

University of Melbourne
School of Historical and Philosophical Studies

HISTORY BROWN BAG SEMINAR

Thursday, 6th April, 1pm

Room 353, Interactive Cinema Space

Arts West Building, North Wing

What are the humanities doing about climate change?

Libby Robin
Australian National University

Climate change used to be a problem for ‘scientists’. Then it became a problem for policy-makers. It is now undoubtedly here, and it constitutes the biggest problem for survival of life as we know it on the planet, for both humans and non-human others. If the phenomenon is limited to science, its ethical and justice dimensions can be ignored, along with its implications for economics and business interests. New initiatives under the umbrella of ‘environmental humanities’ are springing up in universities, museums, and cultural institutions across the western world to work collaboratively with science and business interests. One of the key words in the debate is ‘the Anthropocene’. This talk will consider the history of the rise of the Anthropocene idea in Earth Science and its power as a metaphor to engage the environmental humanities. Adapting to already changing climates and mitigating conditions that might lead to further environmental change requires courage and moral engagement, and responses at local, regional and planetary scales. The environmental humanities are particularly attuned to the personal scale, fostering individual responsibility and hope for alternative, positive futures.

Libby Robin FAHA, PhD (Melbourne), is Professor in the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University. She has worked with museums and environmental humanities initiatives in Australia, Germany, Sweden, the UK and elsewhere. Her current project is about scale: “Localising the Anthropocene: Australia in the Age of Humans”. Recent books include *Curating the Future: Museums, Communities and Climate Change* (Routledge, 2017, with Jennifer Newell and Kirsten Wehner), *Natural Resources and Environmental Justice* (CSIRO Publishing, 2017, with Anna Lukasiewicz and colleagues), and with Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, *The Future of Nature: Documents of Environmental Change* (Yale University Press, 2013) and *The Environment: A History* (forthcoming, 2018).