Chapter 2
Introduction to Part I. Theoretical Inquiries: Linking Arts with Biocultural CRC

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Abstract Faced with the current social-environmental crisis, there is a pressing need to undertake ethical responsibilities toward diverse humans and other-than-humans. We address this ethical imperative by examining how to better understand, value, and respect biological and cultural diversity, to achieve just and sustainable forms of co-inhabitation. This first part of the book draws from the biocultural ethic framework proposed by Ricardo Rozzi, enhancing it by incorporating aesthetic dimensions that link art to biocultural conservation, restoration, and communication (CRC). Challenging traditional notions of art, we invite readers to a deeper understanding of its role beyond mere utility, and we address three key themes: (i) an ontological shift towards a biocultural understanding of art, (ii) reflection on philosophical frameworks for linking art and conservation, and (iii) embodied experiences of artistic practices that foster interspecies relationships. These themes underscore the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of artistic expression and its implications for biocultural communities, ultimately aiming to motivate readers towards active engagement in local biocultural conservation initiatives. By bridging the disciplinary gap between cultural and biological diversity conservation, biocultural CRC contributes to socio-environmental justice in the Anthropocene. Biocultural CRC involves collective and participatory actions that respect and

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integrate multiple knowledge systems. In these actions, art can serve not just as a tool for biocultural CRC, but can also be reinterpreted as a transformative biocultural practice that enhances interspecies and intercultural relationships of co-inhabitation.

Keywords Biocultural conservation · Biocultural ethics · Decolonial · Environmental philosophy · Locality

2.1 Introduction

A pressing need and concern in the realm of dominant Western ethics is the recognition and cultivation of interconnected relationships between human cultures and the other-than-human world (Zhu 2023; Andreozzi 2025; Prajapati and Nath 2025). To address this necessity, we explore ethical frameworks that harmoniously couple biological diversity and cultural diversity to orient just and sustainable forms of co-inhabitation. In the first part of our book, we draw from the conceptual framework of the biocultural ethic proposed by Ricardo Rozzi (2010, 2013) to broaden it through the integration of aesthetic and artistic dimensions.

More specifically, we seek to understand, recover, and shine a light on the links between art and *biocultural conservation*, *restoration*, and *communication* (CRC). Toward this aim, we introduce historical and contemporary concepts that present novel theoretical and practical reconfigurations to explain and illustrate how art and biocultural conservation are, and can be, linked. Chapters in Part I explore the connections between the arts and biocultural conservation through aesthetic, ethical, historical, political, ontological, spiritual, and phenomenological perspectives. The essays include a diversity of views rooted in contrasting places and traditions that not only challenge dominant conceptions of art but also philosophically question the relationships among artists, art practices, and biocultural communities. The conceptual framework of the biocultural ethic recognizes and values the interconnected link between cultural/linguistic and biophysical diversity (Rozzi 2012). This recognition is a critical response to Eurocentric and colonial frameworks that separate culture from nature. To recover and enhance intercultural and interspecies relationships and counter the force of biocultural homogenization, this ethic has guided a biocultural conservation approach that incorporates diverse forms of knowledge, including scientific and artistic practices (Rozzi 2013).

Biocultural conservation programs have seen an increasing interest in art as an educational, scientific, and community engagement tool (Polfus et al. 2017; Markienwicz et al. 2023; Lerski 2025). In consonance with these approaches, many chapters throughout this book offer examples of arts being incorporated into biocultural conservation. In Part I, however, we offer a theoretical and philosophical focus that helps us to question from a biocultural standpoint what arts *are,* what it means to *practice* and *experience* art, and how arts are situated within traditions,

place, and community. Consequently, its exploration is not limited to questions of how art can be used as a means to an end in conservation programs.

In other words, in Part I we invite readers to think beyond art as a mere instrument. We aspire to broaden our understanding to a much wider sense of what arts may mean from biocultural standpoints. In this way, each of the chapters contributes to an expansion of our conceptions of arts, biocultural conservation, and their links, revealing paths to more reciprocal, transformative, and caring co-inhabitation with biocultural communities.

One persistent problem that must be contended with throughout the entirety of this book is the philosophical and epistemological limits of the English terms we use in our discussion. The Cleveland Museum of Art in the U.S. provides visitors with a placard for the Native North American section that notes the following:

> There is no word for "art" in Indigenous American languages, including those of North America. Though this European concept and term are now hard to avoid, they skew Native Americans' views about the aesthetically remarkable objects that Indigenous people create. The finished work and its outward appearance are important. But technical excellence, usefulness, and the process followed during creation are often at least as crucial, the latter because it is shaped by the beliefs, history, practice, and values of the maker's community. As museum director W. Richard West Jr. (Southern Cheyenne) says, Native North American arts are grounded in the communal and cultural.[1]

This placard highlights the theoretical limits of discussing non-European, in this case North American Indigenous practices using the term "art," which inevitably comes with specific metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. Nancy Marie Mithlo (2012) complexifies this issue, noting a tension among Indigenous artists and scholars between the "no word for art" approach, which comes as a part of a political rejection of coloniality, and the "artist first, Indian second" approach among many contemporary Indigenous artists, who reject identity claims in response to racist colonial practices wihin art institutions. However, Mithlo notes that growing dialogue among scholars, artists, and curators has contributed to a more nuanced approach to the discussion of Indigenous arts and artists.

In recognition of this ongoing discourse, we note the twofold risk of colonizing definitions of "art" which are deployed to perpetuate unjust power relationships through exclusion, as well as universalizing approaches that reduce bioculturally significant multidimensional practices and products to *merely aesthetic art objects*. With this risk in mind, this section begins from a pluralistic outlook, recognizing that even in the English language, for example, the term art encompasses multiple and ever-expanding meanings. Without committing to one exclusionary view of art, we share the chapters in this section as potentially complementary approaches that can help the readers develop an appreciation of the multifaceted and diverse ways that arts and biocultural CRC can be connected.

[1] Observed on May 28, 2025 in the section on Native North American art.

2.2 Three Core Concepts Linking Art with Biocultural CRC

From the chapters in Part I, we garner three key takeaway points, although the topics of the following chapters are not limited to them.

- First, there is an ontological shift toward a biocultural understanding of art. This can be seen in Tsuji and Johnson's chapter, which proposes a turn away from object-oriented "art," and in Castro Jorquera's chapter, which guides the reader's attention toward the precarious and ephemeral, as a response to biocultural homogenization.
- Second, there is recognition and reflection on foundational philosophical concepts and approaches needed for linking arts and biocultural conservation. This can be seen in Rozzi's tribute to Eugene C. Hargrove, who laid the groundwork for much of Western environmental philosophy. Consistent with Hargrove's multicultural and Rozzi's biocultural proposals, the chapters by Song as well as by Hu and Yang focus on the aesthetic roots of Chinese traditions of thought and art to explore intercultural dialogues with Western traditions.
- Third is a focus on the embodied experience of artistic practice that informs interspecies encounters. McIntosh's chapter illustrates the multispecies expansion of our embodied modes of understanding. The chapter by Chiarini reminds us that although scientific illustrations intend to be objective in the sense of accuracy, such art is no exception from the aesthetic and cultural influences of illustrators and audiences. Finally, Zhu's chapter introduces a critical discussion of the biocultural labor of artists in the advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

Each of these themes is also reflected in Johnson's final chapter, which is an artistic first-person narrative that draws from his face-to-face encounters with other-than-human co-inhabitants. Through these discussions, we also see that the concepts, aesthetic understandings, and practices of the arts are not homogeneous, as they reflect different interspecies and biocultural relationships.

2.3 A Concise Overview of the Chapters in Part I

Part I begins with a tribute to Eugene Carroll Hargrove, who founded the journal *Environmental Ethics* in 1979 and established a solid academic platform for the new transdisciplinary field of environmental philosophy. In Chap. 3, Ricardo Rozzi (2026) underscores two attributes in Hargrove's foundational work: its philosophical analysis of historical ideas, and (2) its transdisciplinary focus. Rozzi concludes that Hargrove's work inspires our book *Linking Arts with Biocultural Conservation, Restoration, and Communication* by stimulating interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches to environmental ethics and aesthetics. In his words, with our book we aspire to move "from the individual work in environmental ethics initiated by

Hargrove toward a collective work for biocultural conservation, in dialogue and collaboration with multiple cultural traditions that co-inhabit the heterogeneous regions of the planet" (Rozzi 2026).

In Chap. 4, Rika Tsuji and Benn Johnson (2026) expand the discussion of art and biocultural conservation beyond the scope of aesthetics to revisit biocultural art conservation through the lens of biocultural ontologies. Drawing from biocultural and critical environmental literature, such as the 3 Hs (co-inhabitants, habits, habitats) model of the biocultural ethic developed by Ricardo Rozzi (2013) and the concept of locality elaborated by Brian Burkhart (2019), the chapter offers an ontology which is relational, co-constitutive, and rooted in locality. Thus, rather than seeing art merely as a set of detachable and discrete "works" to be displayed in museums, the chapter challenges readers to reinterpret art as ongoing relational expressions of biocultural communities. In the process, Tsuji and Johnson provide examples from Japan and North America that invites us to consider the ontology of art from a biocultural perspective and imagine how this might affect efforts to do biocultural *art* conservation. Some of this philosophical approach can be found in the following chapter as well.

Focusing on the work of the Chilean artist, poet, and filmmaker Cecilia Vicuña, in Chap. 5, Carolina Castro-Jorquera (2026) examines how this artist explores themes such as language, memory, ecological destruction, and extinction, grounded in feminist and biocultural perspectives. Since the 1960s, Vicuña has developed the concept of "precarious art" (lo precario), using ephemeral materials to express the sacred and ecological value of the small and discarded, notably through works like *quipus* and *PALABRARmas*. Her early actions, such as creating ephemeral installations on the shores of the Aconcagua River in Chile, reflect a lifelong commitment to environmental and cultural resistance. Revisiting her work through Rozzi's (2018) biocultural lens, Castro-Jorquera reveals how Vicuña's art resists biocultural homogenization and reclaims interspecies and intercultural relationships, offering art as both a practice of knowledge and a prayer for the Earth.

The examination of biocultural dimensions in art and communication in Chinese traditions of thoughts is introduced in Chaps. 6 and 7. In Chap. 6, Yubo Song (2026) offers traditional Chinese understandings of interspecies relationships by focusing on Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism, and demonstrates how these traditions align with biocultural ethics, particularly with Rozzi's (2013) concepts of co-inhabitants and co-inhabitation with other-than-human species. Song introduces concepts from each tradition that convey interspecies and interconnected worldviews, showing that they are intricately connected with aesthetic values — expressed and practiced in various forms of arts, such as writings, paintings, music, and artifacts. In other words, Song's chapter indicates that these Taoist, Confucianist, and Chinese Buddhist worldviews, despite their differences, share an aesthetic practice and appreciation toward the interconnected attunement with self, co-inhabitants, and the world. In this way, Song's chapter demonstrates the vital link between aesthetics and biocultural ethics.

In Chap. 7, Jun Hu and Panpan Yang (2026) state that in Chinese traditions such as Confucianism and Taoism, the natural environment is considered the source of

truth, symbolizing the unity of Heaven and humankind. Based on these traditions they examine Chinese aesthetics and worldviews through plants-inspired art education to reconnect students with their natural environment. Toward this aim they introduce the Chinese art concept of the "Four Gentlemen" as well as contemporary education initiatives examined through the 3Hs model of biocultural ethics (Rozzi 2013). Hu and Yang (2026) show how art classes in primary and secondary schools can play a vital role for the conservation, restoration, and communication of biocultural heritage. They conclude that creative arts education can rewire the interactions among students and citizens with other co-inhabitants, their life habits, and habitats, and restore vital connections for ethical dwelling.

Finding a link between biocultural ethics and the work of artist Miriam Simun, in Chap. 8, Shoshana McIntosh (2026) challenges limited human perceptions of other-than-human animals. McIntosh essays an embodied, cephalopod-inspired approach to understanding and coexisting with them. She explores how engaging with the octopus as a sentient, autonomous being can decenter human perspectives and foster deeper, more respectful interspecies relationships. McIntosh (2026) advocates for a transformative educational method that expands human awareness and supports multispecies flourishing by integrating phenomenology, art, and embodied pedagogy.

In Chap. 9, Valeria Serena Chiarini (2026) offers a rich historical and cross-cultural survey of scientific illustration, showing us the vital role of illustrators in sciences and biocultural conservation. Although illustration intends to be scientifically accurate, Chiarini reveals that illustrators' cultural and aesthetic perspectives influence their art execution and illustrations; illustrators both intentionally and unintentionally have taken an active role of biocultural interpretation and communication of scientific understandings. Given this, Chiarini focuses on examples of how illustrators, including herself, can visually represent otherwise invisible things, such as connections between the 3Hs (co-inhabitants, habits, and habitats) and other-than-human animal perspectives (Rozzi 2012), which are essential for biocultural conservation and communication.

Danqiong Zhu (2026) undertakes a different approach by critically examining how artistic practices of knowledge might change, given the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI). In Chap. 10, Zhu (2026) challenges us to revisit the biophysical links between artists and their biocultural landscapes. Drawing from a biocultural account of labor, in which biophysical and cultural-symbolic practices are linked as artists produce their artwork, the chapter argues that artwork produced by generative AI conceals the connections between artists and their environment (as well as the labor that connects them), and may even discourage specific, direct biocultural connections for viewers and artists. Zhu's chapter both explicitly and implicitly provokes the readers to question what it means to *do* art at all as a human.

Part I closes with Benn Johnson's first-person narrative about a journey to the Cape Horn Biosphere Reserve to reflect on some of the philosophical themes within the chapter. Inspired by the different aesthetic experiences of Magellanic Woodpecker, Black-faced Ibis, skua, and Mirror-winged Gulls *in situ*, in Chap. 11, Johnson (2026) explores what it might mean to begin to think about co-inhabitants not as mere specimens, but as related, precarious, and active parts of biocultural

expression. Throughout Johnson's essay we see how experiencing other-than-human beings can shift one's perspective, occasionally lending to objectification of the other or the self, and at other times lending to a deeper understanding of the relationality and ethical weight of being a part of biocultural expression. Various species, including birds, mosses, and lichens of the Cape Horn region of Chile, resist becoming mere things through their unique expressions.

In an era marked by trans-disciplinarity and trans-culturalism (Prajapati and Nath 2025), Part I introduces harmonious reconciliations between cultural and biological diversity. We acknowledge that there are already manifold personal and collective initiatives committed to better understanding, valuing, and defending life and its biocultural diversity. These initiatives are led by courageous leaders of Indigenous and other local communities as well as artists and scientists that transcend their specialties to embrace a genuine sense of socio-environmental justice.

These biocultural conservation, restoration, and communication (CRC) initiatives have been largely underrepresented by the media, formal education, and the prevailing culture of global society (Rozzi 2019; Georgiadou et al. 2020; Tauro and Rozzi 2025). We hope that chapters in Part I motivate readers to search for biocultural CRC initiatives in their own localities and regions of the world. In this way, we can contribute to transforming a uniform Anthropocene into a multifaceted era that nurtures multiple aspects of biocultural ethics, including collaborations among artists, scientists, philosophers, and local people. In short, our book *Linking Arts with Biocultural Conservation, Restoration, and Communication* aims to stimulate collective work for biocultural conservation that is fostered by multiple cultural traditions that co-inhabit the heterogeneous regions of the planet.

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