

A Cultural Model of Nature in the Italian Alps.

A number of relationships are parts of the cultural model of Nature held.

Vinighesi seem to attribute agency to elements of the close environment and to stress engagement and interaction (symmetrical/asymmetrical) with them. Both men and women hold a rich image of woodland and highlight its importance in the local daily life. If human activity causes the expansion and thickness of woodland – fields are no longer cultivated – the relationship between humans and woodland emerges as being reciprocal. In fact, Vinighesi speak of the significance of the lost relationship between the woodland and themselves. This lack of relationship causes a loss of balance that needs to be restored. When everything is interconnected, a balance could be achieved.

Causal relationships can be inferred from different passages of the interviews. Different human activities—depopulation, changing subsistence practices, technologies—‘cause’ diminished farming and the closing of barns, which in turn ‘cause’ diminished human activities in the woodland. This latter ‘causes’ woodland to become wider and denser and to encroach the village. Further, the number of deer, which have replaced roes, is significantly increased and they are often coming into the village and ‘causing’ the ravaging of the cultivated area in the center of the village.

It is difficult to locate the place that animals have in this causal network. Today’s families no longer have active stables. In addition, our interlocutors, when asked about the activities connected to taking the animals to the higher fields in the past, focused more around moments of sociality with the elderly or with peers or around the heavy work required to harvest hay—which would be used to feed animals once it was taken back to the village—than about narratives centered on animals.

A number of relationships are constitutive parts of their cultural model of Nature:

- 1) a *reciprocal* relationship between humans and woodland;
- 2) an *asymmetrical* relationship between woodland and wild animals, e.g., increasing woodland leads to increasing presence of deer. However, deer do not influence the woodland, rather they are getting acquainted with coming into the village, thus, eliminating the barrier between wild animals space and human space;
- 3) an *asymmetrical* relationship between weather and human activities, e.g., the weather influences agricultural produce such as cabbage’s growth, whereas humans do not influence weather.

Fundamentally, because of the way they attribute agency to some of its components, it appears that Vinighesi hold a holistic approach to the concept of Nature. A type of holism that so far seems to include some supernatural elements but does not include the Christian god. In the interviews, this latter had little resonance.