

Editorial

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2021 has been *Lagoonscapes's* first year of activity. Having passed the 'experimental phase' of the first issue, this second number delves decidedly into the multiple facets of the Environmental Humanities debate. The volume is dedicated to a conference that was held at Ca' Foscari University on 28-29 September 2020. The prestigious Venetian sixteenth-century *aula magna*, the lecture hall, embellished with antique stuccos and Murano chandeliers, hosted an international meeting of scholars, at a very particular historical moment: the first pandemic wave of SARS-CoV2. There was not yet full awareness of the duration of the emergency on the world scene; therefore, almost as in an unreal stillness before the storm, the works took place at the prelude to what would later be called the second wave, with its subsequent lockdown period. The conference, dedicated to Environmental Studies from a multidisciplinary perspective, was entitled *Humanities, Ecocriticism and Multispecies Relations*¹ and today we can say that it was undoubtedly a shining example of the energy that animates our academic debate. More than resilience, which above all today seems to indicate a passive resistance, the participants have witnessed a great desire to meet, to compare their research experiences, trying to develop new philosophies capable of interpreting the role that our species should play in the planet we live on. The very strict rules imposed by the "COVID-19 Risk Management Protocol

1 The event was realised thanks to the funds and collaboration of the Department of Asian and North African Studies, the International Center for the Humanities and Social Change of University Ca' Foscari of Venice, and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures of the University of Turin.

and Plan to Mitigate Transmission in the Workplace” challenged all the speakers to demonstrate that being present in the academy is an important testimony to the fact that scientific research must always be at the forefront, even in a time of global disorientation. From a purely technical point of view, in the days of the conference, Ca’ Foscari hosted twenty speakers, and the organisers managed about two hundred seats booked in rotation, having two hundred more guests attending remotely the sessions. Finally, fifteen hours of video footage were produced. Probably today this is not an exceptional outcome, but until a few months ago we were not so used to the so-called ‘dual mode’ of organising conferences; moreover, the event was still significant since it has been the only one held in presence at the University of Venice between the first and second lockdowns.

The concept note of the event, whose proceedings *Lagoonscapes* is delighted to offer to its readers in two dedicated issues, proposed a sort of journey around the world through cultures, in particular of indigenous peoples native to Asia, Oceania, Northern Europe and the Americas.

The first of these two issues opens with a general reflection on the contribution of anthropological disciplines to the wider world debate on Environmental Humanities. As the editors Stefano Beggiora and Lia Zola explain in their introduction, an important divide in the history of the discipline was the so-called ontological turn, which imposed on both, its admirers and its detractors, the need for a new relational approach between humans and everything around them: the paradigm of multispecies relations. It is a non-anthropocentric approach that imposes new cosmovisions, perceptions of the territory, but above all a system of incorporation of non-human beings into a dimension of kinships and interaction with otherness.

The entire first section of the volume is therefore dedicated to South Asia. The first article is proposed by Davide Torri and consists of ethnographic research on the roof of the world: the Nepalese Himalayas. In one of the richest regions on the planet in terms of biological and cultural diversity, a web of connections between humans and non-humans emerges through the ontologies of indigenous minorities, as well as through practices and discourses of shamanic religious specialists. In the second article, Stefano Beggiora analyses the most timely issues of contemporary ecocriticism in classical Indian literature, with particular reference to the great epics of the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*. Beggiora demonstrates how a new philosophy in response to the environmental crisis can be deduced from comparable moments of turmoil and change characterising the religiosity and spirituality of ancient India. Uwe Skoda, on the other hand, proposes an extremely topical subject for the entire Indian Subcontinent (and beyond), namely the drastic increase in mining and quarrying activities, clashing with the resistance movements of

indigenous minorities (*ādivāsī*) and environmental protection movements. The research is halfway between the historical-religious and the ethnographic investigation and proposes a case study in the Odisha region: here what is a resource for some, for others is a source and reason for life; whereas some see homologation and development, others see the loss of the sacredness of the territory, displacement of communities, and cultural genocide.

The fourth article shifts our perspective to Islamic religiosity, in contiguity with India for its Muslim traditions, but with particular reference to the Arab world. Ida Zilio-Grandi reminds us that in this scenario the ecological theme is pivotal, but it has too often been ignored by Western scholars, generally due to a relatively poor access to the means of communications rather than to the texts, in any case both in the Arabic languages. On the other hand, the Koranic and medieval sources insist on the environmental element as an integral part of God's creation and the relative responsibility of humans in this matter constitutes by itself a principle of sustainability. In addition to the animated debate developing within Islam on ecocritical subject in contemporary times, the sacred literary perspective proves that what we now call Environmental Humanities would have developed in the East (and in the Arab world in particular) well before the West reserved its attention to them. From the Arab world, then, Lia Zola takes us deep into the remote Siberian steppes, in particular in the far eastern territories of Sakha-Yakutia, a republic of Russia. After a dense theoretical introduction on multi-species ethnography, the author proposes an anthropological case study about reindeer herders and Siberian wolf hunters. In this extreme landscape, probably among the least anthropized territories in the world, with a very rigid climate, romantic clichés having sometimes watered down the discipline are swept aside, and a clear example of the great complexity and stratification of possible human-animal relationships is outlined.

Beyond the obsolete antinomy between nature and culture, the theme of indigenous eco-cosmologies seen as non-dualistic perspectives on human and non-human agencies in a mutually shared world, returns predominantly with the work of Lidia Guzy. In her article, the author proposes an intriguing analysis dense of insights and references, through and beyond the ontological turn: its leitmotifs are the most recent redefinitions of the shamanic phenomenon, the critique of indigenous cultures to the values of a certain globalised modernity as the apotheosis of Anthropocene. In doing this, Guzy makes particular references to the Amazonian reality and to the famous Yanomami testimony of Kopenawa. The seventh article is introduced in its first section by Giovanni De Zorzi, who analyses the notion of 'soundscape' and 'acoustic ecology' through an erudite and rich discussion highlighting its historical and aesthetic roots. On this premise, Alessio Calandra proposes an innovative case study about Disn-

eyland Paris amusement park, in which the paradoxical reproduction of various natural and artificial 'soundscapes' is the warp that weaves a weft of sensory elements, driving customers towards an increasingly consumerist approach. Finally, Rita Vianello takes us back to the Venetian Lagoon, thus reconnecting the second and the first issue of *Lagoonscapes*. As the author sometimes jokingly uses to say, she has dealt with perhaps one of the most bizarre case studies of multispecies ethnographies, or rather human-mussels relationships. It is an ethno-historical study of fishing activities in the Venetian surroundings. Less popular in the past, today mussels have become a symbol of the refinement of *haute cuisine*, changing the local dynamics of fishing and farming and the economy of a certain part of the lagoon. The step towards anthropomorphism and the metaphor of lifestyles is short: this activity becomes the keystone of local identities, a way to know and maintain relations with the territory, a measure of its own well-being.

Further contributions on South America and India, articles from China and the deep North-Europe and also from Oceania will reach our readers in the next issue. And now, we are delighted to leave the floor to our authors.