

Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies

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Call for Papers

Transcultural Thought and the Planetary Emergency

Guest Editors

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Deadline for Submissions: July 31, 2023

When Earth system scientists speak of the Anthropocene, they are telling us that we face a planetary emergency: that the life-sustaining envelope of the Earth has entered a period of rapid, cataclysmic change whose outcome depends crucially on how humans will act on this knowledge. This situation is the product of what Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a seminal essay on the implications of climate change for the humanities, called “the industrial way of life,” but it concerns all human beings, no matter how or where they live. Thus a social formation which conceived of itself as the necessary culmination of a singular and universal history of rational progress, and which derived from this conception the right to disinherit all other cultural traditions, has, at one and the same time, revealed itself as irrationally self-destructive *and* disclosed a set of ecological boundary conditions that are indeed necessary and universal. Any serious effort to grapple with the meaning of the Anthropocene therefore involves a kind of double movement: it needs to critique the terrestrial blindness of industrial modernity even as it recognizes (if only implicitly) that conceivable alternatives must be assessed under conditions largely defined and produced by the very way of life which it wishes to repudiate. It must stitch together a “new universal history of humans” from the tattered rags of the old (Chakrabarty).

The wager of this special issue is that understanding the Anthropocene is therefore necessarily an exercise in transcultural thought: it not only requires us to trace the culturally distinctive paths which different groups of people have followed into the Anthropocene, but also how all of these paths converge on the present moment of shared danger. That there is an inherent tension between the universalism

of ecological thinking and the actual plurality of ways in which ecological crises are lived and conceptualized across the world is, of course, hardly a new idea. Already more than twenty years ago, Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier pointed out how an understanding of environmentalism based on the modern environmental movements in the US and Europe made it impossible to understand how ecological conflicts played out in the “global South.” Over the past decade, many scholars have cautioned against the ways in which Anthropocene discourse might flatten the landscape of ecological knowledge and lock in a technocratic vision of our shared predicament which leaves existing global power structures firmly in place (D. Haraway, C. Bonneuil and J.-B. Fressoz). Rob Nixon has made it clear that for many people living outside of the core regions of industrial modernity, the knowledge that the industrial way of life is irrational and destructive has long been a matter of daily experience rather than a new insight. In a very different register, Bruno Latour’s influential “anthropology of the moderns” sought to expose the ontological premises of Western environmentalism and lay open other possibilities for people to attach themselves to the Earth. Ursula Heise has pleaded for eco-cosmopolitanism, i.e. a stance based on “deep knowledge of at least one culture other than one’s own, including a knowledge of the ecology in which this culture is situated and of which it forms part,” and argued that the task of imagining an inclusive planetary polity on such an eco-cosmopolitan basis is central to the environmental humanities. Recent forays towards a new discipline of “geoanthropology” seek to articulate a general framework for understanding the coevolutionary dynamics which tie human communities to their geobiological environments, dynamics to which the diversity of knowledges and cultural practices is essential (J. Renn).

In spite of such efforts, and even as the geomorphic agency exercised by the peoples of Asia and other parts of the world has begun to outstrip that of the old industrial nations, the discourse of the Anthropocene and most popular conceptualizations of the planetary emergency remain tethered to a distinctly “Western” imaginary. The aim of this special issue is to gather essays which advance a transcultural understanding of the Anthropocene. They might focus on the complex interplay between the varieties of ecological experience in a “creolized” world of mutual opacity (E. Glissant), and on how the multiple languages of environmentalism have emerged from “schizmo-genetic” encounters between different human and

nonhuman collectives (G. Bateson); they might trace the ways in which particular communities have embraced, resisted, and transformed both the industrial way of life and its environmentalist critiques; or they might examine how various non-Western traditions of ecological thinking can be brought to bear on the present planetary emergency. In all instances, they would address the question how the Anthropocene can be imagined otherwise in a world where fixed cultural identities have become a dangerous impossibility.

We welcome contributions from the whole multidisciplinary spectrum of the environmental humanities, including (but not restricted to) anthropology and ethnography, history, philosophy, political ecology, sociology, or literary, cultural and media studies. Please send complete papers of 6,000-10,000 words, 5–8 keywords, and a brief biography to concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw by June 30, 2023. Manuscripts should follow the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Except for footnotes, which should be single-spaced, manuscripts must be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman. Please consult our style guide at <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw>.

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