



ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES
IN PRACTICE EDITORIALS

Isn't All Environmental Humanities “Environmental Humanities in Practice”?

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In January 2020 Franklin Ginn (University of Bristol) and I took over the editorial duties of the journal *Environmental Humanities* (EH). The journal is the publication of record in the burgeoning field/constellation/agenda of environmental humanities, which “engages with fundamental questions of meaning, value, responsibility and purpose in a time of rapid, and escalating, change.”¹ We have interpreted the journal’s mission as the publication of scholarship on the environment that draws humanities and qualitative social science disciplines into conversation with each other without being programmatic or dogmatic.² Environmental humanities is a wide and flexible field, and we want to expand it even further. One of the specific things we decided early on was to “seek to broaden the geography of the journal’s authorial voices, readership, and empirical foci, in an attempt to do justice to the multiplicity of environmental cultures.”³

One of the conversations I had early in 2020 was with Bethany Wiggin (University of Pennsylvania, USA) about how the journal might be able to support scholarship on community environmental engagement projects. As founding director of the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities (PPEH), Bethany has cultivated a strong program of public engagement in the environmental humanities, including community-based data

1. Rose et al., “Thinking through the Environment.”

2. Jørgensen and Ginn, “Environmental Humanities.”

3. Jørgensen and Ginn. “Environmental Humanities,” 499.

collection projects, artistic interventions, and public climate storytelling.⁴ Many of these projects involve junior scholars who spend their time and energy cultivating community connections and on-the-ground programming. Could there be more support for publishing peer-reviewed scholarship on these kinds of projects and interventions?

The first challenge with answering that question had to do with the peer-reviewed publication form. *Environmental Humanities* research articles have a standard maximum word count of nine thousand words—and most run at least seven thousand words—and have up to about five images. Our articles are typically analytically rich and contribute to the theoretical more often than methodological development of the field. This format, language, and the type of arguments usually made in our articles might be a barrier for community engagement with the publication. Was this the right format for a description and analysis of a public intervention project?

A second challenge was how to actively cultivate scholarship of this type. Although Bethany's query was based on community-facing work, we also wondered about pedagogical articles. Where did they fit in the journal? Although the journal had recently published a review of environmental humanities teaching,⁵ it had never published an environmental pedagogy analysis article, despite a call by Rich Hutchings relatively early on in the journal's existence to focus on critical pedagogy.⁶ Was it enough to simply send out articles on pedagogy or community engagement projects for peer review, or did we need to somehow call them out as a valid and desirable submission?

We discussed the pros and cons of publishing articles on public environmental humanities work within our existing structure and decided that we wanted a new article type. We established "Environmental Humanities in Practice" articles to fill this niche. We define them on our website this way:

Environmental Humanities in Practice articles should be 3,000–5,000 words. This section offers a peer-reviewed space for critical reflection on creative expression in environmental humanities; on artistic, civic, pedagogical and policy practices that inform and/or relate to environmental humanities; and for reflections on and with community practitioners. It acknowledges, presents, and discusses the intellectual and practical engagements with the journal's interests beyond a narrowly conceived academy. As such, articles in this category should be written in highly accessible language. We particularly encourage submissions from practitioners beyond the academy and from collaborations between academics and other individuals and groups. These articles are double-blind peer-reviewed.

There is, however, a risk with setting up a separate category. We know that the history of the fields that make up environmental humanities—fields such as environmental

4. See the PPEH Experiments at ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/experiments/active and ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/experiments/completed.

5. O'Gorman et al., "Teaching the Environmental Humanities."

6. Hutchings, "Understanding of and Vision."

history and ecocriticism—are deeply activist and interventionist by nature. Most people come to the environmental humanities with an understanding of an ethical obligation in more-than-human relations and a desire to cultivate change in society. Are we saying in this description that some environmental humanities is—or should be—more public facing than others? By calling out that these should be “written in highly accessible language,” are we implying that others should not be?

While recognizing these problems with our solution, we felt that it was worth it to call out artistic, civic, pedagogical, and policy practices as publication topics that EH wants to actively publish. This issue marks the first time that we are publishing an article of this new type. We hope that there will be more in the future. Perhaps a time will come when we delete this new article category because public-facing work is so integrated in our “regular” articles that it does not make sense anymore. Perhaps, then, all environmental humanities will be environmental humanities in practice.

DOLLY JØRGENSEN is a professor of history at the University of Stavanger and the coeditor of *Environmental Humanities*. She is the author of *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and Belonging* (2019).

References

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