

THEMATIC SECTION:  
CULTURAL STUDIES



## **Environmental Education and Cultural Studies: among erasures and new radicalisms**

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**ABSTRACT – Environmental Education and Cultural Studies: among erasures and new radicalisms.** This article discusses the conflicting but potent (dis)encounters among the polymorphic fields of Environmental Education and Cultural Studies. It shows that much research from this articulation has been dedicated to printing erasures in discourses circulating in culture about nature and the environment. But what about when deconstructing is not enough? Recent debates about the environmental crisis, the Anthropocene, climate change and its social developments bring the need for new questions about the connections between culture and environment. Finally, it questions whether the political bias that has marked cultural studies since its emergence may contribute to the search for new radicalisms in Environmental Education.

**Keywords: Environmental Education. Cultural Studies. Anthropocene. Environmental Crisis.**

**RESUMO – Educação Ambiental e Estudos Culturais: entre rasuras e novos radicalismos.** Este artigo discute os (des)encontros – conflituosos, mas potentes – entre os polimorfos campos da educação ambiental e dos estudos culturais. Mostra que muitas pesquisas realizadas a partir dessa articulação dedicaram-se a imprimir rasuras em discursos que circulam na cultura sobre natureza e meio ambiente. Mas e quando desconstruir não é o bastante? Os recentes debates sobre a crise ambiental, o Antropoceno, as mudanças climáticas e seus desdobramentos sociais trazem a necessidade de formularmos novas perguntas sobre as conexões entre cultura e ambiente. Por fim, interroga se o viés político que marca os estudos culturais desde sua emergência pode contribuir na busca por novos radicalismos em educação ambiental.

**Palavras-chave: Educação Ambiental. Estudos Culturais. Antropoceno. Crise Ambiental.**

## Introduction

I return to theory and politics, to the politics of theory. Not theory as a will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledge that has to be debated dialogically. But also, as a practice that always thinks its intervention in a world where it would make a difference, would have some effect. Anyway, a practice that understands the need for intellectual modesty (Hall, 2003a, p. 217).

The intertwining of theory and politics is demarcated by Stuart Hall as a fundamental feature of Cultural Studies intellectual practice. Thus, in research on this subject, the relationship with theory cannot be peaceful or passive at all. Knowledge, concepts and methods are understood as strategic tools that can be used for certain purposes, but are not guaranteed, cannot be used for all situations and need to be challenged, questioned and subverted when necessary. From this perspective, theories are taken as tools not only to access and understand the world, but also to intervene in the world, to modify it. In the opening quote, Hall also stresses the need for intellectual modesty because academia is no longer seen as the only reliable place of knowledge production. Cultural Studies understand that “[...] there are many forms of intellectual practice and many ways of understanding contexts, and that in the contemporary world social movements and struggles are also places of knowledge production” (Grossberg, 2012, p. 53).

In turn, the Environmental Education research field is structured from a peculiar and tense relationship between theory and practice. This tension is largely due to the prescriptive and normative character of Environmental Education as a pedagogical approach focused on environmental training. At the same time, the political bias of Environmental Education as a practice of intervention and reality change is constantly reiterated in its charters of principles<sup>1</sup>. As argued by Reigota (2008), if we are really environmental educators, the results of our research and analysis should contribute to collective learning and social intervention in daily life to overcome totalitarianism, prejudice, injustice. However, the boundaries between educational intervention to change reality and prescribing correct ways of thinking and acting are difficult to determine. Carvalho, Farias and Villela (2011) argue that Environmental Education as the creator of new “[...] ecological morals” has as its justification a difficult foundation to refute, which is the aggravation of environmental problems endangering the existence of human and *non-human* beings. Thus, it is often observed, in the field of Environmental Education research and not only in its educational practices, the absence of questions regarding environmental truths that are naturalized and disseminated in both academic discourses and educational actions.

Thus, there is a conflict between the urgency of solutions to environmental problems and the need for an analysis that seeks to un-

derstand the environmental debate in its educational dimension. This impasse is one of the reasons for the theoretical-conceptual weakness observed in many researches in this field, as Reigota (2008) evaluates, because research needs time, maturity, plunges into the social and environmental problems of everyday life, dialogues with colleagues and experts, libraries with good holdings and smaller doses of the belief that we can save the world. The author adds that conceptual rigor “[...] is a political component of our activity that should not be neglected” (Reigota, 2008, p. 20).

I emphasize, therefore, that both fields of research – Environmental Education and Cultural Studies<sup>2</sup> – face a problematic relationship between the production of theoretical knowledge and social intervention, each dealing with this impasse in a specific way, which certainly dialogues with their theoretical inheritance, but also with their social demands. Mentioning this intertwining between theory and intervention in the world is fundamental to reflect on the encounters and mismatches between the fields of Environmental Education and Cultural Studies in their possibilities, but also in their exhaustion. The purpose of this text is to focus on these mismatches from a double movement: firstly, to take a look at what has been produced so far in Environmental Education research conducted with the theoretical framework of Cultural Studies without wishing to conduct a systematic survey of the approaches and research carried out, but trying to draw attention to some brands that these encounters promoted in Environmental Education, installing problematizations, questions and other ways of operating with discourses about the environment. In the second movement of the text, I present traces of approaches that are gaining visibility, as the human sciences finally appropriate and make significant contributions to contemporary debates about the environmental crisis. I do this movement because I understand that these discussions bring new winds that I believe should destabilize Environmental Education: what is done, what is researched, what is built and invented in educational practices that are concerned with thinking (with) the environment. Therefore, it is appropriate to ask if these recent events in the environmental debates impact the encounters of Environmental Education with Cultural Studies. More precisely, the question that drives this writing is whether the dialogue with Cultural Studies continues to be a productive, creative and strategic path to the demands that these new winds place for Environmental Education.

### **Movement 1: putting Environmental Education under erasure**

It can be said that the research that articulated Environmental Education with Cultural Studies, since the late 1990s, but especially in the following decade, strongly contributed to the inauguration of a post-critical bias in the field of Environmental Education. This theoretical orientation, inspired by references very different from those prevail-

ing in Environmental Education (quite consolidated as a field in which critical research with Marxist theoretical framework predominates) and influenced by cultural studies as well as the philosophies of difference, post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, etc.

As Paraíso (2004) points out, post-critical theories have disrupted and shifted emphasis in relation to critical theories in the Brazilian educational field. The author clearly describes these ruptures and problematizations promoted by post-critical research. I would like to retain, however, just some of the effects of these theorizations that further moved the research in Environmental Education, such as the questioning to “[...] all educational ‘truths’, even those we have come to regard as ‘good’ because they are characterized as ‘democratic’, ‘liberating’, ‘transformative’, ‘citizen’, etc.” (Paraíso, 2004, p. 293). Thus, many studies under this orientation seek to show the fabricated, constructed character of truths, objects, pedagogical practices. Rejecting universal explanations, wholenesses, completeness, post-critical theorizing points to openness, multiplication, and transgression of meaning, giving up “[...] the function of prescribing, telling others how to be, doing, and acting” (Paraíso, 2004, p. 287).

Cultural Studies in Education fully align with these orientations, as most research in this perspective openly qualifies as post-critical and post-structuralist. Wortmann, Costa and Silveira (2015) show that many studies in this field are dedicated to reframing pedagogical questions, discourses and artifacts through the strangeness, denaturalization and displacement of very settled meanings. Such theoretical perspectives made it possible to produce other ways of researching in Environmental Education: other perspectives, other questions, other forms of writing, other subjects to be studied, other concepts to be theorized. However, as it can be guessed, these new frameworks installed some discomfort and tensions in the academic spaces of dialogue about Environmental Education, by confronting and problematizing some discourses (and practices) dear to this field. Indeed, these surveys<sup>3</sup> place under suspicion media discourses about the environmental crisis and its calls to save the planet, *as the future depends on us* (Garré; Henning, 2017); the statements that set the consumer as someone manipulated by the media and unable to make critical choices (Sampaio, 2005); the discourses that naturalize traditional populations as *guardians* of the Amazon rainforest (Sampaio, 2012); the sustainability images that teach us that *being green* is being tuned and connected with our time (Guimarães, 2012a); environmental teachings in cartoons aimed to young children (Wortmann; Ripoll; Possamai, 2012), among so many other examples.

Guimarães and Wortmann (2014) discuss the emergence of articulations between Cultural Studies and Environmental Education from the trajectory of university graduated researchers from the Cultural Studies in Education research line of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul<sup>4</sup> Postgraduate Education Program. In this article, the authors argue that:

[...] among the aspects that intertwine many of the inaugural studies of the articulation between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies, we highlight the constitutive dimension that is given in them to the concept of culture, as well as the centrality attributed to the concept of nature, notably aiming to highlight the disconnection between the views that put culture and nature in opposition or counter position. Moreover, all these studies point out that it has been attributed to nature, in different spaces and times, also different meanings from the cultural constructions in those days (Guimarães; Wortmann, 2014, p. 26).

Taking culture as constitutive of our understanding of nature also means taking away from nature (or the environment) any essence. There is no nature prior to the cultural construction of nature (which takes place in different ways at different times and even at the same time). Obviously, this philosophical discussion predates the articulations between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies. But I find especially powerful the lenses that Cultural Studies lend us to think about these relationships with nature(s), as well as the productivity of the concept of nature in our daily lives, the power relations involved in the different ways we conceptualize nature throughout history, the subjectivation operations that are involved in these processes. As Grossberg (2012, p. 51) explains, “[...] Cultural Studies seek to analyze and theorize about the processes and practices through which any context, understood as a relationship organization, is constructed.” Moreover, Cultural Studies reject determinations, which enables us to be clear about the contingency of these contexts. According to the author, “[...] nothing is ever fully reducible to a single plan of effects, a single power structure, a single political site” (Grossberg, 2012, p. 51).

Therefore, the approximations between Cultural Studies and Environmental Education made possible some extremely prolific discussions linked, especially, to the cultural and historical construction of our visions of nature. As Guimarães and Wortmann (2014) showed with the survey of theses and dissertations that promoted this articulation, most of these studies had the purpose of investigating the relations between nature and culture in the most different instances and productions of culture, seeking to understand how they establish – and even crystallize – at certain times, certain understandings about environmental issues. Taking nature as a socially constructed category helps us to think (and to question) both its forms of subjection – to scientific knowledge, capitalism, the market, urbanization, the media, etc. – as the ways for its salvation – by environmentalists, environmental educators, scientists, the media, capitalism, green consumption etc. Thus, the authors point out that a portion of the studies sought to track changes in the meanings of nature by addressing historical documents, while many other studies have focused on analyzing representations of nature in cultural artifacts such as advertisements, films, television programs, cartoons, print media, among others.

Wortmann, Costa and Silveira (2015) emphasize the productivity of the concept of representation in many studies of Cultural Studies in Education, which is triggered to show that artifacts (especially media) create patterns, models that educate and produce subjects according to their precepts. Thus, many studies have sought to discuss the representations of nature or environment that circulate in culture and how we are taught to establish a relationship with this nature that is constructed in multiple ways at this time in which we live, but also how some ways nature was culturally built in ancient times still resonate today. Wortmann and Guimarães (2014, p. 31) indicate that the processes of cultural construction of nature often establish aesthetic markers that define “what to see, admire, keep and protect in the so-called natural world”. The authors add that one of the reasons that justify the interest of Environmental Education about the ways in which nature has been dealt with in other historical times relates to seeking to understand why what is taken so often “[...] as an undisputed truth stems from an invention / cultural construction solidly based on a complex set of interpenetrating practices and discourses” (Guimarães; Wortmann, 2014, p. 31-32).

I would like to mention yet another focus of research produced at the interface of Environmental Education with Cultural Studies: those that dealt with the network of environmentalist discourses, including statements from Environmental Education itself (see, for instance, Sampaio, 2005; Sampaio, 2014; Guimarães, 2012a; Sampaio, 2012; Garré; Henning, 2017). Such studies seek to pay attention to the strategies of subjectification of these discourses, to the institution of certain ways of dealing with environmental issues as more appropriate, to the consolidation of truths in the environmental field. In other words, environmentalist discourses are also seen as cultural constructions / inventions of our time and, therefore, it is understood that they are plunged into disputes for the imposing of meanings, both regarding the most theoretical debates on environmental issues, as well as regarding the practices that connect to these discourses (for instance: pedagogical practices, environmental management initiatives, environmental public policies, among others). These approaches often suspend some narratives that are constitutive of environmental debates, causing some shudders, sometimes a certain discomfort, as these narratives are taken in present times as important components of a future utopian project.

To give a slightly more concrete idea about this theoretical-methodological operation of tensing some environmentalist discourses, I will present the example of two studies that, from very simple cutouts, promote strangeness and distrust of naturalized ways of dealing with environmental issues. The work of Silva (2016) analyzes publicity material coming from water use awareness campaigns. The researcher developed her work with the videos produced and aired during the water crisis (late 2014 and early 2015). Through a thorough analysis of the elements present in these audiovisual materials (a few-minute long videos), the author shows a series of interesting aspects that would go unnoticed

by a less careful look. Some aspects problematized by Silva (2016) were: the choice for middle-aged male presenters (would this choice convey greater credibility about the need to save water at a time of scarcity?); the strategy of pointing out right and wrong actions in a narrative tone that comes close to a moral lesson being given to the viewer; the search to develop *self-awareness* in people, giving them individual responsibility for solving the water crisis; and even the attempt to *monetize* water savings by associating less attitude with environmental motivation and more with the benefit of saving money (Silva, 2016).

Pereira's work (2016) focuses on blogs and websites that address the topic of conscious consumption, seeking to analyze how environmental discourses cross these cultural artifacts. The author has selected blogs and websites aimed at young people, some of which are relatively popular, such as the blog *Um ano sem lixo*<sup>5</sup> and the website *Mode.Fica*<sup>6</sup>. She noted some strategies used in these virtual spaces, such as addressing environmental issues establishing a strong relationship with the blogger's daily life, so that she is seen as an example to be followed; give tips, recipes and tutorials, teaching the Internet user to be a more conscious consumer through concrete actions in their routine habits; deal with the reduction of consumption as an attitude that is fashionable, using terms / concepts that circulate a lot on the Internet and challenge young people, as *lowsumerism*, minimalism, *upcycling*; use language and design very similar to fashion blogs, seeking to capture her readership (especially young women); advertise product brands that meet the environmental requirements set in these virtual spaces (for instance: biodegradable toothbrushes, reusable cups, washable straws, etc.).

Research as described above casts careful and systematic glances at the different features of contemporary environmentalist discourses, seeking, among other things, to think about the processes of subjectivation that take place when we are continually challenged by these discourses. One question that is always hovering over these investigations, even if not explicitly asked, is: what subjects are being trained by these discourses? What appeals do these discourses incessantly make to the subjects? For instance, who are these blogs analyzed in Pereira's research (2016) seeking to access? The utterances put into circulation by these blogs address someone other than the young middle-class consumers who would be the most obvious imagined audience of these utterances, or do these discourses construct a position that may be occupied by other subjects (even if it is in the condition of an idealization, something far removed from our daily lives, such as when we leaf through a fashion magazine full of glamorous images)?

Thus, the analysis of consumption blogs, water-saving advertisements, and so many other cultural artifacts that set environmental discourses on stage is more pertinent to the subjective forms these artifacts effect and put into operation than to the content of the texts themselves. In an article that can already be considered classic in the field of Cultural Studies, Johnson (2010, p. 75) states that the text is a *means* in Cultural Study. He points out that, in his opinion, the ultimate

object of Cultural Studies is not the text, but “[...] the subjective life of social forms at every moment of their circulation, including their textual embodiments” (Johnson, 2010, p. 75).

Thus, when we analyze how environmental discourses manifest themselves in different places of culture, we seek to reflect on how we are taught to think, to relate to environmental issues and also to act on them. That is, subjectivity is taken as an object of analysis and not as a given, a premise or a starting point. (Johnson, 2010). I understand that this path of thought is (or was) extremely relevant to Environmental Education, as it allows us to distrust the ways in which these teachings on environmental issues position us and even subject us, since they often establish what is said as something that must be turned into action, put into practice, followed to the letter.

Throughout this section some verbs were used to characterize important procedures in research that articulate Environmental Education and Cultural Studies: place under suspicion, denaturalize, problematize, distrust, tense, wonder. These actions can be considered components of a common direction for most of these researches and such intellectual work has brought significant contributions to intellectual production on Environmental Education. The theoretical-methodological movement of *putting under erasure* both the representations of nature that circulate in culture (and the history of our relationship with nature) and the movement as the environmentalist discourses themselves produced some extremely relevant displacements in the field of Environmental Education, opening a space for dissent, for formulating different questions from those that have been asked so far and for destabilizing some already well-established narratives on environmental issues. This notion of *putting under erasure* is being used here as an attitude toward concepts that one wants to problematize but cannot (yet) give up. Hall (2003b) uses this notion to talk about the concept of identity and multiculturalism. He says that “[...] in the absence of less complex concepts that allow us to reflect on the problem, there is no alternative but to continue using and interrogating this term [multiculturalism]” (Hall, 2003b, p. 51). I reiterate, therefore, that much research conducted so far from the mismatches between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies has been dedicated to erasing Environmental Education. I consider that this movement to place Environmental Education – its discourses, concepts, practices, clichés, etc. – under erasure was fundamental for deconstructing some certainties, some crystallizations, and trying to reinvent ways of thinking, talking and doing research in this field.

In this sense, it is possible to say that the post-critical and post-structuralist approach of Cultural Studies provided another type of critical work in relation to research in Environmental Education. It is not, therefore, a criticism that aims to identify positive or negative aspects in practices or discourses related to Environmental Education, that is, an assessment of these practices and discourses based on criteria considered as external to these categorizations is not at stake. As one might



suppose, this criticism to which I refer is not confused with Critical Environmental Education, a theoretical current that is most expressive in the academic spaces of Environmental Education, which is based on Marxist thought and is called in this way to contest and contrast with an Environmental Education considered as conservative. The very act of (self) naming as a *critical* tendency as opposed to a conservative tendency already deserves to be problematized in a poststructuralist bias, as it establishes beforehand where the *best way of thinking* would be. The *critique of criticism* – or hypercritics – made by poststructuralist studies is what Veiga-Neto (2012) indicates as a non-metaphysical criticism, since it does not have universal assumptions and *even suspects itself*. According to the author, “[...] hypercritics is difficult and uncomfortable, but always open and provisional; consequently, it is a humble criticism, as it does not claim for itself the status of best, true, definitive and most correct” (Veiga-Neto, 2012, p. 274).

The considerations made by the author very precisely highlight the tone of the approaches between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies in most research developed from this encounter. The post-critical (or hypercritical?) theoretical frameworks mobilized sought to provoke ruptures and blurs in the contours of Environmental Education without the intention of invalidating, substituting, extinguishing concepts, practices, methodologies. That is why the idea of printing an erasure allows us to glimpse this theoretical-methodological movement: it does not go out, it does not rewrite itself, but it is scratched, causing a mark that indicates that something is not appeased, that there is something that one wants to see in another way.

But at this point in the text, I would like to argue that we need to invent other ways to produce movements in Environmental Education or whatever it may be that they call intervention practices in the (subjective, concrete, living) world and attentive to relations between humans and *non-humans*. Aiming at this productive trajectory of encounters and mismatches between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies, I have some questions: and when deconstructing is not enough? And when the present asks new questions as well as new answers? And when even hypercritic seems to be a theoretical-political operation that does not realize the complexity of the challenges posed in our times? And when it is necessary more than a critical attitude to deal with the crudity of these times and the need to imagine other modes of existence?

These questions are pulsating from approaches with philosophical and anthropological approaches that have been producing new narratives on *environmental* issues. I use italics to point out that I have doubts, even if the use of the word *environmental* would be the choice made by the thinkers who have produced these new, thought-provoking and different perspectives on relations between humans and *non-humans* and to the consequences of human action (or more precisely occidental capitalist action) on *nature* (another word *under erasure*). In the next section, I present some fragments of these discussions with the purpose of trying to think about what is posed for Environmental Edu-

cation from these theoretical, philosophical, artistic winds about the Anthropocene.

## **Movement 2: Anthropocene winds**

Unable to contextualize in so few pages this theoretical debate that is dense and full of clashes, as well as philosophically complex, I decided to build a mosaic with some loose pieces from utterances, provocations, insights, thoughts and quotes that at least allow the flow of these recent theoretical elaborations on human and *non-human* relations to be interviewed. These discussions involve reflections on the Anthropocene, global climate change and other disasters, fear of the future, capitalism, modes of existence ... The big news, in my view, is that these issues are being debated by recognized thinkers in the Humanities, such as Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Isabelle Stengers, among others. While previously, ecological issues were mainly addressed by environmental scientists often working at the interface with the Natural Sciences from a notion of interdisciplinarity that can be considered to some extent theoretically fragile, we now have some big names devoting their most recent writings to a topic that can be said to be marginal in the academic productions of the Humanities. I understand that these thinkers intend to bring thoughts about the future of our relationship on the planet with other beings and how much it questions our own existence in its multiple dimensions (social, cultural, economic, political, etc.) to the center of the debates of the Humanities, an unprecedented theoretical movement that certainly produces radical transformations in the approaches to *ecological issues*.

One can imagine that the winds of the Anthropocene move the thinking about Environmental Education (environmental educations?) by bringing difficult questions, dilemmas of the human in contemporary times, often without answers, without exits. Inventions like traces of questions that echo and call us to think together and perhaps to create other narratives, other images, of the world, of the future, of possible.

Debora Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014) wrote a powerful book about the end of the world from the backdrop of the global environmental crisis we are living in, weaving relationships with countless films embodying the fear that we have to experience the end of the world in our lives. In addition, to discuss these issues, the authors systematize an extensive overview of the contributions of various contemporary thinkers about the world(s) and their ends. Therefore, I follow the tracks of these writings to assemble this composition of fragments present in this section.

The notion of Anthropocene<sup>7</sup> is quite present in the authors' reflections on the end of the world, as in the following excerpt:

The Anthropocene (or whatever name you want to give it) is an epoch in the geological sense of the term, but it

points to the end of 'epochality' as such with respect to the species. Although it began with us, it will most likely end without us: the Anthropocene should only give way to another geological epoch long after we have disappeared from the face of the earth (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 16).

The transformation of our species into a geological force is largely due to the use of fossil fuels and other large-scale environmental changes whose effects will continue to resonate in the Earth's biosphere, long after the disappearance of our species. As the authors say, "[...] when the scales of collective finitude and individual finitude enter a trajectory of convergence, this cognitive truth suddenly becomes an affective truth that is difficult to manage" (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 29). That is, the idea that the world will end one day is acceptable, just as we know that our own lives will end at some point, but knowing that this end is really near is a very difficult thing to accept in both situations.

Another aspect addressed concerns the (im)possibilities of reversing this situation, taking the reins of the environmental crisis, affecting the political and economic mechanisms that cause the degradation of the environment, through concrete changes in the ways we explore nature and the devastating effects of anthropic action. Quoting Jameson, the authors point out that there is a "[...] huge gap between scientific knowledge and political powerlessness, that is, between our (scientific) ability to imagine the end of the world and our (political) inability to imagine the end of capitalism" (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 31). A very concrete example of this mismatch is that we follow the increasingly accurate diagnosis of global climate change from the IPCC<sup>8</sup> and, at the same time, we see the immense difficulty of establishing and complying with international agreements on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Throughout the book, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2014) tense the notion of the future, so dear to environmentalism since its inception, showing the deep shudders generated by the environmental crisis. What would this future be? A future without humans? A world without us? As the authors describe, one of the images of the world after us would be that of a new golden age for life on the planet that would gain in vigor, variety, and abundance. Or would the future be *us without the world* as a catastrophe movie scenario in which humans roam lost across a scorched earth? Or there is the possibility of escape from the planet, as in science fictions where, after the possibilities of inhabiting the Earth have been exhausted, a group of humans depart through space in search of other planets to colonize. From these speculations among others, the authors state that "[...] the future is no longer made of the same matter as the past, it becomes radically another, not ours, a time that demands our disappearance to appear" (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 41).

Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2014) explore in many directions the idea of the end of the world and the future. The book's title itself asks:

Is there a world to come? This dense intellectual work takes the authors' reflections away from the ways in which the future has been thought of in ecological discourses, although at first this approach seems to be convergent with the catastrophic narratives about the future that are founders of the environmental field. As Guimarães and Pereira (2015, p. 71) indicate, in the repeated calls for the future in the ecological debate, the future is enunciated as a catastrophe or "[...] planned, objectified, structured, controlled, positively and productively through the notion of sustainability". Either total uncontrollability and annihilation or absolute control by human economic and technological rationality. Either we take complete control of the situation or we have the end.

Danowski and Viveiros de Castro's approach, in turn, is much more nuanced: the authors break down the statement about the end of the world, problematizing its components. They ask: end of the world for whom? What world are you talking about? And they claim that, "[...] for the native peoples of the Americas, the end of the world has already happened five centuries ago" (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 138). They complete by saying that it is as if the end of the world were a fractal event, which reproduces indefinitely on different scales: from ethnocidal wars in various parts of Africa to the assassination of environmental activists in the Amazon, from gigantic transgenic soy plantations to deforestation of huge areas of forest for mining. While the responsibility for environmental collapse cannot be evenly distributed among nations, the Anthropocene is a shared catastrophe in every way (Chakrabarty *apud* Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

Another well-known author who has been getting more and more involved in debates about relationships with humans and *non-humans* is Bruno Latour. This has been an important issue in the thinker's work for many decades, but its recent publications have made it a reference in philosophical debates about the actions of humans on the planet and their effects. Latour revisits the work of James Lovelock and recovers the notion of Gaia, reframing and making it a central notion in current discussions (Latour, 2017). Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2014) clarify (when it comes to Bruno Latour's texts, clarifications are always welcome) that in Latour's reinterpretation of Lovelock, Gaia is a gigantic discordant, mutable, and contingent agreement of the multiple intentionalities distributed by all agents. They further explain that Gaia designates:

[...] a new way to experience 'space', drawing attention to the fact that our world, the Earth, made on the one hand suddenly small and fragile and on the other hand susceptible and ruthless, has assumed the appearance of a threatening power that evokes those indifferent, unpredictable, and incomprehensible deities of our archaic past (Danowski; Viveiros Castro, 2014, p. 107).

To conclude this limited and fragmentary exposition of the winds that discussions about the Anthropocene blow on Environmental Education catalyzing the formulation of new questions, understandings

and debates, as well as other pedagogical practices, I would just like to mention the title of the latest book released by the philosopher Donna Haraway (2016): *Staying with the trouble*<sup>9</sup>. With this call, Haraway argues that the problem is in the present, not in the future, it is something we face today. There is no point in clinging to a nostalgic past or projecting an apocalyptic or salvationist future if we are not truly in the present. The thinker says that in times of urgency we are tempted to solve problems by planning an imagined and secure future, *cleaning up* the present and the past to build the future for future generations. She claims instead that our task is to establish inventive connecting lines with each other as a practice of learning to live and die well in a complex present. Staying/dealing with the problem, focusing our actions on thinking about our relationships with multiple others, as an inspiration to think about environmental educations in and for the present.

### **Openings: The search for new radicalisms in Environmental Education**

I want to suggest a different metaphor for theoretical work: a metaphor of struggle, of combat with angels. The only theory worth retaining is the one you have to contest, not the one you speak with deep fluency (Hall, 2003a, p. 204).

Once again, I recall Hall's words about the theoretical work in Cultural Studies, where he marks, with the metaphor of struggle, the necessity of transgression of the senses settled and the non-acceptance of the convenience gained from theoretical (and also methodological!) fluency. In this sense, as signaled in the introduction of this text, recent discussions about the Anthropocene and the many faces of the environmental crisis create new challenges for Environmental Education, either in its academic approaches or in the construction of educational practices. These challenges give rise to different approaches to what has been done so far through the production of different questions, other narratives, the use of other lenses to (re)compose the gaze.

The poststructuralist critique of environmental discourses through the deconstruction of clichés and slogans about the environment and the denaturalization of the nature representations that circulate in cultural artifacts, perhaps is no longer enough at this time of inflection and increasing complexity of ecological debates. Therefore, it is worth asking if the encounters with Cultural Studies are still interesting for research in Environmental Education? Could there be a transgression of what has been done so far by creating other encounters? Can Cultural Studies also offer conceptual and methodological tools for environmental education research that do not crystallize ways of doing and thinking? This last part of the text goes through possibilities, dialoguing interested but briefly with some authors who bring some insights that allow to answer affirmatively to these questions. These interested dialogues help us glimpse openings for new encounters between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies.

Addressing the environmental disasters of our time and the ways in which we can intervene in all that is happening (climate change, water crisis, environmental accidents), the philosopher Isabelle Stengers (2015) evaluates that we need to seek new bases beyond criticism. Criticism, for her, acts redundantly, “[...] as if it just ratified something that happened before it” (Stengers, 2015, p. 105). Like a well-known litany, repeated to exhaustion, criticism (even hypercritics) no longer produces the effects one would expect it to produce. So, the political struggle,

[...] does not go through representation operations, but rather through repercussions, by setting up *resonance boxes* so that what happens to some leads others to think and act, but also that what some do, learn, make exist, become as many experimental resources and possibilities for others. Every success, *however precarious*, has its importance (Stengers, 2015, p. 148, author’s emphasis).

The affirmation of the need for *resonance boxes* refers to something that reverberates from one another, causing chain movements, reverberating, echoing. The present demands, therefore, a more purposeful attitude for (re)creating experiences of the ability to think and act together, affecting us. “It is at the crossroads with such diverse modes of existence, in the inter-worlds, that something can be gestated or created” (Pál Pelbart, 2013, p. 401). Therefore, looking for clues to (re)think the ways we can intervene in the world, several thinkers emphasize the idea of the collective, the coexistence, the between, the relationship, of affecting each other.

Guimarães (2012b), in a beautiful text in honor of the ten years of publication of the book *A floresta e a escola: por uma educação ambiental pós-moderna*, by Marcos Reigota, rehearses some openings for Environmental Education in their possible, but not necessary, articulations with Cultural Studies. The author expresses the intention of displacing this encounter beyond the readings that operate the *deconstruction* of the discourses of media artifacts. From this, it proposes other creative movements that enhance the production of new ways of imagining Environmental Education. An Environmental Education in inventive encounters with Cultural Studies could provide these events: gliding glances beyond the meanings and identities towards inventions of the world, the environment, subjectivities; *unreasonable*, as an ethical need to become entangled in the events that update and let the potentialities of environmental relations, encounters with others vibrate; *disfigurements* woven through fading, moving images that do not repeat themselves because they do not simply *portray* a moment (Guimarães, 2012b).

I found other insights in the narrative by Guimarães and Wortmann (2014) about the research that promotes encounters between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies. In the text, the authors tell about some recent investigative developments that escape the logic of criticism and deconstruction, working with the notion of artistic devices<sup>10</sup>. The different artistic devices created in the research described in the text trigger other ways of seeing, narrating a place in a unique way,

that was not given, but was mobilized by a process of creation. As the authors emphasize, in these studies, there was no concern to tell, archive, analyze a lived story, but to live a story to tell, to create, to experience. “Stories produced by an act, by an activation, by a predicted machination so that a narrative can be created” (Guimarães; Wortmann, 2014, p. 34). The movement of approaching artistic practices may be one of the new paths created by the articulations between Environmental Education and Cultural Studies. As Preve says (2015, p. 9), “[...] ecology invents and reinvents itself at the edges of art”.

Finally, I would like to point out that the concerns described in this text resonate with recent writings by Grossberg (2012), well-known author of Cultural Studies, in which he inquires whether there is room for intellectuals in the new radicalism. The author unfolds this question – which is also timely for research in Environmental Education – in some reflections concerned with our present. Grossberg comments that, given the current uncertainty and turbulence (in political but also environmental terms, as we can see from the discussions in the previous section), the *left assemblages*<sup>11</sup> are losing more than winning. And he believes it is not for lack of activism or radical ideas, but for the fact that *perhaps the questions we should be asking are about the stories we are telling*.

It is heartening to read this passage, in which a leading thinker in the field of Cultural Studies questions the lack of a place for radicalism in academic practices, including those promoted by progressive intellectuals like himself, proposing that we rethink the stories we are telling in our research and in our political-academic interventions. In this sense, I think I have shown some clues about the new stories we can tell about our coexistence on this planet. Stories in which we are alert to activate connections in the present. Stories in which we can *be together with the problem* without necessarily looking to find solutions for a controlled future. Stories in which we seek to invent in other ways – more attentive, more collective, more open to listening; less hierarchical and classificatory – the relationships between the human and *non-human* inhabitants of this planet. How many other stories can we invent, build, activate?<sup>12</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 For instance, in the well-known document prepared at the Global Forum (parallel event to Rio-92), the Environmental Education Treaty for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility includes the sentence that became popular: “[...] Environmental Education is neither neutral nor ideological. It is a political act [...]”.

- 2 The use of the word *field* here is quite simplifying. Therefore, it is necessary to point out that Cultural Studies are a rather heterogeneous theoretical set. In this sense, Grossberg (2012) uses the word *assemblage* to explain the artificiality of treating this grouping as a totality.
- 3 As reported by Wortmann et al. (2014), the entry of Cultural Studies in the field of Education took place in the mid-1990s in the Graduate Program in Education of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Therefore, much of the research that carried out this articulation was conducted within the scope of this program until the moment that researchers graduated in this institution started composing postgraduate programs in other universities throughout Brazil.
- 4 It is worth mentioning that much of this research was conducted under the guidance of Professor Maria Lúcia Wortmann in this program.
- 5 Available at: <<https://www.umanosemlixo.com>>. Accessed on: 29 June 2018.
- 6 Available at: <<https://www.modifica.com.br>>. Accessed on: 29 June 2018.
- 7 The authors explain that Anthropocene was the designation proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer. “[...] for what they understand to be the new geological epoch that followed the Holocene, which would have started with the Industrial Revolution and intensified after World War II” (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2014, p. 15).
- 8 IPCC means *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. It is the international institution dedicated to assessing science with regard to climate change, providing a scientific basis for governments in line with the UN Climate Conference negotiations. Available at <<http://www.ipcc.ch>>. Accessed on: 29 June 2018.
- 9 Getting the problem or dealing with the problem in a free translation.
- 10 In this part of the text, Guimarães and Wortmann (2014) are reporting investigative experiences carried out in *Grupo Tecendo*, in the Graduate Program in Education of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.
- 11 Grossberg (2012) explains that he uses the term “assemblages” to mark the heterogeneity of these groupings, among which is the Cultural Studies. It is also important to note that the author recognizes that terms like “left” and “progressive” have become problematic and intensely questioned, but will continue to use them even if hesitantly.
- 12 This article is part of the Thematic Section, *Cultural Studies*, organized by Maria Lúcia Castagna Wortmann (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), Luís Henrique Sacchi dos Santos (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), Iara Tatiana Bonin (Universidade Luterana do Brasil) and Daniela Ripoll (Universidade Luterana do Brasil).

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