

Título de la ponencia: “Immanence, Negotiation, Emergence – Theoretical Nodes in Environmental History”.

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Resumen: Any scholarly field grows and strengthens itself through conceptual crafting and, despite our frequent reluctance to speak out on our theoretical frameworks, Environmental History is no exception. Of course, like historians in other subfields, environmental historians have a traditional – and completely justifiable – crave for the empirical. Since the first theoretical discussions in the late 1980s, voices like that of Donald Worster (1987, p. 253) broke out on the floor to alert us that “theory can become so abstract that it loses touch with the empirical reality that has always been the historian's first devotion. It can end up obscuring or distorting the incredible variety of experience.” The typical attitude of historians is to *embed generalizations within narratives*, rather than the other way around, which is the common procedure in social science. As empirical explanation is our chief objective, we resort to whatever conceptual reasonings, including mosaics of them, that help us make sense of the spatiotemporal continuities and discontinuities in our data. Therefore, theoretical work in our field, while of course setting out to do what any theory does (i.e. congeal the field's findings into general concepts), must strive to be “nodal,” that is, to be focal signifying points for interpreting the most diverse empirical materials, as well as articulative as much as possible with other zones in the broader theoretical landscape including both the humanities and the sciences. In order to assist in the construction of a theoretically-based research agenda, I propose here three such conceptual nodes: immanence, negotiation, and emergence. Immanence refers to the lack of an absolute, pre-existing “ground” for human life – or any life, for that matter. We walk, we erect our homes, we make a living, and we develop ideas and cultures not on top of some sort of “ontological floor,” but by tending to and being tended by the bodies that surround us, some of them animate and some not, some solid and some other liquid and gaseous. To inhabit is to make oneself available to be inhabited. Mutual inhabitation weaves assemblages which are both the container and content of life. Negotiation alludes to the human “conversation with a larger world, both animate and inanimate, about the possibilities of existence,” to use Linda Nash's (2005) formulation. Humans never get everything they want, precisely the way they want it, out of their relations with nonhumans. The only way forward – that is, the only way history as we know it is actually made – is through compromise, acknowledgedly or not. This means that natural entities – humans evidently included – are uninterruptedly *becoming* as they couple themselves and their activities with the activities of other entities with which they cross paths. The basic meaning of emergence, here, is attached to the radical geo-historicity of all earthly things, whose character is never given in advance, but *are constituted as they make their way through the world*.