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Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of ecoartscotland occasional papers.

The three co-editors have identified the theme of Position and Scale. The collection of essays is intended to open up a discussion on an issue in ecoart which differentiates it from other forms of art practice. Published along with these essays is a response from John K Grande.

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Chris Fremantle: Position and Scale: eco, art, Scotland

Introduction

I've been asked the question "Does ecoartscotland mean that there are lots of eco-artists in Scotland?" Of course that's the wrong question. The name 'ecoartscotland' positions this project as a node or hub within a network which includes [greenmuseum](http://www.greenmuseum.org) (<http://www.greenmuseum.org>), [ecoartspace](http://www.ecoartspace.org/) (<http://www.ecoartspace.org/>), [ecoartnotebook](http://ecoartnotebook.com/) (<http://ecoartnotebook.com/>), [ecoart center](http://www.eco-art.co.il/) (<http://www.eco-art.co.il/>), the now defunct [arts & ecology](http://www.artsandecology.org.uk/) (<http://www.artsandecology.org.uk/>) at the RSA, as well as [ecoartnetwork](http://www.ecoartnetwork.org) (<http://www.ecoartnetwork.org>) (which is a ten year discussion taking place through a listserv). These are very small organisations or clusters of individuals.

Ecoart is a neologism bringing together two words: art and ecology. David Haley, co-editor of this issue along with Anne Douglas, reminds us that ecology is the study of organisms in relation to each other and their surroundings, and that one of the roots of the word art encompasses the way that the world makes itself continually and virtuously.

But the question "what is the relationship between Scotland and ecoart?" is a useful question, and is answered by more than just an idea of nodes in networks, or by unpacking the linguistic roots of the component terms.

The aim of ecoartscotland occasional papers is to create a structured and open platform, alongside other more informal aspects of ecoartscotland, through which to develop the discourse on practice and research in the field. To achieve this without homogenising practice and research, or the many different trajectories through the arts and ecologies, requires that the format of 'papers' may be limited by technology, but will not be constrained by the editorial approach. Each issue will comprise a multivocal editorial introduction and several invited responses. The issue will then be open to submissions. Submissions can take two forms: comments made on existing submissions, and new submissions. Both are peer-reviewed before being published on the site.

Position and scale

This issue is focused on questions of position and scale. Ecoart is a positioning in practice and thought. Scotland is a positioning in space and thought. They both imply ideas of scale. Scotland is a useful scale: it is a scale on which it is possible to grasp the complexity of issues that are implied by ecoart. These might include artists practices, biodiversity, energy (on the one hand fossil fuels and on the other renewables), planning (including the relationship between the urban and the rural as well as the in between issues), water, agriculture, and the roles, rights and responsibilities of inhabitants and communities, human and non-human.

In addressing the question of scale we might usefully take on board Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison's 'starter for ten' questions "How big is here?" and "How long is now?" The

Harrisons work combines the visual and the poetic to create a new perception of place. The Harrisons use these questions as a starting point for projects. For them these questions are both 'art questions' and also 'ecological questions'. Whilst it may be self-evident that these questions are relevant to ecological concerns, defining the scope of a bioregion in terms of area and timescale of change, these questions are also rooted in an art practice. These questions are framing devices. They are central to the process of composition. Whether in terms of a 'traditional', painterly, judgement of space, or in relation to the dramatic unities of 'time' and 'action,' questions of scale are artistic concerns, though not traditionally directed towards the ecological. The stories, regardless of medium, that develop from asking these questions are stories of new futures characterised by eco-cultural well-being.

In what senses might we want to explore Scotland as a scale? The Scottish Government's Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set out a series of targets for moving to a low-carbon economy. These targets are ambitious: 80% of electricity produced from renewable resources by 2020. An 80% reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. And of course this is fantastic news. Scotland has set targets that lead the world. But this requires an even more clear focus on a series of cultural issues. Can we simply overlay another phase of industrial development on Scotland's land- and sea-scapes with wind, water and tidal power stations and carry on 'as normal'? The re-engineering of the energy supply will be an enormous achievement, but the underlying, culturally driven, growth of energy consumption is one dimension of a wider cultural challenge that extends to land use, food production and distribution, water, transport and our assumptions about all of these everyday needs. The challenges of social and environmental justice are complex. After all Scotland has one of the highest levels of fuel poverty, as well as some of the most significant health problems, in the developed world. But when the island of Eigg switched on its renewable energy system a couple of years ago the news made a big play of the move from diesel generators to wind and photo-voltaics. They omitted the most important part of the story: social justice is built in – each domestic and business supply has a built-in 'cut out' so that no one person can be greedy with what is a limited resource – limited at any one point in time, although renewable over the duration.

Complexity

One might therefore understand the scale and complexity of Scotland's field of play in relation to energy to include the Scottish Government's ambitions for a low carbon economy juxtaposed with the challenges of poverty, and encompass understanding the importance that learning from the remote and rural such as the inhabitants of Eigg.

David Haley, in his introductory essay *Ecology in Practice* (<http://ecoartscotland.net/ecoartscotland-papers/issue-one-position-and-scale/ecology-in-practice/>), reframes the questions of complexity as central to his art practice, arguing that uncertainty and indeterminacy are to be embraced rather than overcome. Complexity is central to thinking about position and scale from an ecological perspective.

Learning

The question of how to learn from the many examples of practices, all creative even if only some present themselves as art, is a challenge.

Whilst the underlying model on which the arts operate values uniqueness and individuality, and protects these with copyright and as intellectual property, many ecoart practitioners would place higher priority on addressing the challenges of environmental crisis manifesting as climate change, food security, peak oil, resource wars and so forth.

There are many modes of learning, many pedagogies that might be relevant, and there is no question that there is a radical pedagogical thread running through the fabric of these practices, from Hans Haacke (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_haacke) and the Harrisons (<http://theharrisonstudio.net>) as

progenitors of the field right up to date. For example, [PLATFORM](http://www.platformlondon.org) (<http://www.platformlondon.org>) who weave together art, research, campaigning and education and whose course [The Body Politic](http://www.platformlondon.org/body politic.asp) (<http://www.platformlondon.org/body politic.asp>) is delivered with Birkbeck. For example, [Fritz Haeg](http://www.fritzhaeg.com/) (<http://www.fritzhaeg.com/>)'s [Sundown Schoolhouse](http://www.fritzhaeg.com/schoolhouse.html) (<http://www.fritzhaeg.com/schoolhouse.html>), or the [Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army](http://www.clownarmy.org/) (<http://www.clownarmy.org/>), or [Center for Urban Pedagogy](http://www.anothercupdevelopment.org/) (<http://www.anothercupdevelopment.org/>), [Temporary Services](http://www.temporaryservices.org/) (<http://www.temporaryservices.org/>), [Center for Land Use Interpretation](http://www.clui.org/) (<http://www.clui.org/>), [Experimental Station](http://experimentalstation.org/) (<http://experimentalstation.org/>), or [Cittadelarte](http://www.cittadellarte.it/) (<http://www.cittadellarte.it/>).

Anne Douglas, in her introductory essay [Learning from Experience](http://ecoartscotland.net/ecoartscotland-papers/issue-one-position-and-scale/learning-from-experience/) (<http://ecoartscotland.net/ecoartscotland-papers/issue-one-position-and-scale/learning-from-experience/>), focuses on the question of learning and highlights the particularity of the ecoart field where the explicitness of learning and the value placed on it is distinctive. She goes on to ask a series of questions about how to draw out learning as a key aspect of ecoart practice, radically repositioning it as a counterpoint to the values of individuality and consumerism.

Conclusion

So we invite you to respond to the issue of positioning and scale and perhaps to think about the ways to share your experiences so that others can learn from you, not by how-to instructions or unacknowledged copying, but rather by understanding achieved through the generous sharing of ideas and experiences offered in structured forms that provoke rather than limit.

Chris Fremantle, May 2011

[The Kubrick Theme](#). [Blog at WordPress.com](#).
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David Haley: Ecology in Practice

First a poem:

Vision deficit
The language of policy
Need for poetry

Perpetuating
Vanity and distraction
Drivers of desire

As this disjunction
Mutilates our vision
With which we seem live

To live life daily
Dream to find reality
Art as rule-breaking

Aspire to collapse
a matter of emergence
Time as metaphor

Look to the futures
Of indeterminacy
Knowledge dynamic

Matter of context
Knowledge given form to flow
Knowing how to know

Kean ways to listen
Poetic ways of seeing
The white-faced clown dreams

Reframing questions
One being influencing
Ecology of action

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Then a text:

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of context

To briefly contextualise my perspective, I refer to my practice as ecological art. I define ecology as the study of organisms, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to their environment – my practice is concerned with those relationships. The word ‘art’ is derived from the ancient Sanskrit word, ‘*rta*’. *Rta* retains its meaning in contemporary Hindi as a noun-adjective for the dynamic process by which the whole cosmos continues to be created, virtuously. It refers to the right way of evolution and we still talk about excellence, or the correct way of doing something as an ‘art’ – the art of cooking, the art of football, the art of gardening, ‘The Art of Archery’, ‘The Art of Making Cities’, and even ‘The Art of War’. I wish to consider complexity as an art, art as a complex system, and indeed, how we may understand and engage with climate change and many other issues.

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of indeterminacy

The single biggest problem facing the IPCC, since its inception, is ‘uncertainty’ – uncertainty in the significance of its data, uncertainty in the strength of its predictions, and uncertainty in the fact that we simply do not know what the future will bring. Disjuncture from being this natural state of indeterminacy is, I argue, the weakness of most science, most education and much of our society’s inability to even admit to ‘the carousel of 21st Century challenges’. And yet, again and again, despite the potential knowledge and skills base, the arts are relegated “... to tell the good story of science”, present art that is politically neutered and deny our creativity.

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of collapse

I wish to challenge the futility of our engineered culture and its consequences, the ‘ecology of action’. Instead, art may provide creative leverage, ‘to intervene in the system’, and ‘learn how to deal with complexity rather than rejecting it’.

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of climate change

From ‘sustainable development’ to ‘sustainable living’ to ‘capable futures’, to ‘next generation evolution’, I call for the ‘deconstruction’ of Climate Change to re-contextualise its existence, its impacts and its epistemology. We may then consider ‘economy’ as an aesthetic/ethical imperative, and whole systems ecology as the determinate of culture, providing the meta-narrative [creation myth] to evolve complex futures.

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of diverse futures

And like science, art needs to understand that it is, itself, a system of complex behaviour, and that ecology may be the description of its contexts, relationships and processes. It is, therefore, necessary to reconstitute art as an expression of dwelling-making, or '**ecopoiesis**' (Haley 2001), according to the patterns of evolution, *rta*, or what Capra calls 'the cosmic order of things' (Capra 2002 p.442); and its deployment may be through creative processes, or '**ecopraxis**' (Haley 2001). And if we are to address the most pressing issues of our time, we must learn what Morin calls 'fundamental culture' (Morin 2005 p. 27) through '**ecopedagogy**' (Haley 2008). Then perhaps, the greatest potential for art is to contribute to a new paradigm that embodies complexity; not a dialectical opposition to the present canon, nor a re-enchantment (Gablík 1992), but the emergence of a new form, a new order – 'the art of complexity'.

We must learn
Not to be afraid
Of complexity

David Haley, 2011

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Anne Douglas: Learning from Experience

“Activity that is not checked by observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But intellectually it leads nowhere. It does not provide knowledge about the situations in which action occurs nor does it lead to clarification and expansion of ideas”¹

One of our aims in establishing the ecoart occasional papers is precisely to address the idea of ‘checking by observation’ as a means to expand our understanding of and insights into art and ecology. We believe that our approach emphasising the multi-vocal approach to ‘checking by observation’ is fundamentally appropriate.

As someone who does not consider themselves an eco artist, but rather as a researcher concerned with public pedagogy and artists’ research, my concern is with what I perceive to be distinctive about some ecoart practices: a concern with learning. Ecoart practices frequently engage individuals and publics in various forms of learning experiences by framing and focusing an issue, engaging bodies and minds in unravelling its complexity. In addition there is the learning that is the practice itself – the way that ecoart practices are formed, articulated, unfold in the public sphere. In other words there is not only the public and private learning and engagement that is a part of the practice, but learning from the practices themselves.

This is most clearly exemplified for me in the following reflection by Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. The Harrisons record the experience of their own learning (and realisation) in the context of other people also learning. Their interventions, as exemplified by this comment on *Atempause: Breathing Space for the Sava River* (http://theharrisonstudio.net/?page_id=657) (1989-1990), have consequences that were not anticipated at the outset. These consequences, consciously grasped, take one to a new place, a new positioning and a new sense of scale of ecology.

They said,

For instance, we were invited to assist in the formation of a nature reserve along the Sava River... Finding this reserve already in a healthy state, though being threatened by the products of the industrialized agriculture along its banks, we chose instead to envision the whole Sava River, from above Ljubljana to its outfall in Beograd into the Danube, as a nature reserve. In so doing, we created a series of images and texts, exhibited often and repeated in diverse languages. They argued for the creation of a new history for the Sava, basically communicating that, while reasonably healthy, the Sava could move to a more pristine state by many small changes. The proposal was accepted by the Croatian Water Department. A young graduate student who was assisting us and working collaboratively with us on the river, after we were forced to leave because of the war, stayed on and then made a similar but far more complex proposal, using our model, for the Sava’s sister river, the Drava. This proposal was also accepted. The first unintended consequence was that the assistant, using our model, would get a second river, quite different from the first, established as a nature reserve. The second unintended consequence was that the Sava and the Drava, collectively, gave the

lower Danube almost 50% of its clean water. The third unintended consequence was that these cleaner waters, downriver, helped to partially flush the polluted Danube estuary as it flows into the Black Sea. We the artists chose to call the nature of this set of events “Conversational Drift”, as the original Sava proposal was conversational rather than iconic in nature.²

The metaphor of conversation enables a fluidity of ideas in which the first action, the invitation to assist in the forming of a nature reserve locally, is catalyst to a second, a way of envisioning a complex ecosystem at a much greater scale. This in turn feeds back into a new possibility in the neighbourhood, the Drava, which intensifies and augments the consequences for the whole.

In this example we are witnessing how the artists themselves learn from projecting into the world and reflecting on what it means, thereby refining their methods through insight – “We started to design our work differently”. By articulating this learning, folding it back so to speak into in the public sphere, we too learn as a community of practice.

Among eco-artists in particular there is a sense that learning is a matter of urgency given the scale of the issues (and perhaps a need to avoid reinventing the wheel through unacknowledged copying).

Choreographing learning

Crucial to shared learning, therefore, is the way in which we structure and participate in a learning space. The *Working in Public* (<http://www.workinginpublicseminars.org>) seminar series (2006-8) sought to learn with and from *Suzanne Lacy* (<http://www.suzannelacy.com>), feminist performance artist and activist, focusing on a particular body of work, the Oakland Projects (1990-2000). We established a space of exchange between artists working in Scotland and their experiences of specific social, cultural and political circumstances as compared with those of the West Coast United States. With Lacy, we identified a set of crucial subjects that framed tensions and contradictions. These included power and representation, aesthetics and ethics and clashing notions of quality in public art practice. Lacy addressed these issues as did the core group of participants in the Seminars. These issues enabled us to move from focusing on the familiar ‘how to do’ type exchange among artists to the emergence of a shared discourse.

Identifying the means and methods of reflective learning

To be able to reflect, we need to revisit, re-search, experience. While technologies of documentation are ubiquitous, these do not tell us what and how to document work in the public sphere. It is noticeable that the artists discussed above carefully construct a feedback loop between what they do and what happens as a result. But how is such artistic knowledge carried through and beyond its unique manifestations in projects, exhibitions and related publications?

For a musician this knowledge is invested in scores as the material means to communicate quite precisely the content of an artwork. Taking a lead from Allan Kaprow, I would like to speculate for a moment on the potential value of scores to reflection and learning.

Allan Kaprow and others challenged orthodoxies of artistic production/artistic genius/single authorship by means of scores. In being open to interpretation, scores engage improvisation and thereby prioritise thinking and being ‘in the moment’. We mined these aspects in our recent work *Calendar Variations*. Interestingly scores in music emerged historically as a means of capturing part of a performance after the event, rather than in anticipation of it.

If we understand a score, not as a how-to set of instructions, but as a means to access the work in sufficient clarity and depth in order to perform or to develop new works, what does that offer?

How might we ‘score’ an ecological art project such as Agnes Denes’ *Wheatfield- a Confrontation*, New

York (1982), as a past performance? Might such a score move beyond the capturing and historicisation of this 1982 project through iconic images of wheatfield, tractor and skyscraper? Might a score (that remembered not just the image, but also the symbolic distribution of the harvested wheat to 28 further cities around the world) be a means to repeat intelligently, as well as interpret, or develop new related works?

How might such a score draw out underlying critical issues in the way that the framing of issues within *Working in Public* assisted all members of the group to think through practices, their own and others.

How might a score and subsequent performance of Hans Haacke's *Rhinewater Purification Plant* (1972) critically trace this artwork as simultaneously producing a set of functional protocols around graywater as well as framing the symbolic value of doing so?

Might scores enable us to inhabit these artworks critically and intelligently taking them into our daily experience, setting them to work on the challenges we encounter?

Newton Harrison encourages us to break our icons as a way of moving forward, to participate as interlocutors and critically inhabit the artists' metaphors, concepts and methods but in our own understanding of the issues on the ground. In doing so, he interrupts the closure that traps art into objects and notions of genius. He draws out the creator in each one of us. In so doing, he and the artists mentioned here, forge a new path and quality of relations between art and experience.

Anne Douglas, May 2011

Notes

1. Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. Reprinted Touchstone 1997.
2. Harrison, H. M., and Harrison, N.. (2007) Public Culture and Sustainable Practices: Peninsula Europe from an ecodiversity perspective, posing questions to Complexity Scientists. University of California, Irvine: *Structure and Dynamics*, 2 (3).
3. Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany, <http://greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/rhine.html> (<http://greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/rhine.html>)

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John K Grande: eco + art = the human

Interactivity is a key to the present evolution of eco-art. Interactivity and intercultural exchange. The ephemeral artwork or the co-relational project links the human input- our consciousness – to nature as environment. Performance art provides a clue from the past to where eco-art will go. Artists as varied as Ana Mendieta, Robert Morris, Alan Sonfist, Allan Kaprow and Dennis Oppenheim all attracted a dialogue on the body and the land. Their actions remained somewhat trapped in the modernist notion of the artist as ideotype. This had nothing to do with their actions. It had to do with a particular period in the history of art. Intercultural actions of our era are building a new exchange that is unique. The art involves a form that engages community and seeks to recapture the language of form using ecology and the culture of nature as points of contact. There is no gallery. There is no museum. There is no wild, rural, or urban map to locate the work in the aesthetic pantheon. Eco-art as a practise exists in a continuum and embraces the holistic metaphor.

Eco-art can involve notions of Romanticism, and of nature as a beautiful construct. Eco-artists can engage concepts and beautify them. Eco-artists may be involved in a direct dialogue with materials building contextual links with place, hence an ecology of place. Placement is a valuable resource for the artist. Placement of identity in an atomized world is a difficult thing. Placement with atomization makes memory more relevant than ever. The fluid battering of human culture by the winds of globalism will eventually bring a new and brilliant language of eco-art as a process oriented art. Eco-art has as its goal to remove all points of arrival and departure. Eco-art exists within a flux of being. We live in a present. Eco-art challenges us best when it has no model other than the direct involvement with place, and with community in a place. This is where the eco-artist has a challenge... How to go beyond eco-tourism? The wisdom we seek to bring is about ecosystems in perpetual exchange. Intercultural exchange. Inter-regional exchange. Mutualism is not about dependency on a language or a structure. It is more about reading the moment, acting with small groups. Initiating this redefinition of the performance involves redefining a world that is re-creating itself all the time. How to be original in a world that is original? How to balance the arts engagement with what is already there? How to reduce air miles?

The contemporary is ancient. The ancient is contemporary. The holistic metaphor again... Modernism with its links to industrial culture influenced the language of art. The great gap between nature and culture is now disappearing and being re-screened at the same time. The cult of the image is something that always attracted the human since ancient times. We are affirming this with our new media addiction. The blur between new media and the physical tactile world is a place artists can now work very effectively. And we are allowed to embrace old-fashioned notions, and new-fashioned notions, and to decry the didactic implosion of human intuition and intelligence that has now occurred as a result of the cult of the image. This is simply to illustrate a passive passion the humans have always had. Like magpies, we humans like shiny surfaces, and images that move. Screen driven imagery has made us extremely efficient readers of visual and informational data, but the downside to this is we read the tactile, physical world around us in the same way. A hands-off approach to reality tends to

work against the individual's understanding of experience. The projection of imagery simplifies our ideas of nature. The image versus the physical tactile world.

Humans have always moved through space. Space and time is a key to our way of working creatively. Here is a place artists can work in the present. And the forms come from the exchange, the structures from our consciousness. Eco-art has a way of moving through the experience that enables communication between species, between cultures, and uncovers the exploitative, embraces the ecosystem. Sustainability is not just a word. It is a way of living. Not a comfortable way, but a challenging way of living. The catharsis is in the input we can give to systems that are redefining themselves. Be creative my friends. Find new worlds....

The exchange of cultural models between artists from different bioregions involves a simultaneous exchange of permacultural values, of specific symbols, specific codes, specific cues whose origins may be universal. By permaculture, one can speak of a culture that embraces all the values of our evolving era. Eco-art involves understanding the permanent backdrop of ecology and of nature's ongoing performance. Eco-art is a process that goes beyond the theological cues to all cultures. The landscape is no longer an object. The artist's actions are no longer a subject. Eco-art catches a moment of time, an ephemeral moment in time... Eco-art enables us to recognize values of permanence in nature, the environment, in ourselves, in the human built environments, and the image cult world.

Reintegrating humanity into the culture of nature, adapting our actions to the real-life situation is a real challenge. With small steps, each activity, gesture, performance, thought, brings us to work with nature rather than against it. Reducing resource use by individual actions, and intricate yet complex decisions we make. Recognizing human and resource limits is essential to our survival. Materialist values can no longer be supported by a responsible, survival-based economy. Nature is an open and versatile system.

Cultural identity is as necessary to humanity as the sun is to nature, for its guides us to identify who we are, where we have come from and where we are going. The impulse to create reflects an implicit desire to improve the world around us. The limits imposed on us by nature are guiding us to establish a new global ethic that involves the mutual respect between all living things. Art draws upon that flow of energies that is part of the process of life, the procreative core of our need to transform, enrich, express. Nature is the Art of which We are a Part.

John K. Grande is the author of *Balance: Art and Nature* (Black Rose Books, 1994), *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* (State University of New York Press, 2007, (www.sunypress.edu (<http://www.sunypress.edu>))), and *Dialogues in Diversity: Art from Marginal to Mainstream*, Pari Publishing, Italy, 2008 (www.paripublishing.com (<http://www.paripublishing.com>))). He is co-author of *Nils-Udo: Kunst Mit Natur* (Aachen: Ludwig Forum, 1999), *Bob Verschueren: Outdoor Installations* (Editions Mardaga, Brussels (2010) and *Le Mouvement Intuitif: Patrick Dougherty and Adrian Maryniak* (Brussels: Atelier Muzeum 340, 2005). John Grande curated *Eco-Art* with Peter Selz at the Pori Art Museum in Finland and a Dennis Oppenheim retrospective at Galerie Samuel Lallouz in Montreal this year. *Ecology & Art* will be published in Shanghai later this year.

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