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Aesthetic and Pedagogic Entanglements – Special Issue

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The pedagogical and aesthetic aspects of children's and young adult's literature have often been pitted against each other. Yet, if we think of children's literature as a participatory and mediated practice, the aesthetic and the pedagogical dimensions are no longer opposed to each other. In the last two decades, we have witnessed an 'educational turn' in contemporary arts practices (Rogoff, 2010), where the emphasis is no longer on the finished aesthetic object, but on the processes and relationships established with the communities and with the public that are part of the art project itself: that is, education becomes the object of deconstruction or transformation of the arts (Mörsch, 2011).

The division between the pedagogical and the aesthetic has been recognised as more porous after the incorporation of theories, approaches and concepts from childhood studies to our field in the last two decades. Childhood studies has argued for the importance of considering children not as 'adults in the making', but rather as makers in their own right and has raised numerous questions about adult positionality in research about children. In contrast to the developmental discourse of children's immaturity, ignorance, and incompetence, childhood studies have remarked that children are social actors and should be granted effective participation in society. This has influenced a growing interest in how children participate in literary cultures (Conrad & Kennedy, 2020; op de Beeck, 2020) motivating new methodological and conceptual developments such as the kinship-model approach

(Gubar 2016), participatory research (Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2016), new materialists approaches (García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2021), genetic criticism (Joosen, 2021), and a broad attention to how children take part in intergenerational play cultures (see, for instance, Bernstein, 2013, Harde & Kokkola, 2018, Kelen & Sundmark, 2016).

In our call for the 25th Congress of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), we invited scholars in our field to think about the fruitful and innovative alliances between the literary and the educational. We invited to look at these **relationships** as entanglements; that is, not as alliances between two separate approaches, but as complex and interdependent entities that cannot be told apart. In this, we follow new materialist arguments about the nature of interactions, which Karen Barad (2007) proposes to look at **as** "intra-actions"; entities that do not exist prior to the encounter that produces them. We proposed to look at the entanglement of the aesthetic and the pedagogical as constitutive of children's literature which we take to be a participatory and mediated practice. Children's literature is always found in a web of relationships that includes ideas of childhood, institutions, educational practices, popular cultures and intergenerational readings. By bringing in the notion of entanglements we aimed to inspire more inter- and transdisciplinary approaches. We did not consider these advances to be totally new to our field, but rather stemming from timeless questions about how much attention should we give to social themes or how it is that literary education needs to combine the enjoyment of canonical texts with critical engagement. We understood that these were not separate questions from those regarding the aesthetic as a force that opens up "the universe to becoming other" (Grosz, 23).

For this Special Issue, we invited contributions to question the essentialized positions of the adult and the child in relation to children's literature and media. Therefore, we asked to explore the theoretical and methodological possibilities of combining and rethinking the hermeneutical methods of the humanities, the experimental and empirical approaches of social sciences and arts-based research, as well as contemporary anthropological and educational research.

The invitation was eagerly accepted and we received more manuscripts than we could possibly publish in this Special Issue. Here we gather the articles that ostensibly expand our field of study, challenging our preconceptions of children's and young people's literature and literary education, broadening ideas of what is considered 'reading'; that is, venturing for alternative entanglements between literacies and literatures. In many instances, reader response theory, our most dominant paradigm to think about readers, seemed to be falling short. Reader response theory (Rosenblatt 1976) is usually deployed as a method to position the reader as the main agent in the meaning making process. Reader response theory is predominantly comfortable with children making relations, interpreting, feeling about and elaborating on the narrative, producing a less authoritative text. However, in this issue, reader response theory is brought forward to show and push the limits of a transactional approach, remarking when and how the texts demand an ethical stance (as we will see in King's article), how the book-reader mutates with non lineal, interactive and immersive narratives (as we will see in Guanio-Uluru's article), and to expand and contrast theoretical frameworks using the insight of "empirical" readers (as we will see in Campagnaro and Goga's article). Reader response theory seems insufficient when literary entanglements exceed the aesthetic/pedagogical binary, and when reading cannot be

traced back to an autonomous reader. In these writings reader response is strained, signalling an opening in the field that requires new methodologies and conceptualizations.

We open this number with Helma van-Lierop Debrauwer proposal for children's literature studies to be conceptualised as a "joint venture" between children, texts, and adults in which we, researchers, need to develop an epistemological humility to overcome what Karin Murriss terms as a the onto-epistemic (in)justice (Murriss 2013, 2016); that is, how children are wronged as knowers for being children. Van-Lierop Debrauwer article has been developed after her congress' keynote in which she looks back at her four decades in children's literature studies and how the field has been developing new conceptualisations to deal with the power imbalances between children and adults. In this text, van-Lierop Debrauwer poses crucial questions about how our field deals with child and young readers and what may be gained if we move from traditional socialisation theories to post-age and post-developmental conceptualisations.

Helen King's article about archived responses to Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg* vibrates with hope for children's literature to produce understanding and challenge racism, and to promote action. She uses letters to author Beverly Naidoo from 1984 to 2014 from groups of children aged 5 to 16. Here, books are recruited as instruments to interrogate normativity and hegemony, in a similar fashion than critical literacy. Here, books are positioned not just as ideological vehicles that must be decodified and held under suspicion, but as potential antiracist pedagogical tools. King offers four types of engagement to *Journey to Jo'burg*, notoriously entangling the affects, identity, resistance and critical literacy of the readers. Remarkably, King's article explores a complicated notion of children's agency, one that is

composed by resistance and negotiation with institutional frameworks, authoritative adults and the text itself.

Leander Duthoy's article reveals reading and discussing about children's books as embedded within generational practices. The kinship-model proposed by Marah Gubar (2016) has not closed up the discussion but opened up new questions about how we use generational orders to organise research and criticism. In this debate the discussion of age norms as essentialized categories to produce age difference has shown to be productive. In childhood studies, this discussion has shifted from childhood and adulthood as structural attributes towards childhood and adulthood as relational categories, not constituted by belonging to an essentialized age but constitutive *in relation to* . Duthoy's work presents interviews and focus groups with people from a wide age spectrum to deepen our understanding of the construction of age norms in the always messy interplay of fictional characters and non-fictional readers. He offers two concepts around which age normativity is constructed and challenged: innocence and wisdom, traditionally attributed to childhood and adulthood respectively. In this contribution innocence and wisdom show their intra and intertextual performativity, as its potential to defy too narrow understandings of knowledge.

In XX Smith's article, the creative processes behind two comic series and how the child and adult worked collaboratively is explored. This piece also expands on generational order, as Smith summarises the actual collaborative processes—informed by the adult author—and examines the way in which the adult's and the child's positions are negotiated and constructed in the narratives and through the narrative devices of the genre, as well as reaching beyond the frames towards the reader and their fantasies and desires. To this end, Smith analyses the web and print comic series *Axe Cop* (2009-2017) created by Malachai

and Ethan Nicolle, and *Esther's comic book series* (2016) by Riad Sattouf. In both cases the original story that gives way to the respective comics is told by a child and then narrated into a comic by an adult; that is, first imagined by Malachai for *Axe Cop*, and lived by the girl that is represented as Esther in *Esther's comic book series*. The article resists Nikolajeva's idea of *aetonormativity* (2010) in that it seeks to describe how the child and the adult wrestle to contest the asymmetry that Nikolajeva asserted governs children's literature. Likewise, the article strives to broaden the idea crossover fiction (see Beckett 2010) , blurring the lines between author-reader that tend to stand for adult-child in our field, opening to further explorations where these two collaborate either to produce creative works or research alongside, in a child-led participatory authorship.

The notion of entanglement is central to the article coauthored by Marnie Campagnaro and Nina Goga "Material Green Entanglements. Research on student teachers' aesthetic and ecocritical engagement with picturebooks of their own choice". In this article, they report on a course module designed to promote notions of sustainability and ecocriticism through children's literature. The notion of entanglements helps the authors to make claims about the possibilities given by children's texts, and picturebooks specifically, to engage with students differently. In their analysis of videos prepared by the students, the authors aimed to trace the different embodied and affective forms of engagement acknowledging in this way that verbal communication about the books is quite a reduced means to account for reading experiences. The notion of material green entanglements allows them to inquire into how the aesthetic proposal of the picturebooks could be related to collaborative ways of telling about and with them. The authors' attention to materialities gives some insights on how empirical research with books may zoom out from a focus on

readers to address the multiple and complex relations that human and more-than-human entities establish with them.

In the article “How Informational Activity Picturebooks Work: Interactive Invitation to Critical Approach to Knowledge”, Krzysztof Rybak introduces the informational activity picturebook as a subgenre of picturebooks, marking the difference with non-fiction picturebooks. The article is informed mostly by a theoretical framework of articles that appear in *Verbal and Visual Strategies in Nonfiction Picturebooks: Theoretical and Analytical Approaches* (2021) edited by Nina Goga, Sarah Hoem Iversen, and Anne-Stefi Teigland, and *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* (2018) edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer. Aligned with our Call for Contributions and the Aesthetic and Pedagogic Entanglements 2021 Congress, this article celebrates how informational activity picturebooks elicit active engagement with and through this type of books. Rybak distinguishes modes and levels of interaction performed by the “co-creator”. Though questioning the role of the adult-author that invites or “gives instructions” to the intended reader/co-creator is beyond the scope and intention of this article, Rybak explores the role of such instructions and the empty space left within the book for the co-creator to act upon or play with while also learning, as well as the invitations to tear pages and co-create beyond the book itself.

Requiring an even a more active engagement, Lykke Guanio-Uluru’s article expands on the concept of reader and proposes *efferent and afferent gaming* both to refer to the active involvement of players and readers with interactive narratives and as a way of hinting at the merging of aesthetic and functional experiences. Guanio-Uluru highlights children's literature intermediality, and its belonging to a fluid mediascape involving human and nonhumans actors like fanmade productions, films, cómics, apps, forums, critics, etc.

Much of the vocabulary that we have to talk about players and readers comes from different fields of research, games and literature studies. Intermediality, multimodality and cross-mediality are some of the growing theoretical tools that foster the dialogue between these fields. However, interdisciplinary research is also being done by merging concepts from children's literature scholarship and games theory. Thus, the field has advanced a hybrid vocabulary to reflect the literariness of games and the playfulness of books.

In this issue we tried to show children's literature potential between the pedagogical and the aesthetical by providing insights into the multiple relations of children's literature with the publishing industry, readers/viewers/consumers/users, authors/artists, the practices of reading/sharing/discussing/reversioning, and the new technologies. We also aimed to advance the implications this approach has for the ever growing field of children's literature studies, inviting to think about possible entanglements between reception and affective engagement, that is, the flows of emotions and affects between texts, readers and other materialities. We hoped to have succeeded in presenting a wide and diverse range of aesthetical and pedagogical entanglements, to encourage different ways of thinking, feeling and doing about children's literature .

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