
Preface

The original idea for this edited collection emerged from a series of conference sessions at the Royal Geographical Society's Annual International Conference in Exeter in 2015. The theme of the conference, chaired by Sarah Whatmore, was the Anthropocene, and we put out a call for papers that invited contributions on how creativity and creative approaches could enable a deepened understanding of human–water relationships within the Anthropocene. The impetus for this interest arose out of our research projects, first an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project with the title 'Towards Hydrocitizenship'. The project, led by Professor of Environmental Humanities, Owain Jones, focused on using an arts and humanities interdisciplinary approach to community-embedded work looking at uncovering and expanding the narratives that individuals connect to in relation to water. A second project, led by Professor of Environmental Management Lindsey McEwen focused on the use of narratives in relation to understanding drought in a UK context. As researchers working on these two projects we were interested in exploring the ways in which creative methods and approaches to engagement with people in different contexts could provide insight into the fluid social dynamics of human–water relationships. To this end we brought people together at the conference for an afternoon of sessions focusing on different aspects of water, creativity and creative approaches.

As researchers coming in at a juncture in the social sciences wherein creative approaches and the notion of creativity more generally are being increasingly recognised as a source of energy and rupture, we felt placed in a unique position of attempting ourselves to grapple with the interstices of creativity, research and writing, to understand creative processes and how they rub up against different disciplinary academic approaches in Research Council-funded projects in which creative practice is involved. The insights generated by our contributors were expressed to us in other ways by many other creative practitioners and researchers on our projects. The challenge for those in the social sciences, and beyond that in hard sciences and technical and policy fields, is to really allow for completely different ways of thinking and doing that are unbounded by disciplinary conventions, that involve making unusual leaps and

connections, that are relational, embedded and deeply and unapologetically contextual. This is not to say that more scientific disciplines lack creative thinking, but it is to present alternatives to the attempt to generalise or universalise and extract or abstract knowledge from context. Focusing on water in particular has allowed the volume to give space to the fluidity, contingency and relationality of knowledge. Water's inherent mutability and omnipresence in all life renders it a particular kind of vessel for the imagination and thought. In this volume we seek not to treat water as an object to be understood, but rather to recognise that through engaging with water we can uncover relational processes that allow us to think differently about our selves and our relationship to other forms of matter.