

Symposium

“The Environmental Humanities: Cultural Perspectives on Nature and the Environment”

Establishing the environmental humanities in Sweden and the other Nordic countries is a matter of increasing interest and concern, certainly for the sake of the environment itself, but also for the sake of the humanities. Research within the humanistic domain is undergoing significant changes. Traditional disciplinary boundaries are being traversed, just as questions regarding the relevance of humanistic studies are being raised from multiple directions, not least from within domain of the humanities itself.

Environmental studies have traditionally been considered the province of the natural sciences, in the first place, and perhaps of the social sciences in the second place. What perspectives can literary scholars, historians, religious studies researchers, ethicists, human/cultural geographers, architects, cultural studies theorists and art historians bring to the fore that may help to shed new light on the environmental turn in contemporary human consciousness? How can writers, artists and other public intellectuals of the humanistic domain contribute to a better understanding of the state of the planet, its resource base, its socio-ecological systems? What role might the arts and humanities play, for instance: 1) alongside the informing role of science in the formulation of environmental policy; 2) in problematizing economic and cultural interests, as well as the interplay of social actors, that in good measure define today's urban landscape; or 3) in the wider dissemination of new scientific understandings of environmental issues?

To address these and related questions, a symposium is being organized in Stockholm 14-15 October 2011 on “The Environmental Humanities: Cultural Perspectives on Nature and the Environment”. We are looking for contributions from researchers, including PhD candidates, based in Sweden and the other Nordic countries. The symposium is intended to provide a platform for interdisciplinary studies within the humanities that contribute to new research with a bearing on nature, culture and the environment.

Humanistic research that deals with the environment and environmental issues already exists in ample measure, both in Scandinavia and elsewhere internationally. It is an area that is growing if not yet flourishing, partly because its disciplinary grounding has tended to be isolated, fragmented, even splintered. The rise of environmental history and environmental archeology in the 1970s and 1980s, like that of ecocriticism in literary studies within the past two decades, has given the humanities useful models of cohesion and theoretical/scientific development for similar environmentally oriented research. What the domain of the humanities lacks are the pan/trans-disciplinary cohesion and wider institutional anchoring broadly typical of environmental studies in its more recognizable natural-

science and social-science constellations. We hope that this symposium can provide a valuable first step toward establishing just such a forum in a Nordic context.

The papers we seek above all are empirically based contributions from the current field of environmentally oriented research that are capable of showcasing some of the theoretical and methodological advantages of a humanistically framed approach to the study of nature, culture and environment. With this primary aim in mind, reflections on the future role and significance of the humanities for environmental studies – as well as on visions of future environments and societies – are of course welcome. However, it may be worth noting that neither the symposium nor the book we expect to produce from that event are intended to be apologies for the environmental humanities or speculative metadiscussions of what this field might look like. Though it may still be lacking a robust institutional center, the field of the environmental humanities is very clearly and richly in evidence in today's academe, both in the Nordic countries and elsewhere internationally, and as such it is certainly beyond the need for any such justification. It may also be worth noting that the green turn in contemporary thought includes a wide range of questions that certainly include but also extend beyond considerations of material spaces / physical environments.

A selection of papers from the symposium will appear in an anthology edited by Steven Hartman, Anna Storm and Sverker Sörlin, to be published by a leading Swedish publisher. The editors' aim is to introduce the environmental humanities in Sweden and the other Nordic countries to a broader public, including but by no means limited to the academic research community.

The designated languages of the symposium will be Scandinavian (predominantly Swedish) and English. A limited number of papers may be translated from languages other than Swedish for inclusion in the anthology. Papers should be 5000-7000 words in length. An initial draft will be circulated before the symposium, and a final version will be submitted by early spring 2012.

You are invited to submit your abstract (no more than 250 words) and a short CV to Susanna Lidström, suslid@kth.se, no later than 2 May 2011. If you have any questions, please contact Steven Hartman, hartman@kth.se. You will be notified regarding the acceptance of your proposal by the end of May 2011. The deadline for submission of preliminary drafts of accepted papers for circulation among the other symposium participants is 23 September 2011.

The symposium "Environmental Humanities: Cultural Perspectives on Nature and the Environment" is organized by the Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES) in cooperation with the Division for the History of Science and Technology, at KTH Royal Institute of Technology and CEMUS and the Department of English at Uppsala University.