

Thorny questions identified and discussed at the CEAH September Symposium
12 September 2013, University of Exeter, Penryn, Cornwall

- What are the alternatives to the “PR for the sciences” model of environmental humanities?
- Are arts and humanities researchers really better communicators than scientists?
- How can we develop the public understanding of the humanities in a comparable way to the public understanding of science?
- Can we play a role in highlighting the provisionality of scientific ‘fact’? If so, how do we balance an acceptance of science as a realist basis on which to proceed with a questioning of its provisionality?
- The arts/humanities and the sciences may not share solutions to problems, but can they enrich each others’ questions?
- Can we name any examples of how engagement with the arts and humanities has changed methods or questions in scientific research?
- Do the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities hold fundamentally different perspectives on what people are *like*?
- What level of compromise is needed on all sides to enable a productive conversation between science, social science and arts and humanities approaches? Intellectual/theoretical purity can’t be sustained, but can how far will we go to make what we do accessible/useful to others?
- Can an understanding of the deep past be used as a political intervention in debates today? Do we have an obligation to acknowledge historical specificity and the claims of the past, when we turn to the past in the present?
- How should we address issues of translation in environmental humanities, across (national) borders, in relation to language and concepts of the environment?
- Is there anything really new about the ‘environmental humanities’? How does/should this emerging field position itself in relation to the extended genealogy of humanistic scholarship on the environment?
- The coining of the term Anthropocene came from a couple of environmental scientists who were aware that it had no scientific basis but was simply a means to raise public awareness of environmental change. So does the term Anthropocene in effect still privilege a scientific understanding, negating the political elements of global change?
- Most people (we are told) don’t believe there is such thing as the ‘climate crisis’. How can we connect on these matters if we are advocating for dealing with something that is (democratically, at least) untrue?
- Are we comfortable with notions such as eco-citizenship?
- Is a world in ecological crisis more interesting to live in than an ecologically intact world?
- How do we/should we negotiate the tension between academic norms/expectations; institutional affiliations/constraints; and advocacy/activism?
- What different priorities does environmental humanities have if oriented towards teaching or research?