

**Keynote Lecture (Ponencia) 30.11.2016:  
Professor Anne Douglas**

**Leading cultures of transition through arts practice**

The title of this keynote is consciously provocative. It draws on current research within *On the Edge* research programme into 'Cultural Leadership and the place of the artist' (Arts and Humanities Research Council funded 2015-16). It analyses a handful of leading artists addressing issues of climate change, ecology and the transition to more sustainable ways of living.

Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, John Newling, Hans Haacke among others are artists that have entered experimentally into ecological processes. What is important about their contribution is the nature of the shift they propose from 'what nature can do for us', a key concept underpinning UK's ecosystems services policy document, to seeing man as part of ecological systems, less 'user' than co-inhabitant of and co-dependent on the natural environment.

The paper will explore the poetics of practice evident in each selected artistic practice, evidencing the way that these leading practices open up to civic processes of handling waste, envisioning the implications of sea level rise, of understanding the value of high nutrient crops, of clean air and water. These practices have little to do with the recreational benefits of so called 'cultural value' as articulated for example in the literature on ecosystems services. They position culture (and by extension the arts) as foundational. Economics and politics are cultural constructs that can be imagined and re-imagined with immense variability. Through an in-depth understanding of how artists actually work in the field of ecology, it becomes possible to see that for whatever is in life, there are also alternatives.

Core to positioning these artists as leaders is the sense that such practices deeply influence the ways that we see the world and through such insight, they create the intellectual and emotional energy for change. While many artists produce effective and well thought through projects, the artist as leader tests the boundaries and ways of thinking within their own medium in such a way that that the medium itself comes to exist differently in the world, creating a difference that makes a difference within and beyond the world of art.