis in original] (Cumming et al. 2015, p. 56)

How might the knowledge of, and intimate relationship with, land and sea, held by islanders such as MacInnes' Mapmakkar, become part of this decision-making process, when, as Johnson points out, this involves a strong 'focus on central expert-based decision making in London and Edinburgh' (ibid.)? With the authority of strategic national energy policy, and commercial interests driving the narrative, there is a danger that islanders may be written out of their own story, or at least given only minor roles. Johnson is clear about what is at stake, 'these are generation changing decisions. The loss of the seas as a commons appears to be unstoppable. Once lost, the commons will not be regained' (ibid.).

In summing up, Johnson both identifies the issues at the heart of this dilemma, and offers a suggestion to address them:

Our desire and capacity to build knowledge is huge. Our, the human, ability to reach decisions based on that knowledge, to create and defend boundaries, is as fragile as it has been throughout the millennia of human history. The watchwords are to take care and to be fair. (ibid., p. 57)

The role of fairness and care in the gathering and use of knowledge might seem to sit uneasily alongside what we know of the practices of policy making and technology development. Yet, despite George Mackay Brown's unease at his fellow islanders' enthusiasm for the material benefits of progress, my fieldwork in the renewable energy sector in Orkney suggests that the ideals of fairness and care for Orkney as a place and a community are still dominant and influential elements in shared cultural narratives within the islands. In previous research, I also identified the role of humour, as part of cultural expression in Orkney, as acting to reinforce a sense of shared community identity based on mutual interdependence and egalitarianism, by acting to undermine accusations of 'bigsy-ness' (Lange 2007; Ford 2013).

To be 'bigsy'—the Orcadian dialect term for being conceited (Flaws and Lamb 2001)—is to try to set oneself up as better than others, to emphasise individual achievement, against the cultural expectation of community engagement for shared benefit. While individual bigsy-ness is policed in self and others, often through the use of humour to avoid direct criticism that could damage relationships, there is at the same time an acceptance, and indeed the expectation, that members of the community will positively promote the islands. As one of my informants said to me, 'you can be as bigsy as you like about Orkney'. Within the renewable energy sector in Orkney this is expressed in the way individuals and organisations, who might ordinarily be considered as competitors, come together to collaborate as part of 'Team Orkney' (Ford, Rebecca 2015). This can be seen in the work of the Orkney Renewable Energy Forum (OREF), and the way presentations, publications, and events produced by the sector emphasise the importance of Orkney, showcasing the islands as a destination, and promoting local culture and products, alongside promotion of the islands' renewable technologies and services. Johnson's call for fairness and care in the process of developing the islands' marine resources, further illustrates how the cultural narrative of avoiding bigsy-ness and promoting an egalitarian and self-reliant community

has become part of, and informs, discourse in the renewable energy sector in Orkney. Care for, and by, the islands' community is enacted through 'material and affective tasks related to communication, the production of sociability, and capacity of affect' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, p. 93). Care is part of Orkney's ecology.

5. Texts as Care

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa invites us to consider 'how styles of thinking and writing technologies can contribute to relations of care in moving worlds' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 69). In approaching these texts as part of the Orkney ecology, we can also ask how they enact care, both in their form and in the process of their creation.

Laura Watts is an academic with a longstanding commitment to Orkney as her primary research field site, who draws on her practice as a poet to think and write with others about renewable energy in Orkney. Watts draws on Bellacasa's identification of 'care time' to characterise communication practices in Orkney, where 'community making is hard and cannot be hurried, or bought' (Watts 2018, p. 175). She observes how sometimes in Orkney 'strategic silence is needed for the islands to hold together' (ibid., p. 207) recognising that 'silence is care-filled work' (ibid., p. 208). As I know myself, and have observed during fieldwork, there are times when things are best left unsaid to avoid unnecessary conflict or upset. Sometimes this involves biting your tongue and sitting with your frustration, sometimes a shared look acknowledges that silence is necessary to save other people embarrassment or pain. While caring for community interdependencies and entanglements sometimes requires silence, Watts also understands the importance of bringing different voices together in collaboration.

In *Ebban an' Flowan* (Finlay et al. 2015), Watts collaborated with artist and poet Alec Finlay, and photographer Alistair Peebles to offer a poetic primer for marine renewable energy, which, to quote from the foreword, 'considers how, through both language and technology, use is inflected with locality.' The research, writing and publication of the text was part of the Alien Energy research project at the IT University of Copenhagen, and the acknowledgements note that a wide range of people from Orkney and beyond formed the 'intellectual web' to which the published work is connected.

The form of the text actively foregrounds the collaborative process: reading Alec Finlay's poem 'after gareth and laura we sometimes used to say . . . ', I am reminded of Bakhtin when he writes, 'I hear *voices* [sic.] in everything and dialogic relations among them' (Bakhtin et al. 1986, p. 169). The poem not only captures the sense of an ongoing conversation—weaving voices and devices, the poetic and the political, technology and nature—but as the text itself enters Orkney's cultural ecology it actively joins its discourse, posing new questions about the relationship between people, place and technology:

be sure that your gear
will get fankled
by mollusks and weed
[. . .]

these devices pump
like hearts
in the dark
[. . .]

the alchemy of changing
the sea into electricity
has been proven
[after Neil Kermode]
[. . .]

the republic of the waves
cannot be owned
and yet the sea can be crowned?

[...]

(Finlay et al. 2015, pp. 8–15)

By using the words of others, and explicitly crediting sources, Finlay's poem seems to illustrate what Puig de la Bellacasa calls 'writing-with'—'instead of reinforcing the self of a lone thinker's figure, the voice in such a text seems to keep saying: I am not alone. There are many, many others.' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 77).

In drawing on Orkney's Norse heritage, *Ebban an Flowan* illustrates the deep historical entanglements of the natural-cultural world in Orkney. Udal Law, the 'Norse Law defining the extent of land and sea ownership' (Finlay et al. 2015, p. 6), has been used to raise objections to the leasing of areas of the sea for marine energy development, with campaigners using it to claim rights to land and sea ownership defined in various ways, including one given in the book as extending 'as far as a stone can be thrown or a horse can be waded or a salmon net can be thrown' (ibid.). The fact that this link to Orkney's Nordic past is being used to contest its future in a globalised world is unsurprising. In his book *The Norwegian Scots*, Michael Lange (2007) explores how islanders' sense of identity is often expressed in terms of Scandinavian versus Scottish heritage. *Ebban an' Flowan* uses the rich entanglement of language to trace Orkney's Nordic connections, through maritime terms from across region, 'Orkadian Norn, as well as Shetlandic, the Norse tongues, Gothic, Scots and Old English, reach all the way back to ancient Indo-European—their speech energetics and acoustic potential ebb and flow' (Finlay et al. 2015, p. 2).

The technology of language has its own power to generate networks of connection. Readers encounter poems alongside images of energy devices, unfamiliar words in multiple languages, technical figures on energy output and tidal flow, the text works to, 'connect [...] the older lore and languages of the sea with the new lore of energy generation' (ibid.).

Laura Watts' poem 'The Draukie's Tale: Origin Myth for Wave Energy' (ibid., pp. 18–23) weaves Orkney folklore characters of Selkie and Trow with scientists seeking to 'tame/that overflowing power' of the sea. Along with the ebb and flow of language and the power of myth and tide we see how technology emerges as a process of personal encounter and connection. When the scientists in the poem first encounter the Draukie they do so through the medium of technology 'They heard her on their/hydrophone,/saw her power on their/wave oscilloscope.' (ibid., p. 19). Their response is a predictable one, 'they wanted that power,/for the world/has need of sea energy.' (ibid.), and the Draukie's fate seems inevitable:

Closer she swam,
And then . . .
There was a hook about her neck-
Almost pulling it clean off.

Thump,
she went, like a whale
on the deck.

They kept her in the ship's hold,
in a perspex tank.

The scientists prodded and probed:
processed data, and
tried to determine how

she made her wave power.

But the Draukie was still,
silent.
Her wave power,
gone. (Ibid., p. 20)

It is only when one young scientist ‘sat and sang to the Draukie,/on her tea breaks’, that the encounter deepens to connection, ‘and soon/they were friends.’ (ibid., p. 21):

The Draukie told
our young scientist
her deepest, true, name:

Överflöd,
Overflowing,
Generosity,

she sang
(for her name slid
from shore to shore).

I am Overflowing,
Generosity,
my power cannot be caught,

only changed
or shape-shifted. (Ibid., p. 21)

The Draukie’s power only becomes available to the scientists through the personal relationship with the rebellious ‘young scientist’, but while Watts’ desire to create an origin myth for wave energy, focuses on the positive desire to ‘turn generosity/into electricity,’ (ibid., p. 22), the reality of developing a new technology in Orkney’s marine environment cannot be related in a neat singular narrative. As Puig de la Bellacasa points out, ‘relationally is all there is, but this does not mean a world without conflict or dissension, and that even when we are acting with care ‘our cares also perform disconnection’ (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 78). Within ‘Team Orkney’ not all narratives are shared—there are as many versions of a story as there are storytellers, and not everyone’s story gets heard. Spending time with those involved in the renewable energy sector in Orkney, I have developed relationships and connections which place me within that discourse community, but having grown up in the islands my connections outside of my research bring me into contact with a whole range of opinions about renewables, from the sceptical to the actively hostile. Just as the shared narrative of Orkney as an egalitarian, mutually supportive community which resists personal bigsy-ness (Lange 2007), ignores the existence of inequality, conflict and individual egotism, the story of Orkney as a centre for renewable energy development and environmental awareness, does not include those who object to onshore wind development, or capture the distrust towards environmental organisations seeking to dictate land use or regulate farming practices.

Ecological dialogism suggests that it is through the process of community, the day to day interaction of people and place, that shared narratives emerge; shaping, and being shaped by, relationships between individuals and their environment. It is in the interaction between Guattari’s three ecologies, the personal, social and environmental, that islanders create, share and retell their, sometimes conflicting, stories. Living on an island, where the physical community is clearly bounded, creates practical connections and makes interdependency visible (if not always comfortable). Shared narratives emerge through

day-to-day encounters, as relations are negotiated amidst the tensions of ‘heteroglossia’, the multiple voices (Bakhtin 1981, p. 272), of community discourse.

6. Technology and Care in, for, and as Community

The role of renewable technologies in the ongoing story of the islands and their inhabitants, and the complex entanglement of the three ecologies in an individual narrative, are skilfully explored in Amy Liptrot’s *The Outrun*. In the final chapter Liptrot ponders her feelings about the outrun land of her family farm potentially being sold as the site for a substation serving a proposed marine energy development. She recognises that there are no easy answers in this dilemma for islanders:

I am generally in favour of renewable energy. This is a new way of using the land and our natural resources, providing income for the islands into the twenty-first century and reducing our use of fossil fuels, as well as giving a one-off cash boost to ageing farmers. But the idea that this beautiful, barely touched stretch of land where I grew up, where I chased lambs, watched birds and hid with my brother, should become an industrial zone is dizzying. (Liptrot 2016, p. 275)

Where *Working the Map* and *Ebban an Flowan* offer a collaborative approach to representing Orkney, Liptrot’s is a searingly personal relationship with a place that is never an uncomplicated home. As a child, her English parents and lack of Orcadian accent make her feel she does not belong. Returning home after university to the breakup of her parents’ marriage and sale of the family home intensifies her increasingly problematic relationship with alcohol.

While *The Outrun* is a story of recovery and renewal, in which the Orkney landscape and wildlife play a vital role, there is no easy romanticism here. Liptrot is as unflinching in her honesty about the realities of island life as she is about her own struggles with addiction. She acknowledges the tension she feels locating her own narrative within a shared story of an idealised Orkney—‘I didn’t want to become part of what I saw as a subtle conspiracy to present Orkney as an island paradise’—while at the same time recognising that she is in fact part of that conspiracy—‘but although I regularly complained about Orkney, I was on the defence as soon as someone else was sceptical of its charms’ (ibid., p. 19). Here Liptrot illustrates the process described by Bakhtin in terms of the power of language in the relationship between self and other—‘the tendency to assimilate other’s discourse’ as part of ‘an individual’s ideological becoming’. In this way community discourse can be understood as part of an individual’s ‘ideological interrelations with the world’, shaping their behaviour by acting both as ‘authoritative discourse’ and ‘internally persuasive discourse’. [emphasis in original] (Bakhtin 1981, p. 342)

In ecological–dialogical terms, Liptrot’s personal narrative has inevitably been shaped by growing up in Orkney, the narrative of ‘Orkney as an island paradise’ acting as an ‘authoritative discourse’, which, while she might have actively rejected it, was ‘internally persuasive’ enough to shape her personal narrative. Having also been born and brought up in Orkney by English parents, and failing to acquire an Orcadian accent, I recognise Liptrot’s sense of ‘a push and a pull’ (Liptrot 2016, p. 19) exerted by the islands—the desire to reject, and a desperate need to be part of, a place where you are not sure you can claim to belong. Yet, thinking in terms of the three ecologies has helped me to understand that belonging is mainly about being where you are, the day-to-day interactions with people and place. Knowledge making as thinking-with starts with being-with; as Liptrot writes of the sea-swimming, which becomes her new addiction, ‘there are things about the sea you find out only by being in it’ (ibid., p. 197).

7. Swimming with Seals and Polar Bears

This same awareness of the physicality of place as part of knowledge making is also captured by Liptrot’s fellow author, and member of the sea swimming group the Orkney Polar Bears, Victoria Whitworth. In her 2017 memoir, *Swimming with Seals*, Whitworth describes how swimming every day at the Sands of Evie becomes an essential ritual to deal with the pain of the end of her marriage,

and the unresolved grief for her mother's death. In writing about place, she captures the entanglement of the physical, 'the wind pimpling my skin, the spray on my right cheek'; cultural, 'the sea and islands are also metaphors, scientific, religious and literary'; and personal 'swimming here makes me question everything I have known, in the face of time, danger, loss and death' (Whitworth 2017, p. 7).

As an academic, Whitworth's research skills come to the fore as she weaves together the ancient history of that particular coastal landscape with her growing fascination with the seals and orcas with which she shares the sea. The diary entries of her daily swims focus on her interactions with birds and seals, with evocative descriptions of the weather and water conditions. Yet, alongside a desire to think with the landscape, Whitworth initially seems to seek to escape her human, socialised self through her new relationship with the sea:

Cold-water swimming is the obliteration of self. The chipping away of carefully inscribed personality, the reduction of all my complexity to a bare, forked animal. (ibid., p. 90)

It is through her animal encounters with fellow creatures of the sea, and the desire to understand their lives, that Whitworth comes to understand her own situation and find healing. The three ecologies are deeply entangled within the text, and in the closing pages the personal, cultural and environmental are all present in Whitworth's description of her journey of self-discovery:

Swimming in the sea has helped me rediscover myself. It has opened Orkney up for me, and made me understand the strengths of my body, as well as its limits. It has been fundamental in healing my feet, but, more than that, it has allowed me to fall in love with being embodied all over again. With being alive. I have finally lost a lot of my self-consciousness: there's nothing like trying to wriggle out of a wet swimming costume on a darkening beach in a Force 7 with a lot of other giggling idiots for knocking some sense of proportion into you. And then there are the seals—the orcas, too, but mostly the seals. The human face of the sea. The shape-shifting selkie offers me a narrative that makes sense of my tangled life when nothing else does. (Ibid., p. 274)

Whitworth's time in Orkney was relatively short, and she herself asks, 'What gives a ferry-louper like me the right to write about Orkney?' (ibid., p. 245). Yet it is clear from the text that she has opened herself to thinking-with this place, and its inhabitants, with some care. And despite her self-consciousness, the process of community, particularly in relationship to her fellow sea swimmers, has played an important role. In one passage discussing the Orkney Polar Bears Club, Whitworth foregrounds the increasing complexity of Orkney's cultural ecology, as it is extended into the island's online Facebook community, while also questioning the author's responsibility, or answerability to use Bakhtin's term, to the wider world beyond the text:

I am finding it hard to write about my fellow bears. If I did this in an academic context I would have to draw up a research framework with a robust ethics component, get it approved by the relevant university committees, design consent forms covering every eventuality, make sure my subjects approve my use of their data, their voices, their experience. As a novelist I can redesign and contort my characters into the shapes I need [. . .] This is different: these people are real. Hey, I post on the Facebook page, I'm writing about you, just a little—do you mind? (Ibid., p. 139)

Facebook is an extension of the Orkney community, the characters in the book are also the audience; these are real people in real places with real and ongoing relationships with each other and their environment (including the non-human inhabitants). I share Whitworth's dilemma. I am entangled in the very texts I seek to discuss. I have swum with the Polar Bears, am friends with some of the authors I discuss here, and have acted as informant in other researchers' fieldwork. I know what it feels like to read your own words as an anonymised quote in someone else's work, and to see your name in a list of acknowledgements. When my own writing is published, I know I will meet people I

have quoted on the street in Stromness, and will be directly answerable for how I have represented them. It is clear that the relationship between these texts, and the places and people they depict cannot be captured by only discussing the words on the page.

8. Text as Ecology

Moving towards the conclusion, I would like to answer Timothy Morton's call to engage 'text seriously' (Morton 2010) by discussing how ecological dialogism can take us beyond the page to explore text as ecology. The process by which these texts are becoming interwoven into a twenty-first century Orkney Tapestry can be understood in terms of an ongoing interaction between text and society. Bakhtin's characterises the relationship between 'the work' and 'the world' as a 'continual mutual interaction [. . .] similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 254), and if we consider texts to include news reports, gossip, rumours, oral storytelling, as well as works of fiction and non-fiction, it is clear that text can indeed be understood as ecology—a living and responsive part of the human environment.

While Guattari's identification of the three ecological registers reinforces the inseparability of the personal/cultural/environmental (as captured by Haraway's natureculture), it also highlights how human behaviour, and social structures continually work to create the illusion that these three aspects of our lives are entirely unrelated. Our dependency on language, as an invisible technology through which we describe, and are therefore given the illusion of controlling, our world, has obscured the way our personal narratives form part of a 'meshwork of entangled lines of life, growth and movement' (Ingold 2011, p. 63).

When individuals in Orkney engage in public discourse, they are simultaneously creating a shared understanding of the 'Orkney community' and expressing their individual identity in relation to this official version of the community story. This process includes individuals challenging or presenting themselves in opposition to 'the community', as well as individuals who identify themselves positively with it. The emergence of personal narratives in dialogical relationship to shared community narratives reflect the 'generative forces of linguistic life'—the centripetal force towards unification and 'official' language, struggling against the centrifugal force of heteroglossia in everyday language use (Bakhtin 1981, p. 270). Bakhtin identifies the 'fundamental moments in the architectonic of the actual world of the performed act or deed' in terms of the basic 'emotional-volitional moments', which are 'I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other' (Bakhtin 1993, p. 54). These fundamental elements suggest the movement between internal and external experience as the origin of the two forces in language—as individuals simultaneously aim for self-understanding and shared understanding.

In Orkney, the process of community is a pragmatic response to a reality shaped by geography, climate and natural resources. The nature of islands makes the particularity of context visible; as one of my informants commented about the need for collaboration in the renewable sector, 'you can see who you're in this with'. As I have spent time interviewing and observing those involved in making this new technology I have seen how the Orkney cultural narratives of self reliance, egalitarianism and pragmatism have become woven into the story of renewable energy in the islands. At the same time, climate change, the opportunities and challenges of renewable technology development, and the economic realities of island life have become part of island texts, as discussed above.

Guided by ecological dialogism I have come to understand the important role of storytelling in the process of shared meaning making which includes but goes beyond the text into every day interactions. Sergey Sandler usefully suggests an approach to 'Language as Literature' by identifying 'Action, Character, and Plot in Conversation' (Sandler 2015) and it would be interesting to consider how the benefits of such detailed textual analysis of oral communication might be extended to include embodied and ecological aspects of meaning-making. As I consider the ecology of the interactions in which I have taken part or have observed, I am aware of the meshwork of meaning-making from which these encounters emerged: the physical surroundings; the weather; animals and birds capturing

my and/or my interlocutors' attention; shared knowledge of local events; references to mutual friends, etc.—and how these relate to the texts I read, from policy documents to poetry.

9. Conclusions

How I am situated, as a researcher in the community of my birth, has shaped my thinking about meaning-making as ecological; the story-telling culture of Orkney has emphasised the dialogical nature of that ecology. I am part of the process of community I am trying to describe, and my relationship to it is messy and emotionally charged. As Puig de la Bellacasa points out, 'refusing self-erasure of attachments and inheritances is about acknowledging implication, about a way of thinking in interdependency that further problematizes the reverence to critical distance and the correlative value of "healthy" skepticism' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p. 80). Who I am, what I do, has been shaped by the place and the people I have lived with, been in dialogue, formed connections and relationships. My research is part of that ongoing process and it includes all those human and more-than-human encounters that have shaped my thinking. While I would agree with Puig de la Bellacasa that 'interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal—it is a *condition*' (ibid., p. 70), recognising, acknowledging and caring for that interdependency is a choice, which requires active and ongoing commitment. This is also part of the process of community as a form of ecology.

In using ecological dialogism as a way of approaching these Orkney texts, I hope to have shown the way islanders creatively and carefully express a sense of personal interconnection with their environment and each other—exploring how texts reach beyond the page into a living meshwork, where text is ecology and ecology is text. These Orkney ecologies entangle the natural, personal, cultural and technological, through, and as, stories, which emphasise relationships, responsibility and a sense of interconnectedness with, and reliance upon, the natural world. I believe these are stories that need to be shared—not as an answer but as a way of questioning how to proceed—if we are to learn to think with care about a future shaped by climate change.

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