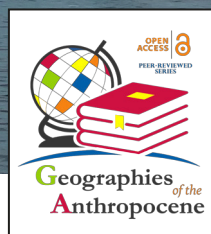


# NARRATIVES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA

*Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Editors)*

Preface by Kirill O. Thompson

IL Sileno  
Edizioni



# Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis  
Vittorio Valentino  
*Editors*



IL Sileno  
Edizioni

“Narratives in the Anthropocene era”

*Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)*

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# 1. Italian writers and the Anthropocene

Chantal Colomb<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Three Italian writers have used their art to denounce our behaviour towards animals, and more generally towards our planet. Fiction allows them to draw our attention to the dangers posed by our Cartesian desire to make “ourselves the lords and possessors of nature” (Descartes, 1637). Philosophers such as Peter Singer and Jacques Derrida had already invited us to see non-human animals with a careful and respectful look. David Abram goes further by encouraging us to perceive the living in all its sensitivity and free from any utilitarian aim. The man of the Anthropocene would have gradually destroyed what nature offered him. But what is the Anthropocene? Theorized for the first time by Paul Josef Crutzen, Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1995, the Anthropocene etymologically means “The Age of Man”. Crutzen writes:

It seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, in many ways human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene — the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt’s design of the steam engine in 1784 (Crutzen, 2002, p. 23).

However, this control of man on planet Earth has put it at risk to the point that life is threatened there. Laura Pugno, using science fiction in *Sirene*, introduces us to a planet that has become uninhabitable. Antonio Prete, in *L’ordine animale delle cose*, gives voice to the animals who relearn to be attentive to them. It is part of the tradition of the fable that goes back to Aesop. As for Erri De Luca, in 2009, in *Il Peso della farfalla*, he proposes the story of a fight between the leader of a chamois herd and a seasoned poacher; his story, centred on the poacher and the dominant chamois, sets out by a

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counterexample what not to do if one wants to live in harmony with nature. Is it still possible to remedy the harms caused by man for nearly two centuries? We will begin, based on the works cited and the Italian press, by trying to define the evils related to the Anthropocene. We will then ask ourselves, based on *L'ordine animale delle cose* and the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, David Abram and Giorgio Agamben, how it is possible to connect with the animal world, of which we are only a part, in a more sensitive way than in the past. Finally, we will try to see how, through *cura* (care), wisdom and art, it is possible to better respect our environment and the beings who live on earth.

**Keywords:** anthropocene, italian literature, nature, destruction, human being.

## 1. The evils of the Anthropocene

Because man has managed to master many aspects of nature, he has caused irreparable damage and even can destroy the earth by means of the atomic bomb. Writers, philosophers, and journalists have become for some the voices of peoples subjected to devastating industrialization and globalization but have also given their voice to make us aware of the animal distress and the ravages of deforestation. It is right that as early as the 1960s, Pasolini tried to challenge us to warn us against the destruction of the link between man and nature, a destruction which, according to him, is at the origin of the desecration of the world. In *Teorema* (1968), he shows us the awareness of a bourgeois family that has lost the true values and finds itself annihilated when a mysterious visitor with a divine character retires. The father of the family leaves his factory, and the last sequence of the film shows him wandering and screaming in the desert. Fifty years later, Laura Pugno uses science fiction, even dystopia, to alert us against the impending danger. Man is not only threatened, but he has also already destroyed his environment and caused his own loss: “In Laura Pugno’s *Sirene* (2017), a deadly sun causes those who expose themselves to a violent skin tumor. The novel illustrates a dystopian, semi-apocalyptic world”, writes Ludovica del Castillo (Del Castillo, 2019). Indeed, although not explicit, it seems that the cause of “il cancro nero” (black cancer, p. 10), attacking anyone who walks unprotected on earth, is the disappearance of the ozone layer because summer makes the sun deadly. Moreover, global warming seems to be the source of a desire to get closer to

the sea, and the house of Samuel, the hero, is compared to a “forno crematorio” (crematorium) because of his “southeast exposure”. The land has become uninhabitable, so that cancer survivors, the leaders of the yakuza of Japanese origin, have an underwater life where they live in kinds of underwater bunkers and feed on thanks to the “riproduzione delle sirene negli allevamenti” (*Ibid.*, 32), which undergo forced growth, like cattle in our real world. The world described by Laura Pugno is an apocalyptic vision of the Anthropocene.

Indeed, man used his superiority to appropriate the land, losing sight that it could not respond indefinitely to his request and that he shared it with other animals and plants. Hunting, which in prehistory was a means of food, because livestock was not yet practiced, has become today for most peoples, with the exception of those who have kept their ancestral customs and refuse to enter the Anthropocene, a simple hobby. True hunter-gatherers such as the Yali in New Guinea or the Inuit in northern Canada, although attached to their rites, now live in frequent contact with the dominant peoples and may have commercial relations with them. Their way of life is changed by the presence of people who came to settle on their land centuries ago. Jean Malaurie recounted in *The Last Kings of Thule* published in 1955 the customs of the Inuit who still lived at that time of hunting and gathering. They had only contact with Canadians or Greenlanders to sell the skins of animals killed in the hunt and to buy cartridges for their rifles or tea. Hunting in the cold was their only means of subsistence. In Europe, Lapps live on reindeer herding and no longer depend on hunting for food. When Erri De Luca, in *Il Peso della farfalla*, portrays a poacher living off the hunt, breaking with Italian society, he writes a fable and not a narrative based on reality alone. "In inverno cacciava per le tavoli degli sciatori, d'estate per l'appetito degli escursionisti e degli alpinisti, ma a novembre c'era il trofeo del ciuffo di schiena, che da solo valeva il resto del camoscio"<sup>2</sup> (De Luca, 2011). But it is possible that there are still poachers in Italy who, living in the Alps, where Erri De Luca practiced mountaineering, engage in poaching, as is the case in Upper Corsica. They perpetuate a way of life that has been taught to them from father to son but may have other livelihoods than hunting.

The relationship between man and nature, especially since the beginning of the Anthropocene, is most often a relationship of domination. Man appropriates the land to collect coal, oil or rare metals without worrying,

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<sup>2</sup> “In winter he hunted for the tables of skiers, in summer for the appetite of hikers and mountaineers, but in November there was the trophy of the tuft of back, which alone was worth the rest of the suede” (Our translation).

neither about the damage caused to the environment, nor of the violation of the living space of the natives and animals. Guillaume Pitron, author of *La Guerra dei metalli rari* (LUISS University Press, 2019), denounces the harms of extracting these metals:

Volendoci emancipare dalle energie fossili passando da un ordine antico a un mondo nuovo sprofondiamo in realtà in un'altra dipendenza, ancora più forte. [...] Bilanciamo una privazione con un eccesso, un po' come un tossicomane che per interrompere la propria dipendenza da cocaina cade in quella da eroina... In fondo, lungi dal risolvere la sfida dell'impatto dell'attività umana sull'ecosistema, non facciamo altro che spostarlo. Il fervore con cui domiamo i pericoli ambientali presenti potrebbe condurci di fronte a gravi crisi ecologiche<sup>3</sup> (Michielin, 2020).

As our impact on the ecosystem is not at all reduced but only displaced, it seems clear that we are only exacerbating the ecological disaster. The same applies to the current exploitation of land previously conserved in the wild. Deforestation of the Amazon, to install trees producing palm oil, is not only an ecological disaster with negative impacts on the climate, but also an attack on Amazonian populations who are deprived of the natural resources necessary for their survival, as well as a disaster in the animal world since animal species are decimated. Well known is the negative impact of Sichuan logging in China: by cutting down bamboo forests, humans have put the giant panda species at risk. The animal survives only through captive fertilization plans. The lack of respect for animals, since it is clearly shown in the conditions of raising and transporting pigs, cattle, sheep and poultry<sup>4</sup>, has insidiously resulted in the death of thousands of human beings. Indeed, the consumption of certain animals by humans is believed to be the cause of AIDS and more recently of SARS-Covid 19. With regard to AIDS, it has

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<sup>3</sup> Pitron, G. quoted by Michielin, D., 2020, "Il problema con i metalli rari", in *Il Tascabile*, 20<sup>th</sup> oct: <https://www.iltascabile.com/scienze/metalli-rari/> : "If we want to emancipate ourselves from fossil energies from an ancient order to a new world, we are actually sinking into another, even stronger dependence. [...] We balance a deprivation with an excess, a bit like a drug addict who falls into heroin addiction to stop his cocaine addiction... After all, far from solving the challenge of the impact of human activity on the ecosystem, we are moving it. The fervour with which we tame the environmental dangers present could lead us to serious ecological crises". (Our translation).

<sup>4</sup> To denounce the plight of animals destined for human food, Charles Patterson titled his book *Eternal Treblinka*, wanting to show that we reserve the same living conditions for livestock as those of the victims of the Nazis in the extermination camps.

been proven that too much promiscuity between monkeys and humans, or even the consumption of monkeys for the feeding of the poor, is at the origin of the spread of the virus to humans:

Come in altre infezioni virali o batteriche, anche l'infezione da HIV è una zoonosi, cioè una infezione che proviene da animali. Sembra che il passaggio non sia molto vecchio e forse risale agli anni Cinquanta o almeno in questo periodo sembra essere avvenuta la prima diffusione nella popolazione mondiale. [...] Il passaggio può essere avvenuto per la stretta convivenza in alcuni villaggi tra uomini e scimmie, attraverso la contaminazione di ferite, di sangue, l'uso di mangiare carne di scimmie, o altre pratiche promiscue<sup>5</sup> (Aiuti, 2005).

Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects Italy like most countries in the world, is believed to have originated with the presence of bats in the Wuhan market in China, but it is not yet known how the coronavirus present in some bats may have contaminated humans<sup>6</sup>. Our industrial diet is also responsible for diseases such as diabetes, obesity and a sharp increase in the number of cancers. As these facts show, the dystopia used by Laura Pugno finds its veracity in the destruction of the living by man's will of man to do with the earth what he sees fit, regardless of the harmful consequences that this entails.

## **2. Building better relationships between people, animals and plants**

Such a disaster could not last without voices denouncing it and proposing to question the way we behave towards animals, plants and minerals.

We are the only known animal to have caused climate change, desertification, ozone depletion, ocean acidification, pollution, and

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<sup>5</sup> "As in other viral or bacterial infections, HIV infection is also a zoonosis, that is, an infection that comes from animals. It seems that the passage is not very old and perhaps dates back to the 1950s or at least during this period it seems to have been the first spread in the world population. [...] The passage may have occurred due to the close coexistence in some villages between humans and monkeys, through contamination of wounds, blood, the use of eating monkey meat, or other promiscuous practices" (Our translation).

<sup>6</sup> See on the question: 2020 "Perché il governo degli Stati Uniti ha interrotto il finanziamento di un progetto di ricerca sui pipistrelli e i coronavirus", 29<sup>th</sup> Apr: <https://it.adioscorona.org/questions-reponses/2020-12-22-origine-coronavirus-pandemie-laboratoire-naturelle-zoonose.html> (consulted 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021).

species extinctions. Until relatively recently, technologies and ways of life that enabled us to transfigure the earth in these ways were understood as expressions of our inherent superiority. Today, the Anthropocene is increasingly seen not as a mark of human exceptionalism, but as an ecological catastrophe that threatens not only non-human lives, but also our own continued existence<sup>7</sup>.

That's why, according to Dale Jamieson, we need to create an Anthropocene ethic. It is difficult to date the beginning of the ecological movement, but it was the first initiative to try to remedy the destruction caused by the man of the Anthropocene. For Patrick Matagne, the entry into what Donald Worster called "the ecological age" would go back to the first test of an atomic bomb:

The opening of this new age would have taken place on July 16, 1945. That morning, the explosion of the first atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert marked the culmination of the Manhattan project initiated in 1942. [...] For the first time, irreversible contamination of the atmosphere by the products of nuclear fission raised the threat of a global ecological catastrophe. Shortly thereafter, studies conducted on the military and scientific grounds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the aftermath of 6 and 9 August 1945 demonstrated the sustainability of the impact of fission and fusion bombs on human populations and ecosystems (Matagne, 2003, p. 27) (Our translation).

It is difficult to say whether, as early as 1945, there was a true ecological awareness. This is more clearly expressed in the 1960s and 1970s. The use of synthetic herbicides during the Vietnam War, the use of pesticides and the press's denunciation of the toxicity of DDT (Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichlorethane) clearly show opposition to environmental degradation by chemicals in consciences. The environmental movement materialized April 22, 1970 with a gigantic demonstration mobilizing twenty million people in the United States, earth day. From this day on, the denunciation of the attacks on life on earth will multiply, and ecology will become a political movement in several countries of the world. In Italy, the ecological movement dates back to the 1960s:

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<sup>7</sup> "Dale Jamieson on love and meaning in the age of humans", Yale University, 2019: <http://www.whenwetalkaboutanimals.org/2019/02/25/ep-10-dale-jamieson/> (consulted 21<sup>th</sup> Apr 2021).

L'ecologia, per un intero secolo, dagli anni Sessanta dell'Ottocento è rimasta severa disciplina scientifica rivolta a comprendere e descrivere i rapporti degli esseri viventi fra loro e con l'ambiente circostante. Negli anni Sessanta del Novecento è diventata popolare con la scoperta che l'animale "uomo", con le sue scoperte e le sue attività, stava modificando prepotentemente le condizioni di vita degli altri esseri viventi e dell'ambiente naturale, con effetti diventati planetari in seguito ad alcune scoperte come quella dell'energia atomica, dei pesticidi e di molti altri prodotti sintetici non biodegradabili, "estranei" ai cicli naturali. "L'ecologia" indicava anche alcuni rimedi che presupponevano maggiori conoscenze sui cicli della materia e dell'energia e azioni politiche: pubblici controlli e divieti e imposte<sup>8</sup> (Nebbia, 2018).

It is the awareness of the damage of the Anthropocene that creates in the collective consciousness the desire for a life more respectful of the planet.

Humans today live very often with a pet and have learned to look at animals differently than as Cartesian "machines". Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, was one of the first philosophers to claim rights for animals. He is an antispecist, which means he wants to "give equal consideration to the interests of humans and the interests of non-human animals"<sup>9</sup>. Antonio Prete, professor of Comparative Literature and Leopardi specialist, knows German-language poetry, especially Rilke, for whom the animal sees what man cannot perceive. In a poem dedicated to Rosa Luxembourg, Antonio Prete writes: "Indifeso / il dolore animal"<sup>10</sup>, highlighting this peculiarity of animal pain

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<sup>8</sup> "Ecology, for a whole century, since the sixties of the Ottocento has remained strict scientific discipline aimed at understanding and describing the relationships of living beings with each other and with the surrounding environment. In the sixties of the twentieth century, it became popular with the discovery that the animal "man", with its discoveries and activities, was overbearingly modifying the living conditions of other living beings and the natural environment, with effects that became planetary following some discoveries such as that of atomic energy, pesticides and many other synthetic non-biodegradable products, "foreign" to natural cycles. "Ecology" also indicated some remedies that required more knowledge about the cycles of matter and energy and political actions: public controls and prohibitions and taxes" (Our translation).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Peter Singer, by Hugo Domenach, 2019, "Animal liberation is a major political issue", *Le Point*, 24<sup>th</sup> Aug: [https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/singer-la-liberation-animale-est-une-question-politique-majeure-24-08-2019-2331385\\_23.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/singer-la-liberation-animale-est-une-question-politique-majeure-24-08-2019-2331385_23.php) (consulted 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021).

<sup>10</sup> "Helpless / animal pain" 2020 (Our translation): Poem by Prete A. quoted by Devicienti A., in "Prestare parole al desiderio. Su Tutto è sempre ora di Antonio Prete", *Zibaldoni e*



which is to be helpless, that is to say without possible recourse, unlike the pain of man who, in turn, can turn to a doctor. It is this sensitivity to the fragile being of the animal that prompts Antonio Prete to listen to him in *L'ordine animale delle cose*: “Un respiro che era quasi una voce, fatta solo di vocali pronunciate col fondo della gola, aspre e perdute, che non arrivano a diventare lingua, ma soffrivano per questo, si disperavano per questo, gridando da una lontananza soffocata e piangente” (Prete, 2008, pp. 81-82). As in his poem, Antonio Prete shows his sensitivity to animal suffering. The lexicon of pain is present through *lost*, *soffrivano*, *disperavano*, *gridando*, *soffocata* and *piangente*. This breath, which the poet reveals a little later, that it is that of a frightened person seen in his childhood, seems to him close to the human word, “almost una voce”, and makes the poet not paying attention to rumours of ghosts. He seeks to communicate with the bird and, while silent, it is through the imitation of his voice that he causes the flight of the scare to which it judges superior to humans who have mistaken him for a ghost. The human animal still has a long way to go before it can understand other animals. For Antonio Prete, it is the animals that hold the wisdom: “Sarà il tempo in cui, deposta infine la pretesa superiorità del vostro genere umano, e appresa dagli animali la forma profonda del pensiero, sarete anche voi pronti per una metamorfosi<sup>11</sup>”. Man, because he has long affirmed his superiority, still has a long way to go to achieve this metamorphosis indispensable to a just perception of things. Merleau-Ponty, after recalling 1948 in *Causeries* (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) how Cartesian philosophy has diverted us from the animal world, invites us to coexist with animality:

Some of these fragments of matter that we call living begin to draw in their surroundings and by their gestures or their behaviour a view of things that is theirs and that will appear to us if only we lend ourselves to the spectacle of animality, we coexist with animality instead of recklessly denying it any kind of interiority (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) (Our translation).

To admit that some animals have an interiority, that is, that they can experience sensations, even feelings, and that some of them can think and

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*altre meraviglie*, 29<sup>th</sup> Apr: <https://www.zibaldoni.it/2020/04/29/prestare-parola-al-desiderio-su-tutto-e-sempre-ora-di-antonio-prete/> (consulted 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021).

<sup>11</sup> “It will be the time when, finally laid down the supposed superiority of your human race, and learned from animals the deep form of thought, you too will be ready for a metamorphosis” (Our translation).

have a language, is the prerequisite for an approach to animality. It should be remembered that it was not until 2015 that the French Civil Code admitted that the animal is "a living being endowed with sensitivity"<sup>12</sup>, giving it a legal status of its own and distinct from the personal property to which it had until then been assimilated. Only writers, scholars and philosophers who do not refer to Descartes can try to understand what the animal perceives. Thus, Rilke can affirm the superiority of animal perception over man's one as early as the 1920s in the *Elegies of Duino* (Rilke, 1923), and that Uexküll, in 1909, developing the concept of Umwelt (surrounding environment), tries to expose, sketches to support, the difference between the perception of an adult man, a child and an animal. For Uexküll, each of these beings has a different Umwelt because his perception of the surrounding world is not physically the same. For Uexküll, there is not a world but a plurality of worlds, the world being only a subjective construction. Belief in one world is therefore only an illusion (Von Uexküll, 2010, p. 43). The work of Uexküll and Conrad Lorenz is at the origin of a new science, ethology, which is concerned with the perception and social life of animals. Antonio Prete's *L'ordine animale delle cose* only makes sense by the will, in accordance with ethology, to perceive the richness of the animal world. Similarly, David Abram invites us, in *How the Earth Is Killed*, to perceive the world without reference to writing. According to him, an oral language remains close to the nature it speaks while writing is a screen. He refers to the transcription of the experiences of Manuel Cerdova-Rios who, having been captured at the age of fifteen by an Amazonian tribe, had learned to hunt by communicating with animals: "Knowing how to imitate and use the signals produced by animals to communicate with their fellow human beings in different situations allowed the savvy hunter to locate the game and attract it to its sight" (Abram, 2013). Fortunately, in Europe, it is not necessary to hunt to learn how to communicate with animals. Ethologists have been able to communicate with monkeys, parrots and pets by reproducing some of the sounds or gestures they make. Europeans, long marked by Western philosophy, could not really begin to understand animals until the 20th century. Giorgio Agamben, in *L'Aperto - L'uomo e l'animale*, has freed himself from Cartesianism by relying in particular on Rilke's "Eighth Elegy" and reminds us that for Rilke, animal perception is superior to human perception:

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<sup>12</sup> French Civil Code. Article 515-14 created by Law n°2015-177 of 16 February 2015. Article 2.

Nell'ottava Elegia, infatti, a vedere l'aperto "con tutti gli occhi" è l'animale (*die Kreatur*), opposto decisamente all'uomo, i cui occhi sono stati invece "rivoltati" e posti "come trappole" intorno ad esso. Mentre l'uomo ha sempre davanti a sé il mondo, sta sempre e soltanto di fronte" (*gegenüber*) e non accede mai al "puro spazio" del fuori, l'animale si muove invece nell'aperto, in un "da nessuna parte senza non"<sup>13</sup> (Agamben, 2002, p. 60).

### 3. Respecting the Earth

The effort made by man of the twentieth century to learn to know the animal world must now extend to plants and minerals because it is the whole earth that the man of the Anthropocene has jeopardized. Man needs *cura* (care), wisdom and art to try to reconcile with the Earth. This is how Luigina Mortari proposes a *Filosofia della cura*. Drawing on the Heideggerian concepts of *Sorge* (care) and *mitsein* (being-with) present in *Being and Time* (1927), Luigina Mortari does not accept the condition of being-thrown into the world, presented by Heidegger. She uses her concept of *Sorge* (*cura*, care), to develop a philosophy of *cura* that relies in particular on her knowledge of childhood because she is Professor of Educational Sciences. It is important to remember that the child needs the *cura*, that someone has to take care of him so that he can develop. Reader of Levinas, she proposes an ethic of *cura*. Every human being must care about the other, "feel con l'altro":

Non c'è comprensione se non c'è la capacità di sentire il sentire dell'altro. Non c'è comprensione in un atteggiamento emozionalmente neutro. L'atto del comprendere è sempre emozionalmente situato (Heidegger, 1927, p. 407). Una efficace responsività all'altro comporta la capacità di "sintonizzazione emotiva", che va oltre il mero riconoscimento razionale della situazione in cui l'altro si trova<sup>14</sup> (Mortari, 2015, p. 192).

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<sup>13</sup> "In the eighth Elegy, in fact, to see the open "with all eyes" is the animal (*die Kreatur*), decidedly opposite to the man, whose eyes were instead "turned" and placed "like traps" around it. While man always has the world in front of him, he is always "in front" (*gegenüber*) and never accesses the "pure space" of the outside, the animal moves instead in the open, in a "nowhere without not" (Our translation).

<sup>14</sup> "There is no understanding if there is no ability to hear the other. There is no understanding in an emotionally neutral attitude. The act of understanding is always emotionally situated (Heidegger, 1927, p. 407). An effective responsiveness to the other involves the ability to

But we can go further and, as David Abram proposes in *Becoming Animal*, learn to feel the earth by our senses, not only by the touch of the hand but also by the "touch" of the eyes and skin. "The most intimate contact between the body and the earth unfolds not just at the bottom of our feet, but along the whole porous surface of our skin. For earth is not merely that dense presence underfoot - it is also the transparent air that enfolds us". David Abram invites us to feel the earth and the air around him as a wild animal world. This experience is fundamental to realize that we are in constant contact with the earth, and only an experience of this kind will allow us to take care of the earth that is only the extension of our body. The porosity of our body reveals to us the intimate presence in which we should live with the earth, and this animal sensation should lead us to stop destroying this planet without which we cannot live. The project of journeys to Mars or other planets corresponds only to the illusion of being able to replace the Earth if, by our unreasonable action, we make it totally uninhabitable. It would be better to take care of the Earth. Indeed, it takes wisdom that people learn to live in harmony with their environment. But this search for harmony that is at the heart of Eastern wisdom is hardly attainable by Westerners whose philosophy is based on the opposition between a subject and an object. The ego occupies so much space in the West that it encourages us to think only of the realization of individual desires.

Zen è la pronuncia giapponese del carattere cinese "Chan" (禪), che a sua volta è la traduzione del termino sanscrito "Dhyana". Il suo significato letterale è "vision," ma viene spesso tradotto anche con "meditazione," intesa come "stato di perfetta equanimità e consapevolezza." La pratica del Dhyana era largamente utilizzata nel Buddismo, nell'Induismo e nel Jainismo per raggiungere l'illuminazione<sup>15</sup> [...].

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"emotional tuning", which goes beyond the mere rational recognition of the situation in which the other is located" (Our translation).

<sup>15</sup> Hsin Hsin Ming, S., *Il Libro del Nulla*, translated by Clarke R. B.: <http://www.gianfrancobertagni.it/materiali/zen/libronulla.htm> (consulted 2<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021): "Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character "Chan" (禪), which in turn is the translation of the Sanskrit terminus "Dhyana". Its literal meaning is "vision", but it is often also translated as "meditation", understood as "a state of perfect equanimity and awareness". The practice of Dhyana was widely used in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism to achieve enlightenment [...]" (Our translation).

However, in order to achieve Zen, one must be fully aware of being connected to the world and to all that composes it. "Satori is waking up from a dream and grasping the ego that penetrates the entire universe". This dissolution of the ego in the universe can be achieved by different practices, such as yoga, Chinese ink painting, haiku, archery, etc. Everyone can find the most appropriate form to produce awakening. But there is no awakening without a dissolution of the ego in emptiness:

Quando gli oggetti del pensiero svaniscono, il soggetto pensante svanisce, poiché quando la mente sparisce, gli oggetti svaniscono. Le cose sono oggetti a causa del soggetto; la mente è tale a causa delle cose. Comprendi la relatività di questi due e la realtà basilare: l'unità della vacuità. In questo Vuoto i due sono indistinguibili e ognuno di essi contiene in sé il mondo intero. Se non fai differenza tra il grezzo e il fine non sarai tentato al pregiudizio e all'opinione<sup>16</sup>.

Because Western philosophy is a philosophy based on the distinction between subject and object, it is difficult for a Westerner to achieve the letting go those alone leads to enlightenment.

Art can allow us to reconcile ourselves with the earth. Without being an oriental artist, it is still possible to empty oneself of the division between mind and things, because the artist can dissolve his ego in what he creates. Sculpture, in particular, unites subject and earth in the form that will emerge from the sculpted material. Camille Claudel's work is inseparable from the union with the minerals she sculpts. It is a question of making the living of the naked body spring from the raw stone, seized in the glare of a gesture, an affect. In the "Clotho" statue, the raw material seems to be linked to the body of the old woman, to the point that it is difficult to grasp what is the body of what is matter (De Loisy & Adam-Couralet, 2014). In the same way, the painter Alexandre Hollan, fascinated by trees, lets himself be absorbed by their presence. Thus, by looking at "In the Tree", acrylic on canvas from 2015, our gaze drowns in the blue matter of color and joins nature without the means

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: "When thought objects vanish, the thinking subject vanishes, because when the mind disappears, objects vanish. Things are objects because of the subject; the mind is such because of things. Understand the relativity of these two and the basic reality: the unity of emptiness. In this Void the two are indistinguishable and each of them contains the whole world. If you don't make a difference between the rough and the end you won't be tempted to prejudice and opinion" (Our translation).

of representation<sup>17</sup>. With dodecaphonic music, the 20th century musician has found a way to bring nature and music together. Thus, in his *Songs of Birds* composed on the organ, Olivier Messiaen makes the birds dialogue by the contrast of tones<sup>18</sup>. The poet is perhaps the artist who finds it most difficult to overcome representation because language is a screen. It was in the brevity of haiku that Japanese poets attempted to express the moment of enlightenment. In the poetry of Giorgio Caproni, who loves brevity, we can see that subject, natural element and animal are linked in a short poem where rain plays this unifying role: "Piove sulla foresta/Piove su mia testa/Piove sulla mia bestia/che s'imputa e s'arresta"<sup>19</sup> (Caproni, 1998, p. 772). The title of the poem, "Verlainiana" refers to the poetry of Verlaine for whom, as for Caproni, music was essential in the poem. However, Verlaine's famous poem, to which he is referred to with "Piove" did not establish a link with nature, but with the city: "Il pleure dans mon cœur/Comme il pleut sur la ville" (it cries in my heart/as it rains on the city) published in 1874 in *Romances sans paroles* was marked by modernity and celebrated the city. With Caproni, it is the union of the earth and man that is sung. Art plays an essential role in the desire to save the earth and to take it out of the damage that the Anthropocene has inflicted on it. The artist inhabits the earth thanks to his art, without the desire to possess it.

Some Italian writers have denounced the impossibility of living in the Anthropocene, whether as Pasolini by inviting to a return to the sacred that is inseparable from nature, or as Laura Pugno by using dystopia and giving us an apocalyptic vision of our uninhabitable planet. Philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Giorgio Agamben or David Abram make us wonder what we might feel if we lived, like wild animals, as close to nature. And the majority of artists do not see why we should separate the creation of nature, man from plant and animal. More than Westerners, Chinese and Japanese artists and sages invite us to live in harmony with the earth and the various elements that make it up. At a time when we are in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe it is urgent to put an end to this race forward where we should consume more and more and destroy the planet to remove products contrary to life. The social distancing imposed on us by this pandemic shows us that a

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<sup>17</sup> Alexandre Hollan, 2015, « Dans l'arbre », acrylique sur toile, 150 x 150 cm: <https://www.galerielaforestdivonne.com/fr/artiste/alexandre-hollan/>

<sup>18</sup> Olivier Messiaen, "Chants d'oiseaux", *Livre d'orgue 4*, 1951, interpreted by Olivier Latry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzLNIL9kWtE>

<sup>19</sup> "It rains on the forest / It rains on my head / It rains on my beast / that charges and stops" (Our translation).

world without the other and without the possibility of moving to go in contact with nature is unbearable. We are seeing the adoption of a pet everywhere to compensate for our impoverished social life. We have reached a point of no return in the Anthropocene: we are unable to put an end to the disruptions caused by our abuse of natural resources in the past decades. The artists, including the Italian writers, alerted us, but we have to pay for the abuses imposed on the Earth for nearly two centuries.

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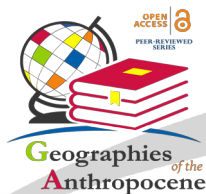
## **Legislation**

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"The Anthropocene has still the rank of a scientific hypothesis. Yet, it has already sedimented in our imagination with its stories of climate change and mass extinctions, global pandemics and energy crisis, technofossils and oceanic plastic, social justice and new minerals that are changing the face (and the bowels) of the planet. Investigating this imagination from multiple angles, *Narratives in the Anthropocene Era*, brilliantly edited by Charles Travis and Vittorio Valentino, is an indispensable tool for situating these stories into the conceptual horizon of the environmental humanities".  
(Serenella Iovino, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

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