

14 Principles for better Practice

Principles for Land Practitioners based on Indigenous and Gaelic Heritage
Lydia Stewart in conversation with Felipe Viveros and Ruairidh Moir

[BARD](#), [Culture Hack Labs](#),

principles for designing a better future

1. Care for all, from seed to sky
2. Slow down and listen deeply
3. Find gratitude and see abundance not scarcity
4. Knowing a place is relational
5. Root where you are planted– be like your place
6. Kinship is an active practice
7. Map the stories
8. Capture living memory
9. Use language or you will lose it
10. Community is a resource
11. Call people/places as they wish to be called
12. Measure in value not expense
13. Wander off the path to explore possibilities
14. Find the joy of living

Introduction

These principles are distilled from a conversation among three creative practitioners whose work revolves around ideas of land, people, and heritage; as well as inclusions from others who have spoken and written thoughtfully on the topics of indigeneity, ancestry, and kinship. For one of us, this is a specifically Gaelic practice, drenched in their own history, their architectural work focuses on nurturing a return of resources and abundance to the Western Isles. For another, their identity and their collaborative creative work are one, rooted in indigenous and colonial ancestry reaching through creative technologies to work across the global north and south. For the third, for myself, the work is an evolving academic discourse about the power of community in action, and the notion that our regenerative futures depend on an integration of old ways of knowing with the now, innovation from tradition. These principles are a guide to keep ever present as we all continue to do work within the ecosystem of people, processes, and place. Whether you are a facilitator, an educator, a developer, a builder, a maker, we can all do with a reminder to think of the big picture, past and present as we shape the future.

Note: the following conversation is edited for brevity and clarity.

Profiles

Lydia: I'm a lecturer at the Glasgow School of Art, teaching design innovation and service design, with a special interest in relational ecology and communities of practice. My work in Scotland has been primarily within highland communities looking at regenerative land potential and more recently doing research with BE-ST and HUB North around achieving Net Zero. A lot of my thinking comes from my background growing up primarily in Canada, as

well as my German dual nationality. I'm very much a person of multiple places and I've had the privilege and hardship of re/rooting myself throughout my life. My work being relational as it is, is rooted in ecofeminism and the pursuit of socially equitable futures. Coming from Canada, this means I have a deep appreciation and constant pursuit to connect with my indigenous neighbours that I share this land with.

Felipe: I am originally from Chile. I am a 'fruit salad', a mix of coloniser and colonised, with Indigenous and European background. I live in Devon, in the South West of England, and I'm a researcher, technologist, and practitioner. Because of my heritage, I have been trying to better understand the concept of indigeneity and taken particular interest in the term 'Indigenous futurism'¹. In my work at the Culture Hack Labs, a think and do tank and activist collective, I am constantly grappling with different complex questions such as identity, indigenous ways of knowing-and-being, belonging, community making and place-based sense making in the context of the anthropocene. Exploring how Indigenous worldviews may inform the way we respond to the [polycrisis](#), "where disparate crises interact such that the overall impact far exceeds the sum of each part".

Ruairidh: I'm from the Isle of Lewis, a village called Tolsta and I was brought up on a croft. It's a croft where my grandfather, my sean/seanair, where he was brought up. This village was my world for a long time. Then I went to Stornoway for schooling and decided to become an architect, so I went to Glasgow because of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, then to Barcelona, because of a fascination with Enric Miralles. Since qualifying I've started up BARD about 8 years ago and have been living between Glasgow and the Isles.

BARD, with the dual meaning of Bard being a poet, a roving kind of person in the landscape that for tells things and Bard is also Gaelic standing for "bailtean, ailtireachd 's rùm dànach", which translates as "townships, architecture the room of poetics", because that was really our modus operandi. So we work a lot in the islands; I roam between Glasgow, Tolsta, and Eriskay. We work mostly with comann eachdraidh projects and historical societies, and try to do things with them, to go beyond what a historical society typically does. The latest one that we're working on with the Isle of Eriskay is very, very interesting, because it's a whole island. Their ambition is largely about climate justice and decarbonisation and they've just won an award from BE-ST to try and grapple with what that means for them. They're looking at the past and looking into the future. We're really lucky to be a part of that conversation. But I think if anything, my own Gaelic upbringing helps me understand the way of life here [Western Isles].

Indigeneity, Identity, and Gaelic Heritage

Lydia: Let's dive right in with a big one. What does indigeneity mean to you both in your respective practices and in life. Sometimes those things are mutually exclusive.

Felipe: I come from a *mestizo*² heritage, and that has deeply informed my research and practice. My work focuses on the field of narrative change, how humans make sense of the

¹ Anishinaabe academic Grace Dillon first coined the term "Indigenous futurisms" in 2003, seeking to describe a movement of art, literature, games, and other forms of media which express Indigenous perspectives on the future, present, and past. More specifically, she argues that all forms of Indigenous futurisms "involve discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world"

² [Mestizo](#) is a person of mixed European and indigenous non-European ancestry in the former Spanish Empire.

world through stories. The question of indigeneity has become increasingly relevant, because it helps us better understand how crucial our relationship to the land is. For instance, Indigenous peoples steward 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity in their territories. This reminds me of Robin Wall Kimmerer's words: "To become naturalised is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do."

Indigenous peoples remind us: our body is the territory and our territory is the body [of the Earth]. In other words, we are nature. And yet we have lost our kinship with land and the more than human world. In the words of Aboriginal academic Tyson Yunkapourta's: "Most of us have been displaced from those cultures of origin, a global diaspora of refugees severed not only from land, but from the sheer genius that comes from belonging in symbiotic relation to".

Ruairidh: I think it's not one thing, it's constantly moving with time, even with an understanding of Gaelic— it's constantly evolving, and always has— between villages, there's variations of the Gaelic language, in terms of some vocabulary, as you'd expect with any language. And, from my perspective, that actually translates into the built environment. For me, it's about trying to understand a way of life, and trying to live it. So although I'm a Leòdhasach from Lewis, we go to where we work, we try to listen, and just get under the skin of the place because there's normally a culture, beyond what you see on the surface. What tourists see, it's all very beautiful, but it's when you really start living in those environments, the undercurrent, the particulars of that community, life starts to come through, and a lot of it is embedded in the history of the place. What happened to the ancestors? Why are the crofts in a particular pattern? Why are they scattered with random numbers, one to the other? It all has an underpinning in a kind of logic that's sometimes lost to the first reaction. So I think in a way, it is so multifaceted, and I think that's what makes it so interesting, because it's a well which never runs dry, and you can keep on growing from it.

Deep Listening to Yourself, Each Other, and Place

Lydia: You've both said things around a deep understanding, and that we can only exist and create in this place if we know where we are and who we are in that relationship. So how do we start to build up those mutual kinships?

Ruairidh: I suppose easy things are just reading and looking, but maps help, and speaking to people, so there are ways of facilitating those kinds of exchanges of information. But I think that the most meaningful one, which isn't all that easy, for many, I don't think, is living in it. So I mentioned that we're working in Eriskay or "Eirisgeidh", well although I have a Gaelic background and so does Eriskay I'm not from Eriskay, but when I'm there, I actually live there. It's not everyone who can pick up sticks and move about but in our Glasgow office we've got this bag, that all the stuff goes into, and then I take it up to the islands and then unravel it. So it's kind of a travelling show. In a way formalising that would be a really good thing. Working from there has led to an awareness of what really unravels once you actually experience a place and the community more readily takes you in. So, the way of getting into that undercurrent is actually living it, and experiencing it totally; from the weather patterns, to knowing who's related to who, or why that person knows what. It might be impractical, but it's important.

To know a Place is Relational

Lydia: That's important, the focus on 'the who'. Knowing who's living around whom, and why, and their histories. From my experience there isn't as much emphasis on relational understandings in the built environment. The relational question ends at "who is this for?" We determine a client and then we build for that person without thinking in equal measure about the relational ecosystem that surrounds that.

Ruairidh: Yeah, and I suppose the ecosystem now, is as significant as the histories of a place. For instance, there is someone living in that house, but then we start to learn about the family tree of where the house came from, who built it, who was their relations, and that weaves its own kind of tapestry. So it's ongoing to learn who you're working for, and why you're working for them.

If you don't understand the Gaelic psyche, or what Felipe was talking about, in terms of identity, it's quite hard to uncover that history, but it's not impossible. You need to be doubly observant, through listening, and also find a different way of working in these places for these communities, because a solution that works for the majority of the population in the Central Belt, doesn't necessarily fit here. The challenges here are different, technically, socially, and historically there is a recurring pattern where these communities have not been listened to, have not been understood, maybe deliberately or not, and over time they have eroded.

Grow Where you are Rooted

Ruairidh: There are commemorative events just now for the 100 year anniversary of two ships, the "SS Marloch" and the "SS Metagama" which were immigrant ships that were encouraging young islanders to leave for new life in Canada. Now you see the average for these things though the root of that stemming away and bleeding away of brain power and community started many, many centuries before that. And there is still sometimes I think, a prevailing feeling "just make due, don't put your head above parapet, we're not going to get anything better. Just have to put up with it." That's frustrating for me, though I understand where it comes from, but again, this comes down to the understanding of where the root of these feelings and behaviours come from. And once you understand that, we can say, well, everyone here is as deserving as anyone else. So raise your ambition, try to overcome some of these challenges and make it a better place to live for the people who live here.

Lydia: It is a good reminder to plant where we are rooted, and that might look different for different people. My ancestors came from Scotland, and settled in Western Canada. My great, great, great grandfather became the provincial leader in Alberta and has quite a legacy, both good and bad, but as a person he was deeply committed to serving his community and the land and was a truly formidable character. The traversing and shifting diaspora that a lot of our globalist ideals covet now means that we lose sight of those roots and values, like the strength of the village, deeply knowing a place, and wealth of our land-based communities.

Felipe, do you have similar sentiments around mutual kinship? And how do we engage with people in place?

More than Human Knowledge

Felipe: Indeed. And, what I was actually hearing you saying was how do we build resilience? How do we learn to listen to the more than human world which has been so ignored. Listen to the “deliberately silenced and preferably unheard” as said by Arundhati Roy, and notion is taken further by ecofeminist Donna Haraway to say, listen to not just our species, but all species. This is exactly what Australian architect, [Julia Watson](#) has done, who for years worked closely with indigenous peoples and studied indigenous technologies that work in symbiosis with nature. Then, she applied those principles, knowledge and technologies, to contemporary design creating futuristic resilient cities and urban environments.

I too, have worked with Indigenous peoples in diverse terrains. One of the key things they have taught me is that life is a wonderful, queer and wonderful gift that must be celebrated. We need to restore the kinship between people and place, the love and reverence for the land.

Radical Gratitude

Lydia: That ties in nicely to a quote by Robin Wall Kimmerer from her book [Braiding Sweetgrass](#) that "in a consumer society, contentment is a radical proposition. And recognizing abundance rather than scarcity undermines an economy that thrives in creating unmet desires, gratitude, cultivates an ethic of fullness." Gratitude, and this mindset of joyful abundance, is something that came up when I was chatting with Professor, Dwayne Donald at the University of Alberta a few weeks ago. He said, gratitude is a really core principle within indigenous communities; that we are to be grateful for the things around us. That we walk through our forests, and we are grateful for the trees to allow us breathe, and we drink our water, and we are grateful for its source. So I think gratitude is an interesting principle. Is there a way that we can pull these ideas of play, of joy, of gratitude into our practices in some sort of way? What might that look like, when we start to do the work? Felipe have you encountered any of that in your work? Have you started to implement facets of that?

Felipe: I used to work in Bhutan where I encountered first hand a new developmental philosophy inspired by ancient wisdom. The former Prime Minister famously said that in order to have wellbeing economies, we need to fulfil the needs of the body, and those of the mind. In other words we need food, we need shelter, we need clothes. But we also need meaning and purpose. And we also need a sense of belonging, culture, leisure, and play. Furthermore, when we think about our ancestors' values, whether in South America, Asia, or in Scotland, we often find the same core principles: community, belonging, solidarity and reverence for life.

Wellbeing

Felipe: Currently we are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness, created by an economic system that has pushed our civilization and the planetary systems to a critical point, nearing total collapse. But life is abundant, if we know how to share, however capitalism, our current operating system, breeds inequality and that breeds social violence and so many other kinds of issues such as loneliness, poor mental health and corruption. We need to start at home, remembering our shared humanity, and the principle that human beings are naturally altruistic and kind, and not selfish and self destructive as the dominating paradigm wants us to believe. We can begin to change the system right where we are, by joining a mutual aid network, volunteering our time, or joining a community group There are so many ways we can all contribute to creating wellbeing economies.

Lydia: Donna Haraway's [Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene](#), states that we cannot languish to the overwhelm of our current climate crisis, but equally we cannot absolve ourselves with optimism. We must stay in this liminal space, stay present for the good and the bad. And I think there is a sort of liminal space here, even in our conversation, where, on the one hand, Ruairidh, you talked about people who, you know, have settled and make do with what they have, and that there needs to raise the ambition, that we can strive for better conditions, better resources. But that does not necessarily negate this idea of contentment, and gratitude. Especially in this idea, maybe we can start to touch on some of the Gaelic preservation or the Gaelic vernacular materials that Bard is working with? How do you do this work through material practice?

Ruairidh: With what Felipe said, I was thinking that contentment versus gratitude should be linked. I think you're probably grateful for the others in the community, because you do tend to look out for one another, similarly to those in the central belt, the tenement is an excellent example of micro communities within blocks, that become sort of districts etc. But I think, in terms of what you are saying about inequality, out here it is also about infrastructure. There's a huge erosion of common infrastructure and there is a feeling, within the changing land economics, that people right now feel they are living through a new Clearances. There's many young people who don't live full time in the islands for various reasons. So they/we migrate away, but your heart isn't there, your heart is back home. So there's huge systemic problems and they're reoccurring.

Use language or you will lose it

Ruairidh: But with Gaelic vernacular there is something to be grateful for, because it's still there, and it's still resisting. There was a systemic effort to diminish its cultural significance and diminish its use [Gaelic]. When I went to school in the early 90s, and even then our teachers were very dismissive of speaking Gaelic; and that's from Gaels. Thankfully that is changing now, it's cool to speak Gaelic, it's cool to be getting under the skin. That's a really good thing. More power to people.

I suppose then the idea of vernacular is another conversation, I would say, because from a building perspective I think it's a word that sometimes gets used too often. In a way people think it's all sort of quaint little cottages with smoke coming out. I actually think it's far more basic than that, it's using the means of which you have available to you. Building with what you have, you do make do, as well. There is a kind of resourcefulness about dealing with whatever problem that you're up against, with whatever you can find. It's trying to understand where we are now and there are elements for which we can be grateful, but that there are big problems that need to be dealt with.

Community as a Valuable Resource

Lydia: There are two things here: one, I want to touch on this idea that you said, the thing that we're grateful for, the contentment is, we are here, and we are together. There is something to be grateful for. And it's maybe that togetherness, that is something that can be harnessed: what can we do together? That is why these elements of community are so important, to realise that when we become quite disparate and isolated, we lose the knowledge of our relational ways of being. That's the second bit: language is a big part of that. There is a significance to language that I often think about being bilingual. I grew up

with a German mother and a Canadian father in Canada, and my mother raised us German. And it made me 'other' in both Canada and Germany. So I'm home in both places, and I'm 'other' in both places. And that is both a gift and a hardship. I'm always at home and also homesick and so I talk with family in our vernacular ways and I surround myself with cultural signifiers that quench the sickness. So language can be really powerful because it is a living embodiment of both cultural and familial roots. The preservation of language, stories, materials, the artefacts, I think all of those things can play such a big role.

Call as They Wish to be Called

When I was speaking with Professor Donald he introduced himself as a member of the [Papaschase First Nation](#). He made this effort because there is great significance and respect in "using the name that people have for themselves, in their own language, in an ancient way". Even by calling people 'indigenous', it is an 'othering'. It's as if to say, we are this rich tapestry of identities (Canadian, German etc) and you are that other one, that indigenous one. Canadians often refer to the indigenous peoples on treaty 6 land in Alberta, as 'Cree'. Dwayne and I talked a little bit about this word, Cree, because it's the word that I grew up hearing for this community of people. But Cree is a term that was given by the white settlers because their songs resembled the sounds of cries. And so in that way, again, you're sort of creating this other identity for these people, rather than calling them by their own name. It is an important consideration when creating inclusive practice for all sorts of folks, such as queer communities. We need to be asking as a common practice "what do you call yourself? What can I call you?". The language we use and the stories we share are a preservation tool and a generative one to carry things forward. How do we capture these things?

Listen to Living Memory

Ruairidh: People need to feel encouraged to really cherish the language and the stories, which I think is happening. But the next step in preservation is use— use in the day to day life. You mentioned artefacts and materials, that's really important too, and I did want to touch on that. There's a number of really good organisations through the west coast that collect these things in hubs and I think that there's a next step of that and it's recording the elders in the communities who still have these links going back a long, long time, and recording the stories and understanding their life. We were looking at something similar to this for Eriskay recently pertaining to climate change. We were trying to envisage what climate change might do to Eriskay, in terms of rising sea levels through conversation with some of the people in the community. They say "well, in my own lifetime, that bit of coastline has changed, there used to be a house there and it's now covered by sand." If you aren't recording that then that knowledge is gone. Maybe there's complacency that the stuff that we don't manage to put into a building, or an archive, we think it will be archaeology and it'll be found eventually. But, there are really interesting things, nodes of landscape, natural things that have a cultural significance, that will never be archeology. In 100 years time, an archaeologist will come across and not understand it, unless it's written or mapped. So for instance, one example of that is in Tolsta, we have this kind of crevasse in a hillside called "sloc an t-searmon", so the "hollow of the sermons", because when there was no church, people would gather there. It was a beautiful setting, a natural hollow in the land, how it was formed I don't know, but that has a cultural significance, that requires that kind of storytelling, which I think Gaels are really good at. So it's something that needs to be promoted, facilitated, understood, and preserved, and then crucially, used.

Kinship in Action

Lydia: Storytelling is crucially important in helping us relate and develop connection within communities. It is how we feel a sense of kinship with one another through generations. Keavy Martin, a Canadian academic wrote a great paper entitled "[Kinship is not a Metaphor](#)" and it reminds me to enact these ideas of relationship, to be in relationship. Storytelling has long been a way for ancestral knowledge to be shared through generations, and yet in creative work it is often a mechanism of persuasion. How do we ensure we are using what we do for good—telling the right story? Felipe, that is very much something that you spend your time with, stories and language.

Felipe: Since time immemorial, myths and stories have helped us navigate and make sense of reality. A unique quality of being human is our ability to tell and live by our stories—we are *Homo narrans* ('storytelling human')³. Moreover, we are heavily influenced by our environment; we are contextual beings. Especially in this day and age, "we're prisoners of context in the absence of meaning", as the political adage reminds us. Personally, I grew up in a culture filled with violent conflict during dictatorship, where we had to learn how to grapple with conflicting ideologies. That was part of my context, that despite all the attempts to erase, silence and homogenise us, we are still here telling our story of resistance. For better or worse, the polycrisis is a direct result of our ancestors' choices. This is the age of consequences, a term coined by archeologist Courtney White to describe "a time when the worrying consequences of our environmental actions- or inaction - have begun to raise unavoidable and difficult questions." This is the landscape that we are traversing right now, one of uncertainty and jeopardy, but also pregnant with possibility and learnings.

Map the Stories

Going back to the question of language, there is a huge need to start mapping the future's uncharted territory. Seeing that despite political instability, social breakdown and ecological collapse, there is a future that needs to be forged today. And language can help us do that, help us not only to understand our current trajectory but to imagine a different path. Human beings are incredibly creative beings, we can and we always have come up with groundbreaking ideas and inventions. In that sense, language is a crucial tool that can help us convey stories of the beautiful alternatives, that acknowledge the urgency of the moment and at the same time imagine more just and flourishing futures.

Lydia: Consequences is an interesting idea to bring up. Tyson Yungkapourta, says to "[be like your place](#)." He speaks of place as a living sort of breathing thing. He talks about the interdependence of our ecologies, that we are a part of it, and that our actions create ramifications, consequences, good or bad, and to be cognizant of this in our daily interactions. How we can tap into those places? To be like our places? It was said that we need deep listening and to spend time and live in that place. And I think part of our challenge as practitioners is that things move at a pace that doesn't always allow for those conversations, and doesn't always allow for that immersion. Ruairidh you mentioned, being in that place, living in that place. Hearing those people's stories, mapping, but you also

³ The term posits the primacy of storytelling over, for example, language or reasoning, in differentiating *Homo sapiens* from other species of the genus *Homo*.

mentioned a bag and I want to come back to these tools and how BARD navigates that sort of roaming into communities.

Slow Down

Ruairidh: We do a lot of travel so this bag is a sort of toolkit of all our stuff that we're going to need, files and drawings and tracing paper etc. The back of the car is for the boxes, for models and materials. We don't fly much at all anymore, so, that time at sea, when you're six hours on a ferry is brilliant, because you get so much work done, and sometimes it actually becomes a bit of a workshop too, because people who are roaming the ship come and find you, speak to you, or you have meeting on the ship, it's fantastic. It is best when the team can come with me, we've had some major adventures and serendipity happening to us. The weather will play a big role. So it helps the team actually get a sense of what a storm is really like; we'll be stuck for three days. Then there's power cuts, so you start to get a sense of the existence there. It's also great fun; one of the memories, as well with our old car we were driving along looking at the various sites. Everyone in the full car has got models up to here [indicates neck]. But then Ciaran, from our office, is sitting on the backseat with a football, ready for a game when we get to the beach. It's not just all work, sometimes we'll get invited onto a boat, go fishing, we'll spend the evenings actually making the best of where we are, go for a swim, and catch up with friends, some new, some old. You spend your time wisely. So it's not a hardship at all. If the ferries were more reliable, it'd be a dream.

Wander off the Path

Lydia: I wonder if there's something in that though, that, you know, it's maybe because of these disturbances to scheduling that maybe you're afforded the extra time. And time is so precious. We rarely get to move on nature's time. How do you reconcile that from a business standpoint? Do you work with billable hours?

Ruairidh: If we were to charge all the hours that we would otherwise be able to charge for these trips, we would throw this kind of way of working in the water, it just would not be economically advantageous to the client. So sure, it'd be useful, but it doesn't work that way so that's why this is rather beautiful because it's fun, because we can, because the communities here and our couple of bases allow that to work.

Lydia: There's something from COVID that I wish we'd held on to. For all of the terrible things that came along with that period of time, I think it afforded people a lot of time to take space to do things at a slower pace and people were clamouring for common spaces that didn't previously exist. There are a lot of things that come with slow living that we would benefit by holding on to. Now we've done this pendulum swing as things opened up again. So, I think these disruptions, though they are disruptive, they can also be really fruitful. We get to spend time at the beach playing football, or chatting on the ferry.

I'm always curious how we start to subvert the structures that want to keep us moving in that linear and productive driven fast pace; how to do things differently? I try to spend time outside and I do a lot of walking to creatively process and I encourage my students to do the same. And it sounds like those trips out to your contextual sites, to see your partners, and those places are really important to the practice, and really important to your team and the work that's being done. It affords you the ability to see what sits underneath and to see oh, yeah, these disruptions like power and infrastructure and community dislocation, those things are really pertinent. That is part of the research, but you wouldn't necessarily catch

them if you just go for one day. So it's interesting. How do we build that into more of our models of work?

Measure in Value Not Expense

Ruairidh: It also comes down to thinking of another way of running design practice in relation to how you mentioned billable hours, and how you manage to get that to balance in terms of paying your staff, paying the expenses, and keeping things fluid. Maybe another way of looking at it is thinking of the value of the time, the value rather than the expense of time.

Felipe: In the wellbeing space there is a phrase "time is the currency of well being." Which means that study after study we have seen that doing things you love, being with friends, meaningful relationships, spending time in nature makes us happy. When you ask people: what makes you happy in most varied contexts, no one ever says money, or my new car. Moreover, only when we stop competing, we can create bonds based on care and solidarity. Take 'degrowth' for instance, that talks about "a planned downscaling of energy and resources used to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, in a just and equitable way."

We need a new guiding vision for the future that can help us move from extraction and domination to reciprocity and commoning. The challenge then is 'mythopoesis' or myth-making that can galvanise the best of us. I think it's fascinating that this conversation has been convened by Scottish researchers and practitioners, who are inspired by the beauty and the myths of this land. Together we need to rethink what are the principles guiding our work and practices. What are the principles and practices that honour both the beauty and memory of the land, and the brilliancy of our lineages?

Be like your Place

Lydia: The land speaking through us is something I see coming up repeatedly in the works of indigenous researchers and practitioners. In [We Need a New Story: Walking and the wâhkôhtowin Imagination](#) Prof. Dwayne Donald speaks about this term wâhkôhtowin, a cree word for kinship and relating to the natural world. In it he writes that walking is a form of convening with nature and meeting nature where it resides. Like Keavy Martin wrote Kinship is not a metaphor but a way of being in relationship with place and sometimes that takes changing your ways of engaging to meet place where it is. Dwayne Donald does a course at the University of Alberta that eschews typical curricular structure and takes place over a year, only meeting on the lunar cycle. The students study a place and engage with it over that year, to map it, capture the stories that it imparts, and understand it and reflect it through any sort of medium they like. This is not an artistic course, he teaches pedagogy and curriculum. But it's about engaging with a place deeply, meaningfully over time; engaging outside the bounds of conventional education.

Wâhkôhtowin is not only about the physical body and the imaginative mind but also an alignment of the spirit. That we are spiritually connected to the place where we are planted. You both reminded me of this, when you mentioned our generational lack of connection to land and these feelings of being uprooted.

Ruairidh: For any individual, you're going to be shaped by your experiences growing and then evolving in later life. What you're saying about uprooting, touching on our conversation,

it's a very present feeling. But I think that for those of us who are maybe uprooted, temporarily or otherwise, you take your identity with you. There's a Gaelic saying " 's binn guth an eòin far an do dh'fhàs e"

which is "the bird's song is sweetest, where it grew". So I think a lot of the time, if things were perfect, people would stay. But even aside from that, even when times were maybe easier, there's always been a prevalence in Gaelic culture, or west coast, island culture of people going to then come back.

Find the Joy

Lydia: I feel we are coming wonderfully full circle. We have talked about the need for rooting in place, embracing collective identity, cultivating gratitude and resilience, designing contextually, preserving stories and language, spending slow time, and seeing abundant joys around you. What do you take away from today? We're here and we're together, what do we want to be here and together working toward? What are the emergent opportunities that you see?

Ruairidh: The exciting things of the future is that if those challenges, that we identified earlier, are addressed, then these are really brilliant places to live in and to thrive in. The outlook for these places are very bright indeed, in part because you are building it from a root, a foundation of such richness, despite the adversity. Some of that requires political will, of listening, of appropriate intervention and action. And if that's done, then it'll be tremendous.

Felipe: This reminds me of philosopher Antonio Gramsci's words "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born; now is the time of monsters." As you both have said, we have all the tools, the science and understanding to alchemize and transform our current scenario. I often feel so lucky to be doing this work, but especially exploring and prototyping new ideas, because I get to see how many people around the world are doing excellent work, and coming up with groundbreaking innovations and lasting sea-change. Lastly, I think it is a matter of awareness, of realising that indeed we already have so much, that life just is--incredibly beautiful and abundant.

Lydia: This idea that there is a sort of return to the land that has a more contemporary application is interesting, that there are different ways of doing things, that we maybe haven't been afforded the time and ability to see though into implementation. I think sometimes we see resources and processes in their conventional paths and we don't see the different potentialities they could have in different applications or times. That is where these contemporary innovative practices can come from; where stories as living memory become tools for contemporary applications. There is a real richness in returning to some of these stories and seeing them as innovation from tradition.

Acknowledgements:

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Figure 1: BARD, Ruairidh and Ciaran arriving on Eriskay with the go bag (foreground), Ruairidh Moir



Enrique Castro-Mendivil

