

The Ecological Turn: Living Well with Forests to Articulate Eco-Social Art Practices Using a Guattari Ecosophy and Action Research Framework

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Eco-social art practitioners routinely foster cycles of multi-constituent translation, reflection and action, across lifeworlds, art, science, and other socio-political domains to progress new life-sustaining knowledge. This enquiry, however, reveals the absence of a guiding theory and a clearly articulated methodology for such transversal practices. A lack of a general theory and methodology, I argue, significantly hinders the education, practice, and appreciation of such practices' value and, inevitably, understanding of the art and ecology field as an innovator of creative practice particularly suited to respond to 21st century eco-social concerns. As a consequence, the central research objective of this enquiry is to model, through creative practice and theory analyses, why, and how, a selected theoretical-methodological framework may articulate a clearer understanding of eco-social art practice. This framework formulates a foundation to advance sophisticated transversal practice responses, and makes a contribution to knowledge for the art and ecology field in articulating an accessible, transferable framework for eco-social art practice. // The proposed framework builds on my ongoing Hollywood Forest Story eco-social art practice, ecological knowledge and actions, and critical review of a suitable theory and methodology. From 2008, this includes transforming Hollywood forest, the monoculture conifer plantation where I live in rural South County Carlow in Ireland, into a permanent forest. // This thesis is framed by critical reflection on and is an extension of new mappings of the emergent art and ecology field. Suzi Gablik (2004), Sacha Kagan (2011), David Haley (2011a; 2016), Linda Weintraub (2012) and others chiefly view transdisciplinarity as best describing long-term art practices that aim for a deeper understanding of sustainability in emergent eco-social contexts. While transdisciplinarity is evident in such practices, I propose a hybrid theoretical-methodological framework to fully articulate the overarching purpose and common methodology of transversal eco-social art practices. // I apply Félix Guattari's theoretical concept of ecosophy, which articulates transversality, with an action research

methodological approach. I thus define eco-social art practices as working creatively in an ecosophical-action research mode to develop ecoliteracy and agency for their practitioners, collaborators and audiences. Such practices encompass emergent transversal endeavours directed by innovative, yet recognisable pattern of social enquiry. My research draws attention to recent advances in understanding the value of artful activities in action research for sustainability from Chris Seeley and Peter Reason (Seeley, 2011b; Seeley and Reason, 2008) and the usefulness, and underexplored potential of online social media to support the connected learning and sharing of eco-social art practice. The significance, challenges and transferability the eco-social art practice framework advances are characterised and evaluated in application to my practice and the exemplary eco-social art practice of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. From these studies, I conclude that the eco-social art practice framework has potential to advance understanding that transversal practices are as critical as scientific, economic and political responses to advance a life-sustaining, ecological turn.