

## Preface

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This edited volume was conceived to foster the building of common ground between artist-researchers and scholars operating at the juncture of visual, performing and media arts, and the environmental humanities. As art research methods have become increasingly crucial in envisioning and (pre)interpreting the massive planetary changes that are defining contemporaneity - by consequently creating awareness and a sense of care for every form of life and of interspecies relationship - it is of utmost importance to bridge the gap between academic and artistic research. Sharing problems, methodologies and tools constitute the basic premise for the work done by the social and environmental humanities, together with the arts and the natural sciences, and for preparing a much needed epistemological shift; that is, bringing human and non-human knowledge closer together.

This shift, as cultural anthropologist Veronica Strang brilliantly points out, is first of all one in "positionality", since it "recognises that non-human beings and ecosystems are not humankind's passive subjects but the co-creators of shared lifeworlds". "A logical consequence - Strang stresses - "is a greater appreciation of the rights and interests of non-human beings and ecosystems, both in law and in the decision-making processes that shape human-environmental relations". Therefore, she calls for the need "of some form of pan-species democracy that simultaneously respects biocultural diversity" (2023, 1).

In their writings, both Veronica Strang and another distinguished cultural anthropologist, Elizabeth Povinelli, have argued how indigenous people greatly contribute to the debate about the urgent need to start considering and establishing the rights and personhood of nature, namely of non-human beings (Strang 2020; Povinelli 2016). The reference to these two authors is far from being accidental, not only for their important contribution in the field, but also because their thoughts and researches are among the beacons of the activities carried out at THE NEW INSTITUTE Centre for Environmental Humanities (NICHE), within which this volume situates itself.

As a research centre devoted to the environmental humanities, NICHE promotes interdisciplinary studies and public engagement activities, from the unique perspective of Venice, but opening the debate to a global scale. At the core, NICHE places water and aquatic landscapes, with the identification of new methodologies necessary to have a greater perception and awareness of water at a social, cultural, political level, which questions current decision-making processes.

The alliance between the humanities, the sciences and the arts is crucial to NICHE, this is why, among its current ten research clusters, one is dedicated to Ecological Art Practices. This cluster interrogates the relationship between art and the environment combining ecocritical approaches, radical imagination and creative sustainability. It seeks both to create inclusive opportunities for transdisciplinary dialogue and to encourage international collaborations with (arts) institutions, research centres and commons on the importance of rethinking the 'ecology of culture' in relation to the environmental change.

As the essays in this volume also confirm, by collecting different voices and perspectives, art can help us - as dwellers - to think with and listen to the Earth, facilitating respectful co-existence and co-creation processes. The artist duo formed by Beate Geissler and Oliver Sann, who engaged in an intriguing conversation with the book editor, Emiliano Guaraldo (a fellow at NICHE and a member of the Ecological Art Practices research cluster), have consciously expressed the role and value of art, especially in relation to the ecological crisis. "It's not simply about generating artworks" - they argue. It's "an all-encompassing ecosystem of creative thought and expression. Most artists, unlike many other producers of knowledge, can afford failure more readily and are therefore not paralysed by fiasco. As a result, art is not afraid of failure" (see p. 155). If art is not afraid, we - first of all as researchers and scholars - should not be afraid either and we should try to bridge the gap between what we know and what we do not know with the help of others, whoever 'the other' may be.

## Bibliography

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