

The ocean that keeps us apart also joins us: charting knowledge and practice in the Anthropocene.

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Figure 1. Google spherical projection map of the Pacific Ocean Te Moana Nui a Kiwa with Tahiti marked.

Abstract

This panel consist of five experts who have collaborated across hemispheres of Earth in the context of environment. Collaboration has become increasingly common over the past 15 years, to now being a pre-eminent form of creative practice. Over the same period, the human connection to climate change has moved from being predominantly known in academia, to a situation where the climate crisis is widely acknowledged intergenerationally and across most mass media. This development has forced a revision of knowledge and theory, led to engagement with indigenous peoples and new sites for projects. The notion of the constitution of a sentient human being has changed, in particular moving out of solely Western conceptions. These forces have led to an activist re-orientation in creative practice, with ramifications for art, society, humanity and Earth which together lead to a re-shaping of language.

Keywords

Climate crisis, intercultural, interdisciplinarity, intergenerational, indigenous, new knowledge, art, science, culture, technology.

Introduction

The panel will first sketch changes to the role and prominence of collaboration in practice, illustrated by reference to project activity. An awareness of art and science will then be introduced with reference to the work of David Bohm. The conception of life on Earth as an integrated whole forms an important connective point to the philosophies of indigenous peoples and is a foundation of contemporary sentience.

This will be followed by an introduction to associated changes in theory and knowledge. From this basis, engagement with indigenous groups in project activity will be scoped, with particular reference to previous ISEA exhibitions.

A change in philosophy as a result of the Anthropocene will be discussed along with a range of projects that engage with art, science, culture and technology with particular focus on the environment and activism as a basis for projects. The focus of the discussion will then turn to language, its role in shaping climate and the world, and the emergence of a new terminology geared to post-ecological scenarios, encompassing both organic and non-organic worlds and dimensions.

2004– 2019: collaboration

The first panelist will discuss changes to the role and prominence in the past 15 years. In essence there has been a transition from informally arranged collaboration at events such as Polar Circuit and Solar Circuit. In these collaboration interests in art and science were melded based on the sensibility of those co-located.

A trope in regard to cross hemisphere engagement was already set in place at this time, largely due to the commitment of participants. Since that time, project based activity around art-science collaboration has become a feature of calls to action: the deliberate framing of issues and projects around art-science interactions.

In the context of knowledge, an important step outside of disciplinarity has taken place at this juncture. In 2004, most academic institutions were divisively split between disciplines, where the art department almost never engaged with the science department. While this remains the situation in many institutions (not for want of trying) it has mainly been left to interdisciplinary research centres to pick up on the thrust of interdisciplinarity and engender projects across disciplines though often away from the campus context.

While commonly art and science were considered at opposite ends of some kind of knowledge spectrum, there were figures with a deeper awareness that foregrounded art-science interaction such as the scientist David Bohm among others. This introduces to the panel discussions, notions of interconnectedness and trans-disciplinarity.

Presently cross-disciplinary teams connect from remote locations and collaborate in hybrid environments. Within the process of these collaborations many questions emerge such as how is the most important element defined in such collaboration? Are there any rules? Is there an applicable methodology? How are cultural differences approached? How are the underlying artistic, social and political motivations defined? While extensive flexibility, modularity¹ and mutually satisfying professional and personal relationships seem to contribute to the ultimate success of the collaborative process many of these questions remain unanswered.

2004 – 2019: theory

If the silos of disciplines are discarded, the consequences for knowledge are significant as categorization was previously the fundamental premise for knowledge acquisition by research.

Importantly, when disciplinarity is dissolved, so too is the notion of knowledge as independent of culture. This is largely a Western colonization of thinking where the basis for knowledge acquisition is logic, rationality and propositional exploration followed by research and proof. That approach effectively privileged Western knowledge over that of cultures outside of the Western European cultural hemi-

sphere. This was sufficient to discount other forms of knowledge acquisition and excluded the knowledge base of indigenous and ethnic minorities.

Interconnectedness and transdisciplinarity generate a new condition of sentience upon which knowledge is based and language is constructed. The Anthropocene imposes a reflection about the time span of the species and cultures in contrast to that of individuals. The Climate crisis implies a cognitive leap, a vision extended to a future that must be attempted to govern, although we will not be part of it. The challenge is going beyond the generational time, into an expanded and intergenerational dimension that overcomes the biological lifetime of many. It also implies a different vision of humanity and its relationship with the “non human” and the environment, as a complex dynamic intercourse among different cultures, towards a further level of awareness in a sort of new pact with the existing.

On these topics the art*science project has activated a three-year research program (2018-2020) on Climate Change, with conferences, exhibitions and projects. Art and science can collaborate in order to reflect on the present and to imagine the future, bringing together cultural institutions, scientists, artists, researchers to focus on environmental transformations and their geographical, ecological, economic and cultural impacts. Until now four events have been organized (Cervia, Rome, Urbino and Bologna), and some are in preparation.

ISEA 2004 – 2019 and SCANZ 2006 - 2018: engaging indigenous and ethnic minorities

In contrast to conventional compartmentalized Western worldviews indigenous cultures across the world focus on a holistic understanding of Nature based on thousands of years of traditional experience - David Bohm, a noted physicist and originator of the casual interpretation of quantum theory, challenged established notions concerning the nature of reality and the order of the universe in his publications including *Wholeness and Implicate Order* (1980). The endorsement of the holistic nature of the world by David Bohm became an essential scientific argument.

At ISEA2004 which occurred in Helsinki, Tallinn and on a cruise ship between that sailed via Stockholm, there was a project that attempted to connect both local ethnicities and hybrid Polynesian cultures through the development of the constitution of *Leistavia*, a portmanteau of *Lei* and *stavia*. The former is well known in Polynesian as a flower garland worn around the neck, which is also found in India. *Stavia* is a common suffix to place names in the Baltic and surrounding areas.

The resultant constitution bore hallmarks from The Estonian constitution post Eastern bloc, and a unique cultural context in Polynesia – the 1838 Laws of Pitcairn Island, which gave all over 15 the vote (i.e. women were not excluded), protected cats and called for a Meritocratic Head of state. Ecological sustainable values were overwhelmingly voted for by the majority.

By *ISEA2011:Istanbul*, a multicultural approach involved the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand as part of the core concept and exemplars of a curated exhibition within the overall ISEA shows. *Te Kore Rongo Hungaora* incorporated a chart of Te Taiao Māori, the Māori universe.

Then at *ISEA2012:Albuquerque*, the Māori conception of Wai or flow dominated in a curated selection of projects. At the request of the kaumatua guiding the project Dr Te Huirangi Waikerepuru, this project involved local indigenous Dineh-Navajo.

Subsequently at *ISEA2019:Gwangju*, video works crossing the art-science and intercultural border were exhibited. These were based firstly on scanning a painting by contemporary Māori artist Wharehokasmith which was then converted to audio; the audio was then converted using generative video software. This created a video-audio art work.

In between these exhibitions SCANZ residency, workshops, exhibitions and hui (symposia) events took place every two years in cultural partnership with Te Matahiapo in Aotearoa New Zealand. The basis for this cross cultural engagement was the consideration that part of the solution to climate change entailed involving the voice of indigenous peoples. This is an alteration of the sentient mind, and is a key driver to the current condition of knowledge.

*SCANZ2015:water*peace* attracted indigenous peoples from Aotearoa New Zealand, Canadian Inuit and Vanuatu, with core events at the historic settlement Parihaka. This developed into events in partnership with Maata Wharehoka, a Kaumatua (elder) and Kaitiaki (guardian) of one of three Whare Nui (meeting houses). *Water, Peace, Power 2016* attracted the participation of a representative of the Yorta Yorta people of Australia who collaborated with Australian artist Tracey Benson. It also folded in low emissions technology as an element of projects in a direct statement about the environment. *SCANZ 2018: He Punawai Hohourongo Pace, Water, Power* saw the location of the entire residency, hui and workshops at Parihaka, with Nina Czegedly co-ordinating Roger Malina Skyping into the Whare Nui Te Niho o Te Atiawa, meaning he spoke in a room containing images of ancestors and family of the people of the house. Residency workshops and hui at Parihaka are in total contrast to conventional exhibition and symposium venues, and facilitate engagement with the community in ways no conventional exhibition could.

Salty Reflections across spaces and seas

Salt is a common and simultaneously precious substance, essential to the growth of life, yet able to destroy life; symbol of economic wealth and able to trigger environmental decline ...salt has many functions: not only do they differ radically, but they are also often located at opposing ends.

During *Art*Science 2018*, a group of international artists and theorists converged in the city of Cervia, a popular seaside destination with an interesting history and architecture located on the North East coast of the Italian peninsula. The city is crossed by a canal connecting the sea

to a small sized salt flat reservoir, which doubles as a conservation site and one of the major tourist attractions of the region.

In the Cervia context, salt is an important metaphor, it is the symbol of a delicate balance between conservation and tourism. That is, it stands at the cusp between the desire to preserve a very delicate and rich natural reserve constituted by the “Saline” and its surrounding territory, and the need to manage its tourism. The latter is a threat to this equilibrium. However, it also acts as an incentive to its preservation. The “Saline” (salt flats) constantly evoke the labor of the “salinari”. Remembering this tradition is very important: it is not just a source of entertainment, but also brings back the ephemeral memory of a past long gone which will likely be forgotten soon.

Because of the fragile relations between tourism and conservation, nature and artifice, sustainability and wealth that it is able to evoke, “salt” is an ideal catalyst to initiate dialogues about climate change and across different contexts. The installation “Creating and Destroying: salty reflections” by panelists four (ITA CAN) and Elaine Whittaker (CAN), was created as a piece able to connect the above narratives through the properties of salt and the “salt flats” as complex ecosystems.

For those who want to listen, the objects comprising this installation also reflected a series of contradictions calling for dialogues, questions, memories. Their function was evocative, rather than pedagogical.

The event also unfolded a cross hemisphere session connecting Cervia to Ngamotu New Plymouth in Aotearoa New Zealand as part of the exhibition *Art-science + environment* curated by panelist three.

Author Biographies

Nina Czegledy is an independent media artist, curator, and researcher with international and national academic affiliations is based in Toronto, Canada. She collaborates on interdisciplinary projects internationally.

Pier Luigi Capucci is an Italy-based researcher, academic and EU consultant on art/science/technology. President of Noema and founder of art*science-Art & Climate Change project.

Ian Clothier has exhibited in public space 107 times in 15 countries including six ISEA exhibitions, as artist, curator and events producer. Primary works have involved engaging with art, science, culture and technology frequently with indigenous peoples and in the context of environment.

Roberta Buiani is a researcher, activist and media artist based in Toronto working at the intersection of science, technology and creative resistance. She is co-founder of the ArtSci Salon at the Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Sciences and is program advisor for the Subtle Technologies Festival.

But the goal was to think past salt and the saline. When located in the context of climate change, it asked the following questions: Is it possible to preserve both Saline and Tourism simultaneously? Is it possible to remember and recreate the past. In spite of, or as an opposition to the environmental industrial and economic changes that have transformed our world in the past several years?

2004 – 2019: engaging language in post-ecology scenarios

The fifth panelist will discuss the role of language in shaping the world, with a particular focus on climate and post-ecological scenarios and the emergence of a new terminology to describe them. Language - be it oral, written, genetic or algorithmic - is embedded in ancestral forces which give it the power to materialise anything that is part of the world as we conceive it, reconfigured into cartography, human species, artificial intelligence, geography in the broadest sense. Taking these considerations as its premise, and with the support of works produced at the intersection of art and science, the discussion will examine new or re-defined terms related to the post-Anthropocene era. Each of these is a tile in the mosaic that re-draws the outline of our contemporary landscape, with its constantly-evolving forms of interconnection between humans and non-humans. The debate overall expresses the urgent need to introduce a new terminology in order to attune to this newly-discovered scenario, where possible shaped by a combination of local tradition and globalized knowledge, and encompassing both organic and non-organic worlds and dimensions.

Since 1999, Elena Giulia Rossi has expressed her research throughout writing, curating, teaching, based on exploring contemporary art and its relationship with science and technology, from a socio-anthropological perspective. She is founder and editorial director of Arshake. Reinventing Technology (www.arshake.com).