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"'Down Beside Where the Waters Flow': Reclaiming Rivers for American Studies (Introduction)"

Della Marca, Manlio, and Uwe Lübken

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Over the past three decades, rivers have become a fascinating and popular subject of scholarly interest, not only in the field of environmental history, where river histories have developed into a distinct subgenre (Schönach 2017; Evenden 2018), but also in the emerging field of environmental humanities. In this scholarship, rivers have often been reconceptualized as socio-natural sites where human and non-human actors interact with the natural world, generating complex legacies, path dependencies, and feedback loops (Winiwarter and Schmid 2008). Furthermore, rivers have been described as hybrid "organic machines," whose energy has been utilized by humans in many different ways, including the harvesting of both hydropower and salmon (White 1995). Indeed, as several environmental historians have noted, in many regions of the world, watercourses have been transformed by technology to such an extent that they increasingly resemble enviro-technical assemblages rather than natural waterways (Pritchard 2011). Rivers have also been discussed through the lens of "eco-biography," a term coined by Mark Cioc in his influential monograph on the Rhine River, a book informed by "the notion that a river is a biological entity—that it has a 'life' and 'a personality' and therefore a 'biography'" (2002: 5). (From the article)

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