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Abstract

The Ecoimaginaries panel brings together creative collectives, Indigenous artists and cultural workers working with art, ecologies and alternative technology cultures. The focus is on art that grows relations and resilience over long flows of time through work with communities, embodying ancient and emergent cultural practices in ways that are woven with the life of the Land.

Ecoimaginaries brings together creative collectives, Indigenous artists and cultural workers, creatives who work closely with the fluid dance of flocks, swarms, soil and mycelia networks, and the interdependence of peoples. The panel considers how plural imaginings of creative technologies serve vital and more-than-human ecologies - from seed archives growing protected commons in germplasm, to digital embodied networks for community knowledge, and transcultural media art installations connecting with trees and migrating birds. Emphasising that technologies, as such as animal ecologies, are expressions of place and specific locales, our focus is to learn from long-term ecological engagements across communities, art and alternative technology cultures working for eco-social transformations.

Ecoimaginaries is designed with communities and collectives who are working with the land to grow ecologies of creative practice, imaginative activism and the new commons in deep connection with Indigenous perspectives.

Keywords

More-Than-Human, Ecological Communication, Commons, Indigenous Knowledge, Ch'ixi, Wānanga, Ecological Thinking, Practice As Research, Eco-Social Transformations, Embodiment, Living Networks, Systemic Change

Introduction

In nature, flocks embody a dynamic collective unity, a convergence of energy. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, a saying composed by Tumatahina of Te Aupouri goes:

Te kuaka marangaranga, kotahi manu i tau ki te tahuma: tau atu, tau ra.

'The godwit flock has arisen; one bird has come to rest on the beach: others will follow.'¹

This panel brings together creatives who work closely with the fluid dance of flocks, swarms, soil and mycelia networks, and the interdependence of peoples across living ecologies. Our focus is to learn from long-term ecological engagements that grow resilience across communities and are woven with the life of the land.

Presenters share “in process” learning from creative work on long-term, place-based projects that embody decolonising practices and plural approaches to technologies and protocols in living relation with Indigenous perspectives: projects on Gubbi Gubbi country, as well as in Aotearoa and Latin America. Artistic techniques explore how social technologies and more-than-human ecologies are expressions of a place, ranging from acoustic ecology to digital archives to preserve intangible culture.

Panel members share experience on the opportunities, difficulties and necessity of combining creative media techniques with sustained cultural work and activism. Our dialogue is guided by key concepts underlying the creative presentations, including the notion of ch'ixi shared by Bolivian Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui that names the energising force of “parallel coexistence of multiple differences”, and the practice of Wānanga in Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems and ways of knowing) that represents the oral tradition of sharing collective knowledge to create understanding and enhance mana (prestige) through expert discussions and mutual learning. These ideas open up insight and lines of connection that honour living dynamics across ecologies and mutual reliance, rather than individualism and colonial extraction.

The Ecoimaginaries theme began as a hybrid programme at Schumacher College in Devon, UK - 'Ecologies, Technologies' - linked to the MA in Ecological Design Thinking. The work now grows and deepens in Aotearoa with artists and technologists across the Intercreate network honouring wisdom from the learning spaces of where wānanga in pre-colonial Aotearoa that emphasised a mutual responsibility to listen to and nurture the living fabric that supports us:

“It was the preoccupation of the whare wānanga to view the world as a music, a singing, as ‘rhythmical patterns of pure energy’ that are woven and move with cosmological purpose and design. Our concern therefore, should be to pay attention to how this fabric is woven and the nature of our place within it.”

– Māori Marsden, *The Woven Universe*

¹ The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Maori Marsden—Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Ed.) (2003, pg xiii)

Listening with Ecosystems and Acoustic Ecologies on Kabi Kabi Country, Leah Barclay

Beeyali is a word from the Kabi Kabi peoples in south-eastern Queensland, which means “to call”. This presentation will feature a body of work exploring listening as method on Kabi Kabi Country and will also introduce two projects, including a collaboration with Kabi Kabi artist Lyndon Davis and photographer Tricia King on the creative research project Beeyali, a call to look after Country and its endangered ecosystems. This research aims to encourage communities to listen, connect with place and share knowledge through new technologies. The Beeyali project aims to sound an alarm for the multitude of vulnerable species on the brink of extinction in Australia and the broader research on Kabi Kabi Country explores the value of listening in times of ecological uncertainty.

Changing ecology of sound; Ko ahau te whenua / I am the land, Jean Yern

Ko ahau te whenua frames the complex issue of climate change in a local context, grounded in the ecological consciousness held by a small Māori tribe in Aotearoa New Zealand. Audioscapes and lush blue imagescapes projections bring forth an experience; a provocation, on how one’s intimate individual experience with sacred spaces can play a critical role in climate sustainability. By exploring changing ecologies of sound, the work highlights how climate change affects not only the physical landscape but also the spiritual landscape.

Standing in place: complexity and creativity in coastal conservation practice in Pūkoro, Trudy Lane

Reflections on growing a creative project from a long-term, embedded and relational perspective within a rural area of Aotearoa New Zealand. The creative work traces the Kuaka (Bar-tailed Godwit), a taonga (treasured) species who fly each year to the Arctic to breed, and are famous for their non-stop return flights to Aotearoa New Zealand. The work is rooted in decades of creative collaborations

and a long-term commitment to this place, its peoples and ecologies. This has included for example, wading into turbid local politics to restore coastal wetland habitat – the ancestral river delta of the hapū (Māori family groups) of the area – that was strangled by my colonial forebears. Developing collaborations locally has involved learning to step away from a sense of control to allow for the flow of the collective to follow its own local tikanga (protocols).

Seeding Communication: growing a protected commons in germplasm in Argentina, Almendra Cremaschi

Bioleft is a network of plant breeders and a seed exchange exploring how open-source principles can be used to create a protected commons in germplasm in Argentina. The presentation will share learning from developing Bioleft’s open seed initiative, growing kinships in the wider community and creatively meeting challenges and adapting the project over many years. The presentation explores how creative work with open-source strategies and radical collaboration with the more-than-human contributes to seed sovereignty and better futures for the agricultural commons.

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[1] The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Maori Marsden—Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal (Ed.) (2003, pg xiii)

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Author Biographies

Leah Barclay, UniSC/Biosphere Soundscapes

Leah Barclay is a sound artist, designer, and researcher who works at the intersection of art, science, and technology. Leah's research investigates new methods in ecoacoustics, exploring the soundscapes of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems to inform conservation, scientific research, and public engagement. Leah leads several research projects including Biosphere Soundscapes and River Listening. The design of these interdisciplinary projects is responsive to collaborating communities and involves the development of new technologies, including remote sensing devices for the rainforest canopy and hydrophone recording arrays in aquatic ecosystems. Leah is the Discipline Lead of Design at the University of the Sunshine Coast, where she is also co-leading the Creative Ecologies Research Cluster.

Almendra Cremaschi, UNSAM/Bioleft

Almendra Cremaschi is an agronomist and co-founder of Bioleft, a community laboratory that works with collective intelligence and open knowledge on seed sustainability in Argentina. In leading the Bioleft open seed initiative, her work focuses on sustainability, family farming, and participatory methodologies for the co-production of knowledge. She is particularly interested in the new commons and designing strategies that contribute to growing fair and open spaces for creativity and collaborative innovation.

Kate Genevieve (moderator), University of Sussex/ chroma.space

Kate Genevieve is an artist, researcher and programme lead of Ecoimaginaries / Cosmoimaginaries. Kate founded chroma.space studio in Brighton UK in 2010, and exhibits art and performances worldwide. Her practice-based research, education and curating work explore ecological communication and the strange entanglements of inner and outer space. She convenes the Emerging Practices Working Group for the SETI Post-Detection Hub at the University of St Andrews. Kate designed the hybrid programme 'Ecologies, Technologies' with a community of practice for Schumacher College, UK. This work is now developing with the Intercreate network, where she serves as a trustee in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa.

Trudy Lane, Intercreate

Trudy Lane takes a relational, embedded approach to conservation and creative projects which support the healthy interrelationship of community and ecologies in her rural home area. In this way, navigating turbid waters to restore coastal wetlands, using creative works to advocate for globally migratory shorebirds, and co-organising events acknowledging painful colonial histories, all form interconnected manifestations of a commitment to find ways to create healing in her 'place to stand' in Aotearoa New Zealand. Trudy has exhibited internationally, and is a co-founder of Intercreate.

Jean Yern, Ngāti Tamaoho/Intercreate

Ko Tainui te waka
Ko Waikato te Awa
Ko Taupiri te Maunga
Ko Ngāti Tamaoho te hapū
Ko Mangatangi te Marae
Ko Jean toku ingoa
Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Jean Yern works across many mediums responding to themes of identity and belonging through sonic art and is assertive in her role as an indigenous artist seeking out the social and cultural visibility of Māori. Most recent exhibitions have been Papakura Art Gallery in 2024 and The New Zealand Steel Art Gallery in 2023. She is currently completing a Bachelor of Arts in Māori and Indigenous studies at Waikato University.