

Introduction

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In this Vibrant issue, researchers present their results and reflections on experiences of «another possible world»¹, on the challenges linking waste management, creativity and other environmental issues such as climate change and social vulnerability. We would like to thank all the dossier authors, in particular the ones that participate in our researchers' network linking universities from Brazil with colleagues from Argentina, Uruguay and The Netherlands. We are thankful to all that answered our call for papers and brought their analysis about initiatives that aim to improve the way in which humans live on our planet Earth, a place we like to call our «home».

With its common origins in the word «oikos» (from the Greek language), both ecology and economy intersect in this Vibrant dossier. We share the narrative that there is no «Planet B» and that Pachamama, Mother Earth, Terra or Gaia are all diverse names to call this planet our home. We like to point out that anthropology can contribute to the future alternatives as we all know that the sound life of humans, as well as many other species, do depend on what the humans are doing concerning ecology and economy. This Vibrant number brings anthropological research about experiments that deal with waste and solid residue in order to achieve a better circularity of materials, be them technically manipulated materials (like plastic), be them organic (such as composting).

Inspired by Ailton Krenak, whom we met in person in Amsterdam last year when the activist, philosopher and artist came to receive an award at Dam Square Palace, we wanted to record practices and ideas that will «postpone the end of the world» and denounce greenwashing practices, one of which Krenak denounces as being about the «myth of sustainability» (Krenak, 2020). Recycling, this term, is also a kind of «nirvana concept» (Molle, 2008), in which the capitalist production system sells the possibility that the extractive and destructive effect has some kind of way out.

The articles we have gathered here show and reflect on alternatives to «postpone» the destruction caused by economic policies and actions that undermine and collapse the ecological balance. In this dossier, we give visibility to what is being created on the other side of chaos, bringing together research carried out on the basis of ethnographies on how different planetary inhabitants try to organise their relationships with materials so that they circulate in their life cycles. Is this way of thinking about humans as «planetary inhabitants» a new form of «universalism»? Or earthly thinking, is it a way of thinking of humans as inhabitants of the same village, our blue planet?

¹ We are honouring the slogan «Another world is possible», from the World Social Forums, born in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil.

The texts analyse with how humans in different contexts (be they eroded landscapes, small and large neighbourhoods, residences, communal houses, towns or large megalopolises) deal with these realities that have been as Earth itself, in a permanent «metamorphosis» (Beck, 2016). Solid waste is not just treated as «rubbish», but as polysemic and provocative categories, as it reveals the social structures that produce inequalities within different social groups and also points to new uses and creations.

We open the dossier with an article, by Mariano Perelman, entitled «Informal Collection in Buenos Aires. Behind and Beyond Crises». He shows how waste pickers created a new trade circuit related to (informal) recollection in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The author analyses data he had gathered ethnographically between 2002 and 2011. This is also a very in depth historical description about the people who were struggling to survive and to live in Argentina, Perelman could follow how they went through feeling ashamed of their work to managing a new environmental vocabulary where they feel that they were doing «decent» and «dignified work». He analyses in a very detailed ethnography the differences between generations of waste pickers in Buenos Aires and also the different gender roles in their practices. The paper also brings many images that register the recent history in Argentina” capital and the many related social and economical values involved in the circulation of materials in a city.

In the second article, written by Josefina Tranquilin-Silva and co-authors, we are presented to the lives of waste collectors in Santos, a coastal city in São Paulo state, and how do «they bring their knowledge, sensitivity and intelligence for providing original and creative input to the system or reutilizing waste, including what pertains to the relationship between technology and nature». The authors intertwined philosophical insights from thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Ailton Krenak and Felix Guattari, among others, to make a point that we would like to quote, as we totally agree with it:

(...) urgent times in which we live demand changes to our mindset, if we are to face this deplorable landscape, in three ways. First, we must admit that no agent can, in isolation, provide ready-made answers. We must therefore consider collective participation in the process of organising, developing, and implementing initiatives, accounting for the fields of self-administration, social advocacy, cultural respect, environmental care, and economic solidarity in the micro-spaces of territories (a condition, therefore, is that actions be rooted in a physical territory).

Following this suggestion of locally rooted actions, we want to bring the readers’ attention to the article «Recycling, caring and chatting at the Food Bike», where the authors Jordi Bok and Freek Colombijn analysed the social interactions in a Dutch municipal experiment. The project offered organic residue collection done by bicycle riders in contrast with the big garbage trucks that collect the other kinds of waste in Hengelo. Focused on the social interactions resulting from this more personal way of small scale collection, the researchers found out that exchanges among the «food bikers» and the citizens participating in the experiment went far beyond the goal of separating the organic from the other types of solid residue. Their text is also a report about the difficulties experienced during the Corona pandemic and how it heavily impacted older people. In The Netherlands, «the greying of society» is a metaphor used to refer to a population that is getting «grey» hair, growing older and a country that is seeking ways for the elderly to deal with loneliness. At the end, the authors included a note informing that the Hengelo municipality is discontinuing this experiment. We, as editors of this dossier, have also done research in The Netherlands and we consider it striking how many waste related social experiments have such short lives, one we had studied called 100-100-100 project (Arisi, 2020) was also short lived in many municipalities. It would be interesting to keep on researching in The Netherlands to find out why do municipalities and waste companies put so much effort in designing and implementing these projects and do not opt for continuity, even when they are considered successful for its participants and researchers.

Anthropologists Cornelia Eckert and Carmen Rial, present us with an ethnographic report based on a case study carried out in the city of Zaandam, The Netherlands, in 2019 and interviews with recycling companies' managers and workers done in 2021. The ethnography was developed with companies that manage waste, addressing questions about industrial business logic, the origin of solid residue materials they work with in the recycling and the destination of their products. They also introduce the perspective of residents and the practices on how they collaborate in the materials' recycling and how they perceive the recycling policies in their surroundings. Their pictures and text present solid waste recycling as a dynamic process that can be part of a «circular economy». They reflect upon the contradictions of the industrial world with special regard to the exhaustion of consumption practices, considered to be abusive to the environment.

To follow in the theme of projects that deal with organic composting in an urban setting, the paper written by Camila Bevilacqua and Arthur Imbassahy focus on the experience of indigenous people living in the city of Rio de Janeiro to explain how organic compost «represents this aggregate of relationships: a mixed, heterogeneous pile with great creative power». The garden Dja Guata Porã has a Tupi Guarani name and it becomes a feeder of relationships that show how a good mix can result in composting for feeding new lives, in the same way observed by Bok and Colombijn, the social interactions are fed by the organic residues that is a humus for new lives, resulting in healthier food, soil, worms and people, a «more than-human» anthropological research. Inspired by authors such as the already classic Haraway, Latour, Ingold and Tsing, it also brings the readers' attention to Abrahamsson and Bertoni who specifically researched about the transformation power of vermicomposting and the feeling of «togetherness» when we focus our attention to the rot side of organic life.

The fifth article presented, written by Sonia Gau and Esther Zamboni, presents an analysis based on ethnographic data from interviews with different actors that make up the plastic recycling chain in the city of Las Piedras (Canelones department), in Uruguay. With an interdisciplinary perspective, they seek to make visible the particularities and complexities of this process (plastic recycling) as well as its challenges and opportunities. To do this, observations from different contexts, all of them related to the plastic recycling chain, call our attention to the importance of the involved social actors, to see the sociocultural and economic dynamics involved. We can understand many of these issues as part of what Dunlap (2017) had named as «sustainable violence».

This Vibrant brought together papers that focus on ethnographically showing the «state of the art» of waste when it is not «wasted», annihilated and/or incinerated, but re-enters and circulates in the cycles of use, reuse, repair, recycling, composting - rotting and recovery of materials. Lena Muldoon registers how in The Netherlands «food bikers» not only collect organic food «residue», as in the experiment studied by Bok and Colombijn, but they also engage in «rescuing food» to diminish what would otherwise become food waste and be considered «residue». The ethnography follows the «food rescuers» in two initiatives of small scale projects called «Strawberry» (*Aardbei*, in Dutch) and «Tomato» (*Tomaat* in Dutch), perhaps not by coincidence two red fruits that are fragile and rot quickly. She describes the «multisensory interactions» people have with food and how they recover them from being thrown away and make them circulate in the consumers' network. She was surprised when she realised that the consumer was not being informed that this was «rescued food». There is just one point we do not agree with Muldoon, when considering that the «*Aardbei*» (Strawberry) operates outside of this globalised food system». We understand that we are all part of the same global system, even when some of us try to think of ourselves as «very alternative» and out of the mainstream, we are entangled in lives that interconnect us all. In one of the figures shown in the article, we were happy to see a familiar jackfruit («*jaca*», in Brazilian language) in the basket of a food rescuer Muldoon photographed, a fruit that made all her way crossing the oceans from Asia, Africa or South America to be «rescued» in an European city. The food system as the waste system entangles us all, even when we have different and local perceptions about waste, as the articles in Vibrant dossier shows.

The Gavião indigenous people studied by Maycon Melo are a nice example of how differently social groups experience the relationship to what they consider «waste» and how they classify their «solid residues». The Gavião community has 60 years of experience in dealing with industrial objects waste disposal in their communities that are located quite far from city centres. The ethnologist follows the categories created by the Gavião people when they split the garbage in three sorts: poisonous waste, danger waste, and «our waste». «Our waste» is the non-industrialised organic waste that brings positive potential to humans, since their rotting increases the productivity of the soil in the form of natural fertiliser. Same as explained and experienced by people who also «feed the Earth» in the garden Dja Guata Porã (article five of our dossier), Melo brings Gavião perspective to reflect on the impact of petroleum derivatives in a smaller scale society, same problems big metropolis inhabitants face on a huge scale. The author makes as well another relevant observation rooted in Amerindian cosmologies when he affirms «The idea that we are all children of the same mother Earth, and therefore brothers and sisters, is opposed to the Amerindian ontogenesis perspective» as the indigenous people take a lot of energy creating beautiful bodies to come closer to the ones of mythological times. Not brothers and sisters but living in the same planet house, we can learn from Krenak that states: «there will come a time that the Earth will not answer anymore; you can fill her up with all kind of poison, but she will not respond. She will be a dead Earth. (...) The Earth gets tired»². As Ailton Krenak reminds us, we are facing the Earth getting tired.

Camila Iribarrem and co-authors bring us an ethnography rich in data and analysis of research that examines water and solid waste in two Brazilian capitals: Manaus (AM) and Recife (PE). Contrasts, differences and intersections between public policies on waste management, sanitation and housing are the points that connect this work to emerging socio-environmental issues in water-related ways of life, whether along rivers and streams, tidal areas or oceans. A multi-situated look at the reality of people who live on the water river banks courses and flooded areas are held responsible for dumping waste that overflows into the streets, invading their homes, is based on street ethnography, visual records and comparative studies.

In the article written by Carla Rocha and Eunice Nodari, the scope of winemaking is studied in an interdisciplinary perspective. The work points to the dependence of wine making on environmental factors and how this production is associated with several negative environmental impacts. The authors highlight the increase in waste derived from the wine industry. It also points to the need to overcome the problem, especially in face of the transformation provoked by climate change. The ideas linked to the concept of «circular economy» became a guiding principle for the reconfiguration of this field, both in terms of diminishing the aforementioned negative impacts and exploring other related potentials. Focused on the South Brazilian context, it presents particularities of local winemaking and the advancement of research about solid waste management. At the same time, it points to the obstacles that arise while achieving greater circularity in this field.

Is there utopia in imagining, creating and putting into practice what our future could be like? Precious Egboko and Freek Colombijn help us think about these «utopias of recycling» - a theme we had explored in an academic event we organised linking our research network online to debate topics now presented in this dossier. Egboko and Colombijn registered the activities carried out in the «repair cafes», also studied by Arisi (2020). Created by a Dutch woman in The Netherlands, the repair cafes have spread to the United States of America and to other European countries. The Repair Cafes are an experiment that links owners of broken objects and volunteers that offer for free their services willing to help others to repair their stuff, they also promote - like the «food bikers» - social solidarity and bonding. All these people come together to rescue broken domestic equipment, toys, and clothes in a glimpse of how important social solidarity is. Although their

² Arisi's translation from Krenak in an interview with Tainá Aragão (ISA, 2023).

economic effect is still small, repair cafes are a step forward in achieving a circular economy as they motivate participants to keep industrialised objects and their materials a bit longer in their life cycles, avoiding them to become «wasted» and getting dumped or ending some parts of their material cycles in waste incinerators, like it is common in North Europe.

The following article, written by Maria Raquel Passos Lima, theorises the anthropology of waste as an appropriate field of knowledge for thinking and acting in the contemporary world characterised by climate change. The author proposes waste as an object of study and action that provides a privileged analytical key to understanding cities as «Anthropocene urban landscapes». By defining the anthropology of waste as «epistemologies of the Anthropocene», she outlines a conceptual overview of the discussion that provides a set of theoretical, methodological and political questions. In conclusion, waste policy is also conceived as knowledge policy, outlining a research agenda for this expanding field of studies as a strategy to point out possible paths for action.

In the audiovisual session, we are happy to present an interview we made with the director of the Central de Cooperativas de Materiais Recicláveis do DF e Entorno (CENTCOOP-DF), Aline Souza. She made Brazilian history for being the representative of the Brazilian people to hand over the presidential sash to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in his third term. She has dedicated her life to organise a huge contingent of workers. Currently, Souza is the coordinator of the National Movement of Waste Pickers, representing the Federal District, and is a member of Unicatadores' National Secretariat for Women and Youth. Aline is also the mother of seven children (Ariela Vitória (2 years old), Alef Josimar (4 years old), Alexandro Airan (6 years old), Arthur (9 years old), Adriano (12 years old), Adriel (13 years old) and Andrei (15 years old). She also studies Law and is the daughter and granddaughter of women who managed to live and raise their daughters and sons by rescuing materials that had been «discarded».

Aline Souza is «our heroine», and we are proud to have her words and thoughts registered in this academic journal, her life as a practitioner of the «utopia of recycling» brings a bright light and irradiates in Vibrant. Her voice shows us how important it is to pay attention to the diversity of knowledge, and we believe that this is one of the main contributions anthropology can make: to bring respect to knowledge diversity inside the academia. We are very proud to have interviewed Aline Souza and we hope to contribute to Centcoop-DF in future projects in the area of mutual educational exchanges. We are sure that universities have a lot to learn from the ways in which waste pickers' cooperatives organise themselves, as well as being able to offer space on university campuses so that waste pickers' cooperatives can work and separate the materials produced by universities. Universities still have a lot to do as homework in the management of «solid waste» (Firkow, Freitas 2019) and Centcoop/DF certainly has a lot to teach to universities.

The following photographic essay made by Ana Goldemberg shows us, in a sensitive gaze, ways of life and resilience in the open-air dump of the city of Oberá, Misiones, Argentina. The work establishes a dialogue with concepts from Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway, and it brings us images to reflect on multispecies collaborations and the possibilities of survival in a contaminated environment.

Finally, anthropologists Carmen Rial and Cornelia Eckert seek to explore visual language to support ethnographic experiences on solid waste recycling carried out in The Netherlands in September 2019 and December 2021. Detailing an image narrative that reports their ethnography through a street photography process and interviews with their interlocutors, situations are observed and recorded, reflecting on residual phenomena, removed from the vision field, attention is paid to the foreground and the different regimes of invisibility of waste.

As utopians, we expect this dossier will inspire other practitioners and researchers to get into the world of recovering what is possible on this planet with finite resources and in making the human and social sciences participants in feeding the Earth. We want to close this introduction, paying tribute to writer Eduardo Galeano.

He recorded the answer given by his friend the Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Birri, when students asked Birri, in Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia: «what is the use of Utopia?» Birri answered the students that utopia rests in the horizon, that he would walk some steps, utopia would also walk some steps further away from him and that was what utopia was good for, to make him keep on walking.

The original in Spanish, as Galeano, wrote it, we reproduce below:

La utopía está en el horizonte.

Camino dos pasos,

ella se aleja dos pasos

y el horizonte se corre diez pasos más allá.

¿Entonces para qué sirve la utopía?

Para eso, sirve para caminar.

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