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The Canon of East Asian Ecocriticism and the Duplicity of Culture

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Abstract: In his article "The Canon of East Asian Ecocriticism and the Duplicity of Culture" Hannes Bergthaller begins with the premise that ecocritical scholarship often locates the roots of environmental crisis in Western modernity and that it looks towards pre-modern or non-European traditions for a remedy. Bergthaller argues that such forms of cultural critique tend to reiterate a quintessentially modern gesture. Following Niklas Luhmann's account of culture, Bergthaller examines how these reiterations functions as a semantic mechanism for coping with the contingency of social forms. To describe a social practice as cultural, Bergthaller contends, is to valorize it as a marker of group identity and to highlight the fact that it could also be otherwise; moreover, to gauge the ecological relevance of cultural differences, these differences must be viewed against the background of modern world society, which has evolved structures that are largely indifferent to them. This insight is important for East Asian ecocriticism and Bergthaller's discussion contributes to the debate of the Western canon in East Asian ecocritical studies.

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The Canon of East Asian Ecocriticism and the Duplicity of Culture

When we speak of "the environmental crisis" in the singular, we imply that it is an event that concerns the entire biosphere. While the effects of this crisis may vary considerably across the different regions of the globe, it seems clear that the fates of their inhabitants, human and otherwise, are inexorably intertwined. If, for example, a drought or excessive rainfall cause crops to fail in one area of the planet, this raises the price of food everywhere else, as well as the incentives, to convert forest to farmland. Loss of biodiversity affects the ability of life as a whole to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Undoubtedly, states and other social institutions will seek—as they always have—to insulate their respective constituencies from the dramatic ecological changes that are likely to mark the twenty-first century. Regardless of their success, however, such attempts will necessarily impinge on the chances of everyone else to do the same. Such has been the case at least since the advent of the "Great Acceleration" in the late eighteenth century (Steffen, Crutzen, McNeill 617). And, crucially, anyone plugged into global networks of communication can now know that this is the case. The environmental crisis is, therefore, a crisis of world society, in the precise sense that Niklas Luhmann has given that term ("Globalization").

Ecocriticism recognized the planetary scope of the environmental crisis from the moment of its inception in the early 1990s. Although it may be said to have originated in the study of US-American nature writing and the British Romantics, it has always harbored global aspirations. The discipline understands itself as a response to the environmental crisis—in the singular. It studies the ways in which the relationships between society and its ecological environment, between humans and other species, are represented in literary texts and in other cultural artifacts, on the assumption that the latter play an important role in how society understands and manages these relationships. In short, ecocriticism seeks to make the study of literature and culture meaningful to the larger effort of coping with global environmental change. But the effort to transplant this intellectual enterprise to academic communities outside of the Anglophone world, often pursued with great missionary zeal, turned out to be a surprisingly difficult one. In most European countries, for example, ecocriticism arrived as a branch of British and US-American literary studies. More often than not, it has remained just that (see Bergthaller). This has much to do with the inertia of institutional structures and academic traditions, but the most important reason is probably that ecocriticism in its original form was burdened with a fair share of unacknowledged cultural baggage. When ecocritics advanced ecology as the conceptual foundation of their project, they often took this to entail a set of universally valid ethical norms. As a matter of fact, however, these were the values that had subtended environmentalist movements in the US and the UK since their emergence in the 1960s. The notion of nature's "intrinsic value," for example, stands in deep continuity with notions of individual autonomy that are central to the liberal tradition. As a result, ecocriticism was poorly equipped to deal with the many different ways in which environmental issues are conceived outside the West. Only over the past decade or so has the field begun to systematically question the Eurocentric assumptions that have informed both environmentalist discourse and much of ecocritical scholarship, and to engage, however reluctantly, with postcolonial theory and theories of globalization (see for example Heise; Huggan and Tiffin; Marzec; Nixon).

It is against this background that the emergence of ecocriticism in East Asia assumes its larger relevance. In the following, I argue that it poses problems which cannot be resolved by turning ecocriticism and postcolonial studies into a joint-venture, or by supplementing the ecocritical vocabulary with the language of environmental justice. This has to do with East Asia's unique historical situation and position relative to Western modernity. If the purpose of ecocriticism is to assist in the development of a conceptual vocabulary which would allow diverse groups to communicate across the political, institutional, and cultural gaps that separate them and to articulate a shared understanding of environmental crisis, then it is difficult to imagine a world region where this task could be of greater urgency. Japan was the first non-Western nation to successfully modernize and challenge the West's political and economic dominance (and, one should add, to promptly engage in a colonialist project of its own). The rapid economic development of South Korea, Taiwan, and China since the latter half of the twentieth century has led to a decisive shift of the world's economic and political center of gravity,

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such that it has become common to speak of our present as the dawn of a "Pacific Century." This development has vast and immediate implications for the biosphere. East Asian countries already rival those of the West in terms of resource consumption and waste generation; their share will only increase in the decades to come. At the same time, their ways of life continue to be shaped by traditions that differ profoundly from those which have sustained environmentalism in the West. Any attempt to build institutions that can address ecological change on a global level will have to account for these differences.

The development of ecocriticism in East Asia thus presents a unique challenge. It requires a thorough reassessment of ecocriticism's theoretical foundations and thematic preoccupations and it throws into stark relief some of the central questions raised by the internationalization of the discipline: how can the implicit universalism of environmentalist discourse be reconciled with the regional or local particularities of how environmental crisis is experienced and conceptualized? Of how much use are the forms of analysis and critique, the narrative and pedagogical strategies on which ecocriticism has relied on in the West, when they are adopted to a markedly different cultural setting? Any serious effort to summarize the various ways in which ecocritics in East Asia have already begun to address these questions in practice would exceed the limitations both of this essay and of my own expertise. Rather than tackling them directly, I turn to a set of questions more narrowly focused, but with broad implications: what is at stake in the emergence of distinctly East Asian forms of ecocriticism? To put it differently, why should we consider the development of a Chinese, a Japanese, Korean, or Taiwanese ecocriticism to be desirable, in the first place? What exactly do these national qualifiers refer to in such a context?

If these questions are worth asking, it is because the answers to them are so often taken to be self-evident. To many readers, they will in fact appear to be already implicit in the geopolitical transformation I briefly sketch above. Understandably, many ecocritics in East Asia bristle at the fact that their field continues to be dominated by scholarship from the U.S. and they resent this dominance as yet another expression of US-American political and cultural hegemony. From this perspective, the development of varieties of ecocriticism that are more attuned to the cultural and ecological specificities of the region and center on a non-Western literary canon is simply a matter of self-respect, part and parcel of the larger task of intellectual decolonization. Within the current ecocritical world order, contributions from countries outside of the Anglosphere are not accorded the attention and visibility they deserve, and they are measured by standards that are imposed from without. The flows of knowledge reflect relationships of power in the academic world: Field-defining scholarly works are translated from English into Chinese, Japanese, or Korean; meanwhile, translation in the opposite direction, to the extent that it takes place at all, is generally of "primary sources"—of literary nonfiction, poetry, or novels. The pattern is familiar: raw materials are shipped to the imperial center, finished products go back to the periphery.

The fact that ecocritics from the U.S. will probably be among the first to credit such a description of the situation does not throw its accuracy into doubt. It should, however, make one a little suspicious of the relative ease with which such arguments can be deployed in order to jockey for a better position within the field. More importantly, it is an indication that the ecocritical scholarship that has thus far come out of East Asia is for the most part perfectly compatible with the established protocols of ecocriticism as it is currently practiced in the West. Surely, it has pushed towards a shift in thematic priorities that corresponds to regional conditions. If, as Karen Thornber argues, literary treatments of environmental degradation are linked in a "conceptual and thematic network" that transcend national or cultural boundaries (243), it is also clear that the distinct historical experiences of East Asian peoples require us to pay greater attention to issues that ecocriticism in the West has often neglected. The studies in the path-breaking collection *East Asian Ecocriticism*, for instance, devote far more attention to questions of urban ecology than Anglophone ecocriticism customarily does (see Estok and Kim; see also Estok and Sivaramakrishnan <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss4/>). This is without a doubt a healthy development, and it is not difficult to imagine other areas of research where such a recalibration of ecocritical sensibilities would be fruitful—e.g., with regard to the Confucian tradition of pedagogy, or to the nexus between democratization and environmental advocacy that was of such crucial importance in South Korea and Taiwan (and which, incidentally, links their experience to that of many Eastern European countries). Still, it can be argued that what we have at the present

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time is not an "East Asian ecocriticism" in any substantial sense, but something that could more properly be designated as "ecocriticism with East Asian characteristics." Like state capitalism in China, which differs only at the margins from the forms of capitalism practiced elsewhere, ecocriticism in East Asia is not substantially different from ecocriticism in the U.S. or Europe. Of course, the problem with "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is not that it is insufficiently Chinese, but rather that the system it designates has faithfully replicated all the flaws of the economic model to which it is ostensibly opposed. Likewise, the problem with East Asian ecocriticism is not that it is insufficiently East Asian but that it has not subjected the ecocritical mainstream to a more rigorous critique. The principal flaw of mainstream ecocriticism today, I argue, is its lack of skepticism with regard to the power of culture.

It is a staple of ecocritical scholarship to locate the roots of ecological crisis in certain peculiarly Western cultural pathologies: the Biblical imperative to subdue the Earth, Platonic dualism, modern rationalism and mechanistic thought, and so forth. Such cultural patterns, it is argued, posit a stark division between the human and the animal, men and women, mind and matter, culture and nature, and thus motivate and legitimize the subjugation and exploitation of whatever falls into the lower half of the binary. The focus on the Romantics in early ecocriticism was largely due to the fact that writers such as Wordsworth or Thoreau were seen to have been among the first to question these dualistic, anthropocentric ways of thinking and to struggle for a more "holistic" view of the world which acknowledged the unity of nature and culture and the intrinsic value of non-human beings. For the same reason, of course, the field has always looked towards pre-modern or non-European cosmologies as a source of inspiration and thus the function of ecocriticism is to explicate and promote the ethical values they entail and many ecocritics in East Asia have adopted this program. They examine literary works from both past and present for signs of an ecocentric disposition, and they valorize those strands within the cultural traditions of the region that seem best able to accommodate it. Won-Chung Kim, for example, emphasizes that "in a lot of Asian philosophy, humanity is not separate from nature but is a significant part of it: there exists a firm belief that nature and humanity are inextricably interconnected with each other" (81). In a similar vein, Hsinya Huang champions the traditions of the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific islands as paradigms for a new world-view which could overcome the artificial boundaries imposed on the ocean and the conceptual split between humans and nature of which the latter are an expression. Nor is this approach limited to ecocritical literary studies. For example, Wei-Ming Tu has promoted an "ecological turn" in Confucian thought, proposing its "anthropocosmic vision" as an antidote to the ills of rapid modernization and the foundation for a "sustainable harmonious relationship between the human species and nature" (254). The notion that Buddhism is compatible with ecological thinking and can point a way out of the environmental crisis may have originated in the West, but it has been whole-heartedly endorsed by the Dalai Lama and a host of other religious leaders in Asia (see Stanley, Loy, Dorje).

These sorts of arguments certainly have much to recommend themselves. Showing that ecological thinking is not simply an import from the West but can also be seen as a continuation of long-standing traditions with deep roots in regional cultures may indeed be helpful if it is to find acceptance and acquire greater political force. However, the strategic utility of this approach must not distract one from the fact that it is also rife with ironies and inconsistencies. First of all, by foregrounding the divide between Western and East Asian traditions, such work only begs the question of why these cultural differences make so very little difference in terms of the actual impact that people in East Asian countries have on their ecological environment. Clearly, the lifestyle of the average inhabitant of Seoul or Shanghai today is hardly any less environmentally destructive than that of someone living in New York or Berlin, even though their attitudes about family, education, religion, politics, and even the ecological environment may differ profoundly. The standard reply to this is, of course, that all of these places are nowadays equally shaped by capitalism, which is, after all, a product of Western modernity, and which was imposed on the rest of the world by the European imperial powers and, more recently, by the United States. But there is something disingenuous and oddly self-denigrating (perhaps one ought to say self-Orientalizing) about a narrative that describes the arrival of modern capitalism in East Asia as an instance of Western cultural imperialism, at the very historical moment when the people of that region appear to have made it fully their own. It also must downplay the long history of environmental degradation in East Asia that precedes the advent of modernity. China, for example, did not have to wait for the introduction of scientific materialism or joint-stock companies in order to destroy its

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northern forests and wipe out much of its megafauna (see Elvin). Most importantly, however, it is difficult to believe that the recovery of cultural patterns which were either unable to withstand the onslaught of modernity or that, to the extent that they did, appear to have no more than a marginal effect on society's relationship to the ecological environment, should now offer a solution to the environmental crisis.

This claim requires further elaboration. As often as ecocritics proclaim the unity of nature and culture, they rarely pause to define what exactly they mean by the latter term. But generally, culture is assumed to function as a repository of values or norms, which in turn cause people to look at, feel about and behave towards the world in particular ways. Culture binds human (and non-human) beings into communities and enables them to act collectively. It also provides these communities, and the people of which they are comprised, with distinct social identities that, we are often told, are worth nurturing and protecting. In the nineteenth century, it became fashionable to apportion such identities along national or ethnic dividing lines, and territorial states developed an interest in promoting cultural practices that would foster a sense of national belonging among their constituency (one of these was, of course, the study of national literatures). The pernicious side-effects of this program became all too obvious in the course of the twentieth century, and much scholarship in the social sciences and humanities since 1945 has been devoted to exposing the nation state as a violent artifice, so as to disarticulate ethnic identity from citizenship and other forms of social inclusion.

Culture continues to be invested with all sorts of elementary powers; at the same time, however, it is widely accepted that people's cultural identity is to be seen largely as a private matter that should be decoupled from their opportunities to participate, for example, in politics, the economy, or the system of education. One does not have to drink beer and eat pork to be elected into the German parliament or venerate Confucius to teach at a Korean university. If a particular practice is designated as part of someone's culture, this is usually taken to have to two implications: On the one hand, it entails the injunction to temper criticism with a certain amount of respect and understanding; on the other hand, it suggests that the practice is not universally binding. For example, I find the custom of burning "ghost money," which is widely practiced in Taiwan, to be intensely irritating—it is a formidable waste of resources and especially in July, when malevolent spirits supposedly run rampant, and around the Chinese New Year, it leads to a considerable amount of air pollution. Yet I am aware that this is an old tradition which is an important part of people's cultural identity—I am free to criticize it, but I must do so respectfully and only after having tried to understand the reasons why people engage in this practice. And fortunately, nobody is compelled to burn "ghost money," so this is an aspect of Taiwanese life that could change over time.

What all of this suggests is that culture, rather than denoting a clearly delimitable field of phenomena, is perhaps better understood as a sort of conceptual lens. To describe a social practice as cultural is to highlight its uniqueness or "authenticity"—and, at the same time, to present it as contingent, as something that could also be otherwise. Niklas Luhmann has argued that this mode of observation is a specifically modern invention which arose during the eighteenth century from a new interest in the comparison of social practices across regions and historical epochs. It is during this time that "culture" sheds the various qualifying attributes which it had required in the past—e.g., as agriculture or the Ciceronian *cultura animi* (Baecker 45)—and is universalized as a stand-alone term. Now all human beings are assumed to have culture, even those formerly dismissed as heathens or barbarians. Luhmann describes the concept as a semantic mechanism for reduplicating the world: "One can still cut with a knife, pray to God, go to sea, enter contracts, or produce utensils. But all of this can also be observed and described a second time, when it is conceived as a cultural phenomenon and exposed to comparisons" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) ("Nach wie vor kann man mit einem Messer schneiden, kann man zu Gott beten, zur See fahren, Verträge schließen oder Gegenstände produzieren. Aber außerdem läßt sich all das ein zweites Mal beobachten und beschreiben, wenn man es als kulturelles Phänomen erfasst und Vergleichen aussetzt" ["Kultur" 42]). This is why Luhmann has elsewhere referred to culture as "one of the most wicked concepts ever coined" ("einer der schlimmsten Begriffe, die je gebildet worden sind" [*Die Kunst* 398]): when a particular social practice is seen as cultural, it is at once valorized and etiolated; it is held up as a source of identity and orientation, but at the same time it is also put under pressure to justify itself with reference to external criteria. To observe it as culture is to not accept it at face value, but rather "as sign for a

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meaning which can only be detected when it is compared with other, similar or dissimilar practices" ("als Zeichen für eine Bedeutung, die man nur entdeckt, wenn man sie mit anderen, ähnlichen oder unähnlichen Praktiken vergleicht" [Baecker 51]). Once religious worship is conceived of as an aspect of culture, it can be praised as a force promoting social cohesion and moral behavior, or denounced as "the opium of the people," in Marx's famous phrase; the sacrificial slaughtering of pigs to appease the spirits of the ancestors can be justified as a sophisticated mechanism for keeping the pig population within ecologically viable limits (see Rappaport), but it could just as easily be criticized as an expression of speciecist aggression (although most ecocritics will reserve such a critique for modern society). In all of these cases, culture is not what it appears to be to its naïve practitioners. Instead, it is something that becomes visible only to the cultural critic—in other words, to a second-order observer who observes how others observe the world (and who, in observing other cultural critics, can even describe their mode of second-order observation as an expression of their culture, as Friedrich Schiller does in his influential discussion of naïve and sentimental art). Culture talk is thus intrinsically, inevitably duplicitous.

The foregoing can be summed up by saying that culture is a modern phenomenon. Only under modern conditions can we observe that all human communities have a culture, even those in the past to whom it would never have occurred to describe themselves in this fashion. But it is equally important to grasp the logical obverse of this statement: modernity is not a cultural phenomenon. An essential feature of modern society is that it has developed forms of social coordination and integration which are able to withstand the corrosive effects of the culturalizing gaze, that is to say, whose functioning does not depend on the existence of the sorts of shared values or norms that culture is assumed to provide (even as it makes them available for critique). The most widely recognized example of this is, of course, the modern market economy, which has flourished in the most diverse cultural settings and has therefore been granted a central role in many influential accounts of global modernity (e.g., Jameson; Wallerstein). As Vivek Chibber has rightly pointed out in his recent polemic against subaltern studies, traditional cultures have never posed a significant obstacle to the spread of capitalism; recognizing the latter's universalizing logic is not the same as capitulating to Eurocentric master narratives (24-25).

However, according to Luhmann's social systems theory, capitalism is not the only social mechanism of this kind. Science, politics, law, education, art, and religion, for example, must also be understood as systems of communication whose mode of operation is inherently global and whose logic is aimed at universal inclusion (which is not to deny that a large share of the world's population is *de facto* excluded from the amenities these systems provide). Luhmann describes these mechanisms of social coordination as "function systems": they are forms of communication that address specific problems of social order for the processing of which they have developed specialized semantic media, codes, and programs, and for whom they claim exclusive responsibility (on systemic approaches in the study of culture and literature, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Systems Theories"; on ecocriticism and the systemic approach, see Estok; see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography" <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1115>). Legal communication, for instance, stabilizes expectations with regard to the norms that regulate social conflicts; it does so in the medium of jurisdiction, using the code legal/illegal, which is operationalized through programs that we refer to as "laws." Political communication generates collectively binding decisions; it does so in the medium of political power, using the code government/opposition, which is operationalized through party programs. The function systems claim universality, but they are at the same time rigorously reductive and mutually dependent on each other—the economic system, for example, is only concerned with the distribution of resources, but it cannot determine what is legal or true (of course, companies try to influence legal or scientific decisions in all kinds of ways, but in order for these decisions to be generally accepted as valid, they still have to be articulated in the codes of the respective function systems of law and science). The basic structure of modern society is thus determined by functional differentiation, which began to supersede earlier principles of social structuration (e.g., in the form of tribes, castes, or center/periphery distinctions) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While this development started in Europe, there is nothing essentially European about it; as a matter of fact, Luhmann generally considers "Old European" semantics as an obstacle for grasping the realities of modern world society.

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For the purposes of my argument, what needs to be emphasized is that systems approaches work the way they do because they do not rely on "cultural" codings and because they do not limit themselves geographically. This is obvious in the case of the economy and of science, but it is no less true for politics and law or culture in general. To be sure, the actual force of legal or political decisions, for example, is closely linked to the territorial reach of state organizations; however, the form of such decisions is nevertheless understood to be universal. For example, a Chinese court of law may reject a decision made by a Brazilian court; but this rejection will itself occur in the form of a legal decision. One state can declare the elections held by another to be invalid; but this will be communicated as a political decision which responds to an earlier political decision and whose effects will first of all be political in nature. These cases illustrate that the communication of function systems necessarily occurs within a global horizon (it should be noted that this does not necessarily apply to other communications systems—e.g., to those systems which Luhmann designates as interaction systems which includes much of everyday communication or to organizations). For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between functions systems, interaction systems, and organizations, see Moeller, 30-32). For that reason, Luhmann always insisted that modern society occurs only in the singular. There may be great differences in the way functional differentiation actually plays out in various regions of the world, and in this regard, social systems theory differs fundamentally from classical modernization theory. In many places, tribal or caste structures continue to exist alongside the function systems. Functional differentiation does not imply homogenization—on the contrary, it frequently exacerbates existing discrepancies (see Luhmann, "Kausalität"). The increase in complexity and incalculability that it brings in its wake makes the cozy simplicity of religious or ethnic identities all the more attractive. But the rise of such particularisms is itself a reaction to the globalization of functionally differentiated modernity, and even groups which have consciously sought to insulate themselves from it cannot but operate within its horizon. The respective life-worlds of a North Korean farmer, a Nigerian taxi driver, or a Japanese ecocritic may differ dramatically; and yet, all of them are shaped in multiple ways by that single encompassing system of communication which constitutes modern world society (and without which the notion of a global ecological crisis would hardly be comprehensible). To insist that they inhabit different societies is a way of obscuring this all-important fact.

But what does all of this imply with regard to the questions I raise in the first section of my study, and, more generally, to the ecocritical project of ameliorating environmental degradation through cultural (ex)change and the canon of scholarship in East Asian ecoritical studies? First of all, it should lead one to conclude that if ecocriticism in East Asia holds opportunities which are its own, these lie not so much in the recuperation and revitalization of the region's cultural traditions; rather, they have to do with its experience of modernity. The massive social transformations which East Asia has undergone over the past two centuries and the position that it occupies in world society today ought to make it clear that what the field needs most at the present time is a proper theory of modernity that can explain how it is possible for East Asia and the West to be at once so similar and so different—how the countries of the region were able to adopt modern patterns of social organization and yet remain culturally distinct, and why the existing cultural differences seem to have only such a marginal impact on the ecological costs of modernity. If ecocritics in East Asia were to recognize this problem as their most important challenge, they could move the field beyond the established protocols of cultural critique, which frequently pit the forces of (traditional) culture against the corrosive effects of modernity, but fail to consider the fact that this is itself a quintessentially modern gesture. My own view is that social systems theory provides the most compelling account of modernity and the peculiar relationship it entertains with culture. However, the fundamental point I am making here should be plain enough, even if one does not use systemic approaches: as useful as the study of cultural differences may be, the latter's actual relevance can only properly be gauged if they are set within the larger context of a singular modernity—of world society and the singular environmental crisis that is its correlative, or, as systems theory would have it, of functional differentiation. As a model for contemporary world society, multiculturalism only works to the extent that it presupposes the existence of mechanisms of social coordination that are in some sense indifferent to culture (and its norms and values) and which can be applied universally (but, importantly, do not require universal norms in order for them to fulfil their functions). And culture, although it is often taken to challenge any and all universals, is itself a univer-

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sal—albeit one that effectively obfuscates the problem of the contingency of social structures in the very act of naming them (see Esposito).

Before we attach ourselves to the hope that the spread of a new set of binding cultural norms or a new sense of identity could steer the world out of its dire straits, we need to appreciate the sheer strangeness and unlikeness of the fact that modernity has produced a situation in which more than seven billion specimens of *homo sapiens* coexist on this planet—for the most part peacefully, if by no means equally, harmoniously, or sustainably, and this despite their very different histories, cultural traditions, sexual identities, genetic heritage, and religious or moral beliefs. In saying this, I certainly do not want to whitewash present conditions—thanks mostly to the global mass media, we all know very well that they deserve to be relentlessly critiqued. I only want to emphasize that the evolution of world society to its current level of hypercomplexity neither required nor produced a shared culture, a shared moral outlook, or a consensus on values. It would be rather Quixotic to believe that such a convergence of minds could now be achieved or that it would enable us to control a process that has never been under our control. The responses to environmental crisis that make a difference occur not at the level of individual consciousnesses, into which better values would supposedly have to be implanted, but at the level of the function systems and their subsystems (i.e., organizations, such as states and their institutions, companies, universities, churches, NGOs, and so on).

It is worthwhile to study the many divergent cultural inflections of environmental discourse, and Ursula K. Heise is surely justified in cautioning against hasty attempts to superimpose a universalizing vocabulary onto them (Heise, "Comparative"). But this must be complemented with a better understanding of the structures that have already made world society (and along with it, environmental crisis) an integral reality, cultural differences notwithstanding. A description of these structures themselves as cultural designates them as contingent, but it does not get us very far if we want to explain their remarkable recalcitrance, their ability to produce realities that persist even though any shrewd observer can recognize and critique them as social constructions. Incidentally, this also applies to ecocriticism itself, which is a form of academic communication, and therefore operates within the function system of science (the German term and notion of *Wissenschaft* covers all forms of academic knowledge production including those of the humanities). If only for that reason, ecocriticism in East Asia will never really be East Asian (no more than it could be US-American or European). It will have to prove its enduring value on the basis of criteria that are set by the discipline itself, rather than be determined by any of its cultural settings. Disenchanting the concept of culture might be a good start.

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