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"Planetary Environing: The Biosphere and the Earth System"

Rispoli, Giulia

Rispoli, Giulia. "Planetary Environing: The Biosphere and the Earth System." In *Environing Media*, edited by Adam Wickberg and Johan Gärdebo, 54–74. London: Routledge, 2023.

This chapter counterposes the biosphere and the Earth system as two notions that help reveal the different ways in which Earth was environed over the second half of the 20th century.

Inscribed in the work of the Russian mineralogist Vladimir Vernadsky, the biosphere is depicted as a global dynamic system characterized by the all-encompassing human impact on the Earth's biogeochemistry. By stressing co-evolutionary processes involving the biosphere and the geospheres in which living matter merges with human technological systems and their geophysical properties, Vernadsky's theory suggests that a human-reconfigured biosphere has transformed our planet from the inside. Contrary to this interpretation, the Earth system notion that took hold in the early 1980s primarily acknowledged the Earth as an object to be experienced from the outside. George Evelyn Hutchinson and James Lovelock in particular promoted a vision of the biosphere that is indebted to the idea of the Earth as visible from space. This view emerged from the convergence of ecological discourses and cybernetics, which acted as an important trigger for the rise of the Earth system concept. The conceptual tools of the Earth system and the biosphere resulted from processes of environing media that created radically different views of the planet. Together, they can be seen as a paradigmatic example of how different media create different environmental epistemologies. This chapter shows that the recognition that human processes have pushed the Earth into the Anthropocene, imposing new directions on Earth system processes from the inside. Such a recognition revives the biosphere as a protagonist of the Earth system, prompting us to re-evaluate historical attempts to conceptualize biosphere genealogies and the history of a human-reconfigured biosphere. (Source: Taylor & Francis)

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"Planetary Environing: The Biosphere and the Earth System"
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9522
Print date: 28 November 2026 08:00:03