

Ecology and Education: The Example of Ecotopias



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Abstract “ECO- from the Greek *oikos* (household or home) -TOPIA from the Greek *topos* (place)” – the source of the title of the literary utopia *Ecotopia*, published in 1975 by the Californian author E. Callenbach (1929–2012). In a manner analogous to Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), a traveller, the *Times-Post* reporter William Weston, discovers an isolated place which is an exemplary form of social and political organization. The three states of the American northwest (California, Oregon, and Washington), formerly American, seceded from the rest of the federation some 20 years previously, following a period of political unrest. During this relative isolation, the territory of Ecotopia was able to develop a system and culture of its own centred around ecological issues. Distancing itself from the ‘modernism’ of the United States (capitalist, consumerist, based on fossil fuels and the myth of growth) Ecotopia explores the possibility of a regime rooted in the earth (Latour B, *Down to Earth: Politics in the new climatic regime*. Polity Press, Medford, 2018) i.e. having as its principle a harmonious inhabitation of the earth. The narrative imagines the implementation of many of the ideals of the hippy movements of the 1970s, which themselves having a link with the socialist and anarchist emancipation movements of the nineteenth Century and are now being taken up again in ecological alternatives, for example as *Cities in Transition* (Hopkins R, *The power of just doing stuff*. UIT/Green Books, 2013). Here we find new forms of governance (decentralization, women in power, less authoritarian administrative structures and hierarchies, citizen participation), self-management and a circular economy (recycling of all organic waste in the capital San Francisco, soil production for local agricultural production, a 20-h working week, integration of ecological and social factors in economic decisions), urban organization centred on eco-mobility (no individual cars, autonomous electric minibuses and free bicycles for all), renewable energies, bio-sourced and biodegradable materials, eco-spirituality, education in nature, egalitarianism and individual emancipation, etc. The topicality of the problems posed by this literary utopia and the transformation of certain imagined ideas into concrete

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political projects is striking. It is probably because Callenbach recognized what feeds how we imagine a transition might take place today: the Anthropocene obliges us to take seriously the fact that our relationship with our living environment is one of interdependence and realize that this is a principle of politics. In 1990, Michel Serres called this adding “to the exclusively social contract [...] the making of a natural contract” characterized as “a contract of armistice in the objective war, a contract of symbiosis” (Serres M, *The natural contract*. The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 38) in order to consider nature, not a fund of resources to be exploited, but as “the new partner of our actions” (Serres M, *Retour au contrat naturel*. In Bindé J (ed), *Signons la paix avec la Terre*. Albin Michel, UNESCO Publishing, pp 169–180, 2007, p 178). Influenced by ‘equilibrium ecology’ a dominant paradigm in the 1970s assuming that nature is a set of stabilized ecosystems, Callenbach expresses in an analogous way the new politico-religious principle, or the dogma of equilibrium which organizes the new relationship with nature: *People’s happiness no longer depends on their domination of all earthly creatures, but on a peaceful and balanced coexistence with them*. This implies both an overhaul of our legal, political and economic organizations, and also a subjective metamorphosis, which makes education a central issue for surviving or coping with the Anthropocene. But what is an ecotopia? What are the characteristics of an ecotopic education, pedagogically and sociologically? And how can such education play a role in dealing with the Anthropocene?

Keywords Ecology · Anthropocene · Political education · Ecotopias

1 What Is an Ecotopia?

1.1 From Ecotopia to Ecotopias

In a 2009 lecture entitled *From Capitalism to Ecotopia: a Successionist Manifesto*, Callenbach questions the historical possibility of realizing what was, in 1975, only a literary fiction. In particular, he observes the emergence of multiple alternatives, proliferating like *weeds* full of vitality in a hostile environment, and aiming to replace the dying capitalism with a system that is ‘earthly’, cooperative, ecological, egalitarian and emancipatory. Callenbach calls these marginal actors of ecological transformation ‘ecotopians’. I also propose to use the concept of ecotopia to designate any place that has committed itself to making a cultural transition in response to the global ecological crisis. An ecotopia is thus a place of resistance to the ideological, economic and political paradigm that has produced this catastrophe. It is also a place where new relationships with nature, new theoretical and practical ideas, and new collective organizations are invented around the key ecological question of how to inhabit a place in a harmonious and sustainable way? This can refer natural parks, agro-ecological farms, cooperative gardens, training centres in natural construction, centres for spiritual retreat and education in nature, ecovillages, etc. What they have in common is that they are minority, marginal places, places of local experimentation

but linked together to form a network, no longer under the control of a technocratic authority but emerging from interstitial centres of vitality taking as a model the mycelium (Tsing, 2017; Vidalou, 2017), the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) or weeds (Callenbach, 2009).

1.2 Concrete Utopias, ‘Intentional Communities’ and Ecovillages

This topical use of the concept of ecotopia is not new. Anthropologists and sociologists use it as a generic term to designate ‘intentional communities’, which, from the nineteenth Century to the present day, in the socialist and anarchist tradition, have carried these values of harmony with nature, equality among individuals, emancipation through cooperative organization of work, and education in nature (Anderson, 2010; Lockyer & Veteto, 2013).¹ Ecotopia then refers, in a narrow sense, to an ecovillage. Exploring this history of concrete utopias in the United States, Ronald Creagh suggests that, due to the lag between writing and practice, there are far more realized utopias than those written about (Creagh, 2009, p. 22). The *Ecotopia* narrative thus builds on a historical tradition and a series of realized utopias that, on a modest scale, implemented resistance to the productivist system and invented new ways of relating to with nature. Serge Audier notes in his history of the social thought of nature that “The movements of the 1960s-1970s, beyond their heterogeneous, complex and multiform character, had opened up important “breaches” in the history of emancipation, as much for their democratic, anti-hierarchical and libertarian dimension as for their questioning of productivism, of which the resurgent ecological critique constituted one of the essential dimensions. These “breaches” were in fact not the first, and were more or less consciously part of a long history going back to the socialist and libertarian utopias of the 19th century” (Audier, 2017, p. 82).

Ecotopias, particularly in the socialist and anarchist tradition, have preceded *Ecotopia*. But how do they stand up to the discourse of the Anthropocene?

1.3 Terraformation or Return to the Earth?

If we agree to call our time the Anthropocene, and if this name is also the designation of crucial problems that we must face, it remains to be determined where ecotopias

¹Eugene N. Anderson, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, claims to have used the concept since 1969 although he acknowledges that it is Callenbach who popularized the term (Lockyer & Veteto, 2013, p. xi).

fit into the spectrum of possible reactions. Indeed, Anthropocene discourses reconfigure controversies and polarized political options. There are two extremes here: on the one hand, the human shaping of the Earth (terraformation)² and on the other, the “return to the Earth” (Latour, 2018). On the one hand, the Anthropocene is the place where the increase of human power over the system Earth is recognized, calling for geo-engineering, ‘smart cities’, ‘eco-modernism’ and ‘new conservation’; on the other hand, the trigger for a cultural, political and spiritual surge calling for the reconsideration of the ways of inhabiting a “New Earth” (Bourg 2018).³

Ecotopias are clearly on the side of the “return to the Earth”, inviting modern, capitalist Western culture to reinvent its ways of feeling, knowing, acting and organizing itself in order to pacify its relationship with the Earth. They express an awareness of planetary limits rather than a logic of limitlessness justified by a ‘*techno-fix mentality*’, i.e. an inordinate confidence in techno-scientific solutions – often hypothetical. Ecotopias take up a stance that is resistant towards the system of globalized capitalism rather than, through the introduction of superficial green policies, prolonging the dominant economic thinking, which is extractivist, productivist and consumerist. They are part of a deep or integral ecology insofar as ecological concern, the awareness and care of interrelations with one’s living environment and its inhabitants, becomes the new centre of gravity of a culture, of its moral and religious norms, of economic and political organisations. They are driven by minority collective movements emerging in a natural, local way and not by technocratic decisions assuming a hierarchical power within a globalized system. They promote gentleness (reciprocity, humility, partnership, symbiosis, listening, etc.) rather than domination, separation, control, appropriation and exploitation.

They thus fulfil two functions typical of utopianism, one critical and the other emancipatory: to *resist*, that is, in Ronald Creagh’s words, “to challenge the social system” and “to shake up fundamental beliefs”, but also to *invent*, that is, “to be a creative force for the present” and “to reveal the infinite possibilities of our finite condition” (2009, pp. 28–29). In this sense, ecotopias are a laboratory for implementing an integral response to the Anthropocene, this “Great Turning” that involves, according to eco-psychologist Joanna Macy, three essential dimensions: (1) resisting catastrophe: acting to slow down the damage inflicted on the Earth and its inhabitants; (2) promoting alternatives: analysing and transforming the foundations of our common life; (3) spiritual transformation: making a fundamental shift in our worldview and values (Macy & Brown, 2014).

Ecotopias thus refer to all places of resistance, invention and metamorphosis where grassroots actors of the ecological transition live. More specifically they refer

²For a critique of geo-constructivist discourses, see Hamilton, 2013; Neyrat, 2018.

³For an analysis of the plurality and political polarization of anthropogenic discourses see Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017; Latour, 2018; Beau and Larrère, 2018 (especially part one: narratives and counter-narratives); Maris, 2018.

to ecovillages and intentional communities formed around ecological concerns. How does this translate into education?

2 The Sources of Ecotopian Education

2.1 *Education in Ecotopia*

In *Ecotopia*, Callenbach devotes a chapter to ecotopian education, which is education in and through nature. Nature is first and foremost the place of instruction: students attend a classroom for only 1 h a day. The rest of the time is devoted to “project” teaching outside. There are no hygienic precautions to prevent contact with nature due to danger or dirt. Nature is then the object of knowledge and biology is the architectonic science. Alongside basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), most of the skills are based on naturalist knowledge of the environment and practical knowledge: “An Ecotopian 10-years-old [...] knows how to construct a shelter [...], how to grow, catch and cook food, how to make simple clothes; how hundreds of species of plants and animal live both around their schools and in the areas they explore on backpacking expeditions” (p. 120). The pedagogical relationship is based primarily on an exchange of interests and passions on the part of the educators, who emphasize cooperation rather than competition among the students, and do not have to use violence to discipline the children, who evolve in an atmosphere of calm and self-regulation.

2.2 *The Pedagogical Lineage of Natural Education*

In fact, the ecotopian education described by Callenbach is part of a pedagogical lineage according to which ‘nature teaches me’ – to borrow a formula from Cartesian metaphysics.⁴ From a historical point of view, this ‘natural education’ can be traced back to antiquity (Hannoun, 1979), but it was the founders of modern pedagogy, and in particular Rousseau, who formulated the principle in a paradigmatic way: “It is you whom I address, tender, foresighted mother – you who know how to stay away from the busy highway and protect the growing seedling from the impact of human opinion! Cultivate and water the young plant before it dies: its fruits will one day be your delight. Early on, form an enclosure around your child’s soul. Someone else can mark its circumference, but you alone must build the fence. Plants are fashioned by cultivation, man by education” (Rousseau, [1762] 2010, p. 19).

The plant metaphor allows Rousseau to justify, on the one hand, resistance to an environment and practices that are hostile or harmful to the child’s development, and

⁴Cf. Descartes, ([1647] 2011), p. 191, AT, IX, 64.

on the other, to characterize pedagogical action as an aid to the maturation of the natural powers present in every newborn child. Pedagogical action is modelled on gardening care, which enabled Julie in *The New Heloise* to revitalize and produce an area of abundance from an abandoned place, by working with nature: “It is true,” she says, “that nature has done everything, but under my direction, and there is nothing here which I have not ordered” (Rousseau, [1761], 2000, p. 41). In *Experience and Education*, John Dewey, following the same principle, proposes an elementary distinction between ‘progressive’ and ‘traditional’ education: “The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure” (Dewey, 1938).

This distinction points to a fundamental problem in the relationship of education to natural endowments: should one *go along with* a child’s potential or *against* tendencies that must be subverted? Should nature be taken as a guide to accompany development or as an adversary to be eradicated and replaced by a civilised ‘second nature’? Ecotopian pedagogies are on the side of the ‘progressive’ pole, based on the potentialities and dynamics of vital development, and envisaging pedagogical action not so much as manufacturing something that can be reproduced for all, but as ‘steering’ what is there.⁵

2.3 *A Pedagogy of Emancipation in, Through and with Nature*

Ecotopian education can be said to combine ‘natural education’ and what Serge Audier calls a ‘pedagogy of emancipation’.⁶ In the words of Élisée Reclus, a supporter of non-coercive and anti-hierarchical education, “The school that is truly freed from ancient servitude can fully develop in nature” (Reclus, 1905, p. 433). From the nineteenth Century onwards, emancipation movements (socialism, anarchism and republicanism) took up this plant metaphor and thought of education as care, allowing the deployment of full natural potentialities rather than an unnatural forcing which they labelled as bourgeois. For example, among the Fourierists, a distinction is made between the good educator and the bad educator using the metaphor of the good and the bad gardener. The first knows the delicacy of a plant and succeeds in making it flourish. It can then unfold all its beauty thanks to this care. In contrast, however, the bad gardener mistreats the plant and causes a rapid

⁵I transpose to pedagogical action the distinction between “fabrication” (manufacturing) and “pilotage” (steering) proposed by Catherine and Raphaël Larrère to think of two fundamental modalities of technical action. Cf. Larrère, 2015 and Larrère, 2017.

⁶The pedagogy of emancipation isl be a pedagogy that promotes contact with nature, in every sense of the word. (2017, p. 535).

depletion of its vital energy (Audier, 2017, p. 534). Moreover, the first concrete socialist or anarchist ecotopias of the nineteenth Century are conceived of as places of *education in nature* (as a living environment) and *in the service of nature* (as a principle of harmonious individual and collective development).⁷ The experience of the Cempuis orphanage, directed by Paul Robin from 1880 to 1894, is a striking example of this ecotopian conception, in this case libertarian and democratic, of an emancipating education in and through the natural environment. The aim was to remove children from social misery by offering them holistic development in a favourable environment. According to Serge Audier: “almost ten years before the new schools in the countryside of England and Germany, Robin set up the Cempuis experiment as a laboratory for a pioneering school given over to the ‘natural environment’, that is to say, in the middle of fields, with a park and gardens, a small farm and surrounding crops. In this spirit, the physical life advocated by Robin consists of spending time in the open air with natural exercise: walking, riding bicycles, swimming in a pool dug by the students, the ‘simple and easy’ work of gardening” (Audier, 2017, pp. 539–540). Education was based on an invigorating relationship with nature, benevolent cooperation and simple, balanced vegetarian food! In the twentieth Century, a whole series of great educators took up these principles and put them into practice, often within ecotopias: Francisco Ferrer, Adolphe Ferrière, Maria Montessori, Ovide Decroly, Célestin and Élise Freinet, Rudolf Steiner, Alexander Sutherland Neill, Daniel Greenberg, etc.

Ecotopias are therefore in line with the pedagogies of emancipation through education in, by and with nature. Educating consists essentially in taking care of vitality through a holistic and differentiated approach, resisting authoritarianism and promoting creative originality at all ages. How is this expressed in the organization of contemporary ecotopias?

3 Education in Contemporary Ecotopias

3.1 *The Invention of Alternative Models*

In ecovillages and other initiatives for the peaceful habitation of our living world, the importance of education is widely recognized. The former president of the *Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)*, Jonathan Dawson, considers “holistic, whole person education” (Dawson, 2015, p. 62) as one of the five main areas of eco-responsible living experiments in which ecotopias are inventing alternative models. He adds: “The area in which ecovillages have perhaps had great success in creating bridges to mainstream society is in the area of education. This forms the bedrock of many ecovillage economies” (ibid., p. 62). How can this be explained? Jonathan Dawson

⁷See, for example, the educational principles of New Harmony, a community founded in 1826 by the English socialist pioneer R. Owen (quoted by Audier 2017, p. 532).

suggests formal reasons related to the nature of ecotopian collectives: “Freed from the constraints of conventional educational structures and pedagogies, and given the availability of the entire community as a grand technical and social laboratory and classroom, ecovillages have become masters in the design and delivery of this type of educational package [unaccredited courses outside of any formal school or university curriculum covering a wide range of topics such as permaculture and ecovillage creation, renewable energy systems, arts and crafts, performance art, and spirituality]” (ibid., p. 62).

3.2 *Ecotopias as a Counter-Model*

I would add that ecotopias function as *counter-models*, i.e. as alternative, places that contest the hegemonic system. It is thus the difference and the potential offered by the exceptional nature of the ecotopia that makes it possible to innovate and introduce new knowledge and know-how, by addressing a population in search of change. Ecotopias thus have the function of challenging the ‘radical monopoly’ (Illich, 1973), i.e. the colonization of the imaginary by hegemonic practices. They make it possible for another model to exist, one that revives the imagination, and for different institutional structures to evolve. For example, ecotopias function as the ecological bad conscience of the prevailing educational system. What is the value of an education system that produces pupils who are unaware of their vital relationship with their environment and who are likely to desire its destruction as a good?

3.3 *Sanctuaries, Resource Centres and Transition Laboratories*

But beyond this differential function, it seems that contemporary ecotopias structurally place education at the heart of their collective project for three reasons which are inherent in their embracing the natural environment. First, ecotopias function as *sanctuaries*, i.e. places preserved from destruction caused by urban culture.⁸ The place where one lives is a provider of air, water and food necessary for one’s health, the possibility of partnership, care or diplomatic negotiations with the co-inhabitants of this place, the possibility of personal synchronization not with the metric time of productivity but with the existential time of vitality and the cosmic time of circadian rhythms, or even the daily frequentation of the beauty of nature’s beings. There are so many elementary practices that have become rare and precious for city dwellers

⁸The UN estimates that 55% of today’s population lives in urban areas, and this rate reaches more than 80% for the most developed countries. <https://population.un.org/wup/> accessed on 3 January 2019

who forget the ancestral culture of our relations with our living environments. As a result, ecotopias can function as *resource centres* where we can learn what urban culture neglects. Thus, many ecotopias offer or host training in permaculture, natural construction, environmental education, survivalist knowledge, collective decision making and conflict management, eco-psychology, spiritual retreats, etc. Finally, ecotopias function as *laboratories* of transition. Education is at the heart of ecotopias, not only because it allows for the economic viability of these collectives, but also because it legitimizes the commitment of an active minority within the global problem of dealing with the Anthropocene. Education, reception and dissemination to an outside audience help to reinforce the idea that, even if they are drop in the ocean in the face of the global challenges of the Anthropocene, subjective transformations serve as examples (the hero model), contagious metamorphoses based on micro-organisms (fermentation or virus model), modifications of the global balance by targeted actions on crucial points (acupuncture model) are all useful and can be decisive in the face of the common challenges of ‘re-terrestrialization’.

Here are two examples of the centrality of education in contemporary ecotopian projects.⁹

3.4 Example 1: O.U.R. ecovillage

O.U.R. ecovillage is an intentional community located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. It was founded in 1999 by social workers and environmental activists interested in exploring the potential of community living. The ten hectares comprise a farm, gardens, living quarters and buildings for communal activities (meals, meetings, parties, events). The place is economically viable as a demonstration and training centre for natural construction, permaculture and environmental education. It is also a place for children’s groups, volunteers, workers, trainees and a place where a spirituality of connection to the earth is attempted. The permanent members of the community also see themselves as guests passing through. The name O.U.R. is an acronym for *One United Resource*, but it plays on the shifting use of the possessive pronoun *our* to signify this revolution in the order of ownership. From the time of its incorporation in 2000–2001, the ecotopia set out to be a *model*, a centre of education, a living laboratory, and a hub for connection to a larger network. In 2004, the on-site school began. It is called *Topia* and offers different training such as weekends in the forest for children, introductory or professional permaculture trainings, and different environmental education trainings especially through the

⁹The first one is the result of a study trip carried out in 2016 with about 30 North American ecotopias (see the description of the *Untaking space* project and our research notebook: <https://usproject2016.com/>), the second one is the result of recent encounters, notably around questions related to the practice of a field philosophy.

international network *Gaïa education*¹⁰ in connection with the Global Network of Ecovillage Trainers for a Sustainable Earth (*GEESE*). In 2016, *O.U.R ecovillage* welcomed around 10,000 visitors who were made aware of community life and various modes of conscious relationships with other members of the collective living in this territory.

3.5 Example 2: The Practical School of Nature and Knowledge (*EPNS*)

The *Ecole Pratique de la Nature et des Savoirs* (*EPNS*) is located in the Haut-Diois valley in the Drôme. It is an association run by about 20 people, experts in their fields, which presents itself as a ‘school’ laboratory’ “for rediscovering and experimenting with the links of alliance with this nature that supports us and sustains us”.¹¹ It is structured around nine sites¹²: “(1) The secular primary school *Caminando*; (2) the ‘in nature’ school of naturopathy *Naturilys*; (3) the farm school in mutation *Permacole* in *Montlahuc*;- (4) the consulting activities for companies *NovaSens*; (5) a research laboratory, *Territory Lab*; (6) the *Coopération Lab* training courses for the general public;(7) the *Gens des bois* wilderness workshops;(8) the *Comtesse* site, a nature immersion site at the source of the Drôme river and (9) the opening up of spaces for dialogue between the root societies and our modernity through the *cercle des passeurs*.”

By addressing a variety of recipients, each of these ‘work camps’, nourishes the project of assisting a personal transformation that is always taking place, in order to understand how we relate to our living environment and also to learn to inhabit this environment collectively in a harmonious and joyful way. The primary school project is particularly interesting because, whilst it follows the national curricula, it is project-based and of most of its practices take place in the open air.¹³ *Caminando* welcomes about 20 students between the ages of 6 and 10. At least half of the activity time is devoted to ‘sensory’ activities, linked to work on the land and to seasonal changes, notably through a permaculture vegetable garden which provides part of the meals shared at lunchtime, but also through visits to other places in the *EPNS* (the *Montlahuc* school farm and the *Comtesse* immersion site). Cooperation, autonomy and transversality are at the heart of the educational project which aims at the acquisition of fundamental knowledge, the blossoming of the pupil in all dimensions, taking care of social skills and human development with a vision of permaculture. On another level, among other new projects, in partnership with the

¹⁰<https://gaiaeducation.org/> accessed 03 Jan. 2019.

¹¹<https://www.ecolenaturesavoirs.com/> accessed 03 Jan. 2019.

¹²They take up the nine principles of life analyzed by one of the founding members of *EPNS*, geographer and specialist on the Kagaba-Kogi Indians of Colombia, Eric Julien. Cf. Straus and Julien, 2018.

¹³<https://www.ecolenaturesavoirs.com/caminando/> accessed 3 Jan 2019

Tchendukua association and the ENS of Lyon, the EPNS contributed to an exchange of experience inviting Kagabas-Kogis Indians to meet French academics.¹⁴

Each of these two ecotopias, according to its own cultural and territorial specificities, is therefore a place of innovation, experimentation and metamorphosis which indicate that resistance to the catastrophic system can be a source of creative joy. But in what way does ecotopian education enable us to face the challenges of the Anthropocene?

4 Ecotopian Education and the Challenges of the Anthropocene

The recognition of the Anthropocene produces at least one consensus: the conditions of habitability of the earth we inhabit are in the process of changing abruptly. In the face of this, ecotopias, small experimental structures that are rooted in the earth and on the fringes of ordinary educational institutions, do not find it difficult to transfer the educational centre of gravity, a change that is made necessary by this “new climate regime” (Latour, 2017). Education should no longer aim only at individual emancipation through the acquisition of skills that can be valued in society and in the market. It must also enable us to connect in an elementary way with what constitutes our vital relationship with nature, in order to transform the logics of domination and destruction into partnership and symbiosis. Facing the Anthropocene therefore requires shifting the main objective of educational processes towards what could be called ‘ecological emancipation’, which would involve the exploration of inter-relationships with one’s living environment and with the collectives that inhabit it, on different levels: sensory, cognitive, social and spiritual. At stake is the transition from the subject promoted by modernity, who is autonomous or independent, but not rooted in the earth, to the plurivalent or earth-dependent subject. In *Biogea* (2015), M. Serres deploys a critique of the modern subject that has reduced the relationship to the world to that of objectivity, i.e. to a “partial work of reason”; (p. 32) that produces correlatively an isolated subject, tendentially depressive and destructive. To this “subject deprived of valences”, Serres opposes a subjectivity experienced as the power of connections. The self would no longer be an entity separate from a world of objects, but we would be like “pseudopod bunches” (p. 34), that is to say, with the power to create links through our senses, through receptivity and the gift of caresses, evolving between the two poles of being open and closed, of life and death, of symbiotic creation and narcissistic destruction. Thus, in the face of the Anthropocene, it is important to promote the kinds of experiences that will develop a ‘connected’ subject, that is present to itself, to others and to the world, that would recognize ecological relations as part of its own subjectivity, in short, what Arne Næss (1987) called the ‘ecological Self’.

¹⁴<https://www.ecolenaturesavoires.com/assets/NOV-18-DOC-OK-REMECIEMENTS-DIAG-CROISE.pdf> accessed 3 Jan 2019

5 The Challenge of Ecological Emancipation

Ecotopias are a laboratory for an education centred on the territorialized person, i.e. one who is aware of the pacts he or she has with nature. As there is no age limit for recognizing oneself as a ‘child of the earth’, ecotopian education is not limited to childhood, but envisages training and education processes for all. By repairing the absence of self and the rupture with the living environment induced by cultures that are not ‘earthbound’, this ecotopian education responds to several challenges of the Anthropocene. Against consumerism and pathological imaginaries of limitlessness, ecotopian education contributes to reconfiguring the economy of desires according to what is vital and essential to us and not what is socially and economically shaped and superfluous. In contrast with obedience and conformism, ecotopian education, emanating from active minorities, contributes to ecological emancipation, the emergence of persons who are attentive to their desires, which are sometimes contentious and on the fringes of the hegemonic system. In the face of the storm, the brutal mutations that threaten the current system, and even the possible prospects of collapse, ecotopian education revalues root knowledge, vital because it is elementary in the knowledge of oneself, of one’s environment and of the techniques that enable life. Finally, in contrast to the chimera of global mastery, ecotopian education proposes as an alternative attending and listening to vital relationships in order to resist parasitism (which takes everything and gives nothing back) and to promote a joyful symbiosis (which cares for living together).¹⁵ If education is always “the production by the other in myself of a third”, as Serres once showed (Serres, 1997, p. 53), then it can be said that ecotopian education aims at the ideal of a third Party with its feet in the nourishing earth and its head in the ever-changing sky, a craftsperson and a scholar of vital relations, rich in elementary knowledge and joyfully alive in the face of the Anthropocene.

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¹⁵ See Serres, 2015, pp. 169–170.

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