

Theorising Research Ecologies? An Environmental Humanities Symposium

Date: 11th April 2024 **Time:** 9am – 5pm (UTC Dublin time)

Venue: Seminar Room H204, UCD Humanities Institute **Format:** Hybrid

Organiser: Ashley Cahillane (ashley.cahillane@ucd.ie), UCD School of English, Drama, and Film, and UCD Earth Institute

Keynote speakers: Dr Michelle Bastian and Dr Sam Solnick

How can the environmental humanities expand to consider ‘research environment’ as a form of environment? How do factors such as location, networking, and working conditions matter when it comes to the environmental critic? Does turning an environmental humanities lens to our laptops, desks, or travel choices augment or hinder our practice?

There is a growing desire amongst researchers of all disciplines to reduce the harmful emissions produced by research travel, fieldwork, and equipment. Yet, this decarbonisation effort needs to be collective and structural in order to be just and effective. How can the environmental humanities contribute to such an effort? Could the field, for example, analyse the “energy unconscious” (Yaegar 2011) of academia, highlighting how it is wedded to fossil fuel infrastructure and subjectivities? Initiating research of this kind, the Low Carbon Methods Network ask provocatively: “How does carbon structurally shape conditions of knowledge production, and what possibilities for transition might it foreclose?” (Webb Jekanowski et al. 2022). As well as critiquing structures of knowledge production, can the environmental humanities use speculative or utopian methods to imagine new, more just paradigms of research practice? Could a focus on research ecologies through ecomimesis (Morton 2009) help to stimulate more mindful consideration of research materials and processes when devising research projects?

And how might a consideration of ‘research environments’ enhance the environmental humanities by bringing together process and outcome, as well as theory and practice? How might it inculcate more ecological modes of thinking and working which also include social justice for researchers? For example, does attunement to work spaces foster attunement to worker’s rights? Or attunement to politics of gender, race, age, class, and ability (among other categories) as they play out in knowledge production? How can ‘research environments’ encourage us to focus on the immediate, the practical, and the political?

Of course, too much of a focus on ‘research environments’ may induce myopia, angst, or risk (for the precariously employed). It may also upset work/life separation. Is it worth putting ‘research environments’ under analysis, even if only fleetingly, occasionally, provocatively? What are the personal, intellectual, and professional costs? Is it worth it?

This symposium will gather researchers interested in the intersections of humanities research and the environment. **Free to attend in-person or online.** Due to our focus on research environments, we will reflect on questions of location, accessibility, and travel when it comes to networking on local, national, and global scales. Through a day of discussions, presentations, and provocations, the event will advance environmental humanities discourse in new place-based and politically-engaged directions.

Discussion may include (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- Place-based methodologies
- Navigating scales, such as local, national, and global
- Feminist approaches, such as ecofeminism, positionality, intersectionality, embodiment, or social reproduction theory
- Trends and trajectories of Environmental Humanities
- Travel, infrastructure, or energy
- The environmental impact of research itself, e.g. emissions, data storage, travel
- Environments and Disability Studies
- Digital spaces and technology
- Spatial theory and spatial (in)justice
- Minority language/culture contexts
- Economic precarity
- Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research
- Practice- and arts-based research
- Covid-19 precedents, experiences, and legacies
- The representation of research/ researchers and work/workers in culture

A collaboration between the MARBEFES project on Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (Ashley Cahillane): <https://marbefes.eu/> and the Cultural Imaginaries of Just Transitions project (Treasa DeLoughry): <https://www.ucd.ie/humanities/research/culturalimaginariesofjusttransitions/>.

Funded by the UCD Humanities Institute, the UCD Earth Institute, and the UCD College of Arts and Humanities.

The event will provide networking and ideas to feed into the Biennial Conference for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment UK and Ireland (ASLE-UKI), which will take place at University of Galway, 12th-14th August 2025.

A development of the Decarbonizing Research Workshops held at University of Galway in November 2022 (Laoighseach Ní Choistealbha and Ashley Cahillane): <https://mooreinstitute.ie/2023/01/24/incorporation-support-equity-reflections-on-decarbonizing-research-methods-2/>.

To register: <https://forms.gle/zNeod87z3Fcm37tL7>

