

## Creative interventions: eco-culture and aesthetic diversity

### INTRODUCTION

The title of this presentation is "Creative interventions: eco-culture and aesthetic diversity". 'Creative intervention' is concerned with my personal research and practice in ecological art, something I refer to as "ecopoiesis" and "ecopraxis". Aesthetic diversity refers to an on-going dialogue I am having with Tim Collins, an ecological restoration, artist/researcher at the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh – he talks about "an aesthetic of diversity" and I propose "a diversity of aesthetics".

But before I get started I should warn you that this presentation is, perhaps, not of the usual format. I thought it was unfair to ask our collective body of students to 'boldly go' into unknown territory and not take a few risks myself. So, despite the jokes I have had from my fellow lecturers, I admit that I have not yet finished writing this paper – don't worry too much, though because that is deliberate. You see I want you to help me resolve this event in my programme of work.

More of that later.

In Barcelona, a year and a half ago I presented a paper at the Waterfronts of Art conference called "O Brave New World: A Change In The Weather". Last November in Exeter at the Divers@ities conference Anthony Remesar asked me to add a review of that paper prior to its publication. This presentation is not so much a review, but a response to that paper – a continuum – another set of ripples circling out from a series of ideas and questions concerning our relationship with water, weather and evolution:

- Does the presence of bacteria in water with its ability to swap genes and evolve according to need suggest that the weather is a biological phenomenon?
- If the weather is a biological phenomenon, does this suggest that 'climate change' is an expression of evolution?
- If these questions have any validity, how should we use our arts and sciences to respond?

Today, I wish to initiate this dialogue in the form of a poetic sketch – a kind of metaphorical drawing or haiku tour of Porto's 'Common Places' in the context of climate change.

So, February 2001. Porto, European Capital of Culture. Common Places, a workshop of the Public Art Observatory. Geneva, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Work Group II – Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.

## POETIC DIVERSITY

There are times and places – situations – when poetry is needed to intervene. As the application of an acupuncture needle releases a blockage in the nervous system, so too the presence of creative activity may return the flow of life to relieve a state of stasis. The nature and degree of intervention depends on our sensitivity – action / non-action – a capability of (purposive) pattern recognition and comic timing – phenomenological drawing perhaps? Or, a capacity for the poetry of evolution – a rhyming of ‘morphic resonances’?

## HOMECOMING

I once proposed an ecological artwork for the Atlanta College of Art Gallery entitled “A Drop in the Ocean: A Trace of Life” – it logged the progress of a bacterium as it journeyed the North Atlantic weather system. Now as an Odyssey that will probably continue for the rest of my life, and more, it is a programme of related interventions to research and reveal a narrative. I call this story ‘Homecoming’.

## TO THINK THE UNTHINKABLE: A DIALOGUE

As a contribution to this epic work, I invite you to join me in considering a question:

Given the facts of Climate Change and that the Gulf Stream is slowing down - there is even the possibility that this current will flip into reverse direction - how might this affect Porto European Capital of Culture and how may we as artists, designers and educators respond to these ‘**natural interventions**’?

Before we depart,  
Tales of anticipation  
And expectation.

Dancing on water.  
Seagulls swoop through the city,  
Caged canaries sing.

A golden sunrise.  
To flow with the sun and make  
Mingling waters

The great stream encircles,  
Beyond the Atlas Mountains,  
The world’s disc

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Now, like Oporto, I will turn my head from the Orient

*[point towards the audience]*

and facing the Occidental I will search for new discoveries.

*[SLIDE ON - turn to left and perform Tai Chi Chuan exercise sequence.  
Right turn back to the audience]*

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Impacts, Adapting,  
Vulnerability. Risk  
Or Uncertainty?

Given safe haven  
A healthy environment  
A basic human right

It was, you might say,  
An accident of nature  
Insured against risk?

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Euro-dam drowning  
The Whistler tree and lynx  
Lost to a market

Eucalyptus trees  
Evaporation of life  
A monoculture

Black storks and cork oaks  
The drowning of asylum  
Some rite of passage?

Eat stone, drink the sun  
Turning wine into water  
And water to dust

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Trade winds and riptides  
Is it a crime to be poor?  
Sea levels rise.

Seawater intrudes  
Into freshwater sources  
Flooding and landslides

Whispers of power  
There are cracks in the granite and  
Cracks in the system.

Next time the cock crows,  
Global warming in concert,  
It could be too late.

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A Futures Toolkit  
Adaptive capability  
The Drivers of Change

Managing retreat  
Enhanced resilience  
And planned settlements

A handful of dust  
And three litres of water  
Knowing who we are

This valley, the source  
Of biodiversity  
Of culture and gold

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Homecoming: "... drifts with  
the rise and fall of the surf."  
Phytoplankton blooms.

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Greeting to the seals ...

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## UK REFLECTIONS

Uncertain models.  
But everything returns,  
back to the ocean

Flowing from high  
Mediterranean  
To deep Atlantic

Memories of charts  
and captains in pursuit of  
new discoveries.

Pilots surround.  
Looking up to the weather  
he saw his father

Charted memories.  
Returning to the Azores,  
the world seems smaller.

Crossing the river,  
dancing on the water,  
carried on a wave

Run to the ocean,  
as the back lights of the bus  
slipped away.

Fronts and cyclones.  
Our Lady of the good death  
or a good voyage.

And beauty is seen  
in the eye of the storm.  
A water cycle