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Jan Suk

Where Are We Now: A 12° Invitation

Nová Paka 30. 11. 2025 16:06

For the 12th time, the Hradec Kralové Journal of Anglophone Studies has come out, which is why you are holding it in your hands and reading it right now. Yet, right now, I am sitting in my home typing these words and drinking beer, Krakonoš 12°, to relax while writing; paradoxically, the sensuous experience has brought me back to my memories of my upbringing and early academic years as a student in Vrchlabí, with the school located in the proximity of Krakonoš brewery. But why this confessional spill of guts, I wonder? Because I am wondering, while writing, about you, dear reader, who is now reading: Who are you? Where are you now?

"Where are we now?" is the title of a song by David Bowie. The song was originally recorded in secret between September and October 2011 at the Magic Shop in New York City released on 8 January 2013, Bowie's 66th birthday. Last week, on a car journey to work, I decided to play the Blixa Bargeld's cover version (recorded at Bonello with Nikko Weidemann in 2025) to my third-year students in our creative seminar. I stripped them of any information about who wrote it and what they were listening to, and in the post-listening reflection, I was amazed at how knowledgeable, inspiring, and original their feedback was. "You never knew that/That I could do that/Just walking the dead," Bowie/Bargeld sings.

My students are the best aspect of my academic work. Unfortunately, my daily toil is predominantly limited not only to spending my time with them; pervasively, I dedicate most of my creative energy to endless bureaucratic spam. In the meantime, between teaching and fighting the administrative beast, I try to squeeze my limited research and even sparser writing. Thus, I am limited to recycling or downcycling the little I have learned recently from what was supposed to have been grand state-of-the-art research findings. My nearly non-existent academic writing output is thus limited to screams and shouts of my externally suppressed desire to communicate something. I feel the same way as Matthew Goulish puts it, "write by rewriting other people's words, on the humble assumption that somebody already said what I have to say better than I will ever say it. My writing involves rearranging, altering, adding to, subtracting from, the words of those who came before" (117).

I believe that these days, the majority of my colleagues share the same fate. BTW, "I like the word *believe*. In general, when one says 'I know,' one doesn't know, one believes" (Marcel Duchamp). Hence, I am even more honoured and pleased to be writing this introduction to my colleagues and friends, whose time management and research are undoubtedly far more consistent and thus publishable. So please accept my quick overview of the next twin issue of our journal.

The issue opens as customary with a section dedicated to Linguistics and Methodology. The initial study by Jana Černá and Josef Nevařil addresses the topical issue of how future English teachers, specifically students from Generation Z born between 1997 and 2003, approach online technologies. Furthermore, their paper proposes possible ways to integrate their findings into pre-service teacher training programmes. In a similar fashion, Petr Hájek, in his paper entitled *Representation of Selected Subjunctive Phrases: Topicality and Grammatical Relationships in English—A Corpus-Based Study (1990–2019)* attempts to "provide clear evidence that the subjunctive mood is not merely a sporadic or obsolete feature of English, but a grammatical resource that continues to function in specific registers and contexts."

The volume proceeds with two papers revolving around the use of AI: Monika Hřebačková & Martin Štefl analyse intercultural and digital leadership in the age of Gen AI, which is an indeed interdisciplinary contribution discussing how students develop intercultural (communicative) competence while

encouraging thoughtful and critical engagement with AI technologies; Václav Řeřicha, on the other hand, explores how the rise of social media has transformed emotional expression, perception, and education, drawing on Marshall McLuhan's media theory and his observation that "the new medium is never considered an art form, but only a degradation of the older form" (*Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 308). Finally, the section also features a premier paper by an emerging scholar, Dominika Mihaľová, whose paper underscores the need for improved methodological training for teachers and recommends a more systematic, explicit, and balanced approach to pronunciation instruction to better support students in developing clear and intelligible speech.

The literary section opens with an interdisciplinary paper by Aleksandra Hołubowicz addressing two contemporary novels: Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* (2018) and Stanislav Biler's *Destrukce* (2021), to advocate a need for combining education with activism for social transformation. Analogously, the following paper, called *Reader, Spectator, Viewer, Player, Influencer: The Changing Paradigms of Reception as a Challenge to Literary History,* by Kristýna Janská examines how recent transformations in media and cultural production challenge traditional literary historiography. Drawing on Hans Robert Jauss's reception aesthetics and his concept of the "horizon of expectation," Janská argues that literature must increasingly be understood through the lens of its reception across diverse media platforms.

The other two papers are also highly transversal: Michael Matthew Kaylor challenges traditional readings of "The Windhover" by the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins to foster Hopkins' complex and utterly unique approaches called "inscape" and "instress," coinages that were developed, in part, after he had embraced a conception of reality that aligned with that of the medieval Oxford theologian Duns Scotus (read through Philip Tonner). Additionally, Botagoz Koilybayeva, in her paper entitled *No Techno-Human Is an Island: Non-Anthropocentric Dimensions in the Philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram*, traces a more biocentric paradigm that comes to the fore in a world engulfed in a climate crisis and outlines the strengths and possible shortcomings of eco-phenomenological narratives.

The volume returns to the issue of leadership as contemplated by Monika Hřebačková & Martin Štefl above; it is Hana Pavelková's contribution which understands leadership as performance enacted through language in both theatrical and real-world contexts. Pavelková uses Charlie Josephine's 2022 play *I, Joan*, reimagining Joan of Arc as a non-binary, queer leader, as the central case study for her stimulating paper. Alice Tihelková returns to our journal with another contribution highlighting the fact that there is indeed a lot rotten in the kingdom of Great Britain. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, Tihelková's paper examines the attitudes underlying the transition from the understanding of unemployment-related poverty as a structural problem to its perception as an individual moral failure curable by "work for work's sake policies that have largely ignored the precarization of the labour market and the new social risks engendered by the increasingly globalized economy." Finally, the journal closes with Agata Walek's paper utilising conceptual metaphor theory and new materialist insights to argue that David Abram's metaphors, when taken literally, destabilize the traditional Western hierarchical models.

Dear reader, whoever and wherever you may be, thank you for having read this far. I would like to inform you that the present text is a result of an experiment conducted with my students from the aforementioned seminar to spend 30 minutes writing together[(1)]. One of the writing topics was Where Are We Now, based on the song from the week before. I hope, dear reader, that you understand that this is not an introduction; rather, this is an invitation: an invitation to sit down, read the 12th volume of our journal, drink a glass of something dear to you (it need not be a 12° beer), and immerse yourselves in the state-of-the-art findings of Anglophone studies. *Bon appétit.* I hope the experience will help to realize who and where you are; or, to conclude with David Bowie, "Where are we now?/The moment you know/You know, you know."

Notes

(1) The experiment was inspired by Matthew Goulish, who justifies the need for writing together followingly: "In painting classes you paint *together*, you don't paint, bring your work to class and have it criticized. There is a model and everyone is working together. The important thing is to teach how to *work*, not how to criticize a finished piece. There is something about the atmosphere in a room full of people working. Each person's concentration is giving you something.

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LINGUISTICS AND METHODOLOGY

Jana Černá & Josef Nevařil

How Generation Z Future English Teachers Approach Online Technologies

Abstract: *This article explores how future English teachers, specifically students from Generation Z born between 1997 and 2003 approach online technologies (OT). The research involved students at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University in Olomouc, with 53 participants included in the analysis. Results indicate that future English teachers tend to be keen creators, with average values reflecting a creative approach to OT, although the receiver and reluctant approach is represented to some extent as well. The findings reveal that students recognize the significance of OT for their profession but exhibit some reluctance in regularly updating their knowledge of new technologies. This study provides valuable insights into how Generation Z approaches online technologies and how these attitudes may influence their future teaching practices. It also suggests possible ways of integration of our findings into pre-graduate teacher training programmes.*

Future teachers

In this article, future teachers refer to students of teacher-oriented academic programmes. The empirical part of the article provides a detailed description of respondent groups in terms of birth year and field of study, with a focus on students in full-time study programmes.

The characteristics and specifics related to the age of future teachers are discussed, focusing on physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. The paper also explores how personality traits of teachers evolve across generations, with a particular focus on Generation Z and its distinct approach to the use of online technologies (i.e. all kinds of digital technologies, including web pages, applications, social networks, etc.), which is considered an independent variable in the research.

Future English teachers as understood in our paper were born between years 1997 and 2003. The period of young adulthood spans from the ages of 20 to 30 and it is marked by the development of professional roles, stable partnerships, and parenthood (Scales 150–174; Vágnerová 262–305). Jeffrey Arnett proposed the term "emerging adulthood" ("Emerging Adulthood" 469–480) and suggests that this developmental period spans between ages 18 to 29 and shares the following characteristics: self-focus, instability, identity explorations, feeling in-between, and a sense of possibilities ("Cultural Psychology"; Trible). It is "the time from the end of adolescence to the young-adult responsibilities of a stable job, marriage and parenthood" (Munsey 68).

In the Czech Republic, as for emerging adults, research by Macek et al. (444–475) shows that two-thirds of respondents feel "in-between", influenced by demographic and social factors. Older adults view themselves as more emotionally stable and future-oriented compared to emerging adults, who express a sense of freedom related to social changes, often accompanied by anxieties about their abilities and others' behaviour.

Arnett and Mitra claim in their research that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a lasting mental health crisis in the U.S., with symptoms of anxiety and depression peaking in early 2020 and only moderately declining since. The issue is similarly addressed by Wood (123–143) and American Psychiatric Association ("Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders").

As for university students in the Czech Republic, a study conducted amongst university students of psychology shows that also in Czech higher education students experience a low level of mental well-being.

Many avoid seeking help due to shame. Research shows that self-compassion is linked to better mental health and reduces shame (Kotera).

To add another perspective, it cannot be overlooked that the COVID 19 pandemic in effect amplified and intensified the transfer of many aspects of modern life into the online space.

Černá et al. ("Digital technologies") concludes that OT "play a crucial role in students' lives… and support their personal and professional development". This study also shows that future teachers of English are fully aware of the significance of OT for the profession (8601).

Another study from Palacký University in Olomouc, the Czech Republic by Černá et al. ("Online Technology") reveals the possible advantages and drawbacks of online technologies (OT) usage listed by future English teachers. Among the greatest benefits, they suggest e.g. the fact that OT are motivating and interesting, make students more active and involved and help students improve their abilities to find solutions to problems (42). As for the drawbacks, students mention greater need for technical skills and support (43).

The follow-up research conducted by Černá et al. on three Czech universities (Palacký University in Olomouc, Masaryk University in Brno and University of Pardubice) reveals, apart from the advantages mentioned above, that students appreciate that OT make communication and cooperation easier and nurture their creativity. As for disadvantages, students remark on the symptoms of losing the ability to pay attention ("Using online technologies" 49–50).

Generation Z

A generation typically refers to groups of people born over a 15–20-year span (Mitchell 1051–1055). A generation can be defined as: "a group of people born within a certain time range, defined by significant events (e.g., wars), technologies (e.g., the internet), social conditions (e.g., political systems), or other significant factors" (Kubátová and Kukelková 39).

According to generational theory, developed by Strauss and Howe, it can be summarized that generations are shaped by time spans, consisting of groups of people who share a common historical time and space, which gives them a collective personality ("Generations"; Šmahaj et al. 9–10).

Each generation has unique expectations, experiences, generational history, lifestyles, values, and demographics that influence their behaviours (Williams and Page). The characteristics of generations born in specific time periods are based on a broad awareness of social and cultural trends, providing information about the shared traits and experiences that define each generation.

Persis (21) offers a division into four groups (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials or Generation Y, and post-Millennials or Generation Z), emphasizing Generation Z as the emerging generation. It is possible to say that each generation is characterized by distinct experiences that shape its perspectives on life and behaviour. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2010, is known for its strong digital engagement, activism, and openness to diverse cultures and identities. Key differences between generations include attitudes toward work, technological skills, values, lifestyle, and communication. Each generation has distinct traits, values, and experiences that shape its identity and worldview.

This classification is expanded by McCrindle (1–18), who identifies seven living generations. It is also mentioned by Kubátová and Kukelková (39–41), based on the work of Strauss and Howe, who developed a theory around recurring generational cycles.

In recent years, research focusing on Generation Z has increasingly highlighted their distinct characteristics and contexts within emerging adulthood, particularly regarding their interaction with

digital technology in educational settings. Generation Z, as defined by Chan and Lee (1), has been shaped significantly by the digital environment, necessitating a thoughtful integration of technology into teaching methodologies. These digital natives possess unique learning preferences that challenge traditional pedagogical approaches, prompting a re-examination of how English teacher training programs can better equip future educators with the necessary competencies to engage this cohort effectively Chan and Lee (6–7, 20–23).

Furthermore, Miftāḥ et al. (377–384) emphasize the importance of pedagogical competency development for pre-service English teachers, arguing that critical reflection and practical technological skills are essential for preparing future educators to navigate the complexities of a technology-integrated classroom (Miftāḥ et al. 377–384). This aligns with the findings of Sotvoldievich (168–170), who identifies targeted feedback as a crucial didactic factor that enhances writing competence among future English language teachers, thereby reinforcing the need for training programs to incorporate technology competencies that support writing and communication skills in a digital context.

Moreover, Yan (140–145) shows the interplay between sociolinguistic competence and technology, suggesting that developing such competencies is vital for future English teachers to effectively engage Generation Z. By fostering a nuanced understanding of the sociocultural contexts in which language is used, teacher training can be aligned more closely with the realities faced by Generation Z students.

In conclusion, integrating studies that specifically address the technological literacy and pedagogical strategies suitable for Generation Z into English teacher training programs is crucial. This approach not only supports the emerging adults' developmental needs but also aligns educational practices with contemporary technological advancements, thus preparing future English teachers to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving educational landscape. By establishing explicit connections between these studies and teacher training methodologies, teacher education can enhance its relevance and effectiveness in addressing the unique needs of Generation Z learners.

Users of online technologies

How future English teachers use online technologies in their free time as well as during their studies was researched by Černá et al. ("Možnosti online technologií"). The study focuses on what online technologies future English teachers use, how much time they spend on working with them for study purposes and for pleasure. This research seems to be suggesting that users of online technologies can be divided into two distinct categories—receivers and creators.

On one hand, there are students who use online technologies rather passively, who usually adopt a somewhat receptive role of a mere receiver, on the other hand, there are students who are rather active, productive users, often willing to take risks and explore the online technologies to create their own content.

In this paper, we consider two different perspectives when it comes to the users of online technologies. From one point of view, the users of online technologies can be seen somewhere between the two extremes of passively receiving users and active, creative users. From another point of view, we consider the users' feelings towards online technologies that can range from eager, passionate and keen to unwilling, hesitant and reluctant.

Keen are the passionate users, the ones who like online technologies and enjoy spending time with them. Reluctant, on the other hand, are the ones who use online technologies only because and when they have to without any real interest in them.

Presumably, Generation Z future English teachers should most often fall into the categories of more or less keen creators or possibly, rather keen receivers.

International studies support this division. In a metaverse classroom design project Hwang and Lee (1–14) observe that preservice EFL teachers who created virtual teaching environments gained self-efficacy, autonomy, and technological affordance.

This observation aligns with a broader consensus among recent studies that emphasize how immersive environments facilitate the effective use of technological resources and foster a sense of belonging among learners (Yoo et al. 585; AlGerafi 3953).

Research in pre-service TESOL shows that teacher candidates who actively experiment with innovative methods such as open teaching are more likely to adopt them in future classrooms. Such experimentation fosters dynamic, student-centred learning and moves away from traditional transmission models. As student-driven approaches gain importance, aligning pre-service training with these methodologies is essential (Wu et al. 332; Yang and Chen 178).

In contrast, candidates engaging with OT only passively tend to sustain transmission models, where teaching is reduced to one-way information delivery, limiting interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking (Winstone 1107; García-Toledano et al. 1086).

Research

This research is a follow up of the third phase of the research conducted via cluster and factor analysis presented in the dissertation titled 'Possibilities of Online Technologies' (Černá 113–138). The dissertation distinguishes between the receiver and creator approach of the users of OT, where two sets of statements were formulated based on the results of an interview carried out in 2021 with future English teachers (Černá 104–112). One set of 13 statements indicates receiver approach and the other set of 13 statements indicates creator approach to the use of OT.

Altogether, 98 students at Faculty of Education, Palacký University in Olomouc, were asked to read the statements and decide to what extent they agree with each on Likert scale from one to six, where one represents strong disagreement and six represents strong agreement. The questionnaire's overall reliability was ascertained using the programme STATISTICA 14 (TIBCO Software Inc.). The Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.80 (Černá 121).

In this paper, the research objective is to explore how a selected group of respondents—future English teachers of the Generation Z—approaches the use of online technologies. Therefore, only responses from students who were born between 1997 and 2003 and study English language teaching are discussed below.

As Table 1 below shows, there are 53 respondents of Generation Z, out of which 24 study in the bachelor programme English for Education, 27 students attend the five-year master study programme Primary School Teaching (future teachers of many subjects, including English) and the remaining two are students of the 2-year follow-up master studies English for Primary and Secondary School.

Study Programme	Year of Birth						overall
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
English for Education (bachelor)	1	–	1	5	7	10	24
Primary school teaching (master)	–	4	8	1	6	8	27

English for primary and lower secondary school (follow-up master)	1	1	–	–	–	–	2
overall	2	5	9	6	13	18	53

Table 1: Generation Z future English teachers

Results

Based on the respondents' answers, for each statement the values of mean, median and modus were calculated. The two sets of statements were then put to separate tables and organised according to the calculated means. For each set, the overall mean, median and modus were ascertained.

The data shown in Tables 2 and 3 below reveal that the overall values of mean (3.44 and 4.08 respectively), median (3.38 and 4.15 respectively) and modus (3.23 and 4.46 respectively) suggest consistent inclination of the Generation Z future English teachers towards the creator approach to the use of OT.

As for the statements from the 'receiver approach' set, eight out of the total 13 gained the mean value below 3.5 (grey background in Table 2), which seems to be suggesting the Generation Z future English teachers tend to disagree with most of the features of typical OT receivers (see Table 2).

Statement	Level of agreement with the statement on Likert scale from 1 to 6. 6 represents strong agreement 1 represents strong disagreement 3.5 mean indicates neutral position					
	mean	median	modus		max.	min.
			m	freq.		
I cannot describe how I use OT.	2.26	2	2	21	6	1
I do not care about pros and cons of the use of OT.	2.30	2	1+2	16	6	1
OT are not effective tools for reaching my goals.	2.66	3	2	14	5	1
I cannot imagine how I will use OT in my future teaching career.	2.87	3	2	17	5	1
There is a lot of free time when I do not know what to do.	3.08	3	2	14	6	1
Even if an OT does not work ideally, I rather stick to it than find a new one.	3.19	3	3+4	13	6	1
In connection with OT usage, self-disciplining myself is quite problematic.	3.32	3	2	17	6	1
I do not actively seek and test new OT.	3.47	3	3	13	6	1
I spend most of the online time without any specific aims.	3.55	4	4	14	6	1
I use OT in my free time at random.	4.13	4	5	17	6	1

OT are above all easily accessible source of entertainment.	4.42	4	4	21	6	2
I use OT, including social networks, to fill the gaps or "empty moments" in my life.	4.62	5	5	17	6	1
I use OT to procrastinate.	4.83	5	6	24	6	1
Overall means	3.44	3.38	3.23			

Table 2: Statements indicating receiver approach to the use of OT

Interpreting the data from Table 2, somewhat inverse proportion can be observed. The more respondents disagree with a statement, the less reluctant receivers they appear to be.

It can be deduced then, that although there are some receiver traits among the Generation Z future English teachers, they do not define their overall approach and feelings towards the use of OT.

Table 3 (see below) can be read as showing rather opposing tendencies. As many as 10 out of 13 'creator approach' statements score the mean relatively high above the neutral 3.5 (grey background in Table 3). Therefore, the Generation Z future English teachers appear to be relatively creative users of OT. The same 10 statements obtain both the median and modus on the level of four or higher. Further, nine of these statements' modus (i.e. the most frequently chosen value) is five or six, which suggests very strong agreement (see Table 3).

Statement	Level of agreement with the statement on Likert scale from 1 to 6. 6 represents strong agreement 1 represents strong disagreement 3.5 mean indicates neutral position					
	mean	median	modus		max.	min.
			m	freq.		
I use OT in my free time purposefully.	5.53	6	6	36	6	3
I know exactly how and why I use OT.	4.74	5	5	19	6	2
I can clearly describe how I use OT.	4.68	5	5	20	6	2
When an app or OT does not suit me, I get a new one without hesitation.	4.66	5	6	20	6	1
I look for ways to educate myself outside of school.	4.57	5	6	17	6	1
I use OT to help me reach my goals.	4.26	4	5	16	6	1
Self-discipline is crucial for me with respect to OT usage.	4.23	4	5	12	6	1
I have got my online activities under control.	4.04	4	5	17	6	1
I actively think about pros and cons of OT.	3.83	4	5	14	6	1
I have got clear plans about the usage of OT in my future teaching career.	3.75	4	4	17	6	1

I routinely update my knowledge about OT tools.	3.13	3	2	12	6	1
I actively seek and use new OT.	3.06	3	2	15	6	1
Regarding the use of OT, I intentionally follow a self-imposed set of rules.	2.57	2	2	19	6	1
Overall means	4.08	4.15	4.46			

Table 3: Statements indicating creator approach to the use of OT

In contrast to Table 2, Table 3 indicates inclination towards direct proportion. The more respondents agree with a statement, the more keen creators they appear to be.

Perhaps surprisingly, students are not very keen about 'routinely updating their knowledge' nor 'active seeking and usage of new OT', however, the same respondents are ready to 'get a new app or OT without hesitation' (see Table 3).

Comparing the tops in the two tables, the respondents most disagree with 'not being able to describe how they use OT' (see Table 2) and place their strongest agreement on 'purposeful usage of OT' (see Table 3) which suggests strong and consistent tendency towards creative usage of OT.

Directing the readers' attention to the bottoms of the tables, the Generation Z future English teachers award their strongest agreement with a receiver approach to the 'usage of OT to procrastinate' (see Table 2) and mostly disagree with 'following a set of self-imposed rules' (see Table 3).

The findings appear to be suggesting that the Generation Z future English teachers can be seen as a community with mostly creative and keen rather than reluctant approach to the usage of OT.

Discussion and conclusions

We believe any user of online technologies can be categorised according to how they use them and according to what their general approach towards online technologies is. Thus, the following four basic types of users can be distinguished:

1) reluctant receiver,
2) keen receiver,
3) reluctant creator,
4) keen creator.

The results from our questionnaire research lead to the conclusion that the Generation Z future English teachers are, as presumed (see above), in many aspects quite keen and creative users of OT, although some features of 'receiver approach' and reluctance towards keeping up to date with the development of the new technologies were found as well.

It follows that while it might be fairly easy to place an individual into one of the four above-described categories, classifying a whole generation of OT users is a task far more complex. Attempting just that, we propose the following model of users of OT (see fig. 1 below).

Describing this model, the horizontal line symbolises the distinction between receivers on one end and creators on the other end of the continuum. On the vertical line, depending on their feelings towards the usage of online technologies, receivers or creators can be described as more or less keen or reluctant towards online technologies and their use (see fig. 1).

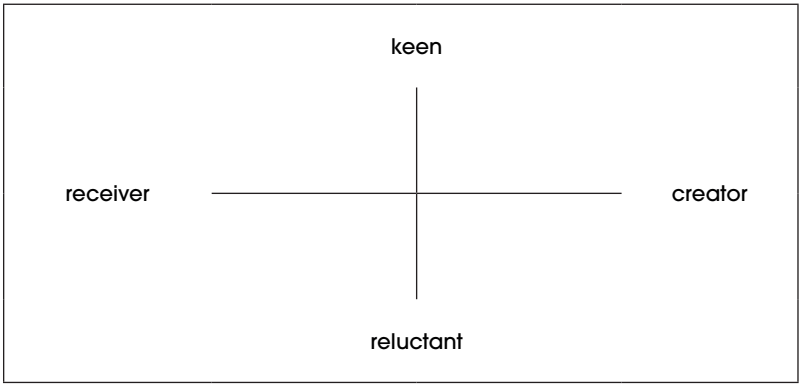

Figure 1: Model of users of OT

Applying our findings, we can only speculate about the Generation Z future English teachers' position in this model, because there is not enough relevant and statistically significant data to give a definite answer. However, the tables above and our interpretations of the observed tendencies lead us to believe we can make a rough guesstimate (see fig. 2).

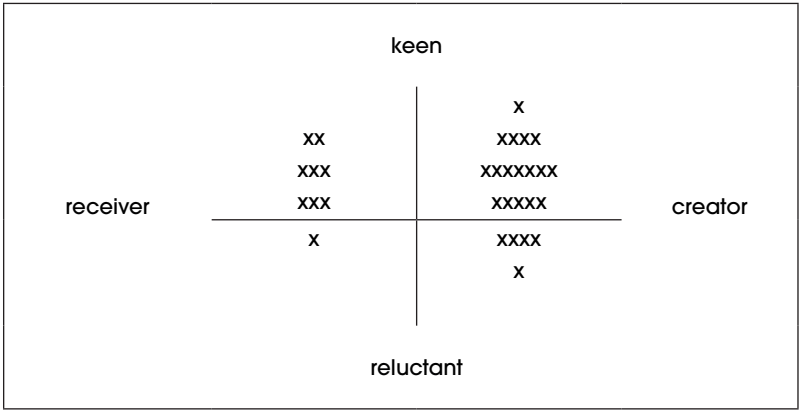

Figure 2: Model of users of OT (Generation Z future English teachers)

It is safe to conclude that there are most probably many more creators than receivers in the group of future English teachers of Generation Z, who tend to approach OT with enthusiasm and keenness rather than indifference and reluctance.

Based on this observation, such technological advancements challenge pre-service teachers to not only become proficient users of these tools but also to critically reflect on their pedagogical implications within the language classroom. This highlights the dual role of technology as both a facilitator and a potential distraction, prompting a need for comprehensive frameworks such as those proposed in the

DigCompEdu initiative (Litiņa and Svētiņa 365–380), which aim to guide educators in digital competencies that combine pedagogical effectiveness with technological proficiency.

Nevertheless, despite an increased focus on integrating digital competencies into teacher preparation programmes, significant gaps remain. Sillat et al. accentuate that many educators still struggle with utilizing digital tools meaningfully in their practices, indicating that ongoing professional development and support are critical to overcoming resistance to technology adoption (Sillat et al. 42).

Moreover, personal factors influencing digital competence, such as age, gender, and prior experience with technology, also play an essential role in the preparedness of future teachers. Rodríguez-García et al. found that these personal variables can lead to disparities in digital competence among pre-service teachers, resulting in unequal readiness to integrate technology into their future classrooms (Rodríguez-García et al. 534).

Taken together, these studies, including our own, point to clear priorities for English teacher education. These priorities include: explicitly developing Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (e.g. Akçay et al.1011); fostering digital self-regulation as both a teacher and learner skill; supporting positive, confident attitudes toward technology; and embedding project-based tasks—such as metaverse lessons, augmented reality activities, or video modules—that position pre-service teachers as creators, not just receivers. Such targeted preparation ensures that OT integration moves beyond novelty, becoming a deliberate tool for communicative, learner-centred language pedagogy.

In conclusion, our findings bring an insight into the issue of online technologies and the feelings with which Generation Z future English teachers approach them. However, further research and more extensive data remain necessary to gain deeper comprehension of the issues outlined in this paper.

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Petr Hájek

Representation of Selected Subjunctive Phrases: Topicality and Grammatical Relationships in English—A Corpus-Based Study (1990–2019)

Abstract: *This article describes the subjunctive mood as a morphological category of verbal modality and focuses on the use of this grammatical phenomenon in current English. Corpus data are used to demonstrate the use of the subjunctive mood on selected excerpts. The subjunctive mood is also presented here as a grammatical category describing the relationship between verb and actuality or intention expressing an important aspect of English grammar. In Corpus findings, the trigger word/phrase method is applied, which allows to detect individual subjunctive phrases, thereby explicitly expressing the grammatical relationships between the components in a sentence. The current state of this language mean is then discussed on the examples identified and its relevance is assessed at the end of this article.*

Research focus

The focus of this paper is the subjunctive mood in English, examined both synchronically and diachronically. Specifically, it aims to investigate the extent to which the subjunctive is still productively used in Present-day English, the registers in which it most frequently occurs, and how its distribution differs between British and American English. In addition, the study explores long-term diachronic tendencies by analyzing the shift between subjunctive *were* and indicative *was* and considers how these patterns align with descriptions in major reference grammars. The analysis is based on large corpus data (COCA, BNC, and COHA), which allow for a systematic comparison across registers and historical periods.

A few comments on the subjunctive

Subjunctive mood (hereafter SM) as a language phenomenon demonstrates its importance in language in terms of its permanent validity. This analysis addresses the issue in grammatical terms, it is also involved in the syntactic correctness and, finally, raises the question of the importance of an utterance while using the subjunctive mood in English.

Subjunctive and its specific meaning can be understood as a complex and the very meaning of it is expressed in the following words. Subjunctive mood belongs to the category of non-facts mood. This category also includes, for instance, imperative mood. To clarify the meaning of a non-fact category, I can delineate it as a certain kind of reality which comprises wishes, requests, desires, warnings, commands, possibilities etc. Subjunctive falls within the category of indicative mood and together with the imperative, they belong to a subcategory of the indicative form of expression (Brinton and Brinton 2010, 129).

Hogg and Denison (2006) complement this argument and acknowledge that "the subjunctive is a subjective expression and is found especially in volitional, conjectural and hypothetical contexts, which are, as it were, one step removed from the situation as fact" (p. 142). Just for completeness, they also add "the subjunctive is not (or no longer) a primary marker of modality: it has grammaticalized" (p. 142). According to Jespersen's study, which is relevant to this point, all the subjunctive mood belongs to the mood category and tense fulfils its function as the secondary agent (Jespersen 1933, 255).

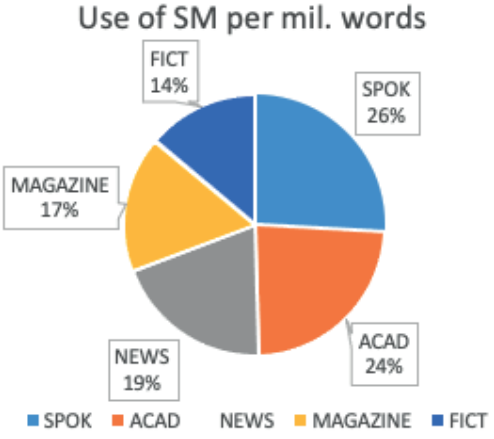
Corpora data (mainly spoken and academic form) which were used and referred to these different language variants as a basis for this analysis show the opposing fact to the general belief stating the subjunctive mood as a language mean is very often considered as an extinct phenomenon. Kovács (2010) even says "the subjunctive in English is a fairly marginal and rather controversial topic of grammar. In fact, it is usually described as moribund, fossilized and almost extinct in Present-Day English" (p. 57). Jack English's (2009) study provides the basis for this data and states that it is not possible to assess data from the point of view of a single period. To prove this, he examined data from the language corpus, namely

COCA (385 mil. words). Jack's English focused on the subjunctive rate used over the years 1990–2008 with a result that says subjunctive is on the decline and this is evidenced by the usage of subjunctive mood 5,5 mil. words between 1990–1994 and 3,6 mil. words between 2005–2008 (Kovács 2010, 59). On the other hand, another outcome from the same study can be used to report the following data from the subsequent Figure and Chart and thus puts it in the opposite direction:

Table 1 Percentage of SM use within given genres

Genre	SPOK	ACAD	NEWS	MAGAZINE	FICT
mil. words	5,8	5,3	4,4	3,8	3,1

17



The Figure and Chart explicitly show the usage of the subjunctive mood in the period of 1990–2008 (per mil. words) and it is equally divided among different genres in which this phenomenon is used.

In this case, using the data provided, I can dispute the question of whether the subjunctive is an extinct language phenomenon, or its use is higher than it is assumed. It can provide a reliable data for the subjunctive mood and its change in English. Regarding the previous results, its decline in present-day

English is obvious. Nevertheless, descriptive grammars and traditional linguistics are still addressing this area of language due to its complexity and constant linguistic development. Whereas the mood issue is very marginally addressed in the linguistic studies, Quer points out that "it has never become a major focal topic in theoretical approaches, it often appears as a co-occurring factor" (Quer 2009, 1).

According to many expert studies the subjunctive is not widely used in present-day English but gives a relevant view of the subjunctive. They state that other language means are more frequently used than subjunctive constructions. The result is probably because this form of language has not occurred as much as other grammatical forms. However, considering the findings, I do argue that this language device is not extinct, and it cannot be claimed as not used anymore. Given the results shown in the Figure and Chart above, the very frequent use of the subjunctive in spoken language is simply confirmatory. I can also consider the following a validatory statement from Fries (1940):

> In general, the subjunctive has tended to disappear from use. This statement does not mean that the ideas formerly expressed by the inflectionally distinct forms of the verb called the subjunctive are not now expressed but rather that these ideas are now expressed chiefly by other means, especially by function words (p. 106).

Subjunctive mood and its relevance

The subjunctive mood in general has long been undergoing the development of the English language and forms an integral part of it. Its presence in English is unquestionable and therefore a detailed analysis of the phenomenon must be carried out so that we can then get an idea of its seriousness in the English grammatical system. Despite numerous opinions and a large number of studies and research, this article is to point out the importance of the subjunctive mood for the most part.

At the outset, I would like to mention the comment of the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1924) on the subjunctive mood stating that "from the middle of the nineteenth century there has been a literary revival of some of its uses" (p. 318) which, in a way, is becoming a kind of commitment to me to devote a substantial part of my research to this phenomenon. Needless to say, the subjunctive has also been regarded as a quite controversial topic in linguistics for years, and it is indeed relevant to address this issue. Despite the fact that the subjunctive still holds an important position in the English language, there are opinions and beliefs that the relevance of this issue is exaggerated, and research in this field of grammar is not entirely appropriate on a larger scale.

The subjunctive structures are undoubtedly one of the types of grammatical structures, which inherently have their specific function and a considerable influence on the current language. As for the relevance and its use, it can be assumed from my research that this phenomenon is often marginalized by certain linguists, on the other hand, we can argue here that its function in the sentence is although substitutable, but very appropriate in some cases. The pragmatic aspect plays an important role in terms of whether a speaker expresses an idea or a wish, recommendation, proposal, or obligation with a certain kind of verbal modality. This aspect affects the correct understanding from a listener as well as a mutual comprehension of ideas expressed. It is undoubtedly clear that this phenomenon is not only a matter of archaic or written form of language, but it also appears at all stages of the development of the English language, and it is therefore beyond doubt that the question of relevance is fulfilled here. For this reason alone, it must be noted this subject is very topical in the current language research.

Present subjunctive (PrS) vs. Past subjunctive (PaS)

In this article, I prioritize using the terms present and past subjunctive on purpose and I agree with Waller (2017) who claims that it goes hand in hand with the current tendency in terminology, which is described below, but to which there are numerous arguments against the usage of these terms in present-day English. There are far more terms concerning the subjunctive mood and the terminology differ from case to case. Waller (2017) states "it is rich in terms such as 'present subjunctive', 'past subjunctive', '*were* subjunctive', 'irrealis *were*', 'modal preterite', 'modal past', 'non-inflected subjunctive', 'modally marked form', 'subjunctive construction', 'subjunctive clause', 'subjunctive form', 'optative', 'hortative'". A generative, descriptive, or prescriptive approach, as well as a synchronic or diachronic timeframe, might be the reason that makes it different (p. 27).

Grammarians concur with their explanations of the subjunctive mood, many of whom use different terminology, but ultimately speak of completely identical situations, and they finally discuss, describe, and speak about the same phenomena that the subjunctive expresses by forming specific constructions. 'Unreal situations' or often called 'contrary-to-fact situations' are most often conveyed by the subjunctive structure. Interestingly enough, Huddleston (1984) does not deliberately refer to the mood system, stating "there is no inflectional system of mood in Modern English", and he explains instead that modality is expressed via "an analytic mood system" (p. 164). On the other hand, Huddleston rather uses the term present subjunctive while criticizing the traditional system concerning the mood, but I do not find this term in his studies in great numbers. Besides, the form as *I insist that he take it* is considered to be "a syntactic use of the base form" according to his terminology (p. 149). He does not speak about the subjunctive form.

If I make a general comparison of these two moods from the same category (both are subjunctives), I find they are not fundamentally different from each other. I can say with certainty that these forms are identical in this respect. Speaking of identity, I notice here thesame form of a verb *be* in first / second / third person singular and plural in the present subjunctive part (see the Table below) using the trigger construction with no that-omission, which means they do not differ anyhow. The same situation occurs in the past subjunctive part, using optative sentences with *wish*, see Figure 2. For a general understanding, I can render a few following corpora examples which can prove using these variants in its present and past form. The excerpts are chosen from COCA, BNC corpora. Here I can add a comment of Davtyan (2007) saying, "the forms of present subjunctive are homonymous to the forms of the past indefinite indicative with the exception of the verb *to be*; the form *were* is used for all the persons", which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 PrS and PaS with no-that omission constructions

Person	Present subjunctive	Past subjunctive
I	...that I be...	wish I were...
you	...that you be...	wish you were...
he, she, it	...that he be...	wish he were...
we	...that we be...	wish we were...
they	...that they be...	wish they were

e.g.

(1) *The first move will be to alert all my known contacts, to request that I be held incommunicado if I approach any of them.* (Forbes, Colin. London, BNC)
(2) *Chief Constable has recommended that you be given a trial with the detective staff.* (SPOK: Suffolk Sound Archive: interview, BNC)
(3) *Perhaps I ought to recommend that she be killed.* (FICT: The Book Guild Ltd, 1991, BNC) (4) *And I actually wish that he were trying to be funny because I've done bad jokes.* (SPOK: Fox Susteren, COCA)
(5) *But sometimes I wish I were more consistent an idealist.* (ACAD: Physics Today, COCA).
(6) *While a woman might wish she were someone else, the fashionably mature woman accepts what she cannot change and makes the best of it.* (NEWS: Houston Chronicle, COCA).

In past subjunctive examples, subjects *we*, *you* and *they* were skipped intentionally when searching because the cross-linking of past indicative and past subjunctive is obvious (e.g. *They thought we were there yesterday* for the past indicative, and *They recommended that we were there* for the past subjunctive). The same was performed with other subjects in present subjunctive (*we*, *you*, *they*) for reasons of efficiency. The differences from the past indicative are marked in red in Table 2.

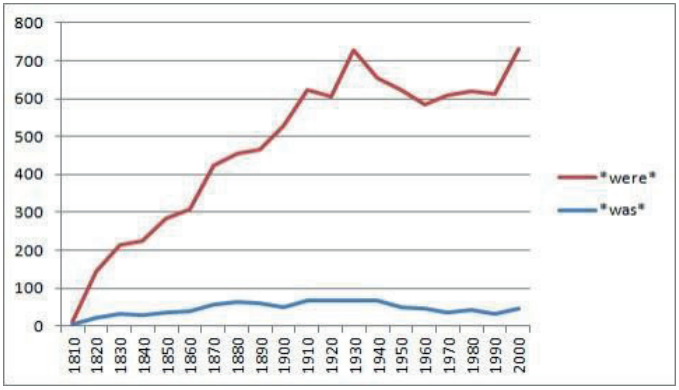
An interesting note on this issue given by a grammarian and lexicographer James Champlin Fernald (1917) says:

> A past tense of the subjunctive of all other verbs is given by many grammarians because there is a distinct form for the past subjunctive of the verb *be*. Hence it is held that there must be a past subjunctive of every other verb in the language to fill the niche thus created. Then the *past indicative* without a change of a syllable or a letter is given as the *past subjunctive*. The simple fact evidently is that in the case of every other verb except *be*, the past tense in a conditional clause is expressed by the *past indicative*, and that in every verb, including *be*, the past perfect tense in a conditional clause is expressed by the past perfect indicative (p. 158).

As for the subjunctive mood, I have encountered different points of view on this area of grammar concerning its syntax and semantic field. The authors' different approaches have a common basis, i.e. they convey the same idea, so their theories are not different from others, but there are differences in the concept of how to present their final results. Hausser (2016) even draws a distinction between the subjunctive and the speech acts saying that "these are to be kept clearly distinct from (the properties of) the speech acts in which a linguistic expression may function" (p. 72). It gives me the idea that the linguistic surface of the subjunctive regarding the correct grammatical construction (not using 3rd person singular in *She suggests that he go to hospital*), and its pragmatic perspective goes far beyond its fundamental importance, i.e. that certain pragmatic aspects play a role, though the latter are not always mentioned to a large extent.

This chapter indicates the interdependence of the PrS and PaS, but, on the other hand, mainly points out that there is a certain contrast between these two. Table 3 is relevant evidence demonstrating the contradiction between the two subjunctive forms across different genres. It is clear that there is a certain discrepancy both in terms of individual periods and frequency, which includes the use of these subjunctive forms in real language. I can also refer to supporting information that is relevant to this current research presented. Speaking of PrS and PaS, Jespersen (1933) also affirms it is not that clear which form is currently used both in speech and written form, either indicative (was) or subjunctive (were) (e.g. *I wish he was here* contrary to *I wish he were here*).

Table 3 Use of 'was' and 'were' per mil.—across genres (COCA and BNC)



Overall interdependability but also different uses of *was* and *were* precisely illustrate by Huddleston's (2002) following statement: "*Was* has been in competition with *were* for 300–400 years, and in general the usage manuals regard it as acceptable, though less formal than *were*" (p. 86). Algeo adds here and confirms the already known fact saying that *was* is often used in common English with first and third person and the condition is the idea to be contrary to fact as opposed to *were* used in traditional English. This fact, he said, appears to be more in British English (Algeo 2006, 38). I can also use corpora examples here to document the use of *was* instead of *were* in given sentences:

e.g.

(7) *But a little bit selfishly, I wish she was here. She's one of my best friends...* (NEWS: NEWS: Minneapolis Star Tribune, COCA)

(8) *Kind of wish he was around now though.* (TV/M: Imperfections movie, Genre: Comedy, Crime, Mystery, Thriller, COCA)

(9) He has no intellect and does not improve a bit: I wish he was in the army. (NON- ACAD: Patronage and politics in Scotland, BNC)

(10) *He didn't answer and I saw his lips quiver slightly.' I wish he was here,' he sobbed.* (MAGAZINE: Woman. London: IPC Magazines Ltd, BNC)

(11) And I thought, oh poor Joey I wish he was back. (SPOK: 12 convs rec. by `Margaret2', BNC)

Present subjunctive constructions

As stated above, present subjunctive form is quite distinguishable from the past form by using specific grammatical construction omitting the suffix -s in 3rd person singular triggered by 'that omission' or 'no that-omission' clause (e.g. *I insist he go there* and *I insist that he go there*). As Biber (1999) adds "subjunctive forms, which are possible in certain finite dependent clauses, do not show subject-verb concord" (p. 180). Subjunctive is typically known for this divergence, which can be understood as denying the grammatical rules known from the indicative mood (e.g. *…that she plays her role as…* versus *…insist that she play her role as…*).

Also, I would like to provide information on the use of the SM that is also used in the past 'environments' and carried out by four elements as (Waller 2017, 99):

1) remote conditionals (*provided*, *as long as*, *on condition*, *supposing* etc.)
2) complements licensed by *wish*
3) complements licensed by *would rather/ sooner/ as soon as*
4) complements licensed by *it BE time (that)*

Quirk (1985) demonstrates another use of the present subjunctive and identifies these structures as very formal; these are (1) open conditional, (2) concessive and (3, 4) negative purposive clauses:

(1) *Man, if he be not blind, only recognizes truth when he sees it.* (ACAD: Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review, COCA)
(2) *Unconventional woman though she be, God has done great things for her, as for others similarly outside the pale.* (MAG: U.S. Catholic, COCA)
(3) *Invisible Girl was sequestered in a Manhattan penthouse during her pregnancy, sheltered from the realities of the dangerous world outside lest it cause her undue stress.* (ACAD: Journal of Popular Culture, COCA)
(4) Despite Alcuin's plea to Aethelheard that he not be stripped of his pallium during his lifetim e… (ACAD: The earliest English kings. Kirby, D P. London, BNC)

Past subjunctive constructions

The past subjunctive operates in the same way as its present counterpart, making the construction with a different form of the verb *be* used in the past tense, i.e. *was* or *were*. The following Table 4 with its multiple function renders some grammatical constituents in a sentence (if-clause etc.) that can be implemented in order to form the past subjunctive construction.

As Quirk (1972) states "the were-subjunctive is hypothetical in meaning and is used in conditional and concessive clauses and in subordinate clauses after optative verbs like *wish*" (p. 77). He also asserts that the past subjunctive is not used in a form other than *were*. For this reason, the term is sometimes referred to as *were-subjunctive*. It occurs in the 1st and 3rd person singular (*he go*, *she do*) and it is often blended with the past indicative form of a verb *be*, thus *was*. *Was* variant is more common in a colloquial speech. As it was previously mentioned, the terminology differs to a very large extent, and he also confirms that grammarians often use more traditional 'past subjunctive term'.

Table 4 Grammatical constituents in an if-clause[1]

Category	Formation	Use	Meaning conveyed	Examples
were-subjunctive	were-form	Adverbial clauses: introduced by *if, as if, as though* Nominal clauses: after *wish, suppose*	Hypothetical or unreal condition	(a) If I were a rich girl I would buy you anything you wanted. (b) I wish she were happy.

It is just called were-subjunctive because, until now, its function has only been a contrast to the past indicative of a verb *be* (Quirk 1985, 1013).

I can compare it with the data in the new grammars claiming the following. *I were* and *he/she/it were*, used for example after if-clause and an optative wish in a formal style, are also subjunctives (Swan 2017, 232). Collins Cobuild (2011) notes "the subjunctive is not very common in English and is used mainly in conditional clauses such as *If I were you…*" (p. 23). This particular grammar does not even mention the past subjunctive format all; it only introduces it as the past simple tense by uttering "when you are talking about an unlikely situation, you use the past simple in the conditional clause" (p. 660). As can be seen, these do not, in principle, distinguish them terminologically from each other. See examples below to show both usages, *was* and *were* in past subjunctive constructions:

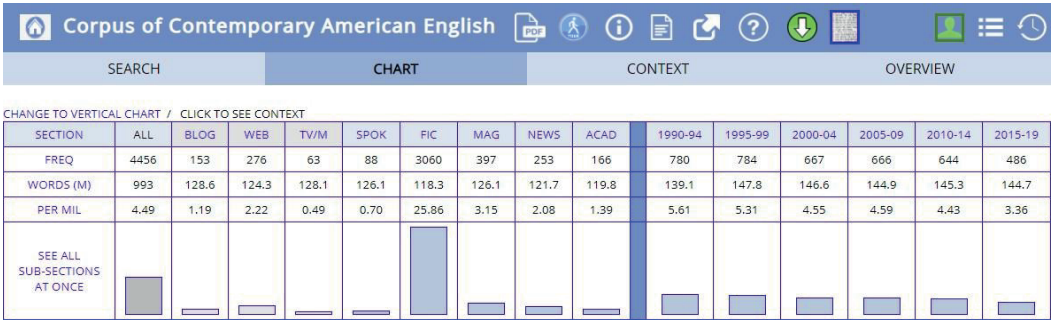
e.g.

(1) *Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another though he were your enemy.* (ACAD: Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, COCA)
(2) *Hethatbelievethin me,though heweredead,yetshallhelive.* (SPOK: CBS_48Hours, COCA)
(3) *Never during his life time though he were a hundred miles the other side of Rome in any circumstances would I take a mortal man to be my mate.* (ACAD: The fabliau in English, Longman Group UK Ltd, BNC)
(4) *It didn't seem to her as though he were joking.* (FICT: Mortimer, J. London: Penguin Group, BNC)
(5) *Big Angus stared at him as though he was not there.* (FICT: Manchester: Carcanet Press, BNC)
(6) *It seemed as though he was caught out by Kevin Magnussen...* (MAGAZINE: MAG:ESPN, COCA)

At this moment, from temporary examination it is already a well-known fact that two forms *was* and *were* are interconnected and it is basically for the speaker to decide which one of them will use in their speech. Both forms are interchangeable. This theoreticaldescriptioncan beexpanded atthispoint,and wecannowlookatthefrequency of their use (see following Figures).

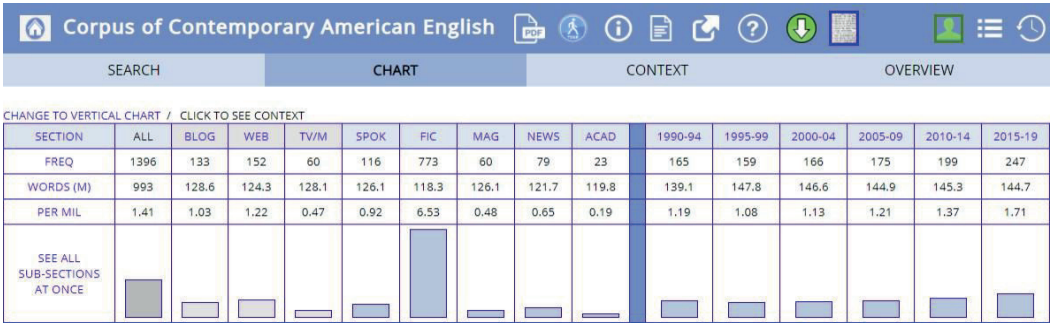
While searching for instances in databases, I used the as if he... phrase to show how the individual genres in English use this construction with use of *were* in sentences. It shows primarily how often speakers use it. In this case, I can also apply other phrases *as if I...* or *as if she...* as phrases of a similar character, but the variant I chose is the only one given here to ensure manageable quantity and, also, these examples can be illustrated in full by the frequency of use of these specific structures. Where necessary, all frequencies are normalized and expressed as occurrences per million of words (pmw). COCA and BNC corpora examples are following:

Table 5 Occurrence of 'were' triggered by "as if he..." phrase in COCA



SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	4456	153	276	63	88	3060	397	253	166	780	784	667	666	644	486
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8	139.1	147.8	146.6	144.9	145.3	144.7
PER MIL	4.49	1.19	2.22	0.49	0.70	25.86	3.15	2.08	1.39	5.61	5.31	4.55	4.59	4.43	3.36
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE															

Table 6 Occurrence of 'was' triggered by "as if he..." phrase in COCA



SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	1396	133	152	60	116	773	60	79	23	165	159	166	175	199	247
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8	139.1	147.8	146.6	144.9	145.3	144.7
PER MIL	1.41	1.03	1.22	0.47	0.92	6.53	0.48	0.65	0.19	1.19	1.08	1.13	1.21	1.37	1.71
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE															

Tables 5 and 6 present the distribution of the subjunctive construction across different registers of COCA, and at the same time display its diachronic development across six time periods (1990s–2010s). As can be seen, the subjunctive occurs most frequently in the genre of fiction (25.8 pmw for *were*, 6.53 pmw for *was*), whereas it is comparatively rare in spoken or academic (e.g. 0.70 pmw for *were*, 0.90 pmw for *was*). Interestingly, in no way do the results and their occurrences differ significantly in other registers, but contrary to expectations, I can see here the spoken register for *was* shows higher normalized frequency[2] (0.92 pmw), which suggests that the construction with *was* remains stylistically marked for more spoken contexts than academic ones. However, if we refer specifically, in those two cases, the number of occurrences in *were* and *was* slightly varies. For *were*, it is 3,060 instances, for *was,* it is 773. The numbers show occurrences in the range of this particular section. It is not without interest that genre fiction is represented to the greatest extent in this respect. The occurrences in other genres are quite minimal when compared.

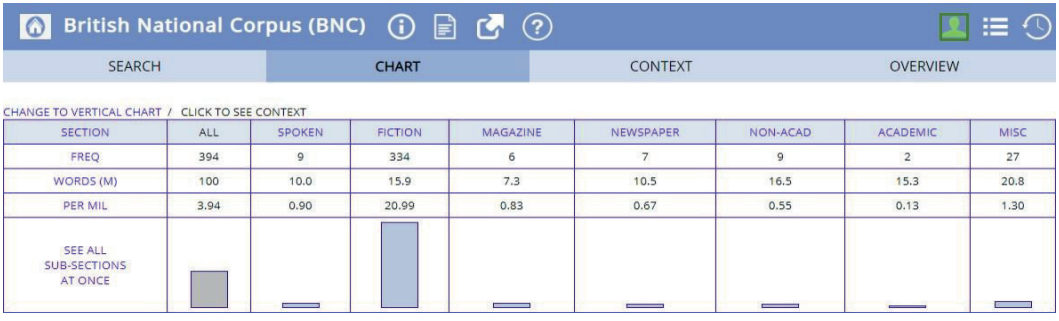
The marked concentration of subjunctive uses in spoken and academic English may reflect two different tendencies: while spoken occurrences are often related to formulaic expressions (e.g. "God Bless"), academic occurrences tend to be linked to more formal and prescriptive contexts. The overall stability across time periods, with only a slight decrease in the 2010s, indicates that the construction, although relatively infrequent, has not undergone a radical decline.

Moreover, I can see a significantly high occurrence of the phrase with *were* compared to other genres. As in the previous Figures from COCA, the difference in frequency of use in individual genres is evident with an obvious predominance in the genre of fiction. In contrast, unlike the previous results in COCA, there is a opposite tendency to use phrases with *was* more than with *were*, but again with the same predominance of examples in the genre of fiction, see Table 7. These data drawn from BNC show similar yet different results.

Table 7 Occurrence of 'were' triggered by "as if he..." phrase in BNC

As shown, the normalized frequency is by far the highest in the Fiction register (19.05 pmw), whereas other registers such as academic (0.72 pmw) or magazines (1.10 pmw) display considerably lower frequencies. This confirms that the use of the subjunctive *were* is strongly associated with narrative and imaginative contexts, where characters' speech and hypothetical scenarios are foregrounded. By contrast, more formal and expository registers, including academic and newspaper English, show a much more restricted use, which suggests that prescriptive tendencies and stylistic conventions play a significant role in constraining the distribution of the construction. These findings are broadly consistent with the COCA data, but the BNC results also highlight the regional specificity of BrE, where the balance between *was* and *were* is somewhat different than in AmE. In particular, the preference for *was* over *were* is more pronounced in the British data, which aligns with the often-cited claim in descriptive grammars that the subjunctive *were* is gradually receding in Present-day English. Nevertheless, its persistence in fiction register demonstrates that the construction still fulfills important stylistic and pragmatic functions rather than disappearing altogether.

Table 8 Occurrence of 'was' triggered by "as if he..." phrase in BNC



In addition to these observations, Table 8 further confirms the predominance of subjunctive *were* in the fiction register (20.9 pmw), while other registers such as spoken English (0.9 pmw) or academic prose (0.13 pmw) show markedly lower frequencies. This distribution highlights the strong stylistic association

of the construction with narrative and literary contexts, where hypotheticality and character dialog are particularly significant. Compared to the COCA data, the BNC results indicate a somewhat sharper contrast between fiction and other genres, which suggests that in BrE the subjunctive *were* may be more restricted to highly conventionalized stylistic environments.

It would still be useful and appropriate to look at the frequency with regard to the time frame in which these two structures are assessed. The data show occurrences in COHA (Corpus in Historical American English) in the range of years 1810 to 2000 (see Figure 9 and 10). Figure 10 shows the slightly upward trend in the use of *was* with advancing years whereas Figure 9 shows a bit changing trend in its use at the very beginning of 19thcentury. Later, the occurrence is almost uniform from 1930 to 2000. As a large number of grammars mention, the use of *was* has its primacy now and it is increasingly on the rise.

Table 9 "If I were" construction (COHA)

Corpus of Historical American English

SEARCH | CHART | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

CHANGE TO VERTICAL CHART / CLICK TO SEE CONTEXT

SECTION	ALL	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
FREQ	3809	7	26	104	123	118	160	211	176	130	231	284	242	210	175	209	227	256	207	337	376
WORDS (M)	405	1.2	6.9	13.8	16.0	16.5	17.1	18.6	20.3	20.6	22.1	22.7	25.7	24.6	24.3	24.5	24.0	23.8	25.3	27.9	29.6
PER MIL	9.40	5.93	3.75	7.55	7.66	7.16	9.38	11.37	8.66	6.31	10.45	12.51	9.43	8.54	7.19	8.52	9.47	10.75	8.18	12.06	12.72
SEE ALL YEARS AT ONCE																					

Table 10 "If I was" construction (COHA)

Corpus of Historical American English

SEARCH | CHART | CONTEXT | OVERVIEW

CHANGE TO VERTICAL CHART / CLICK TO SEE CONTEXT

SECTION	ALL	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
FREQ	6773	7	137	203	170	247	342	458	469	465	472	406	456	364	345	374	356	334	368	382	418
WORDS (M)	405	1.2	6.9	13.8	16.0	16.5	17.1	18.6	20.3	20.6	22.1	22.7	25.7	24.6	24.3	24.5	24.0	23.8	25.3	27.9	29.6
PER MIL	16.72	5.93	19.78	14.74	10.59	15.00	20.05	24.67	23.09	22.57	21.36	17.88	17.78	14.80	14.17	15.24	14.85	14.02	14.54	13.67	14.14
SEE ALL YEARS AT ONCE																					

More specifically, these Figures 9 and 10 reveal the diachronic development of the past subjunctive in AmE based on COHA. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the frequency of *were* gradually decreased, while *was* started to rise. From the 1930s onwards, the dominance of *was* became firmly established, with frequencies stabilizing around 12–15 pmw, whereas *were* remained considerably lower (7–12 pmw). This diachronic shift clearly illustrates the historical replacement of the subjunctive form by the indicative form, a tendency often discussed in descriptive grammars of English.

Were-subjunctive

Davtyan (2007) denotes "the choice of subjunctive depends on the syntactical constructions in which the given form acquires the meaning of unreality, supposition" (p. 21). The present subjunctive conveys an idea connected to the present, future or an idea expressing the same thought equally carried by an independent sentence.

The subjunctive can be either free or dependent and there are certain conditions for both that must be met, these are (Davtyan 2007, 21):

1) free subjunctive – used for its meaning (when expressing a wish, advice, or preference) e.g. *If only he were around now to save it from its greed.* (NEWS: New York Times, COCA)

   I wish I were half as brave as you. (MOV: Nancy Drewand the Hidden Staircase, COCA)

2) dependent subjunctive—the sentence structure requires its use (e.g. using *it's high time* phrase) e.g. *It is high time he were hunting the mourner's bench.* (Oklahoma Sunshine 1905, COHA).

On the other hand, the construction *It's time (that)* is not interchangeable, it means the subjunctive cannot be a substitute for this phrase. As Quirk says "were-subjunctive cannot replace the hypothetical past in constructions introduced by *it's time that* as in *It's time I was in bed*" (p. 1013).

As for the American English, as Waller (2017) finds out that "early evidence that the situation in American English is not being adequately accounted for in such descriptions comes from American linguist George Curme" (p. 100) who says there are four forms that can be used to express such sentences using the structure *it's time (that)*. Moreover, he considers the form of the present subjunctive to be the first to appear in these sentences instead of *were*, *were going* or *should*. Jacobsson (1975) adds that in Present Day English using modal preterite is common, in "rather more formal English the present subjunctive is still usable" (p. 222–223). He also provides the following example:

It is time that the present director no longer be the director. (*Time*, 4 April 1971)

It can be evidenced by John Algeo's study stated by Waller (2017) which shows the different results of the use of preterite and non-preterite forms in the ratio of 8:1 in BrE and 1:2 in AmE. This suggests that AmE is not more restrained than BrE in this area, but there are more variants of how to express ideas through these specific structures. However, how high the percentage of the present subjunctive is directly present is unknown (Waller 2017, 100).

John Algeo (2006) names *were-subjunctive* almost identical to other grammarians, *preterit subjunctive*, and his theory is no different from the others when describing this phenomenon, it is used to express conditions that are contrary to fact. However, his naming of the past subjunctive varies from other grammars and mentions that "the invariant form *were* is traditional for all persons and numbers, but in British use especially, *was* and *were* are both used in their usual agreement pattern with the subject" (p. 38).

Method applied

For this abridged analysis here, I apply the method which reflects a clear verification of the data used in language. It is based on a trigger word/phrase approach using verbal triggers, where the key tags

help to find individual samples of subjunctive structures in sentences, and, if needed, these samples are documented. Using this method, I provide entirely original research focused on detailed monitoring of corpus data. The data used for this paper are a part of large-scale result and extensive investigation across corpora.[3] The originality of the research itself consists of a special method—trigger clause method. To be more specific, a trigger clause is understood as any clause within a sentence using words that introduce the subjunctive mood and change the effect or application of subjunctive structures. Thus, we can see its function in a sentence as a whole. The method chosen allows us to get the overview of these structures on given material. The results of these specific findings are further presented in Figures and Charts for a clear overview. These are subsequently commented on.

Four verbal triggers *recommend*, *suggest*, *request*, *insists* serve as principal elements for the data search in the mentioned Hajek's research. The list of verbal triggers is not complete. I can render other triggers that work on the same principle, e.g. *advise*, *demand*. Certainly, not only verbal triggers can be the key tags for searching subjunctive constructions. There are adjective triggers as well as *essential* and *important* that can serve for the same purpose. For a brief overview and purpose of this text I merely render the verbal trigger *suggest* as an example (see Tables 11, 12).

These triggers can provide sufficient evidence of the use of the subjunctive on the samples and are the main key tags which prove the existence of a subjunctive form, both in spoken and written form. Since this part does not provide completely comprehensive information and it is thus not focused on providing all the instances with the subjunctive mood in English existed in corpora, I provide this merely as an addition, so this search is therefore limited to the above.

The subjunctive form occurs significantly in third person singular (*he*, *she*) as in *I recommend that she/he go home*. It appears here all possible variations. There is no discernible difference using singular and plural. In 3rd person singular (he, she) and 1st, 2nd, 3rd person plural (we, you, they), the occurrences are so slight or not recorded in the corpora. For this paper I do not render any results regarding these key tags as triggers because they do not produce relevant results for this purpose. All other cases coincide with the indicative mood or other structures, so they do not get too much attention here as well. If there is a different verb to be required in *that-clause*, I give this example here, too.

In my findings, the sentence initiation is controlled by constructions as:

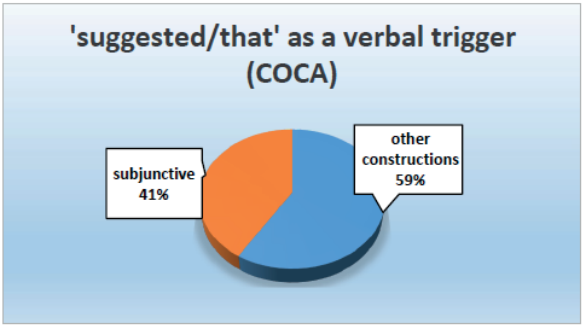
I (verbal trigger) *that/that-omission he/she*...
subject-omission (verbal trigger) *that/that-omission he/she*...
(verbal triggers) in passive constructions + *that/that-omission he/she*

In all instances pronouns *he/she* are rendered because of their role as the most specific indicator in terms of the subjunctive phrases in that-clause constructions. If *we, you, they* pronouns occurred in that-clauses, the results would not be distinguishable from the indicative form as in *I recommend that we ask..., It is suggested that they go...* The verb forms following these structures are identical, thus I have decided not to render any of these. Each Figure shows the frequency of occurrences of the phrase in given corpora and then the number of the subjunctive phrases. The percentage is then determined and shown in the graph.

For reasons of time intensity, and to ensure that the amount of data examined is of manageable quantity, I selected only one trigger phrase which is presented below. Because the search results are most variable for these phrases, the results are considered relevant for subsequent discussion. Below, we can see examples of my corpora findings in Table 11 and 12.

Table 11

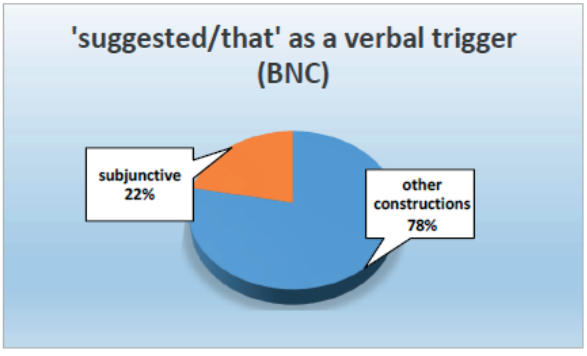
Phrase	Total occurrences	SM occurrences
suggested that he	686	228
suggested he	983	363
suggested that she	300	128
suggested she	524	307



'Suggested/that' as a verbal trigger (COCA)

Table 12

Phrase	Total occurrences	SM occurrences
suggested that he	147	20
suggested he	107	24
suggested that she	47	12
suggested she	51	20



'Suggested/that' as a verbal trigger (BNC)

The theoretical facts identified are appropriately supplemented by examples primarily of two main corpora (COCA and BNC). For this analysis, I have decided to study the corpora data and its content that reflects the active use of this language feature in English, which also enabled me to look critically at the data examined. For my main research dealing with the subjunctive mood in contemporary English

I chose to go through a detailed manual analysis, which has made this piece of writing laborious and time consuming, but on the other hand, it provides a comprehensive and suggested view of the issue commented here. The trigger word method I have applied is to determine the eventual outcomes which allow for an investigation of the actual subjunctive occurrences in the English language exclusively. Specific phrases and clauses were used as trigger elements by which the subjunctive occurrences appeared. Each yielded relevant data for further investigation and discussion.

Discussion and conclusion

From my examination and the final results, it can be concluded that the subjunctive mood as a category of verbal modality has a certain presence in English. Its proportional representation under no circumstances can be determined as being predominant or significantly more emerging in a language than other phrases providing another function. According to data analyzed which support the previous information that the subjunctive mood is not a grammatical feature that appears to be very present, the total number of subjunctive occurrences in corpora is so distinct that we can hardly claim this phenomenon appears to be extinct. If I am to convert these results to percentage points, the result is 38 % of subjunctive constructions in analyzed corpora in total. Moreover, considering the number of other phrases that might have occurred in a given search, this number is quite high to consider it a non-used form in contemporary English. By contrast, the critical view on background and data can serve invaluably to create a clear picture of this language device and its current state in English syntax.

Despite some experts' indications that the subjunctive mood is not capable of surviving as a linguistic form in a language, it appears that, although the trend of its use is declining, this cannot be considered a constant trend. Moreover, the findings presented in this study allow for a more nuanced assessment of the current status of the subjunctive mood in English considering the overall frequency of subjunctive constructions as relatively low compared to other grammatical means of expressing modality. As can be seen from given data, those clearly demonstrate that the subjunctive remains an active and functionally relevant category. In particular, the strong association of the subjunctive *were* with fictional discourse highlights its persistence as a stylistically marked device used to convey hypotheticality and unreality. At the same time, the comparatively limited occurrence in spoken and academic registers suggests that the construction is subject to stylistic constraints and normative pressures.

The diachronic perspective provided by COHA further shows that the balance between *was* and *were* has undergone a gradual but significant shift since the nineteenth century. While *were* enjoyed higher frequencies in earlier stages, *was* has steadily gained ground, becoming the dominant form by the mid-twentieth century. This change proves descriptive accounts in major grammars, which describe the past subjunctive as receding and being increasingly replaced by indicative forms. Importantly, however, the persistence of *were* even in present-day English, though restricted to specific registers and constructions, indicates that the category is not obsolete but rather undergoing functional specialization. These results can be directly linked to the theoretical framework outlined earlier. Considering the English grammar, its use is more common in certain constructions than indicative mood or other grammatical forms that seem to be used more often. From the perspective of mood and modality, the subjunctive exemplifies how English expresses non-factuality through both morphological and analytic means.

The corpus evidence demonstrates that while analytic alternatives (e.g., modal auxiliaries) dominate, the morphological subjunctive continues to serve pragmatic purposes, particularly in contexts where formality, hypotheticality, or stylistic emphasis are required. The data thus support the claim that the subjunctive

should not be dismissed as merely a relic of older English but recognized as a category with reduced but significant communicative value. Based on the data results it can be seen that that the subjunctive persists as a functional grammatical resource, albeit in limited contexts. Consequently, we can also assume that Matthews's (1901) idea saying "it is only a question of time how soon the subjunctive shall be no longer differentiated from the indicative. And so, posterity will not need to clog its memory with any rule for the employment of the subjunctive; and the English language will have cleansed itself of a barnacle" (p. 223–224) does not appear to be supported by current evidence.

Taken together, the empirical findings of this paper illustrate the importance of examining the subjunctive mood not only as a marginal phenomenon but as a grammatical resource shaped by historical change, register-specific conventions, and pragmatic considerations. By combining diachronic and synchronic corpus evidence with theoretical accounts of mood, the paper shows that the subjunctive contributes in distinctive ways to English grammar. Future research may extend this approach by including additional corpora or by investigating pragmatic alignment in interactional data, which would contribute to understanding this phenomenon as a linguistic mean between grammar, usage, and communicative practice.

In conclusion, the findings of this paper provide clear evidence that the subjunctive mood is not merely a sporadic or obsolete feature of English, but a grammatical resource that continues to function in specific registers and contexts. By examining large corpus data synchronically and diachronically, the analysis has shown that the subjunctive persists both as a morphological category and as a co-occurring factor within broader constructions of modality and non-factuality. Although its use is limited when compared to other grammatical means, its persistence in particular registers, most notably fiction and formal contexts, demonstrates that it remains a relevant part of the English grammar. This study therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of how the subjunctive mood is integrated into the overall system of English syntax and its ongoing development. Further research may extend this perspective by exploring pragmatic and interactional aspects of subjunctive use, thereby clarifying the role of this category in contemporary English.

Given the objective I have set myself for this paper as well as the final results, I personally see the potential for further proliferation of this area, and a discussion on related issues would be relevant in this respect.

Notes

(1) Vlasova, Olga. 2010. „The Mandative Subjunctive in American English." Master thesis, The University of Oslo

(2) Normalized frequency refers to the number of occurrences of a linguistic item relative to the size of the corpus section in which it appears.

(3) Hájek, Petr. 2021. 'The Subjunctive Mood and its Use in Contemporary English'. Master's thesis, University of Opava

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Taming the (Digital) Patterns of Culture: Intercultural / Digital Leadership in the Age of Gen AI

Abstract: *As generative AI (Gen AI) becomes more widely used in businesses as well as in education in general, educators must update their teaching methods to address both its benefits and potential challenges. It is important to examine the risks of unchecked AI use and mitigate the unintended consequences. This is especially relevant in the field of intercultural communication competence (ICC), intercultural, and/or intercultural leadership. Drawing on AI ethics and ongoing discussions in the philosophy of technology, this paper critically examines the cultural and social impacts of AI and offers key insights meant for both teachers and students of culture. Key concerns include algorithmic bias related to culture, oversimplification of cultural identities, and the cognitive challenges of relying too much on AI. The goal is to help students develop intercultural (communicative) competence while encouraging thoughtful and critical engagement with AI technologies.*

Introduction

When young Dr Aziz, newly qualified and armed with a degree from the University of Heidelberg, returns home to the pastoral setting of the Kashmiri Lake Dal, his now "travelled eyes" (Rushdie 5) make him perceive his once home as a "hostile environment" (Rushdie 6) populated by a troupe of rather estranged locals. The cultural shock of Dr Aziz's homecoming is embodied in a series of anecdotal encounters—or, in the language of intercultural communication, we would speak of critical incidents—, ranging from rather symbolic ones, e.g. hitting his nose against the frozen ground of the valley while attempting to pray, to more practical ones, e.g., when he is asked to examine the daughter of a rich landowner but is only allowed to see one specific portion of her body at a time through a small hole in a sheet held between himself and the patient. And when the landowner succinctly points out to surprised Aziz: "'you Europe Chappies forget certain things'" (Rushdie 23), the misunderstanding is clearly framed as a cultural one.

Entitled "The perforated sheet", the opening chapter of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* serves as a point of departure in the ensuing discussion of some of the latest developments in Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) for several reasons. Firstly, Rushdie himself is an author famously stretched across cultures; secondly, and in the context of our paper perhaps more saliently, the idea of examining an object of one's interest—being it the body of a supposed cultural other or their culture as such—through a (metaphorical) perforated sheet that mediates, i.e., in our case severely limits, the experience can be read as a metaphor of both the process of experiencing the cultural other through the lens of one's own culture as well as of how the experience of the cultural other is mediated by a theoretical framework and/or as mediated by a technological apparatus, e.g. the AI. This is especially true in situations when we are not aware of the effects the theoretical frameworks and technologies have on the way we experience the world around us, that is, when we are looking at the world through a hole in a sheet and do not know about it. Consequently, the article offers a series of observations meant for teachers and educators interested, in the age of AI, in developing their students' ICC and do not want to teach culture as seen through a (metaphorical) hole in a sheet.

Teaching Cultures: An Overview of Concepts

The field of intercultural studies includes a wide range of definitions and understandings of "culture", reflecting its inherently complex, dynamic, and contested nature. Culture may be conceptualized in terms of shared values, norms, practices, symbols, or communicative patterns, and its boundaries can be drawn along national, ethnic, organizational, or even individual lines. Within the field of ICC, Geerd Hofstede, one of the key figures in the field, famously defines culture as a "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes (…) one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* 3). In a similar vein, Michael Byram defines ICC as "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (Byram 71). The diversity in the definitions of ICC is mirrored by the plurality of intercultural theories, which offer varying perspectives on how cultural differences manifest and are navigated in interpersonal, organizational, and societal contexts. The resulting theoretical landscape is rich but also fragmented, with different approaches employing distinct terminologies and analytical frameworks.

Thus, in yet another definition, Deardorff refers to intercultural competence (IC) as "possessing the necessary attitudes and reflective and behavioral skills and using these to behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations" (242); alongside attitudes, knowledge, and skills, she emphasizes internal and external outcomes that reflect in performance (e.g., adaptability or communication style). With reference to Byram's work and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), intercultural communicative competence (ICC) then relies on the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and using this understanding to communicate successfully with people from other cultures in a foreign language. Other popular models include, for instance, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which focuses on cognitive development ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, or Earley & Ang's work, which builds on cultural intelligence model (CQ) that measures cultural adaptability through metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, behavioural dimensions.

Among these approaches, national cultural models—such as those proposed by Hofstede, Trompenaars—have been particularly influential in both academic and applied settings, including the fields of Business English and Management Studies. However, like all models, these cultural models, too, have their limitations, especially when applied uncritically. Some overfocus on individual performance (e.g., Bennett), rely on essentialized, static notions of culture, risk cultural generalization (e.g., Hofstede, Trompenaars), tailor for Western-business centric executives, and do not necessarily mean respectful or ethical intercultural engagement. Therefore, in the next subchapter, we will focus on selected elements of several prominent cultural models and highlight some of the ways their limitations might become exacerbated by the uncritical and unreflected use of free-to-use and widely available Gen AI technologies such as Chat GPT, Copilot, or Gemini (henceforth simply "AI").

Cultural Models: Critical Considerations

The question of how to research, conceptualise, and teach culture has always been a hotly debated one.[1] Consequently, cultural models that often inform the way ICC is trained and developed have been the subject of critical attention of both theorists and practitioners. As a more comprehensive overview of these debates is available elsewhere[2], in this subchapter, we will focus on selected lines of criticism that are pertinent to the current discussions of how the unreflected use of AI affects the representation of culture and hence ICC as such. As we will argue, despite their overall usefulness and, pragmatically speaking,

undeniable pedagogic value for providing a framework for interpreting cultural patterns, the dimensions-based cultural models necessarily operate under certain limitations that, if unreflected or unrealised, become the metaphorical "perforated sheet", giving a rather distorted or reductive interpretation of culture.

To start off, considerable critical attention has been paid to the fact that some of the most prominent cultural models—including Byram's, Hofstede's or Trompenaars's—rely on a contestable interpretation of culture as *national* culture, implying, if not directly claiming that the dominant cultural organisation is a nation and that each nation has—much in the spirit of Herder's *Volksgeist*—its unique, homogeneous or monolithic *culture*. Culture is consequently defined "as the totality of cultures, within a nation" (Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* 2) with the societal norms in turn defined as "a value system shared by a majority in the middle classes in a society" (Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* 97); thus, in such models, difference gives way to stable identities: culture seems reduced to national culture and individuals are reduced to representatives of this culture.

Consequently, although Hofstede claims that "'culture' (falls in one with the) … unwritten rules about how to be a good member of *the group*" ("Why is Culture Important?"), his 6-D Model of *national* cultures straightforwardly directs its users towards a nation-based model of culture. Similarly, Trompenaars' website (The 7D World Map) encourages users to explore its interactive 7D World Map and locate the score for individual cultural dimensions by *countries*, again suggesting that not only do nations have their unique, homogeneous cultures, but that such unique cultures reside within individual countries. Threatening to flatten any individual or intra-national variation (McSweeney, "Dynamic Diversity" 934), this would, for instance, mean that the United Kingdom has a unique, homogeneous national "cultural average" that is somehow valid although "individuals … vary widely around the norm" (Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* 97). In case of Hofstede, the argument for using the national culture models seems purely pragmatic and nations are simply deemed "the only kind of units available for comparison and (are) better than nothing" (Hofstede "Dimensions" 2); however, despite the clear rationale behind favouring national model of culture, several critics have called for caution, arguing that a strong "container model" of culture should be approached critically and that any "conceptualization of national cultures should not be the sole basis of a pedagogy that aims to develop ICC" (Matsuo 350).

In a similar vein, Hofstede argues that one of the centrepieces of his cultural models, i.e., the cultural dimensions, are also mere "constructs", whose use is justified by the fact that they are useful because they "subsume complex sets of mental programs into easily remembered packages" (Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* 71). In this sense, one of the main advantages of the nation-based models of culture—i.e., their simplicity, facility and managerial usefulness—comes together with a risk that the amount of cognitive offloading it allows for will make the users believe that the models offer a real or realistic representation of culture. As we will argue below, this consideration is in particular relevant in the age of AI that offers another healthy dose of cognitive offloading.

Further, even if we grant the existence of such hegemonic nation-cultures, an important extension of the issue is that the nation-culture model seems to rely on an oversimplification of a complex cause, because belonging to a single nation-culture would then have to explain much of the behaviour of individuals as some ICC models seem to suggest (Ferri 2014: 9). Such latent risk of cultural determinism and causal reductivism is, at least in some authors, bolstered by the ambition to provide a "scientific", i.e., measurable (Minkov 5) origin of culture, and suggests that the cultural dimension or dimensions represent "the exclusive cause with an invariant outcome" (McSweeney 1366), disregarding the idea of culture as a "continuously emerging phenomenon" that "does not arise out of anything given, but rather out of a transformation of what is given" (Iser 162–163). In line with this, critics note the hegemonic, othering

and/or colonial undertone based on "the dichotomy self/cultural other" that goes hand in hand with the strictly managerial mindset of the said theories, often bound to "elite situations, such as business and management, in which recognition of the other is essentialised" (Ferri 9).

When ICC Meets AI

Although ICC cannot be reduced to cultural models despite their popularity and proliferation, e.g., in BE textbooks and training materials for international management, it is interesting to look at the ways these particular models represent culture changes in the context of AI. Thus, in the following paragraphs, we will consider how, in light of AI ethics, AI systems affect our understanding of culture in order to consider some implications regarding how to approach and teach culture and ICC in the age of AI. In particular, we will focus on how AI can be argued to exacerbate some of the existing issues that accompany the dimension-based models of culture discussed above.

The case for considering AI in education, including ICC training, is clear. Firstly, the generation Z learners (born between 1996 and 2010) disrupt the learning preferences of the previous generation of students and interact with digital tools differently as they have grown up in a hyper-connected and algorithmically mediated world. Surveys[3] indicate increased regular use of generative AI tools in students' learning activities and generally beneficial impact on, e.g., engagement, improved language attitude or communicative confidence. However, more than half of learners communicate moderate to very limited familiarity with the technical aspects of how generative AI works. They frequently describe AI as a tutor or a friend that enhances understanding and autonomy, especially in navigating complex content or brainstorming new ideas. Both global and Czech results also show that many students admit relying on AI without fully verifying its outputs. Furthermore, a Mixed-Methods Study on the Determinants of Learners' Behavioral Intention to Use AI in the Learning Context confirms that students tend to use AI through their attitude toward AI, and their "performance expectancy" has a stronger impact on their behaviour than ethical reasoning and critical judgement. The overuse and uncritical overreliance on AI has been argued to lead to various "unintended consequences" (US Department of Education), including "cognitive offloading" that Gerlich defines as the overuse of "external tools to reduce the cognitive load on an individual's working memory" (2) or perhaps even various forms of "digital nihilism", "digital acceleration" and the resulting "lack of wisdom" (Luba 16–17). These and other effects and consequences of AI are considered within the field of AI ethics.

Covering fields ranging from the philosophy of technology, Science and Technology Studies, or Human-Computer Interaction Studies, but also Critical Theory, AI ethics considers various areas of research into the diverse effects of AI on human existence. In contrast to the related but not entirely overlapping *ethics of AI* that "is part of the ethics of advanced technology that focuses on robots and other artificially intelligent agents" (Siau & Wang 76), AI ethics is defined as "a multidisciplinary field that studies how to optimize the beneficial impact of artificial intelligence (AI) while reducing risks and adverse outcomes" (IBM, "AI Ethics") and traditionally covers topics such as agency; fairness of access, accountability and transparency; privacy and cybersecurity; AI hallucinations and AI bias (Coeckelbergh 11–47), but also scrutinises "the workings of large data companies and their AI systems" in relation to the distribution of power in the current society (Mühlhoff 1). In response to various fears and/or expectations connected with the use and development of AI, AI ethics may further address various "regulations, laws, codes of conduct, attempts to build ethics into the design process, (… and) attempts to understand and mitigate bias" (Boddington 6).

The current discussion of AI is also closely related to broader concerns traditionally addressed by the philosophy of technology. Although a comprehensive discussion of how technologies affect our understanding of the world is outside the scope of this paper,[4] any consideration of how AI affects our understanding culture should start by a rejection or at least problematisation of the instrumental understanding of technology that sees as a mere value neutral instrument, and humans, simply, as "tool makers and tool users" (Borgmann 10); as we are famously reminded by Martin Heidegger, we remain exposed to the effects of technology, especially when we "regard (technology) as something neutral" (4). The non-neutrality and non-instrumentality of AI, as well as the insight that "technologies can play a mediating role in our experience, in which certain aspects of the world are strengthened and others weakened" (Verbeek 129), are, in this sense, key realisations that should allow us to point out that the way AI represents culture is neither neutral nor without its effects.

The non-neutrality of technology in relation to the dimension-based cultural models as represented by AI can be directly related to the existence of phenomena such as AI Bias, algorithmic discrimination, and objectivation of culture. AI bias, or "the occurrence of biased results due to human biases that skew the original training data or AI algorithm—leading to distorted outputs and potentially harmful outcomes" (IBM "Black Box Technology"), is well noted by both researchers and policy makers who noted that "training of AI systems on historical hiring data may result in the … inheritance of gender and other biases present in that data." (UNESCO 29). Various forms of "algorithmic discrimination" are not exclusive to AI and have been identified in search engines, on social and business platforms, social networks "as well as in risk assessment software, credit industry, in criminal justice, in social policy, or in recruitment" (Schwarting &Ulbricht 310); such phenomena become of particular relevance and danger especially in the context of the existing biases of technological neutrality and dimension-based models of culture. Importantly, AI bias can be read as a direct exacerbation of the problems already inherent to dimension-based cultural models discussed above, especially to those that rely on measurable data and "representation of culture in the data sets" (Dai & Hua 748), because in their effect, both data- and dimension-based models of culture contain an inherent risk of appearing merely instrumental, value-neutral and thus objective. This, together with their simplicity and facility, suggests that there is no need for critical scrutiny or further reflection.

In relation to the non-neutrality of AI as a mediating technology, it seems possible to argue that the offloading and digital acceleration made so easily possible by AI is, perhaps paradoxically, granted by the opacity and black-box-like nature of "an AI system whose internal workings are a mystery" to its users, who "can see the system's inputs and outputs, but they can't see what happens within the AI tool to produce those outputs" (IBM "Black Box"). The allure of AI thus resides, on the one hand, in AI's ability to "produce outputs that appear to be humanly generated and therefore 'authentic'", while at the same time "producing from (available) data hybridised outputs that appear plausibly coherent and real" (O'Regan & Ferri 2). This production of new content and therewith of culture through AI further perpetuates the "discourses of essentialised cultural artefacts" and simple and facile understanding of culture; in other words, "'every time we ask Gen AI to generate new content, whether it is text, images, music, audio, or videos, we are producing and reproducing essentialised artefacts of culture and shaping the understanding of culture" (Dai & Zhua 748).

Notably, these limitations are similar to the risks posed by the handy but in some sense reductive cultural models discussed above: they are not (only) neutral frameworks of representation but also, quite importantly, they actively co-create, shape and mediate our understanding of culture. Posing as value-neutral representations of culture, such and similar AI outputs can instead be argued to create a simulacrum, a mere image of reality through reproducing reified and/or essentialised tokens of

complex cultural realities by endlessly referring to themselves while concealing their artificial and by default biased status.

Conclusion

In the era of confusing occurrences and revolutionizing AI interactions, it makes sense to talk about ICC and digital leadership, understood in the simplest terms as the awareness of the mediating effects of technologies as they go hand in hand and can hardly be separated. In this context, two increasing trends need to be considered to promote competent engagement with AI technologies: students' high engagement but prevailing low literacy in learning with AI tools, along with their perception of AI as an independent, autonomous thinker, and a neutral, non-biased representation of "reality". The same can be argued of cultural models that rely on facile yet potentially problematic notions and dimensions. Just like in case of AI, we should not forget how these models arrive at their conclusions and how they affect our understanding of culture and, as teachers, systematically approach "AI by coupling a historical perspective that attends to issues of technological advancement with a philosophical awareness of what is at stake for humanity (Zhu Hua et al 29). A failure to do so would leave the cultural models as opaque as the functioning of AI of an LLM. After all, generating a cultural model does not mean understanding culture, let alone acquiring intercultural competence. Teaching culture—if not done through a hole in a sheet—thus requires an integrative view that would promote educational strategies that encourage "human scrutiny" as well as "critical engagement with AI technologies" (Gerlich 3). This effort demands institutional guidance and training that will include ethical reasoning, critical thinking and informed digital interaction, and perhaps more importantly, teachers (and students), who are willing to take an extra step and make themselves aware.

Notes

(1) See for instance the introductory chapters of Clifford Geertz's timeless classic *The Interpretation of Cultures* or Wolfgang Iser's "What Is Literary Anthropology?"

(2) See e.g. Hřebačková, Monika, and Štefl, Martin. "A Useful Cliché? Towards a Pragmatic Interpretation of Intercultural Communicative Competence." Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal, vol 12, 2021, 10.51313/Freeside-2021-3. Accessed 1 February 2025; or Štefl, Martin. "Challenging intercultural communicative competence: Culture as an emergent phenomenon." Litteraria Pragensia, vol. 32, no. 37–53, 2023, https://doi.org/10.14712/2571452X.2022.64.3. Accessed: 22 April 2025.

(3) See for instance Hanwei Wu, Yunsong Wang, and Yongliang Wang. "To Use or Not to Use?" A Mixed-Methods Study on the Determinants of EFL College Learners' Behavioral Intention to Use AI", International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, vol. 25, no. 3, 2024, https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v25i3.7708. Accessed 24 April 2025; Digital Education Council. "Global AI Student Survey 2024.", https://www.digitaleducationcouncil.com/post/digital-education-council-global-ai-student-survey-2024, 11 May 2025.; STEM. "45% of surveyed Czech pupils have already tried AI tools, according to 'How We Learn' research for Nekrachni." https://www.stem.cz/en/45-of-surveyed-czech-pupils-have-already-tried-ai-tools-according-to-how-we-learn-research-for-nekrachni/. Accessed 5 May 2025.

(4) See e.g. Mark Coeckelberg, Introduction to Philosophy of Technology (OUP) 2020.

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Improving Pronunciation in EFL: A Critical Analysis of Word Stress Instruction in Slovakia

Abstract: *Pronunciation instruction often lacks a systematic approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, although it is a key factor in achieving intelligibility in spoken communication. This study investigates the state of pronunciation teaching at a selected Slovak high school, focusing on how three experienced English teachers approach the instruction of word stress. Using a qualitative approach, the study implements classroom observations to examine the integration, materials and techniques used in the activities for word stress instruction, critically evaluating their effectiveness and appropriateness. Individual teacher interviews complement these observations, offering insights into the teachers' reflections on their pronunciation teaching and their methodological preparedness. Findings indicate significant weaknesses in current practices, which, despite implementing engaging and interactive tasks, were decontextualized and isolated, included limited productive practice, and lacked a systematic explanation, making learning superficial and less effective. Teacher interviews revealed a lack of the teachers' critical self-assessment, with their perception of the tasks as appropriate and effective, as well as gaps in their methodological training. By critical analysis and recommendations for enhancing the observed activities, the paper underscores the need for improved methodological training for teachers and recommends a more systematic, explicit, and balanced approach to pronunciation instruction to better support students in developing clear and intelligible speech.*

Introduction: The Role of Pronunciation in EFL Learning

Pronunciation is an aspect of language that largely affects the success of spoken communication: if a speaker's pronunciation is clear and intelligible, it allows the intended message to be decoded and thus understood by the listener; conversely, incorrect pronunciation may lead to serious misunderstandings. Therefore, effective communication depends on correct pronunciation.

In language education, there is a long-standing acknowledgement of pronunciation's importance (Scrivener 271; Brown, 283; Harmer 248). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (129) identifies pronunciation under the term "phonological control", recognising its significance within linguistic competence alongside vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, and orthographic control. Celce-Murcia et al. (7) stress the necessity of attaining a certain threshold level of pronunciation for non-native speakers of English; falling below this threshold may result in serious communication issues regardless of how advanced their grammar or vocabulary may be. Jones (370) highlights that "while other linguistic inadequacies may make exchange difficult, incomprehensible pronunciation will stop the conversation. In addition, incorporating pronunciation into classroom instruction offers distinct benefits: it not only raises students' awareness of different sounds and sound patterns but also significantly enhances their speaking abilities" (Harmer 248). This points out that acquiring intelligible pronunciation is of equal, if not even higher importance than mastering other language competences.

Over recent decades, pronunciation instruction has moved away from the goal of native-like accuracy and toward promoting intelligibility. This shift mirrors the evolving role of English as a global means of communication used predominantly among non-native speakers (Jenkins 5). Not all aspects of pronunciation contribute equally to intelligibility; many successful conversations occur even when certain features are imperfectly articulated (Harmer 249). Among other features, nuclear stress (carried

by the most prominent syllable in an utterance that conveys the communicative meaning) was identified as one of the most essential pronunciation features to be produced accurately for intelligibility in international settings. This has direct implications for the manifestation of word stress: since nuclear stress builds upon the correct realization of word stress within individual words, inaccurate word stress can obscure nuclear stress, undermining sentence-level emphasis and overall intelligibility. Nonetheless, the placement of word stress is more of a grey area: Jenkins (150) identified it as a less critical pronunciation feature unless accompanied by other phonological errors, while Field (399) demonstrated that intelligibility for native and non-native listeners is significantly influenced by both the direction in which word stress is altered and whether the shift involve modifications in vowel quality. Lewis and Deterding (167–172) demonstrated that while unexpected word stress does not always impede communication and may be tolerated in some instances, there are also clear cases where incorrect stress placement significantly disrupts intelligibility. Although its precise impact on intelligibility remains inconclusive, incorporating stress patterns into vocabulary learning or drawing attention to unusual stress placements can only benefit learners (Lewis and Deterding 174). Therefore, for English learners to effectively convey meaning in spoken communication, instruction of word stress indeed has its place in the EFL classroom.

Challenges in Pronunciation Instruction

Despite the acknowledged importance of pronunciation, language classroom reality often tells a different story. Pronunciation teaching tends to be neglected, marginalised or even completely overlooked, and it is often attributed to factors such as time constraints or the perception that learners will naturally develop sufficient pronunciation skills without explicit activities (Reid, *Interactive Activities for English Pronunciation* 136; Harmer 248; Scrivener 271). Even when teachers wish to incorporate pronunciation into their lessons, they often encounter practical challenges: many of them face uncertainty regarding both the content and methods of instruction. This stems largely from two interrelated issues: inadequate methodological training in pronunciation pedagogy and insufficient support from coursebooks. As Reid (*Interactive Activities for English Pronunciation* 136) notes, coursebooks often provide limited guidance on pronunciation, and when they do, the content is frequently decontextualised or lacks progression. Thus, such following of coursebook activities frequently leads to only surface-level, inconsistent and unintentional pronunciation teaching, not supporting improvement or addressing the specific needs of the target group of learners. In this context, word stress is particularly vulnerable to neglect. Unlike more concrete and straightforward aspects such as individual segmentals, accurate word stress requires an understanding of features of prominence specific to English, some morphological patterns (word classes, suffixes), or syllable structure. Thus, it is difficult not only for learners to grasp but also for teachers to teach—at all—or, in the case of motivated and experienced teachers, in a meaningful, systematic way.

Pronunciation Instruction—Methods and Pedagogical Considerations

Word stress instruction in the Slovak EFL classroom should primarily target two interrelated areas: the phonetic realization of prominence and the placement of stress within words. In English, stressed syllables are marked by a combination of four features—greater intensity, higher pitch, increased length, and vowel quality change (Roach 73)—whereas Slovak uses mainly intensity and, to a lesser extent, pitch (Kráľ 82). The absence of vowel reduction and length variation in Slovak makes English prominence less perceptible to Slovak learners, often resulting in insufficient contrast between stressed and unstressed

syllables. Additionally, while Slovak stress is fixed on the first syllable of a word (Mistrík et al. 355), English stress is variable and influenced by morphological and phonological factors (Roach 76). Because incorrect stress in English can lead to misunderstandings, learners must be guided to recognize and produce stress patterns that deviate from their L1 norms.

Pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms can draw on two complementary approaches: the intuitive-imitative approach and the analytic-linguistic approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 2). The intuitive-imitative approach emphasizes imitation and exposure to quality language models, often through listening and repetition exercises, ear training, drills, chants, songs, or rhymes. In contrast, the analytic-linguistic approach involves explicit instruction about phonological features and includes techniques like phonetic transcription, visual aids, metalinguistic explanations, and the analysis of authentic recordings (Reid, *Teaching English Pronunciation to Different Age Groups* 23–27). An essential consideration in the choice of tasks is the balance between receptive and productive pronunciation skills: while receptive control lays the foundation, productive competence, i.e., being able to articulate word stress accurately in real speech, is critical for oral communication. While it is true that activating productive knowledge requires first securing a receptive understanding (Mister 28), research suggests that learners often perceive stress more accurately than they can produce it (Field 419; Archibald 184), which highlights the need to move beyond passive recognition toward active use, as it is only through repeated opportunities to use words in speech that learners develop full proficiency (Laufer 227; Schmitt 265).

Another key consideration regards materials for pronunciation teaching. Adapted materials, such as pronunciation exercises or textbook recordings, offer controlled, targeted input and are beneficial when teaching specific phonological features explicitly. In contrast, authentic materials, including podcasts, films, interviews, and public speeches, expose learners to natural pronunciation and variation across contexts (Reid, *Intercultural Aspects in Teaching English* 34–36). Crucially, the degree of contextualization in materials shapes their pedagogical value. For learners to internalize and reproduce pronunciation patterns, materials should not only present language in isolation but embed it within realistic, meaningful contexts. As Mister (29) argues, effective vocabulary (and pronunciation) development involves more than recognition: it requires understanding the word's use in context. Productive contextualization should meet several criteria: pronunciation features should carry communicative value, relate to students' experiences, minimize mechanical drilling, use natural, realistic language, and prioritize message over formal structure (Bowen 83). The contextualization of pronunciation instruction within broader learning objectives is equally important. Well-integrated pronunciation activities should go beyond isolated exercises and be meaningfully connected to other language skills and systems. For example, Darcy et al. (2021, as cited in Mister 28) emphasize the value of incorporating explicit pronunciation practice into vocabulary-focused lessons, ensuring that learners can apply pronunciation patterns in context rather than treating them as separate or secondary components.

Methodology of the research undertaken

Research aim:

The aim of the research is to investigate current instructional practices for teaching English word stress in EFL classroom at a selected Slovak high school, critically evaluating their appropriateness, as well as to explore teachers' reflections on their approach to pronunciation teaching, identifying key gaps and

formulating practical recommendations for enhancing methodological quality of pronunciation teaching the in Slovak EFL contexts.

Research questions:

1. How is the instruction of English word stress implemented by experienced EFL teachers at a selected Slovak high school?
2. How do the selected EFL teachers perceive pronunciation teaching and their methodological preparedness in addressing it in their lessons?
3. What recommendations can be derived from the investigated classroom practices and teacher reflections to address the specific gaps and enhance the word stress instruction in Slovak EFL classrooms?

Outline of the research

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study as it is particularly suitable for educational environments, enabling an in-depth exploration of the complex, authentic interactions that are typical for real classroom settings (Gavora 21–22; Cohen et al. 170–171). We used two methods for data collection: classroom observations to provide authentic data from the natural environment (Cohen et. al. 396) and individual teacher interviews to complement and "further explain the data arising from (the observations)" (Cohen et al. 351).

The method of observation specifically focused on how three experienced EFL teachers (further referred to as T1, T2 and T3) at a selected secondary school in Slovakia integrated word stress instruction into their lessons. Using a semi-structured sheet, the chosen teachers were observed for one month, each within one group of students. The student groups were similar in terms of size, age and language proficiency (14–16 B2 learners, aged 16–17). The teachers were informed beforehand about the research focus and asked explicitly to incorporate pronunciation teaching into their lessons, though they independently determined the content, materials, techniques, and duration devoted to this aspect. Word stress occurred in three of the observed lessons, each taught by a different teacher, which are the subject of our analysis in this paper.

Individual interviews with the three teachers were conducted after the observed lessons. They were semi-structured, particularly aimed at gathering the teachers' reflections on their pronunciation teaching practices, their attitudes towards pronunciation teaching, as well as on their methodological preparedness. We prepared both open-ended and yes/no questions to gain measurable information while allowing freedom in their answers. The interviews were recorded (with the permission of the participants) and later transcribed.

The data obtained by both methods were analysed through open coding. The semi-structured outline of each method required creating categories and codes in advance but allowed for their later refinement based on the actual data gathered, which enabled meaningful interpretation and conclusions (Flick 307). For observation analysis, the following categories were created: *The (targeted) Aspect of Word Stress* (cat. 1), *Materials* (cat. 2), *Contextualized Practice* (cat. 3), *Techniques* (cat. 4), *Receptive / Productive Skills* (cat. 5) and *Task Integration* (cat. 6). The interview analysis was carried out in three categories: *Self-reflection on the observed task* (cat. 1), *Methodological preparedness* (cat. 2), and *Attitudes Toward Pronunciation Teaching* (cat. 3).

After the analysis of each method, interview responses were compared with classroom observations across the three categories used for the individual interview. Such comparison of multiple perspectives for data interpretation—triangulation—helped us increase the research's validity and gain a more holistic picture of the examined reality (Gavora 156–157): by revealing where perceptions and practices aligned and diverged, we were able to see strengths, weaknesses and possible areas for improvement.

Purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 113) was employed in selecting the three teachers (one male, two female) with 14 to 18 years of teaching experience in a chosen Slovak upper secondary school, willing to cooperate with us on our research. All participants (teachers and the observed students) were included in our research voluntarily, based on informed consent and were assured of complete anonymity and confidentiality. The gathered data were treated in a way that ensured neither the selected school nor individual participants could be publicly identified.

Observation Analysis

Table 1—Data gathered by lesson observations

Categories		T1	T2	T3
		Codes		
1	The Aspect of Word Stress	Word stress patterns in complex words	Word stress in complex words Word stress in derived words	Word stress in derived words
2	Materials	Adapted—online quiz Adapted—video recordings of a model speaker	Adapted—website presenting rules and examples Adapted—recordings of a model speaker Adapted—handout with quiz	Adapted—handout with sample sentences (adapted) Semi-authentic—bilingual dictionary
3	Contextualized Practice	Decontextualized practice (isolated words)	Decontextualized practice (isolated words)	Decontextualized practice (isolated words)
4	Techniques	Ear training Explicit learning Visual aids	Ear training Explicit learning Listening and repeating	Explicit learning Phonetic training
5	Receptive / Productive Skills	Receptive skills only	Mostly receptive skills	Receptive skills only
6	Task Integration	Minimal link to grammar	Not integrated	Not integrated

The following section presents a detailed analysis of each category for the observation analysis outlined in Table 1. The first category deals with the targeted aspect of word stress. All three teachers focused on various lexical stress patterns in multisyllabic words, e.g. "imperfect", "scholarship", "discard" (T1, T2) or derived words, e.g. "advantage" vs "advantageous" (T2, T3). Given the students' advanced proficiency and vocabulary range, the selected target aspects and the vocabulary used were age- and level-appropriate. Despite this, the vocabulary selections served rather as surface-level exposure to the aspect of lexical stress, particularly in the case of T1 and T3, who provided only a limited scope of practice (T1—10 words; T3—11 pairs). While T2, on the other hand, offered a lot of space for individual practice (approximately 20 words in the first exercise and 99 in the second), the words lacked thematic coherence in the various regularities of word stress they exemplified without any explanation by the teacher. These

aspects prevented the learners from gaining a deeper understanding of word stress regularities, leaving the activities more awareness-raising than intentionally developing phonological competence.

Categories 2 and 3 describe the materials used for teaching word stress and the degree of their contextualization. All three teachers used mainly adapted materials and reference tools, although a quite diverse range. T1 relied on an interactive online quiz featuring a model speaker pronouncing the targeted words, with close-up visuals of the speaker's mouth movements. T2, similarly, used an internet resource presenting some lexical stress rules and examples including audio recordings demonstrating correct pronunciation of the targeted words, whereas he complemented these by a printed handout with a similar quiz-like exercise, which however, was not in ta full thematic coherence with the previously used internet resource (while the former addresses word stress in complex words, the latter targeted word regularities in derived words). Nevertheless, in both cases, the materials provided clear pronunciation examples, and their multimodality and variability kept the learners engaged. In contrast to this, T3 omitted using multimodal sources of input and relied solely on printed materials, including a worksheet with example words and semi-authentic, bilingual (English-Slovak) dictionaries, serving as tools for analysis of the targeted example words, which significantly reduced the interactivity of the observed activities as well as student engagement. Despite the wide range of materials used by the teachers, they had two attributes in common: first, all the materials were adapted, and so, although they provided a controlled practice of word stress, they failed to bring authentic language into the classroom, in which the learners would be able to perceive real life use of the targeted word stress aspects (which would be appropriate for the age- and proficiency- level of the target learners). Second, all of them were highly decontextualized, presenting different word stress patterns through isolated words only (e.g., T3 provided a list of words such as "modern"—"modernity), without embedding these examples into larger linguistic units—phrases, sentences, or texts—and communicative contexts, such as role plays, discussions, or other spoken genres that would provide meaningful practice. Thus, there was no opportunity for the learners to apply the introduced word stress patterns beyond the controlled context of the immediate task, which resulted, again, in rather surface-level comprehension and prevention of transferring the practised structures into real-life, spontaneous communication.

Categories 4 and 5 deal with the implemented pronunciation teaching techniques and their focus on developing different language skills. T1 and T2 demonstrated quite similar procedures, with slight distinctions. T1 combined ear training (listening to a model speaker) with visual aids (viewing a model speaker) and explicit learning (identifying and analysing correct stress placement in the quiz). T2 also implemented ear training (listening to a model speaker), although, without visual aids, combined with group repetitions (listening and repeating) and explicit learning in the form of correct stress placement analysis and identification (based on the recorded speaker and later individually in the printed handout), while strengthening this technique by elicitation of students' prior knowledge and brief clarification of some word stress rules. T3, on the contrary, chose a strictly analytical-linguistic approach, consisting of marking word stress in the selected words (phonetic training) and identifying their word class (explicit learning) using dictionaries. It can be observed that all three teachers applied explicit learning in some way, yet a general lack of systematic rule explanation and guided practice was observed: T1 and T3 provided no explicit explanations of word stress regularities, leaving students to guess the word stress patterns based on their intuition and experience (T1) or analytical skills (T3), and while T2 used more structured approach, his explanations remained brief, sometimes unclear and insecure, and at times not addressing the targeted word stress aspect to be elaborated (no explanations of regularities in derived words, targeted in the printed handout, were provided). The superficial elaboration and

systematization of knowledge by all three teachers points to the overall lack of intentionality in their pronunciation teaching, preventing deeper understanding by students for future use.

Moreover, across all three lessons, the focus remained heavily on receptive skills, considering that the activities primarily involved listening, analysing, and recognizing stress patterns. Limited or no opportunities were created for students to actually pronounce the target words: in the lesson taught by T1, students listened and identified stress but were never asked to repeat after the model speaker, T2 required at least collective repetition but he failed to provide individual output, and T3's students identified word stress solely using dictionaries, although some students were asked to pronounce the list of words after the dictionary analysis. Nevertheless, in all three lessons, mainly awareness-raising, passive and receptive tasks were incorporated, without providing space for intentional and productive pronunciation practice (preferably in meaningful contents), which significantly limited teaching impact, and again, prevented students from the application of the covered word stress aspects in other contexts in the future.

Category 6 addresses the degree of integration of the pronunciation tasks implemented by the observed teachers. In the T1's lesson, there seemed to be a minor connection between the word stress quiz and the overall lesson content (narrative tenses), in the form of a brief explanation of word stress' influence on consonant doubling in past tense forms (when the final syllable of a verb is stressed, as in "submit", the final consonant is doubled after adding suffix "-ed"). However, in the remaining two observed lessons, word stress tasks were presented in isolation: while T2 made a clear transition to the "original lesson content" by explicitly stating so after the 20-minute part dedicated to word stress, T3' integration of word stress into broader lesson objectives remained unclear, as the whole observed lesson was occupied by pronunciation teaching—constituted by two tasks—although these lacked thematic coherence as well (the other task targeted pronunciation of homonyms). In general, across all three lessons, pronunciation felt like a separate aspect of language, pointing out its poor integration, which significantly limited students' ability to apply it in various contexts and see its relevance.

Interview Analysis

Table 2—Data gathered by individual interviews with the observed teachers

Categories		T1	T2	T3
		Codes		
1	**Reflections on the observed task**	Successful Engaging Meaningful	Successful Meaningful Improvements could be made	Successful Meaningful
2	**Methodological preparedness**	Feels unprepared No methodological training Intuitive approach	Feels unprepared No methodological training Intuitive approach Approach based on experience	Feels well-prepared and confident No methodological training Approach based on experience
3	**Attitude Toward Pronunciation Teaching**	Views pronunciation as secondary No explicit pronunciation tasks Error correction and unpredictable vocabulary only	Views pronunciation as secondary No explicit pronunciation tasks Error correction and unpredictable vocabulary only	Views pronunciation as essential Explicit pronunciation tasks Regular pronunciation tasks

The following section presents an analysis of the individual interviews conducted with T1, T2 and T3, describing the categories and codes summarized in Table 2.

Category 1 refers to the reflections of teachers on the observed pronunciation task. All three teachers evaluated their word stress activities rather positively. T1 described the activity as successful, emphasizing that the students "had fun" and "learned something,". T2 appreciated the "smooth flow" of the activity and viewed the students' ability to manage the task without prior explicit instruction as a sign of its appropriateness. However, he also acknowledged a possible area for improvement, suggesting that a more systematic approach (such as having students record their pronunciation over time) could enhance the effectiveness of his pronunciation teaching. T3 expressed confidence in her task, considering it successful because it introduced "new linguistic content" to students. It can be observed that all three teachers primarily evaluated the success based on indicators such as student engagement, smooth implementation, and the assumption that some learning occurred through content exposure, with an absence of critical evaluation regarding whether the activities led to improved pronunciation skills or enabled students to apply these skills in future communication. As such, the reflections appeared largely superficial and lacked consideration of long-term skill development, suggesting a gap in pedagogical awareness concerning what constitutes effective pronunciation instruction.

As for the category 2 exploring methodological preparedness, a consistent theme across all three interviews was the absence of formal methodological training in pronunciation instruction: while all teachers had a background in phonetics and phonology from their university studies, none had received training focused specifically on how to teach pronunciation. Both T1 and T2 explicitly acknowledged feeling unprepared to deliver structured pronunciation lessons, with T1 admitting selecting the observed task by simply googling "pronunciation exercises,", and T2 noting that if he were to integrate pronunciation instruction systematically, he would first need to revisit what features to prioritize and how best to approach them. T3, on the contrary, expressed confidence in her teaching, yet stated that she relied on practical teaching experience and a solid foundation of resources for pronunciation practice from her phonetics and phonology training, suggesting that even her approach was shaped more by experience rather than by formal training. Taken together, these reflections suggest that the teachers' pronunciation practices were largely shaped by intuition and experience, limiting the consistency and systematic development of pronunciation skills of learners and highlighting the need for methodological preparation in teacher training programs.

Finally, category 3 examines the teachers' attitudes toward pronunciation teaching. T1 and T2's reflections were largely in alignment: they both shared a tendency to view pronunciation as a secondary skill that does not require systematic instruction, reporting that it is implicitly addressed in activities that target speaking and listening skills. They also admitted including pronunciation teaching only if difficult vocabulary or pronunciation errors occur in their lessons, with T2 explicitly stating that "most students already have a good pronunciation" and T1 that "students will naturally acquire correct pronunciation through exposure". In contrast, T3 regarded pronunciation as an essential part of language instruction, emphasizing her regular implementation of explicit pronunciation tasks, with the focus on transcription and dictionary use, which "would support independent pronunciation learning strategies" of her students. However, despite her acknowledgement of pronunciation teaching, the teaching practices she described and we observed reflect a highly analytical approach, developing more phonetic awareness and receptive skills of learners. So, even though T1 and T2 differed from T3 in how they viewed and approached pronunciation teaching—with T1 and T2 treating it as incidental and reactive, primarily a tool for error correction, while T3 emphasizing its importance and legitimate place in English language lessons, there was a common thread across all three perspectives: none of the teachers viewed pronunciation as a

communicative skill essential for developing learner intelligibility and spoken fluency. This shared perspective highlights an ongoing neglect of pronunciation teaching in the English language classroom.

Triangulation and Discussion

Table 3—Triangulation of the data gathered by observations and interviews

	Category	Interview Insight	Observation Analysis
1	**Self-reflection on the observed task**	Tasks were engaging, meaningful, successful (T1, T2, T3) Possible improvements (T2) No reflection on long-term skill development	Tasks lacked production, contextualization, explicit instruction, integration, systematic structure
2	**Methodological preparedness**	All lack formal training T1 and T2 feel unprepared T3 feels confident	Inconsistent or unsystematic methodology Overreliance on experience-driven approaches
3	**Attitudes toward pronunciation teaching**	T1 and T2 view pronunciation as a secondary, reactive approach T3 views pronunciation as essential, a proactive but analytical approach	All tasks lacked communicative practice and integration into broader learning content

This section presents the triangulated data across the three categories outlined in Table 3, concluding with a summary of key strengths and weaknesses of the approaches and attitudes of T1, T2 and T3, along with practical recommendations for improving their pronunciation instruction.

In the first triangulated category, a large discrepancy between teachers' reflections and the observed reality can be found. Firstly, while all three teachers evaluated their pronunciation tasks positively, all three lessons had significant weaknesses, summarized below.

- Across all three lessons, the tasks lacked productive practice, offered only surface-level exposure to word stress, and failed to contextualize the target vocabulary beyond isolated examples. Even though T2 suggested a possible improvement of his approach in the form of recordings, we observed no structured attempt to provide individual output when possible.
- No (T1, T3) or little (T2) explicit instruction was provided, leaving students to rely on intuition and guessing rather than rule-based learning.
- Integration into broader lesson content or long-term goals was either missing (T2, T3) or minimal (T1).
- None of the tasks was intentional, having a systematic structure and thematic coherence.

Secondly, none of the teachers assessed their approach based on the developed pronunciation skills, but took different criteria into account, such as engagement and smooth course of the activity, or exposure to new language. This lack of critical reflection as well as inability to identify relevant criteria for the assessment of the observed practices points to an underdeveloped understanding of pronunciation as a communicative skill requiring long-term, regular, and consistent development in English language lessons, which highlights the need for targeted teacher training and more awareness raising about the pronunciation' importance in spoken discourse.

When comparing teachers' responses and observations in the second category (methodological preparedness), several similarities and inconsistencies between them were found. All three teachers

reported not having received any formal training in the methodology of pronunciation instruction. While T1 and T2 explicitly acknowledged feeling unprepared to teach pronunciation in a structured way, T3 expressed confidence in her methodology, although rooted in her teaching experience. In reality, however, all three teachers struggled to implement communicative and meaningful word stress activity, relying on their assumptions about students' needs rather than on pedagogically grounded principles. This reveals not only a large disconnect between theoretical phonological knowledge and its classroom application, but also a gap between beliefs and classroom reality, pointing up that even experienced, confident teachers may lack the methodological awareness necessary to deliver effective pronunciation instruction. Again, these findings suggest the need for targeted teacher education to bridge the gap between phonetic knowledge and its pedagogical application.

The third category examined the teachers' general attitudes toward pronunciation instruction and the extent to which these beliefs aligned with their classroom practices. T1 and T2 both viewed pronunciation as a secondary skill, addressed implicitly during speaking or listening activities, with little perceived need for explicit instruction, apart from addressing pronunciation errors or vocabulary difficult to pronounce. This perspective was mirrored in their observed lessons, which included brief, isolated, and non-communicative tasks, highlighting that pronunciation was not treated as a pedagogical priority. In contrast, T3 identified pronunciation as an essential component of language learning and claimed to integrate it regularly, focusing primarily on phonetic transcription and dictionary use. Her lesson was in alignment with these claims, as it indeed targeted the two listed skills; however, in this way, it remained highly analytical, lacking opportunities for productive or communicative use of the target skills. This indicates that even if teachers see pronunciation as an important skill, their beliefs do not automatically transfer into effective, communicative pronunciation practice. So, these findings emphasize the need to reframe pronunciation not only as a linguistic skill equal to vocabulary and grammar, but also as an essential part of communicative competence in EFL teaching.

To conclude the triangulation, we will now briefly summarize the key strengths observed across the lessons, highlight the main weaknesses that limit the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, and present practical recommendations for improvement, aiming to support more systematic and communicative pronunciation teaching in Slovak EFL classrooms.

Strengths

- **Age- and level-appropriate content:** all three lessons targeted advanced vocabulary and stress in complex or derived words, appropriate for the learners' proficiency.
- **A variety of materials and techniques:** although their implementation remained limited in its way in each lesson, teachers showed effort to present pronunciation in accessible ways.
- **Initial awareness of stress patterns**: tasks provided students with exposure to word stress patterns and implicit understanding of word stress regularities.
- **Some recognition of pronunciation's importance and willingness to reflect and improve:** T2 suggested improvement, and T3 emphasized the importance of regular pronunciation teaching.

Weaknesses and Missed Opportunities

- **Lack of systematic and explicit instruction:** none of the teachers explicitly taught word stress rules or provided scaffolding to help students apply the rules in the future.
  - Missed opportunity: to build a systematic awareness of stress rules.

- **Limited productive practice:** all observed activities focused heavily on listening, analysis, and transcription, with minimal opportunities to pronounce the words.
  - Missed opportunity: to move beyond awareness-raising to active application.
- **Decontextualized learning:** tasks involved isolated words with no connection to meaningful communication.
  - Missed opportunity: to transfer knowledge into real-life communication.
- **Lack of integration:** pronunciation tasks were isolated from the broader lesson content.
  - Missed opportunity: to use opportunities for pronunciation practice arising from a broader curricular framework.
- **Limited teacher preparedness:** all teachers lacked formal training and relied on intuition or experience
  - Missed opportunity: to systematically and intentionally develop pronunciation skills.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. **Complementing implicit tasks with explicit instruction:** explanations of rules and regularities, complementing the imitative-intuitive techniques, help students build systematic understanding of stress placement, not just isolated recognition
2. **Balancing receptive and productive practice:** for pronunciation to be practised, student output is necessary, therefore, receptive and awareness-raising techniques should be complemented by controlled and productive tasks.
3. **Integrating pronunciation** into broader lesson content: pronunciation tasks should be embedded into the practice of other skills and systems, particularly when it naturally emerges from these.
4. **Providing meaningful practice:** the target pronunciation aspect should be put into a meaningful and relevant context, reflecting how pronunciation appears in natural language use and reinforcing deeper engagement with the focused pronunciation aspect.
5. **Enhancing teacher training in pronunciation methodology**: there is a need for targeted methodology courses focused on raising awareness of pronunciation teaching and on how to teach pronunciation to help teachers move from incidental correction toward more structured, intentional strategies.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how three experienced Slovak EFL teachers approach the instruction of English word stress in upper secondary education and to evaluate the effectiveness of their methods through classroom observation and teacher interviews. The findings underscore a need to enhance teacher training in pronunciation pedagogy, shifting focus toward more systematic, communicative, and skill-based approaches. By addressing these gaps, EFL instruction in Slovakia can better equip learners with the pronunciation competence necessary for real-life intelligibility and confidence in spoken English.

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Václav Řeřicha

Social Media Emotionality and Education

Abstract: *This paper explores how the rise of social media has transformed emotional expression, perception, and education, drawing on Marshall McLuhan's media theory and his observation that "the new medium is never considered an art form, but only a degradation of the older form" (*Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, 308). Digital platforms function as technological extensions of human consciousness, amplifying emotions and reshaping sensory preferences. Older media such as print, film, and photography are absorbed and redefined by the digital environment, which emphasizes immediacy, brevity, and affective engagement. These technological "messages" produce new modes of emotional participation and standardized expression. Physical reality, in contrast, is increasingly perceived as dull, highlighting the sensory impact of digital environments. The paper examines how these affective dynamics influence educational settings, where students' attention, motivation, and learning are shaped by emotionally charged media algorithms. It argues that emotional literacy, understanding how technologies mediate and manipulate feeling, must become a core educational competence. By integrating media theory, affect studies, and pedagogy, the paper shows that digital media do not simply transmit information but restructure emotional experience itself, calling for new strategies to balance emotional engagement with critical reflection in education.*

Introduction

McLuhan had kept refining his definition of a medium. One of his final definitions was from 1971, where he stated that "Media (are) environments that alter patterns of perception and sensibility" (McLuhan, *Letters* 443). Environments are created by technologies, and technologies are extensions of man's physical, sensory, or mental processes, e.g., clothing, weapons, the wheel, money, cars, printed books, and language. Electric technology is the extension of the central nervous system; it amplifies its structure and functions (instantaneity, simultaneity, interconnectedness, and responsiveness).

All technology is manifestly interrelated in its origin and effects. The press had absorbed the book, and film had absorbed the press earlier, similarly to how the spinning wheel, the telegraph, the steam engine, or the horse and carriage were technologically absorbed.

Recently, all the elements of speech that were suppressed by writing are reappearing in the digital environment, but in a different form: memes have revived metaphor, spelling has revived emotion, and slang is represented by emojis. TikTok, Instagram, and other digital platforms have swallowed radio, TV, movies, literary narrative, and photography, newspapers. It is evident that any new technology creates a new environment, and the content of the new environment is always the old one. "The only remaining act of extension is for consciousness itself," wrote McLuhan in 1963 (McLuhan, *Letters* 288).

Extensions of emotions

The current digital environment has also become an extension of consciousness because it has focused on and significantly impacts emotions, which are a determining part of consciousness. "Consciousness arises from a continuous flow of feelings related to the body's internal state" (Lewis 2024).

At the end of the 19th century, the technology or extension of emotion could be the poem; the French Symbolists at the end of the 19th century were able to evoke emotions through forms of symbols and

metaphors. Just as the technology of the alphabet is an extension of memory, so the poem is an extension of the cognitive process evoking emotion.

Now we can use social media as a technology, as an extension of our emotions. The digital forms of social-media platforms even directly allow us to enhance the emotion; for example, sharing a photograph of a meal offers multiple emotional rewards. Beaver's et al. neural research confirms that food cues alone like images of appetizing meals can activate the brain's reward circuitry; this response is similar to the one triggered by actual food consumption. And obviously, there is the anticipation of social feedback.

However, the impact or message of social media, or of any other medium or technology, is not only the immediate effect—the positive or negative emotional reward activating the brain's reward circuitry (see above the example of food)—but, in general, according to McLuhan, the sum of the changes that result from the use of technology. McLuhan could not, in the 1960s and 1970s, precisely define the "message" of social media, nor could he have expected that adolescents, prone to overuse of social media, would be exposed to their influence five to seven hours a day (De D. et al.).

Moreover, any environment, including the current digital one, of which social media are one of the formal manifestations, permeates all levels of society that willingly accept its influence. Successful media are those that create in society a need that must be satisfied—they create their own market.

According to McLuhan, any contemporary environment that results from new technology cannot be perceived directly. The influence of a technology becomes apparent only when it is replaced by a new one; for example, suburbs are an effect of the application of combustion-engine technology in automobiles. This lack of awareness of the contemporary environment shares certain features with affect theory. Echoing McLuhan, Chris Ingraham (2023) attempts to define affect theory by suggesting that affects are autonomous systems "over which individual beings have little or no control" (5). Ingraham further asserts that "the middle matters, even if it's hard to see it mattering" (8), while acknowledging that "media studies … are making the same sorts of arguments about media as others make about affects" (8). Clearly, the arguments of media theory apply to an environment that is narrower in scope than the subject of affect theory analysis.

The content of every medium, including social media, is incidental, and as we have mentioned above, the present-day media have absorbed and have been using previous, "older" media (radio, TV, movie, literary narrative, photography …), although in a modified form. These modified forms of media arise from the technical possibilities of the digital environment, such as instantaneousness, brevity, feedback loops, and visual aspects.

Altering sensory perception

A number of authors (Aleksic; Hund; Chan et al.; Lerman; Papa and Photiadis; Ranooe; Zhao and Lindley) analyze the regular exposure to algorithmically curated, filtered, and enhanced content on social media and the effects of this exposure.

In accordance with them, we believe that everyday experiences on digital platforms alter the sensory perception and sensory preferences of physical reality, making it seem comparatively dull or inadequate (Řeřicha). In our opinion, however, most authors remain at the analysis of the (algorithmically created) content and no longer take into account further changes resulting from the sensory preferences of social media. The emotional impact is obvious. Physical reality seems psychologically disturbing. A Generation Z Czech composer and singer Pam Rabbit says that "We are a generation that needs more sensory

stimulation. When we don't get it, we feel anxious" (Jandová). This is not a consequence of the content of the medium nor a property of physical reality, but a consequence of the medium, of the technology itself. As we mentioned above, media are environments that alter patterns of perception and sensibility.

The change of sensory preferences was probably not the primary intention of the creators of the digital environment; nevertheless, these changes are the real message, the impact which creates for the users of social media a new reality, the perspective of which physical reality appears to them as less interesting. These sensory changes also, in turn, affect the perception of the older media like radio, TV, movies, and literary narratives.

The gradual changes of perception are evident in the case of photography, which has become an inseparable part of social media. With photography, the user becomes not only the consumer of information but also its creator. The status of photography has changed, as has its purpose, which is no longer to document or preserve moments, but to provide proof of existence in the digital environment.

While in the 19th and 20th centuries photography was primarily an archival record of events, people, or places, its contemporary digital form functions as an emotional statement and a tool of identity construction. The motivation behind the creation of the photograph has shifted from the external (to record) to the internal (to feel, to express). As Susan Sontag (1977) notes in *On Photography*, photography transforms the world into a collection of images; today, social media have transformed the photograph into an instrument of emotional communication. In this process, the photograph has been absorbed by the new medium, losing its original status and acquiring a new, hybrid function. What had once been the "message" of photography, realism, representation, evidence, has been replaced by affectivity, performativity, and temporality. On social media, the photo's value is determined not by its artistic or documentary qualities but by its emotional resonance and its ability to generate engagement.

In the same way, the textual message has undergone a transformation. The written word on social media platforms often serves not to convey information but to enhance emotional tone, to amplify or comment on an image, to complete the multimodal emotional message. A short caption, emoji, or hashtag functions as an emotional code, often replacing the complexity of written expression with immediacy and emotional density. McLuhan's statement that "the medium is the message" applies here literally: the form of communication itself determines the emotional mode of participation. Social media design – its interfaces, algorithmic logic, and reward systems—channels emotional expression into quantifiable, repetitive, and performative patterns. Users learn to anticipate emotional feedback and gradually adapt their own expression to fit these patterns, which further reinforces the emotional tone of digital communication.

From this perspective, emotions on social media are not simply individual responses but systemic effects of the medium's structure. The digital environment shapes not only what is felt, but how it is felt, and how it is expressed. The technological environment has thus become an emotional environment.

Implications for education

The emotionalization of communication and perception, which defines the digital environment, has significant implications for education. Education, traditionally based on rational analysis and critical distance, now operates within an emotional and affective context. Students' attention, motivation, and modes of learning are all affected by the same mechanisms that drive social media—immediacy, emotional charge, and reward anticipation.

Teachers increasingly report that learners' focus is fragmented, that their cognitive engagement is shorter, and that their emotional reactions are more intense and immediate. These changes can be

interpreted not merely as sociological phenomena but as effects of a new sensory and emotional configuration produced by the digital environment.

The educational process, therefore, takes place in an environment that already shapes the students' perception before any teaching begins. To teach effectively in this environment, educators must first understand its emotional and sensory logic. Just as McLuhan analyzed the effects of print or television on cognition and perception, we now need to analyze the emotional logic of digital media and its influence on the learning process.

In this context, the emotional literacy of both teachers and students becomes crucial. Emotional literacy refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions—one's own and others'—within communicative and social contexts (Goleman). However, in the digital environment, emotional literacy must also include the awareness of technological mediation: how interfaces, algorithms, and visual codes influence emotional expression and perception.

Contemporary pedagogy must, therefore, integrate the study of digital emotionality, not only as a topic of discussion but as a structural component of learning design. Teaching strategies that rely exclusively on rational argument and textual analysis are becoming less effective in emotionally charged and multimodal learning spaces.

Instead, hybrid educational models are emerging, combining cognitive and affective components, verbal and visual communication, synchronous and asynchronous interaction. These models recognize the importance of emotional engagement in learning but also seek to restore critical distance and reflection, which are often diminished in digital communication.

Contextualizing emotions

The task of education in the age of digital emotionality is not to suppress emotions but to contextualize them, to teach students to recognize the difference between authentic emotional experience and algorithmically amplified affect. The challenge is to develop sensitivity to the emotional mechanisms of media, to cultivate emotional awareness as a form of critical literacy.

As McLuhan suggested in *Understanding Media* the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance. The same principle applies to emotions: digital technologies alter emotional patterns and responses without our conscious awareness. Education can become the space where this process is made visible, where awareness of emotional manipulation and mediation is restored.

The emotional economy of social media is closely linked to its technical architecture. Platforms are designed to maximize user engagement, which is primarily achieved through emotional stimulation. Algorithms prioritize content that provokes strong emotional reactions, outrage, joy, empathy, curiosity, or anxiety, because such content increases interaction time and, consequently, advertising revenue.

This economic logic transforms emotion into a commodity. Feelings are no longer private experiences but units of value circulating within the digital market. "Emotional capital," as Sara Ahmed calls it in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, becomes a measurable resource. Likes, shares, and comments function as emotional currencies. Users invest their emotions and receive symbolic or social rewards in return.

Such an environment inevitably affects not only communication but also the formation of identity. Online self-presentation becomes an emotional performance calibrated to the logic of visibility and feedback. The individual's sense of self is shaped by algorithmic recognition and validation: "I am seen, therefore I feel."

This emotional performativity creates a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, social media offer unprecedented opportunities for self-expression and emotional sharing; on the other, they impose strict, implicit rules on what kinds of emotions can be expressed and how. Emotional expression is standardized, simplified, and gamified.

Positive emotions, for example, are often rewarded with higher visibility, while complex, ambiguous, or negative emotions are algorithmically suppressed. This leads to what Eva Illouz terms "emotional capitalism", a cultural system where emotions are commodified and regulated by market mechanisms.

The emotional homogeneity resulting from this process can be observed in the aesthetic uniformity of social media content: similar facial expressions, visual tones, and emotional scripts repeat across platforms. These repetitions create what Shoshana Zuboff describes as behavioral standardization, a narrowing of the range of emotional expression aligned with predictive and profitable patterns.

Mediated emotional experience

The consequences for education and cultural formation are profound. If emotional experience is increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems, then emotional understanding, empathy, imagination, and moral judgment—becomes dependent on technological filters. Students learn to feel within the constraints of digital architectures. This phenomenon has been described by several recent studies focusing on "algorithmic emotionality" (see e.g. Karppi; Paasonen; Crawford; Stark). They suggest that emotions are not only expressed through technology but also generated and shaped by it.

For example, the "like" button or the heart icon does not simply register existing emotional states; it produces new emotional practices. Clicking "like" becomes a form of emotional participation, a small ritual of affirmation that both expresses and reinforces social bonds. At the same time, the absence of likes can provoke feelings of exclusion or failure.

From the perspective of education, such emotional conditioning may influence students' expectations of feedback and validation. Learning environments modelled after social media can lead to a dependence on immediate emotional responses, approval, praise, or recognition, rather than on sustained cognitive engagement.

This shift from cognitive to affective validation has been noted by several educational researchers (e.g., Immordino-Yang and Damasio). Emotional engagement, while essential for learning, becomes problematic when it replaces reflection or critical evaluation.

In this sense, the digital environment creates both opportunities and risks: it enhances emotional participation but can diminish intellectual autonomy. The educational challenge is to balance these tendencies, to integrate emotional engagement into learning without allowing it to dominate cognitive processes.

Emotional literacy is considered key to academic literacy, and according to Yang and Duan, there are calls for the integration of EI in academic literacy development interventions/programs. However, Yang and Duan point out in their Final remarks that "many existing studies have overlooked the role of cultural factors in the interplay between EI and academic literacy development of EFL students". If they also consider social media and the related cognitive changes in users to be cultural factors, then we are in full agreement.

One possible approach is to apply the principles of media literacy not only to information but also to emotion itself. Emotional media literacy would teach students to analyze how emotional effects are produced technologically, how emotions circulate through digital systems, and how they can be interpreted.

Incorporating emotional literacy into digital education thus means fostering awareness of the interplay between feeling, technology, and meaning. This awareness can help prevent emotional manipulation and restore agency to users navigating affective digital spaces.

Ultimately, the study of social media emotionality leads back to McLuhan's insight that technologies are extensions of man. When technology extends the nervous system, it inevitably extends emotion. The new environment is not only informational or cognitive but deeply affective, transforming the very structure of consciousness.

The sensitivity of artists is one of the first indicators of the changing consciousness. When the outstanding Irish novelist Paul Lynch was asked in 2024 why he thought society was less emphatic, he clearly stated it was "obviously because of the technologies we have brought upon ourselves. Social media has completely changed who we are and how we relate to each other. Our brains love distraction…" (Lynch).

McLuhan's media theory also allows us to understand why each new medium is initially perceived as a degradation of the previous one. The older medium's users, accustomed to its sensory and cognitive configuration, perceive the new one as superficial or emotionally excessive. The same attitude that accompanied the arrival of film in relation to theatre, or television in relation to film, now accompanies the rise of social media in relation to traditional written culture.

The complaint that social media communication is shallow or emotionally manipulative reflects not only cultural conservatism but also a genuine sensory and perceptual shift. The digital environment prioritizes immediacy and affectivity over distance and analysis, creating a new form of sensibility that does not fit older aesthetic and educational norms.

From this perspective, the "degradation" is not a moral failure but a structural change in perception. Every medium reorganizes the balance of the senses. The typographic culture of print emphasized linearity, abstraction, and visual dominance. The electronic and digital environments, by contrast, restore simultaneity, tactility, and emotional resonance.

McLuhan's recurring observation that the new medium is never considered an art form, but only a degradation of the older form thus describes a recurring cultural pattern: resistance to sensory and emotional reconfiguration. In this sense, social media do not destroy previous forms of communication but integrate them into a new, emotionally charged environment.

However, this integration is not neutral. When older forms, text, image and sound enter the digital environment, they are redefined by its logic. The novel becomes a post, the photograph becomes a story, the film becomes a clip. Each form is compressed, accelerated, and emotionalized.

This compression leads to what Yves Citton in *The Ecology of Attention* calls "attention fragmentation": the constant reallocation of focus across multiple stimuli. Fragmented attention correlates with fragmented emotion—short, intense bursts of feeling without duration or continuity.

The rhythm of social media thus mirrors the rhythm of emotional experience it produces: fast, transient, and discontinuous. Such temporality affects how users experience themselves and others, leading to a sense of emotional acceleration and exhaustion.

The cultural consequence of this acceleration is the emergence of new genres of emotional expression, memes, reaction videos and viral challenges that combine irony, affect, and collective participation. These hybrid forms blur the boundaries between emotion and entertainment, authenticity and performance, communication and spectacle.

In the field of education, similar hybridization occurs. Students increasingly engage with knowledge through emotionally charged media forms, videos, posts, interactive platforms, rather than through

extended reading or abstract reasoning. Emotional resonance becomes a gateway to learning but can also limit the depth of understanding if not critically contextualized.

Tasks facing education

The role of educators is, therefore, not to reject these new forms but to reinterpret them pedagogically. The goal is to transform emotional immediacy into reflective experience, to use emotional engagement as an entry point to cognitive exploration. For example, analyzing social media phenomena in the classroom can help students recognize emotional manipulation and the mechanisms of digital persuasion.

In this sense, education becomes an act of translation translating the emotional language of digital culture into the analytical language of critical thinking. Just as McLuhan sought to make visible the hidden structures of media, educators must make visible the emotional infrastructures of digital communication. This process also implies a redefinition of literacy itself. Traditional literacy presupposed linear reading and logical argument; digital literacy must include multimodal and emotional comprehension. To "read" a digital text means to interpret its emotional codes, its visual and temporal structure, and its technological mediation.

The new sensibility emerging from digital communication may not be inferior to the old one; it is simply different. It emphasizes participation over contemplation, affect over abstraction, connection over distance. The task of contemporary culture and education is to understand this transformation, not to moralize it.

As McLuhan wrote in *Understanding Media*: "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" (McLuhan 7). The emotional tools of social media as likes, emojis, filters, and feeds—now shape not only our communication but our very capacity to feel. The challenge is to regain awareness of this shaping process, to become literate in our own emotional technologies.

The education of the future will have to address this emotional literacy as a fundamental skill, comparable to reading and writing in the typographic age. Just as the invention of print required new cognitive habits, the digital environment demands new emotional competencies. Emotionality is, therefore, not a marginal issue but a central cultural and pedagogical task. It connects media theory, psychology, and education into a single field of inquiry: how technology mediates emotion and how emotion mediates knowledge.

Social media, which continually reconfigures the perceptions and cognitive frameworks of its users, must undergo constant transformation in order to remain engaging and sustain its position within the attention economy. These ongoing changes reinforce and deepen acquired cognitive habits, while education tends to assume a reactive rather than proactive role. It is therefore imperative that educators and researchers develop a deeper understanding of these dynamics.

Existing tools for assessing cognitive reflection are insufficient for this purpose. Traditional cognitive tests often focus on correlating cognitive performance with general social media behavior, examining specific outcomes such as susceptibility to misinformation, or investigating patterns of addiction and usage. However, these approaches fail to capture the direct ways in which social media–induced cognitive patterns interfere with learning processes and educational effectiveness. There is thus a clear need for comprehensive assessment instruments that can directly measure how social media–related cognitive mechanisms impact learning outcomes. The development of such tools would represent a novel and significant contribution to understanding one of the most pressing cognitive challenges of the digital age.

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LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Aleksandra Holubowicz

Empty Promise of (Institutional) Education in Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* and Stanislav Biler's *Destrukce*

Abstract: *Institutional mass education is normally conceptualized as both instrumental in creating better living conditions in society as a whole and enabling upward mobility for individuals. Additionally, schooling is often perceived as inherently valuable because in its course students become not only more knowledgeable, but also able to think critically, creatively and ethically. At the same time, many actors within the system criticize the ways in which the factual state of mass education fails to fulfill the functions it is believed to perform. They put a strong emphasis on schools' inadequacy in addressing the challenges posed by the polycrisis we are facing, in particular regarding the economic predicament of many and climatic change.*

This paper offers an interdisciplinary study: I rely on two quite recent novels—Barbara Kingsolver's Unsheltered *(2018) and Stanislav Biler's* Destrukce *(2021) as examples of the empty promise that institutional education makes to individuals, but simultaneously I explore the possibilities to render learning meaningful. Those ruminations also gravitate towards embracing degrowth as the main educational objective and reconciling it with well-being.*

To achieve that, I scrutinize the teachers and students described in the two works of fiction and their practices in the light of education studies. Thus, in addition to deriving from literary studies I draw on philosophy applied to and of education (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Paulo Freire, Ivan Ilich, Michel Foucault, bell hooks, Tomasz Szkudlarek, Eli Meyerhoff etc.) sociology of education (Piotr Mikiewicz, Daniel Prokop etc.) and environmental humanities (Timothy Morton, David Abram etc.)

Mass education is both a right and an obligation that most contemporary societies have come to perceive as inalienable. As Ivan Illich observed in *Deschooling Society* the belief that universal schooling is necessary "is most firmly held in those countries where the fewest people have been-and will be-served by schools" (Illich 5). In 1980s Boli, Ramirez and Meyer predicted that "for most people, education maybe the most important element of their social status, and their educational background will have a greater direct impact on their overall life chances than any other element but nationality" (Boli, Ramirez and Meyer 145). How accurate does the claim appear to be half a century later? Many point to the empty promise attached to school and university diplomas as well as to the actual skills and knowledge that these purportedly certify.

I will rely on two quite recent novels—Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* (2018) and Stanislav Biler's *Destrukce* (2021)—treating these as insightful observations on the state and goal of contemporary education. Drawing on the novels as critique of the education system in the United States and the Czech Republic I trace the attempts to shift to more relevant and meaningful modes of adequate for facing the challenges of the today's world. We live under a poly-crisis: Edgar Morin's notion meaning a complex entanglement of interdependent critical issues, where singling out the main cause and prioritizing it over others proves futile (Morin 73–74). On the other hand, his concern with the "planetary era" underscores the importance of ecology and the need for "deceleration" (Morin 121), a measure less radical than degrowth, but slowly heading towards it. A more recent work by Timothy Morton dubs the intricate knot of various problems a "wicked problem". The author explains that

> Wicked problems have uncertain boundaries because they are always symptoms of other problems. Global warming is a symptom of industrialization, and industrialization is a symptom of massively accelerated agriculture. Of what is this acceleration a symptom? We could say that it was capitalism, but that would be circular: accelerating agriculture and subsequent industrialization are symptoms of capitalism, not to mention existing forms of communism (Morton 37).

Again, the complexity indicated by the British philosopher is deeply anchored in environmentalism and Anthropocene-generated global warming is his overarching perspective.

In the light of poly-crisis/wicked problematics, this paper studies two belletristic texts with a view to examining the extent to which the currently available education equips students for the contemporary and future world facing environmental catastrophe. The latter is tightly connected to global economic transformations, which at the individual level mean that education in its present form no longer fulfills the promise it makes: there is no guarantee that a certain level of education, including a diploma from a prestigious university, will assure financial stability that would allow for a living standard associated with middle or upper-middle class lifestyles with affordable medical care continuing into old age. Neither does mass education prepare students for the current and future challenges or living a purposeful life. Despite pessimist outlooks, I will attempt to formulate ways to transform learning into a more meaningful experience as inspired by my reading of the two novels in the light of the educational theories I consider beneficial. One possibility is to seek opportunities to create habitability through meaningful learning by opting out of an educational system whose main objective seems to lie in certification and reproduction of neoliberalism, as in the case of Tig and Wilma in Kingsolver's book. Another potential approach relies on individual teachers' interventions within the educational system, which are nonetheless the result of a collaborative effort of some community members as is the case in Biler's novel and to some extent in Kingsolver's (Thatcher's school work). Both these transformative practices are, ultimately, based on degrowth-oriented critical pedagogy.

Methodology

In my ruminations I apply a methodology that emerges at the intersection of literature studies, environmentalism, and education studies relying on rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 6–25) The choice of novels was determined by the theme they explore: education for life under the conditions of climatic change with deceleration and degrowth as necessary measures. A comparison between texts written by a contemporary American and Czech writer might suggest that despite the great distance in terms of geography, differences in educational systems and social organization, shared attitudes persist towards economic structure, environmental extraction and views on education. Both schooling systems are narrated as offering equal opportunities and upward mobility, which "in capitalist societies (…) will always be a false promise and a myth, regardless of whether the economy is growing, static or shrinking, in that not everyone will be able to be upwardly mobile and many will have to fall or fail" (Tannock 7).

The texts' generic differences lie beyond the scope of my research—Biler's Kafkaesque atmosphere with multiple allusions to *The Castle* spotted by Jakub Haubert (Haubert)[1] or the "grotesque apocalypse" (Soprová)[2] is formally divergent from Kingsolver's "Anthropocene realism" (Thieme), or possibly "neorealist" fiction, following Lee Konstantinou's definitions (Konstantinou). What they do have in common, though, is the figure of a teacher and reflection on the futility of institutional education in the face of the escalating

climatic catastrophe. Also, in both cases the symbolics of collapsing buildings is used. In both novels it is clear from the beginning that the building in question will end up crumbling down—the house in Kingsolver's story and the school together with the whole village in Biler's. At the same time, both texts offer ways out: creating habitability after tearing down the house in Kingsolver's novel and following the sizeable destruction described by Biler. Habitability is a term derived from Christine Wilson, who defines it as emerging

> when space fulfills the subject's psychological, emotional, and social needs. It goes beyond traditional ideas of home that rely heavily on feelings of personal comfort, security, and stability and incorporates the inherent flux and conflict in the way that subjects relate to space (Wilson 299).

In other words, there are no rigid criteria that must be met to create habitability except for positive affect for the inhabited space as well as good relations with others living there. It appears to be a significantly easier task with economic means against the backdrop of pristine nature. However, the challenge of today is to ensure habitability under the conditions of economic and ecological crisis. The latter will not be addressed unless the severity of the environmental disaster is acknowledged, and concrete measures are taken. Promoting degrowth and phasing in adequately designed policies could offer a solution. Degrowth "involves far more than an aspiration to downscale", and its functionality necessitates "social transformations" (Buch-Hansen, Iana and Nielsen 3). This will only be possible if the currently held views on what having a fulfilling life means are transformed, and this could be achieved through formal and informal education.

Whereas change on a mass scale is needed so that systemic solutions can be enabled, I focus on grassroots interventions which, if implemented independently within present institutions or attitudes to learning, might inspire and catalyze shifts in thinking about education at an institutional level. There is already an ample body of research anchored in teaching practice on pedagogies that seek to challenge the dominant modes of study with various terms attached to different approaches inscribed in the "radical" category with "canonic" thinkers writing on critical pedagogy (Freire, Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters To Those Who Dare Teach), (hooks), decolonial pedagogies (Mbembe), (Mignolo and Walsh). Their books influenced further scholarship leading to an array of approaches, some of which I would like to mention here as relevant to the paper—subversive pedagogies (Schick and Timperley), pedagogy of encounter (Inayatullah), uncertain pedagogies (Schick), indigenous pedagogies, alternatives to education-based modes of study (Myerhoff), and pedagogies resistant to neoliberalism (sometimes also seen as neo-colonialism). The common denominator of all these approaches is congruence with Freire's emphasis on genuine dialogue relevant to the material and ideological conditions of the given (oppressed) group (Freire). In this way they contest "the banking model of education" (Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed) with its transmissive model of education and the teacher assuming the position of authority as the one who has access to "exclusive knowledge" (Inayatullah 4) and thus has the right to fill their students, who are compared to empty receptacles.

Radical pedagogies also reject neoliberalism, which, with its competitiveness and individualism, "focus on efficiency, instrumentalization, and end-products miss the essential creative step of learning" (Parent 68) with its colonial complicity. Western education diffused around the world through settler colonialism not only privileges a certain Eurocentric "classical" curriculum transplanted to other locations, but it also presupposes a Cartesian body/mind split, which regards education mainly as cultivating the mind and overlooking the body (Timperley). The approaches of my interest, on the contrary, spotlight

dialogue, community learning with collaboration as a value, and non-hierarchical relations, which unlock transformative potential of all participants, including the teacher. Establishing and promoting a more egalitarian rapport in class ranges from space arrangements (e.g. chairs positioned in a circle, so that students can look at each other with the professor walking behind the circle and resisting the temptation to sit and "profess" (Inayatullah 47–48), special areas in some New Zealand universities that aim to recreate aboriginal spaces in which learning occurred (Paringatai and Wharerau) etc.), through decolonizing curricula and recognize other than Western epistemologies e.g. (Mbembe), (Mignolo and Walsh), (Myerhoff) to using methods in concert with the aforementioned values and goals e.g. (Freire), (hooks), (Inayatullah).

I will proceed by describing the novels' plots with the emphasis on education, its purpose, relevance and functionality in the face of the poly-crisis/wicked problem. Later, I will provide a theoretical framework for the reading of the texts through the prism of education and environmental studies. The conclusion will suggest ways to make learning meaningful, drawing on the theories applied in the paper and the analysis of how purposeful modes of study manifest themselves in the researched works of fiction.

Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* and Biler's *Destrukce*

Unsheltered is set in an actual city of Vineland, New Jersey, with two parallel plots in different time periods connected to the same location—a specific house, town, and the environment in the area subscribing to what David Abram termed "a more-than-human world" (Abram). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Thatcher marries Rose following her father's death, and he moves into the collapsing house, where they live together with his mother-in-law and Rose's sister. Their living standard remarkably deteriorates—used to conspicuous consumption, the impoverished family inherits mainly debts and a precarious future. Thatcher, a young science teacher, "had managed to rise a little and Rose to fall, arriving accidentally on a plane that accommodated their marriage. But the weight of their separate histories held the plane in uneasy balance" (Kingsolver 50). He was seen as a savior, unrealistically, and expected to provide prosperity for the three upper-middle class aspiring women. Instead, "Thatcher's disregard for, or inability to address, the material concerns of his family causes the house to grow more and more dilapidated, as rooms collapse on themselves" (Resano 276). Thatcher's wife grows steadily more estranged from him and seeks refuge by spending time with the local industrialist and his entourage, and she eventually divorces Thatcher and marries the rich man. Thatcher, on the other hand, establishes a friendship with his neighbor, a fictionalized version of Mary Treat, a contemporary biologist. Their camaraderie develops as they venture out to the local forests and swamps researching the local biodiversity.

A century later another house stands on the same lot—Rose's second husband had the original building torn down and a new one erected in its place—and it is yet again on the verge of collapse as it lacks foundations. As Ian Tan notices

> Kingsolver employs this architectural metaphor to extend from Willa's own family situation to an entire nation desperate to cling 'to a century-old vision of America' (U 99) at the cost of buying into racist propaganda and unenlightened social policies" (Tan 104).

Willa, a middle-aged freelance journalist, and her husband, Iano, an untenured political science professor, move into the house they have inherited. Initially hoping to settle down after a lifetime of

precarious employment, making temporary homes, they come to face reality: they will have to sell the property and downsize, which also entails discarding most artefacts with a solely emotional value documenting the family's past.

We meet the characters facing Morton's "wicked problems": their son, Zeke, an Ivy League graduate in Economics, visits the family with his baby child Aldus/Dusty, left bereft after his wife's suicide, Nick, Iano's father, a retired welder, is terminally ill in need of constant care, mostly performed by Tig, his granddaughter, and regular medical procedures, which are difficult to arrange on his insurance.

Biler's novel is set in an unnamed Czech village in the near future. The book begins with the protagonist, Ulrich, moving to the country. In an attempt to escape the *betonoza*[3]—the phenomenon implying a steady eradication of flora from the cityscape and paving it, most often with concrete (*beton*), which in Polish also serves as a metaphor for instantaneous and irreversible environmental and aesthetic degradation of scenery, Ulrich wants to settle down in the countryside. Instead of finding what he seeks — a romanticized version of rural life—he lands in a reality where the locals fell trees to prevent littering backyards and cover the surface with concrete. The school building, where he works as a teacher, is marked with numerous cracks, as are most houses in the village. What is more, dust fills the air, and the landscape, ravaged by droughts as it is, features dying trees and animals. Yet none of the inhabitants, but few considered insane, openly acknowledge the situation. The open secret is that the environmental degradation is caused by the factory. Nonetheless, the inhabitants subscribe to the narrative spread by both the factory manager and the local mayor extolling the company as a major investor that creates jobs and grants economic development in the area, blaming the drought on "aliens"—owners of cottages from the city who only haunt the place in their leisure.

Both novels end in destruction, which, at first understood as the ultimate catastrophe, lends itself to new possibilities: adaptability and habitability at a personal level as proposed in *Unsheltered*, which can also be read allegorically as representing a reconceptualization of the way society can be organized, and in *Destrukce,* starting anew on the ruins of the collapsed village, which can serve the same allegorical purpose as in Kingsolver's text. Reorganization at the personal and social level is, nonetheless, unfeasible without contesting the hegemonic epistemology and axiology. In other words, it is indispensable to transform learning: "major shifts in education, and especially formal education, are essential" for schooling as an institution produces 'mental infrastructures', and an individualistic growth-oriented and competitive subject (Tannock 8). If we rely solely on formal education in its present form a reimagining of life is difficult, for as Illich points out, "school is the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is" (Illich 48).

The two intertwined plots in *Unsheltered* play out against the backdrop of environmental, economic and social changes, which emphasize the empty promise of education as a catalyst for upward social mobility individually and collectively, when knowledge can cause the whole society, or even humanity to progress. On the contrary, it might bring about doom—especially, when validated through prestigious institutions, like Ivy League, which promote a subjectivity as described by Tannock. Such 'mental infrastructure' is instrumentalized to increase the profit of the superrich rather than serve the whole community. *Destrukce* similarly points to the subordination of education to the needs of business manifesting the threats posed by technocracy.

In both novels schooling fails to prepare students for the challenges of the contemporary world, but for one that has long started disappearing. Iano, with his doctorate in political science, has no means of either supporting his family financially or the skills to tackle mundane everyday tasks. His prestigious degree and "making all the right decisions" in life amount to nothing when it comes to arranging medical

care for his elderly father or taking care of him. Neither is Zeke prepared for rearing his new-born son—he lacks the necessary skills, emotional maturity, and mind frame to take on this responsibility.

Universal Education

Universal education is generally believed to bring numerous benefits both to individuals and societies. Participation in post-compulsory education is also encouraged. The research on its value points out that

> on the one hand, public discourse emphasizes the ability to gauge the merits of a degree in terms of employment and earnings (BBC 2018) and yet, on the other hand, it has long been argued that higher education has been an important transformational social experience involving intellectual and social as well as economic benefit (Rasciute, Downward and Simmons 3379).

Many also share the conviction that education has an inherent value, following Richard Peters' understanding that it denotes "making a man better (…) just as the development of intellect and character gives context to the notion of developing what is worthwhile" (Peters 27). University is recognized as an important institution exceeding the merely pragmatic function of qualifying students for employment.

The latter aspect, however, cannot be downplayed either—a university degree is viewed as a means of creating a more prosperous society, well adapted to face the challenges in contemporary knowledge-based society. As Tomasz Szkudlarek, a Polish philosopher of education, points out that according to the dominant discourse on education "people's knowledge and skills are valuable assets in (knowledge-based) societies; and that the best way of providing for economic growth and social welfare is investing in their learning" (Szkudlarek 79). Historically, as Piotr Mikiewicz purports, "it can be said that the emergence of institutional education, and its subsequent consistent expansion, is one of the most important modernization processes of Western societies"[4] (Mikiewicz loc. 745–747).

Mass education—elementary and often secondary—is treated as a given, and people who do not receive it or "drop out" are underprivileged: they tend to be classified as unskilled workers, which reduces their chances of finding well-paid jobs. Also, as Eli Meyerhoff observes in his book *Beyond Education*, those "dropouts" themselves identify it as a sense of failure, interpreting it as personal deficiency as well as internalizing shame that they did not succeed (Myerhoff 94).

But why do we need school (diplomas)?

While enumerating the benefits of universal schooling and constant increase in its accessibility, including university education, even its staunch enthusiasts are fully aware that its implementation is far from ideal. Nonetheless, deficiencies are seen as a minor shortcoming of an overall effective solution. These are conceptualized as possible to address through the employment of competent teachers, reforms of systems, and improvements in curricula and syllabi. For individuals, education is seen as a vehicle for learning essential skills, general knowledge that is perceived as worth gaining, and the more specific expertise, the higher the educational stage. These, in consequence, have the potential for granting upward mobility, which occurs through creating equal opportunities and a spirit of meritocracy.

On the other hand, this function of schooling is debunked by sociological studies, which, demonstrate all over the world that schools preserve social inequalities. (Mikiewicz loc. 3869–3870) (Tannock 7). In the Czech context Daniel Prokop raises similar points in *Slepé Skvrny* (Prokop). Then, why do we cling on to the idea

that schooling in its present form is both useful and necessary and why do we attach so much value to graduation diplomas? The current modes of study fail us—a university degree does not fulfill its promises: neither does it translate to economic stability, nor does it equip graduates with essential skills useful in life. It does not prepare students for the current situation of poly-crisis/wicked problems, either: education conceived as part of the modernist state involves goals, expectations, desires and axiology that are now rendered obsolete by the material conditions of the more-than-human world.

As evident in Kingsolver's novel through the eyes of the teacher character, Thatcher Greenwood, the beginnings of mass education are already corrupted. He works when mass education is phased in, and it offers the promise of a better future. Thatcher embodies this promise—he is idealistic about his job and wants the children to learn about the world through hands-on experience and field trips to embrace both theory and practice. He was lured to come to Vineland by its declarative values—freethinking, a progressivist Utopia founded by captain Landis who, as Willa quotes on finding the information about him: "introduced a modern system of education open to all races, a hundred years before US schools were integrated" (Kingsolver 162). Thatcher, who was living in the "Eden" endeavors to persuade the school principal, Cutler, to grant him permission to use his teaching methods (as described above) but meets with fierce opposition.

> Cutler gave tedious lectures about shaping young minds, but would never grant Thatcher leave to take his subjects out of the classroom for a look at the living world. The request so provoked his employer that Thatcher would have dropped it, but he found himself haunted by Mrs. Treat's question: If trained to nature from an early age, could a mind be freed from its vendetta against the world's creatures? Cutler viewed field study as truant and unscholarly. Had ridiculed Thatcher's proposal in front of other teachers (Kingsolver 131).

Thatcher is presented as one of the very few characters who care about the quality of education offered to the kids, driven by his integrity and love of the more-than-human world. Cutler, on the other hand, envisions school as a place where children are immersed in "discipline and moral education". The latter notions would seem to be a relic of the past; however, they persist as manifested in Biler's work. Ulrich is coached by his experienced colleague, a local who boasts about knowing the children, their parents, and grandparents well:

> Children must learn that patience brings roses, my colleague continues, as I watch the children sweeping up the grains of dust in the wind. Children need order and discipline, only then can they grow up to be decent people. They must learn respect. Even if they don't know why they are doing something, they need to trust us to know, my colleague tells me, while the principal yells at the children as if it's their fault that the wind is turning into a hurricane and ripping the brooms out of their hands[5] (Biler loc. 316–320).

Biler's hyper-grotesque rendition of pedagogical practices and values is not entirely ungrounded, with the novel exposing the current Czech socio-political situation by means of hyperbole. In the dystopia that he describes the main goal of education is to train efficient and obedient workers for the local factory. Given the recent problems the Czech Republic is facing securing places for all students in secondary schools, Biler's imagined world mirrors the actual one. A shortage of spots in *gymnázium*, a school whose objective is to foster academic growth and prepare students for college, leaves many

without the opportunity of pursuing a life path of their preference. Instead, there is a growing range of vocational schools, including ones that operate in partnership with companies reconciling academic growth with job preparation. This solution seeks to respond to the need for prioritizing the practical component of education.

> However, this cannot be done well unless there is a change in the framework education programs and other support measures to support vocational training and the cooperation of secondary vocational schools and enterprises in their vicinity. It is essential that framework education programs are based on the needs of individual companies (Hanák, Ižová and Bočková 91).

In other words, young people's education is subordinated to the demands of capitalism, and Gatley's hypothetical position strikes as cynically apt: "if a school was training students to work in degrading circumstances to serve morally dubious ends without providing anything of value to the students themselves, its educational value would need to be questioned" (Gatley 676–677). Whereas acquiring practical skills is highly desirable, designing programs to meet the needs of individual companies is not only morally dubious because it instrumentalizes the learning process, but also because it renders graduates overly dependent on a single employer. Shifting life direction decisions to enterprises seems dangerous as it substantially restricts individuals' opportunities to make choices about their future. Such schooling is also unlikely to foster critical thinking or devising ways to improve the world, as these ways might turn out to be to the detriment of company owners.

Eli Meyerhoff goes even further in his *Beyond Education* theorizing Western compulsory schooling as laying ground for the development and boosting of capitalism. What he terms "education-based" and "verticalist modes of study" became a key component of the emergence of capitalist relations (Myerhoff 123). He interrogates the links between the grade system where students have to complete subsequent stages in an order imagined as ascending, culminating in graduation and the emergence of capitalism. He posits a thesis that

> the rise of the verticalist mode of study as another of capitalism's preconditions. This mode of study divides the working class, disciplines young people into individualized obedience, and creates new separations between them and their means of studying collectively across genders, ages, and abilities. (He shows) how colonial dispossession, misogynist repression of women, and the verticalist mode of study were interconnected forms of primitive accumulation that involved various configuration of commons and enclosure (Myerhoff 109).

Meyerhoff also traces the origins of the word "education" in the English language and his findings contest Peters' constructivist approach implying "transmission of what is worthwhile" (Peters 35). Meyerhoff determines that the term originated in 1530s in England, when Gutenberg's printing press and Reformation induced increased literacy, sparked political changes, and led to peasant rebellions in the territory of today's Germany. The English nobility, aware of the situation in continental Europe, feared "the threats of rebellion from increased literacy and reading of the Bible and other books in the English vernacular" (Myerhoff 141). Education was devised as a way of exercising control over the dangers of wider literacy (Myerhoff 149). Meyerhoff's book complements Foucault's genealogical account of school from *Discipline and Punish*, but the American scholar points to earlier origins, preceding the eighteenth-century total institution operating on similar principles to those guiding the army and the hospital (Foucault). He also

refers to spiritual ascension, which underlays the introduction of levels in various Christian schools. The reason for this measure was not didactic, though, but to enable smoother management of institutions attended by high numbers of students, where "older boys in the first or second level acted as teachers (lectors) to the lower levels, helping the schoolmaster manage the school" (Myerhoff 122). Whereas such measures appear to be sensible in terms of group management, these are usually conceptualized as designed so as to facilitate the learning process, which was clearly not the case.

"Dropout crisis"

Education in its present form—institutional, split into levels that must be accomplished in an ascending order, standardized, culminating in examinations, and normalized as the only viable option—can also be perpetuated because the notion is romanticized. Conceptualizations of heroes in a binary opposition to educational others—dropouts are internalized also by those who fail to graduate as their individual deficiency. High dropout rates at any stage receive a lot of media attention and are presented as a "crisis". Meyerhoff, however, sheds a different light on the phenomenon by using an apter term "pushouts". Choosing an alternative name allows for asking questions which the "dropout narrative" suppresses, including "where/when does the disposal process begin and end, and who/what is responsible for these disposals?" (Myerhoff 97) and "Who or what is responsible for pushing the student out of school—the student, the school, structural racism, the state, or the capitalist political economy?"

In the American context with high college tuitions, incomplete study programs have an obvious culprit, but financial straits also apply to lower levels, where tuitions cost less, or programs are offered free of charge. One of the reasons is that many teenage students have difficulty reconciling studies with a job which they depend on, sometimes also as breadwinners (Kunichoff).[6] In the Czech context there is limited research on high school students as breadwinners: however, a study on university students' work reveals its impact on education: "most respondents see their work as a reason to interrupt their studies and most of them have interrupted their studies due to work" (Dizdarevic and Sršen 165). Highschool dropout rates account for 5.3% in 2022 in the US (National Center for Education Statistics) and 5.4% for the Czech Republic respectively (Eurostat).

Except for injustices incurred at different stages, including discrimination on economic grounds but also in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, neurological or bodily type, realization that a degree often serves solely as a mark of distinction might induce one to opt out of the educational system. As Bourdieu points out, if two people with the same expertise are employed to perform the same tasks, the person that has acquired a certification in the course of a program will be valued more than the self-taught employee. The main difference between "the autodidact, a victim by default of the effects of educational entitlement, is (that they are) ignorant of the right to be ignorant that is conferred by certificates of knowledge" (Bourdieu 329). By this I do not aim to argue for an overall distrust in any certification or abolishing of all examinations, but it is an issue that deserves more thorough consideration: lack of certification does not automatically imply lack of skill and neither does a diploma guarantee expertise.

If one is able to acquire useful competences on their own or in informal ways by means of alternative to education-based modes of study, at a lower cost—not only financial but emotional, social or any other—why should they strive for completing a formal program, given that a degree often does not fulfill the promise it makes? Perhaps a more reasonable course of action is one that Tig from *Unsheltered* takes. Having studied a few semesters of Environmental Science at the university, she refuses to take

a loan just to earn a degree. Instead, she learns by traveling, also to Cuba, where she masters Spanish and resourcefulness. She embodies degrowth, a position

> that argues that efforts to address climate and environmental crisis in ways that are effective and just will be doomed to failure unless these challenge the orthodoxy of needing perpetual economic growth to support social progress (Tannock 3).

She minimizes consumer needs, learns practical skills including fixing cars, knitting, cooking and she is committed to care work. These render her well-equipped for life and adaptable to change.

Dropout, pushout or optout?

Tig is shown in opposition to her brother Zeke, the epitome of success if seen through the prism of romanticized education and special value attached to certification. A Havard graduate in Business, despite the connotations of expertise and prestige he ended up precarious with his "mind-blowing debts and an infant in his care" (Kingsolver 58). To rectify the situation Zeke devises a plan to secure a future for himself and his son: leave his baby with the family to found a startup with his Harvard acquaintances. Zeke describes his enterprise as "the fastest-growing sector of personal finance management. Microloans, fossil fuel-free bundles. Socially responsible investments" (Kingsolver 70). What he sees as pursuing a career in his field of study, where profit coexists with ethical and environmental considerations, his sister dismisses in her retort: "Keep telling yourself that. Helping rich people get richer is socially responsible" (Kingsolver 70).

It is Tig that seems to adopt a realistic approach, whereas her brother symbolizes the reckless casino-capitalism relying on belief in infinite growth and the American Dream. His supposedly rational thinking and a down-to-earth attitude to money as the "engine (…) out there running day and night, whether you like it or not" (Kingsolver 70) proves delusional when contrasted with his sister's. Zeke's goals resemble those that Americans determined seventy years prior and might have been attainable to some before the shift to Reaganomics. Mike Davis in *Prisoners of the American Dream* points to a substantially higher living standard of white working class in richer states, such as California, with home ownership and college for their kids as a new standard prior to the ninety-eighties (Davis loc. 3299). Reaganomics, however, inadvertently affected the situation of the working class by dismantling the welfare state. As a result, their position was aggravated by deunionization, tax breaks for the rich, and various other measures benefiting the capital.

> Financial deregulation, through dismantling many of the New Deal structures that subordinated money-capital to productive-capital (interest-rate ceilings, clear separations of commercial and investment banking, and so forth), has also stimulated the formation of a nouveau rentier class (Davis loc. 4057–4059).

Seen through such a lens, Zeke aspires to enter the world of the rich for the glamor it lends as well as escaping the mundane reality of looking after his own child. Instead of spending time with Dusty, he chases a chimera: the desire to earn a fortune instantaneously when contrasted with providing care work for the near and dear daily, seems like boys playing bosses. Abandoning his son does not strike

me as an act of sacrifice but rather as escaping responsibility and parenthood excusing his flight as indispensable. Resano dubs him "an embodiment of 'progressive neoliberalism' (Resano 272), applying Nancy Frazer's term denoting

> an alliance of mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights), on the one side, and high-end "symbolic" and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood), on the other. In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively joined with the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialization (Fraser).

Zeke's career is also contrasted with Nick's job, who, despite the fact that "he barely had a sixth-grade education, given the turbulent backstory of rural island life, war, and narrow escape" (Kingsolver 102) from Greece as a welder had some expert knowledge in chemistry. I read Nick, Iano's father, as representing a certain era in the United States—industrialism—which marked a period of rapid economic growth and, as already mentioned, certain improvements of the living standard for the white working class (Davis). His agony and passing symbolize changes occurring in American economics, politics and social structure. Nick as a welder and a trade union member has spent his entire life on hard work proving himself worthy as a migrant. His pride and identity are built on simple binary oppositions between hard workers and idlers, the worthy and the undeserving, the well-off and the poor. Nonetheless, at the terminal stage of his life, his medical care program does not cover the expenses of his treatment, and the only option left is to use Obamacare, a health plan Nick despises. In his old age a man who has always valued self-reliance has to depend on welfare and the kindness of his daughter-in-law, Willa and his granddaughter, Antigone, who both learn to nurse him and operate the life-sustaining medical equipment, without any prior medical training. Despite mean remarks flying both directions, the women try to alleviate his suffering, especially Tig who shows immense patience for the grumpy relative.

Meaningful learning in *Destrukce* and *Unsheltered*

Neither Tig nor Mary Treat, born in 1830 (Hollen), can produce a university degree, the former opted out of the system, the latter was forced to be self-taught since in her day women had no access to higher education, which only began to change in the later eighteen-sixties for medicine with Boston University as first to accept women in the years 1871–1874 (King 61–62). Yet these two, formally without any education, exemplify meaningful learning: curiosity of the surrounding world leading to knowledge and skills which translate to concrete practical actions. In both cases it involves rejecting possessions and behaviors, whose only purpose is to mark belonging to a given social group. However, their lifestyle is not presented as a form of ascetism; on the contrary, they are shown as those who can genuinely enjoy existence. Being out in nature and exploring its beauty (Mary), establishing meaningful relationships and providing care to the near and dear in need (Tig) become everyday routines that enable living in the present—practice of mindfulness to use a catchy contemporary term. Both characters exemplify individual acts of defiance of the hegemonic norms of the era. Tig's opting out, however, points to the disillusionment with the hopes that formal education would bring to ameliorate the status of women.

Thatcher and Ulrich, on the other hand, demonstrate ways in which grassroots, even if first individual, change may take place in order to promote meaningful education. Thatcher, initially filled with ideas, endeavors to put these into practice: inspire curiosity and love of the surrounding world. He envisions field trips with students and teaching them the latest discoveries—Darwinism. He also places weight on

children grasping the sense and processing information rather than engaging in mindless repetition. Incrementally he loses his energy, as he has far too few allies. He strives to follow Mary's urge, "Your charge is to lead them out of doors. Teach them to see evidence for themselves, and not to fear it. To stand in the clear light of day, you once said. Unsheltered" (Kingsolver 210). He proceeds according to the principles of Freirean pedagogy (anachronically), valuing dialogue and attempting to render learning relevant for his students as well as trying to respond to their material conditions, e.g. he suggests cancelling extra fees for compulsory events or thematizing the high dropout rate and pre-mature marriage. In consequence, he loses his teaching position since he poses danger to the profit-making system advertised by Landis as a progressive utopia.

Ulrich, unlike Harvard-educated Thatcher, is chosen for his mediocrity. In Urlich's final conversation with the factory director the latter declares: "You know, you disappointed me. When I saw your resume and cover letter, I thought to myself, this is exactly what we are looking for. A person who hit rock bottom unable to even write down what he wants" (Biler loc. 3115–3117).[7] He is filled with self-doubt, which he does not conceal in front of class, in this way instantiating the Schick's uncertain pedagogy (Schick). He does not pretend to be in the position of an expert. He, similarly to what Thatcher would like to perform, takes his class out to nature and reflects upon the discrepancies between the world around and the images in their textbooks. He also gets to know about the material conditions, including the economic and psychological struggle of the community thus implementing the Freirean approach. Ulrich also echoes Inayatullah's pedagogy of encounter—enabling encounter can be transformative, and to learn is to transform, whereas fear of transformation prevents learning from happening (Inayatullah 101). It seems that it is Ulrich's sincerity, self-reflection and uncertainty that facilitate community learning that Schick has described.

Destrukce's character also is supported by a strong eccentric woman—his neighbor, a former teacher, who embodies dissent by her views, lifestyle but also by owning an oasis of permaculture in her garden—where everywhere else everything dries out and dies, her trees and plants remain lush. Just like Mary Treat, Ulrich's neighbor inspires him to develop a critical consciousness and encourages him to prevail. Collaborative effort in Biler's novel offers a glimmer of hope.

Conclusion

One way of looking at institutional education, or Meyerhoff's "education-based modes of study" is to denounce it and call for an immediate defunding—deschool society as Illich proposes. Using the latest technology to our benefit or learning within our own family or community could prove far more exciting and productive than what mandatory schooling has to offer. Illich also points to the exclusive aspect of certification—it discredits the self-taught (Illich 18) as well as "constituting a form of market manipulation and is plausible only to a schooled mind" (Illich 8). Both novels also present diplomas as either mark of class distinction (*Unsheltered*) or responding by following the teacher's instructions blindly (*Destrukce*), in other words acquiring a schooled mind. *Bildung* does not guarantee a steady income, and in the American case university attendance means incurrence of massive debt.

Even though Illich suggests ways to gradually deschool society with liberating students from the mandatory attendance as an important goal, as enticing as it sounds, it is unlikely that such reforms will be implemented. If they were under the conditions of neoliberalism, those transformations could lead to an increase in cheap labor and widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, I would recommend implementation of subversive pedagogies irrespective of the term one decides to use.

Humanization, dialogue, comfortable space indoors or outdoors and good, non-hierarchical relationships which involve collective learning come to the fore and could be prioritized over covering the curriculum efficiently. Embodied pedagogy rather than focusing solely on the mind might also boost learning, which could be organized even in modest surroundings, as it is the attitude that respects bodies that matters. Creating conditions for transformative encounters can occur irrespective of material circumstances—whereas it is more convenient and pleasurable to dwell in spaces that cultivate traditional communal values of knowledge cultivation, as in the example of New Zeeland, again it is the way of relating with the group and the more-than-human world that is essential. Thatcher's and Ulrich's efforts could be inspirational—these or similar novels could be used in teacher training, as stories might be a powerful influence, which explains their pivotal role in indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies.

In conclusion, tiny interventions of individual teachers matter. Once educators learn to "say no to the bureaucratization of the mind" (Freire, Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters To Those Who Dare Teach 6) they could assume the role of a guide who aids students become "investigators" not "sweeteners" (Kingsolver 46), to use Thatcher's division—the former meaning those seeking truth, as opposed to the latter that choose to remain oblivious to the major systemic faults. Paulo Freire saw teachers as cultural workers who become "a role model setting forth the values of democracy" (Freire, Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters To Those Who Dare Teach 11) and degrowth. This involves the next step: merging education with collective movements:

> there is need to go further than just promoting a degrowth oriented critical pedagogy in the curriculum, important as this is, and engage with forms of radical education, within but also beyond the formal education system itself, that are linked directly with collective movements for structural transformation in education as well as society and the economy in general (Tannock 5).

Tannock is aware of the criticism of combining education with activism for social transformation. Nonetheless, no education is ever ideologically neutral. If there is ample data indicating that an economic system that relies on consumerism results in unhindered extraction of finite resources by a few, while the majority of humans live in poverty with the more-than-human world incrementally destroyed, we should put an end to promoting growthism and capitalist hegemony through public institutions. In other words, we are obliged to subordinate education to the needs of the planet, not to those of the market. In order to achieve this goal, it makes a difference when individual action confluences with community building, which enables grassroots organizing. Collective effort and empowerment that emerges might eventually lead to systemic transformations.

Notes

(1) Main Author: Haubert, Jakub Info: Tvar – Roč. 33, 2022, č. 11, 26. 5., s. 6–7
Annotation: Úvaha nad románem S. Bilera „Destrukce"; zejm. Bilerovým zobrazením současné společnosti, mj. k aluzím na román F. Kafky „Zámek".

(2) Apokalyptická groteska v X10 Main Author: Soprová, Jana Info: Lidové noviny – Roč. 36, 2023, č. 59, 10. 3., s. 9 Lidovky.cz (online) – 12. 3. 2023 Annotation: Recenze na divadelní dramatizaci románu S. Bilera „Destrukce", již uvádí Divadlo X10. https://www.lidovky.cz/kultura/divadlo-x10-cynicka-besidka-ondrej-stefanak.A230310_113045_ln_kultura_ape

(3) Jan Mencwel wrote a book reporting on the phenomenon of betonoza and the way it destroys Polish cities. (Mencwel)

(4) Original: "Można powiedzieć, że pojawienie się instytucjonalnej edukacji, a następnie jej konsekwentna ekspansja, to jeden z najważniejszych procesów modernizacyjnych społeczeństw zachodnich." Translated by the author.

(5) Original: "Děti se musí naučit, že trpělivost růže přináší, naváže kolegyně, zatímco hledím na děti zametající zrnka prachu ve větru. Děti potřebují řád a disciplínu, jedině tak z nich mohou vyrůst slušní lidé. Musí se naučit úctě. I když zrovna neví, proč něco dělají, musí důvěřovat nám, že to víme, říká mi kolegyně, zatímco ředitel řve na děti, jako by to byla jejich chyba, že se vítr mění v orkán a vytrhává jim košťata z rukou." Trans. by the author.

(6) "Of the 16.7 million young people aged 16–19 in the United States in November 2014, 28.6 percent were employed and another 20 percent were looking for work, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics."

(7) Original: "Víte, zklamal jste mě. Když jsem viděl váš životopis a motivační dopis, řekl jsem si, přesně toho hledáme. Člověka na dně, který ani nedokáže napsat, co vlastně chce." Trans. by the author.

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Kristýna Janská

Reader, Spectator, Viewer, Player, Influencer: The Changing Paradigms of Reception as a Challenge to Literary History

Abstract: *This article examines how recent transformations in media and cultural production challenge traditional literary historiography. Drawing on Hans Robert Jauss's reception aesthetics and his concept of the "horizon of expectation," the study argues that literature must increasingly be understood through the lens of its reception across diverse media platforms. Integrating insights from media theory (McLuhan, Benjamin, Bolter and Grusin), the article explores how remediation and adaptation alter both the circulation and interpretation of literary texts. Through examples such as the adaptation history of* Oroonoko *and the Czech reception of* Jane Eyre*, it shows how literature is reshaped by visual and participatory media cultures. The study further highlights the role of new agents—such as social media influencers and online fan communities—in shaping contemporary literary canons. Ultimately, the paper calls for a rethinking of literary historiography as a collaborative, interdisciplinary, and globally informed endeavour that reflects the evolving modes of authorship, readership, and textual authority in the digital age.*

In recent decades, literary historiography has faced growing pressure to adapt to shifting paradigms of interpretation, driven by both theoretical developments and evolving media technologies. Traditional literary history has long grappled with the tension between objectivity and interpretation—particularly since the rise of literary and cultural theory in the twentieth century rendered the ideal of a neutral historiographical method increasingly untenable. While this theoretical turn has challenged positivist and historicist approaches, it has also opened new avenues for studying the mechanisms of cultural production, reproduction, and reception.

The result is a vast array of new fields of cultural research, such as semiology, cultural studies, media studies, adaptation theory, histories of … (book market, film market, the book and others), sociologies of… (culture, literature and many more). This inevitable fragmentation and specialisation have enabled scholars to pursue original and previously unexplored paths of inquiry. At the same time, however, such specialisation risks narrowing the audience and limiting the broader influence of scholarly work to particular subfields.

Paradoxically, this state of fragmentation may reinforce the relevance of traditional literary history and theory as unifying frameworks. This article argues that reception—a once peripheral aspect of literary study—must now be re-centred as a foundational category for literary historiography. Drawing on Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectation," I explore how reception aesthetics offers a productive model for integrating historical context, reader agency, and evolving media forms. I further situate this model within an interdisciplinary framework that incorporates adaptation studies, media theory, and sociological research.

By examining how literature is increasingly shaped, circulated, and received through diverse media—from stage and screen to digital platforms and social networks—I propose that literary historiography must embrace an interdisciplinary model that integrates media theory, reception studies, and adaptation history to reflect the contemporary modes of literary production and reception. Such a reconceptualisation requires not only interdisciplinary cooperation but also a fundamental rethinking of the object, scope, and methods of literary historiography itself. Two compelling examples of the way forward might be found in the seminal series of *The Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe* (series editor Elinor Shaffer) and even more so in the *Prismatic Jane Eyre* project (Reynolds et al.), which both

prove the essential role of interdisciplinary and international teamwork in the study of literature today, discovering new semantic potentialities of canonical texts which only appear in the context of their international reception, while at the same time exploring the mechanisms of production, distribution and reception of literary texts across Europe and in case of *Jane Eyre* of the whole world.

Reception as a cornerstone of literary history

To ground this rethinking of literary historiography, it is necessary to return to the foundational work of Hans Robert Jauss and the Konstanz School, whose theory of reception aesthetics remains indispensable for understanding how readers and reading communities shape literary meaning across time. In his critique of 19th-century positivist historiography, Jauss rejected the notion of history as a "completed process" with a "definitive beginning and definitive end" and the presumption that an "objective picture of the past" is attainable. (Jauss, "History of Art and Pragmatic History" 440–441) Instead, he proposed a dynamic conception of history "based on the historical functions of production, communication, and reception, which would take part in the process of continuous mediation of past and present art". (449)

Central to Jauss's theory is the concept of the "horizon of expectation," derived from Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. This horizon, formed by a reader's historical, social, and literary context, governs the reception and interpretation of texts at any given time. The literary work, in this model, is not a fixed object with inherent meaning but a response to anticipated questions from its readers: "The answering nature of the text, which provides the historical link between the past work and its later interpretation, is a modality of its structure—seen already from the viewpoint of its reception; it is not an invariable value within the work itself." (456)

In his seminal study "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," Jauss proposes seven theses which allow for the objectification of literary reception. In the first two, he analyses the key concept of horizon of expectation, based on Gadamer's notion of a horizon in the process of hermeneutical interpretation. The horizon of expectation could be characterised as a transsubjective frame of reference formed by readers' expectations, which determines the interpretation and evaluation of each text at a specific moment in history. The horizon is shaped by several factors: the tradition and previous understanding of the genre, the form and themes of already familiar works, and the contrast between poetic and practical language. (Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory" 20–24) The notion of a horizon of expectation thus addresses two aspects of the text: the reader's expectations assumed by the text for its first audience, which comes close to the concept of an implied reader used by Wolfgang Iser, and the actual expectations of various historical readers and groups of readers. The dynamic relation between these two conditions the aesthetic judgement and evaluation of the work plays a key role in the process of forming a canon and tradition.

What allows for a historiographic questioning is then the Gadamerian "fusion of horizons", which presupposes the analysis of the expectations of the original audience as well as the contemporary questioning of present-day critics, readers and the historiographer. It follows then that literary history should be understood as a process in which the historian is a temporal "anchor" establishing the horizon of questioning.

Although Jauss's influence has been more prominent in Continental than in Anglophone literary studies, his model laid the groundwork for integrating later developments in gender studies, postcolonial theory, and translation studies into reception-focused research. His emphasis on crossing national and disciplinary boundaries offers a useful perspective for analysing literature in a global, multimedia context.

This merit of Jauss's literary history was emphasised by Mario J. Valdés, who explored its potential for uncovering the phenomena repressed by the dominant tradition:

The horizon of expectation can be summarized as the need to make the past a part of the present in cultural inquiry. If we restore the dialectic between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation we push the inquiry into the questions of legitimacy, symbolic process, and cultural identity on a deeper level, one that I believe has significant consequences for the meaning of our relation with the cultural past. One of the important consequences is the opening up of forgotten possibilities, that is, the potentialities of symbolic representations that were cast off when they were not incorporated into literary history and constitute repressed cultural activity that did not meet with the acceptance of the literary historians of the day (Valdés 65).

Inspiration in other media

What is not a widely accepted approach to research in literary scholarship has been much more universally developed in cultural and especially media studies, where reception is a thoroughly analysed part of the communication chain. Parallel to the theories of reading as an act of active participation in formulating the meaning of a text, media studies have contested the common-sense idea that reception is a passive activity.

In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan's groundbreaking theory differentiated between the so-called hot and cool media. Hot media, he explains, are filled with data, whereas cool media are "low definition," providing less. "Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience." (McLuhan 23) Similarly to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding conception of media reception, McLuhan's technological approach shows that reception is not a single type of activity or passivity—it varies with different kinds of media. McLuhan's idea forms the core of most of the recent studies in adaptation theory, which has moved from the concept of "fidelity" towards an analysis of adaptation as a translation process between different kinds of media.

However, McLuhan's approach was not as novel as it might seem; it can be traced back to Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility", where he uncovers the revolutionary transformation of reception mechanisms with the appearance of film. He employs the term "reception in the state of distraction", which represents a more participatory way of perception than contemplation associated with traditional art. While in contemplation, the viewer is absorbed by the work of art, with the dynamic reception in the state of distraction, the work of art is rather absorbed by the masses (Benjamin 119). In this respect, Benjamin, unlike McLuhan, agrees with Jauss (and Prague Structuralist School) on the significance of collective reception; he puts emphasis on the audience as a social group. Politically, Benjamin's writing is deeply rooted in the time of its origin. However, in relation to present-day development of new media and the digital sphere, Benjamin's study of films is in many ways prophetic, especially in relation to the active reception and erasing of the border between the authors and the audience. Since modern film allows masses to become actors, his claim that "the distinction between author and public is about to lose its axiomatic character" (114) foreshadows the latest developments in the sphere of literature as well.

His notion that art is increasingly "absorbed by the masses" rather than absorbing them is mirrored in contemporary phenomena such as viral book trends, BookTok and Youtube influencers, and participatory fandoms. These shifts necessitate a broader understanding of reception that includes not only reading but also viewing, sharing, reacting, and remixing.

Changing paradigms of reception as a challenge to literary history

Although Benjamin's analysis of the aura, as opposed to the art in the age of mechanical reproduction, was primarily concerned with the contemplation and distance from visual arts, literature in its history has gone through a parallel evolution from an "elitist" art for the chosen few, the limited literate audience, through the stage of spreading in mercantile classes with the rise of what Jürgen Habermas has called the "public sphere" to the present-day state of literature immersed completely in popular culture in terms of its production mechanisms and market conditioning, its distribution and promotion as well as in its reception.

This is where the latest challenge for literary history emerges. In his rethinking of literary history, Mario J. Valdés employs Jauss's conception of reception aesthetics to propose a version of literary history which is not limited by the boundaries of genre, nationality or language. Literary historiography is viewed as a constantly developing and changing process, rather than an attempt to create a definitive interpretation of the past, and based on the conception of the book/text as an event, not an object sealed off at the moment of imprimatur. Such research in literary history is best conducted as teamwork, which allows for a wider scope of reference and study and prevents the continued marginalisation of previously repressed cultural activities. However, literary historians today are facing a challenge of a scope much larger than crossing national and language borders and discovering marginalised discourses and suppressed narratives of the past. The present-day challenge is posited by the changing paradigms of reception and the immersion of literature in other forms of media and cultural spheres, which is reflected in the aforementioned fragmentation of the humanities into dozens of separate disciplines.

If we look again for a parallel in media theory, it is useful to reflect on the notion of remediation, understood as the representation of one medium in another (Bolter and Grusin 45). According to Bolter and Grusin, new media do not emerge in isolation; rather, they define themselves in relation to existing media by either emphasising or disguising that relationship—for instance, when films adapt novels, websites mimic newspapers, or virtual reality simulates cinematic experience. This interplay is not a historical anomaly but a foundational principle in the evolution of media. Bolter and Grusin illustrate this primarily through the visual arts: Renaissance linear perspective, for example, aimed to represent the world more realistically, thus remediating visual perception itself. Similarly, when photography emerged in the nineteenth century, it borrowed compositional conventions from classical painting to legitimise itself as art.

However, this process is not linear—older media also adapt themselves in response to new ones. As Bolter and Grusin note, "what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media" (15).

This is where literature comes into the picture. Reading is no longer the activity it was several decades ago; readers are not the same audience they once were, and literature as a medium has undergone profound changes. More importantly, these changes do not affect only texts written under new media conditions. As our Jaussian "horizon of expectations" has shifted dramatically, so too has the object of literary study—even texts from the past are inevitably transformed by ongoing processes of remediation.

A compelling early example of how adaptation reshapes reception can be found in the case of *Oroonoko*. While Aphra Behn's 1688 novella was a significant literary intervention in its own right, it was Thomas Southerne's 1695 stage adaptation that cemented the story's popularity in the 18th century.

Southerne reframed Behn's political and philosophical narrative into a tragic love story, softening its critique of slavery and empire in favour of heightened emotional appeal. His version, especially through the sentimentalisation of Imoinda and the insertion of a romantic subplot, aligned the narrative with contemporary theatrical tastes and ensured its widespread success on the Restoration and Georgian stage. For decades, it was Southerne's *Oroonoko*, rather than Behn's, that shaped the story's public reception. This case demonstrates that the remediation of literary texts into more widely consumed media not only affects their reach, but also fundamentally alters their interpretive horizon—a phenomenon not limited to modern adaptation but embedded in the longer history of literary culture.

One of the fields which attempt to bridge the gap between media studies and literary scholarship is therefore the flourishing study of adaptations, which has evolved from analyses primarily concerned with the question of fidelity and the differentiation between adaptations and appropriations towards the "translational," intercultural approach and profound studies of the processes of remediation involved in the adaptation of literary texts in film and other newer kinds of media. All of these studies are highly relevant for literary historians today and need to be reflected upon in literary historiography, as is often done in monographies concerned with major popular authors. Thus, adaptation history has been profoundly studied with authors such as Dickens, Austen, the Brontës, among others, although there remains a lot to be done in terms of "global" reception through adaptations. The aforementioned impressive edition of *The Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe* (Shaffer, ed.) includes historical overviews of the reception of major British and Irish authors in individual countries, including the study of their adaptations, but the work is limited by the scope of a book publication and geographically by the space of the European continent. *Prismatic Jane Eyre* (Reynolds et al.), a large international project mapping the reception of the Brontë novel across the globe, takes a step further, facilitating worldwide research and making use of digital technologies on an unprecedented scale. Yet, this is an enormous task encompassing a large amount of data and must have taken a great amount of dedication—and that is the beginning of future research, dealing with a single novel. Hopefully, we will see more projects like that coming in the future. Once sufficient data have been collected across cultures, scholars can begin studying the mechanisms of international cultural transfer, intercultural reception of literary texts, as well as their influence on the production and distribution of books, the type of research envisioned by Franco Moretti in his thoughts on the global dynamics of world literature. Moretti promotes a systemic approach, based on "distant reading" as opposed to the more traditional close-reading approach, yet *Prismatic Jane Eyre* shows that close-reading the corpora of translations across various cultures can potentially help explore and analyse the systemic processes that are at play in the worldwide circulation of literary works.

Adaptation studies have formed the backbone for such research by providing analytical tools for the study of remediation. However, as shown by Bolter and Grusin, remediation is a bilateral process and adaptation studies concentrate primarily on the direction of text ′ other medium. What the literary historian, as well as theoretician, needs to address now is the opposite direction, in which the widespread culture of adaptations and appropriations has transformed our horizons of expectations and the object of literary scholarship itself. Literary reception is no longer primarily a matter of reading a text on paper—more than ever, the potential reader would be familiar with the narrative before opening the book from other forms of media. More than ever, readers would discuss books they have not read based on their adaptations into films, TV series, comic books and many other forms. Jane Austen nowadays is not the same Jane Austen as known by her readers before the 1990s boom of Austenmania triggered by the Hollywood adaptations of her novels. Thus, the literary historian is no longer concerned with readers

and reading only (perhaps not even primarily)—the formation of canon and tradition, the afterlife of every book, is as much dependent on the traditional reviews, critics, scholars, teachers and readers, as on the audience of stage and film adaptations, viewers of the TV and online streaming websites, players of video and computer games based on literary texts, readers of comic books and popular adaptations, students and pupils forming their opinions based on the summaries from student support websites and fandom communities gathering through online social networks.

In the 1960s, Jauss was deeply concerned with the process of forming tradition as a founding principle which literary history must uncover. What we are witnessing nowadays is a profound transformation (or dissolution?) of the process of forming a canon triggered by the rise of new media, the digital sphere and the related changes of culture and human and social identities. This process is not, of course, unnoticed. Some of the literary critics turn to studies based on a more or less sociological approach to literature and reflect and attempt to analyse these transformations. One of these, Jim Collins in his *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*, has looked at present-day readers and the changes in their literary tastes, some examples of how literary culture has merged with cinematic culture and the influence of other book communities or influencers, such as Oprah's book club. He also stressed that these changes in literary reception influence the production: "How and where those audiences appreciate literary fiction has changed profoundly, but so has the literary fiction written for those passionate readers who watch television book clubs, cruise Amazon, or take their literature in cinematic form at the local multiplex or via Netflix" (Collins 4).

The rapid changes brought about by the digital sphere have made earlier accounts of literary reception, such as Collins's, feel already outdated. A more recent and comprehensive account is provided by Simone Murray, who in *The Digital Literary Sphere* (2018) maps the convergence of literary production, reception, and commerce across platforms like Goodreads, BookTube, and Amazon. Murray demonstrates how readers increasingly encounter literature through platform-mediated environments where reading is shaped by algorithmic visibility, user reviews, and community trends—mechanisms that significantly influence both taste and canon formation. These new agents of reception, including social media influencers and fandom communities, now rival the institutional roles once played by schools, publishers, and professional critics. It is no longer a question of "specialised" communities, such as the sci-fi or fantasy fandoms of a few years ago. Social networks are the motive power behind many fan communities of the more traditional authors as well, be it the popular Victorian fiction, present-day novels or William Shakespeare.

All of these profound changes in the book market, production and reception of literary texts as well as related cultural products and other media forms will have to be reflected in the literary history of our age. However, as the hermeneutical concept of the fusion of horizons reminds us, the same process should be reflected in analysing the literary history of the past. Remediation is not an exploit of postmodern culture but a process inherent to the entire history of cultural production. Therefore, we need to uncover similar processes of the past which have not been reflected before. One little example might be found in the Czech reception of the Brontë sisters, which has been shaped by stage adaptation since the very beginning. Decades before the first actual translation of *Jane Eyre* into Czech, it was known to the audience as *The Lowood Orphan*, a sentimental, middle-class play by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer which stripped the original narrative of all its feminist or revolutionary potential and presented a rather Richardsonian story of the social rise of a virtuous heroine. This German play was immensely popular on the Czech stage and its influence can be traced in the whole later publication and reception history of the original novel itself since the very beginning—as a book for children it was adapted in a very similar manner to

the play, published with the same title which would be familiar to Czech audience, and in the reviews it was never the gender question that would be reflected, but rather the social issues of class, similarly to the play.

This seemingly marginal example shows the importance for literary history to overcome its disciplinary limitations. The history of *Jane Eyre* in Czech lands could never be properly addressed without the involvement of adaptation studies and the analysis of the bilateral process of remediation, without the study of the history of the book and book market, without the sociological study of literary production and reading, without the reflection of the processes of forming literary canon in Czech society. Without such an interdisciplinary approach, literary history would remain enclosed in its immanent lines of evolution, which do not properly reflect the complex issues of cultural production. Mario J. Valdés has noted the complexity of literary historiography which needs to be developed under these changing circumstances: "A history of the production and reception of complex figurations of life is one that can only be written as part of the cultural forces of society; it is for this reason that perhaps our thinking of literary history should best be recognized as moving toward a history of literary culture" (Valdés 65).

Literary History beyond the Page

In light of shifting cultural and technological conditions, literary historiography must move beyond the study of isolated texts and authors toward a broader investigation of how literature is produced, circulated, and received across media and borders. As Hans Robert Jauss and Mario J. Valdés have shown, literary meaning is not fixed but emerges through processes of reception and re-evaluation, shaped by historical context and evolving interpretive communities. Today, these processes are increasingly mediated by digital platforms, multimedia adaptations, and algorithmically shaped public discourse.

The logic of remediation, as defined by Bolter and Grusin, helps explain how literature is now routinely refashioned into new forms—through film, fan fiction, online book communities, and short-form video—that reach readers long before they open a printed book. This dynamic not only transforms reading practices but reshapes the very "horizon of expectations" that guides interpretation, including of texts from the past. As digital and participatory cultures continue to redefine authorship and readership alike, literary historians must incorporate these forces into their methods.

Recent projects such as *Prismatic Jane Eyre* demonstrate the potential of collaborative, multilingual, and digitally enhanced research that foregrounds translation, remediation, and global reception. Similarly, the work of scholars like Franco Moretti, Andrew Piper, and Simone Murray offers new tools and models—from data-driven mapping of literary systems to analyses of online reading cultures—for understanding the contemporary life of literature. Taken together, these developments call for a historiography that is international, interdisciplinary, and methodologically pluralistic—capable of responding to a media environment in which reading is no longer the only, or even the primary, mode of literary reception.

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Michael Matthew Kaylor

"The Windhover": Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Sacred Font

Abstract: *This paper will set aside the traditional readings of "The Windhover" by the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (such as those arguing that this sonnet is primarily an expression of Decadent paganism or Christian devotion or simply a love for Nature) and instead consider it as Hopkins's principal illustration of his complex and utterly unique coinages "inscape" and "instress," coinages that were developed, in part, after he had embraced a conception of reality that aligned with that of the medieval Oxford theologian Duns Scotus—an odd choice, especially during the Victorian period, for a poet who was also a Jesuit priest.*

The sonnet "The Windhover: to Christ our Lord" was composed on 30 May 1877, the very same morning that its author, the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89), rambling about the rural surroundings of St Beuno's, the Jesuit college where he was then studying theology, had more than caught sight of a falcon in flight. This is the sonnet in its final version:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstacy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

(*Poems* 144)

The poem can be summarized as merely:

This morning, my heart was stirred by a falcon ecstatically and masterfully riding the wind, sweeping like an ice-skate, displaying brute beauty and valour and act, bundling together air and pride and plume, displaying a dangerous but lovely fire, common even to the shine of a plough in a furrow or the gold-vermilion of falling embers in a fireplace.

Despite the seeming simplicity of its argument, Hopkins's sonnet has become "the most written about short poem in the English language" (Pick 1). Forests have been felled for the printing of elaborate arguments regarding whether this poem is primarily a nature sketch, a Luciferian expression of defiant Decadence, a profound Catholic expression of Christ's Incarnation, or a Baroque merger of the sacred

and the profane, leading one of Hopkins's biographers, Robert Bernard Martin, to assert that "the poem has been written about so exhaustively (and so contentiously) that further criticism would be otiose" (264). Even if one considers hyperbolic Herbert Marshall McLuhan's claim that "there is no other poem of comparable length in English, or perhaps in any language, which surpasses its richness and intensity or realized artistic organization" (215), it must be admitted that "anyone who chooses to write on Hopkins's 'The Windhover' does so against the background of a body of critical writing that is as formidable as it is lacking in consensus. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any English poem of comparable length that has been the subject of as much concerted explication" (Whiteford 617).[1] Despite the risk of proving "otiose," I venture here to provide yet another explication.

Regarding Hopkins as a Jesuit, his biographer Norman White observes: "A genius at individuality, Hopkins had made himself subservient to a regimental organization which controlled its members' bodies and minds for every minute of the day, where individual behaviour was frowned on, and where imagination and the senses had to be harnessed within a specific dogmatic syllabus" (*Hopkins in Wales* 19–20). Nowhere is that syllabus more concretely illustrated than in Hopkins's theology studies while at St Beuno's College, in the town of Tremeirchion, just east of St Asaph, in Wales.

Because the theology taught at St Beuno's during Hopkins's period was "Thomist, orthodox and dull" (Basset 397), it is perhaps unsurprising that "Hopkins had the greatest reservations about the scholasticism he was taught, and what Thomism he could identify (*via* his study of the Spanish theologian Francisco Suárez) was no more attractive to him" (Downes 271). However, seemingly by providence or serendipity, in 1872 Hopkins nonetheless encountered in the seminary library a rare Venetian edition (1521–22) of *Scriptum Oxoniense Super Sententias, Et Quodlibeta* by the Scottish theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), a Franciscan from Dumfries who studied at Oxford and Paris before famously lecturing at both universities. The *Scriptum Oxoniense*, which derived from many of those lectures, became for Hopkins, a Victorian poet born half a millennium later, the most profound of influences: "Rarely has a philosopher been as influential on a poet's work as Duns Scotus was on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (Doyle 3). In a journal entry for 3 August 1872, Hopkins writes: "At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the *Sentences* in the Badeley library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus" (*Diaries* 530–32). Later, in March 1879, while resident at Oxford, Hopkins would encapsulate his fellow feeling for this medieval scholastic through the sonnet "Duns Scotus's Oxford":

> Yet ah! this air I gather and I release
> He lived on; these weeds and waters, these walls are what
> He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to peace;
>
> Of realty the rarest-veinèd unraveller; a not
> Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece . . .
>
> (*Poems* 156, ll. 9–13)

The rarity of such an enthusiasm is evident from Hopkins's personal note for 9 July 1874: "I made the acquaintance of two and I suppose the only two Scotists in England in one week" (*Diaries* 583). Championing John Duns Scotus, often dubbed the "Subtle Doctor," rather than his Vatican-approved rival St Thomas Aquinas—as well as elevating him above all those Greco-Roman philosophers such as Aristotle whom

he had studied as an Oxford undergraduate—proved problematic for Hopkins, not as a poet or person but as a professional religious.

On Sunday, 22 July 1877, Hopkins was orally examined in theology by his superiors at St Beuno's; and, although his tepid performance sufficed to complete his training and secure his ordination as a priest in the Society of Jesus, it nonetheless proved insufficient to advance him into that crucial fourth year of studies necessary were he ever to ascend into the hierarchy of the Jesuit Order. Regarding his unimpressive performance, his main biographers disagree. Robert Bernard Martin observes, rather judiciously though vaguely: "There has been considerable guesswork about whether Hopkins's Scotism contributed to his poor showing in the examination, since the general tenor of the Order was anti-Scotist. But it seems improbable that his examiners would have allowed their feelings on the subject to influence their judgment of Hopkins" (267). Norman White is more detailed and accusatory: "According to one of his contemporaries, Joseph Rickaby: 'in speculative theology (Hopkins) was a strong Scotist, and read Scotus assiduously. That led to his being plucked at the end of his third year: he was too Scotist for his examiners.' . . . Irish colleagues wrote that his 'obstinate love of Scotist doctrine . . . got him into difficulties with his Jesuit preceptors who followed Aquinas and Aristotle'" (*Hopkins* 284).

The reason for this Jesuit preference is almost self-evident, as the prominent Roman Catholic writer Frederick William Faber explains in a footnote in *The Creator and the Creature* (1857):

> There are two views of God in theology, the Scotist and the Thomist. The Scotist seems to bring God nearer to us, to make our conceptions of Him more real, to represent Him as more accessible to our understandings, . . . (while the Thomist) seems to put God further from us, and to thicken the darkness which is round His throne. (The Scotist view) is exposed to much greater philosophical dangers than the Thomist, and may more easily be pressed into the service of anthropomorphism, perhaps of pantheism. Thus the Thomist view is safer. (10)

As Gilles Deleuze claims in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), "There has only ever been one ontology, that of Duns Scotus, which gave being a single voice" (45), and that ontology did so through *haecceitas*, a medieval Latin concept the *Oxford English Dictionary* attributes to Scotus and defines as "the quality that makes a person or thing describable as 'this'; the property of being a unique and individual thing." For Scotus, "individuality is embodied in form, spirit, activity, and not merely, as Aquinas said, in quantified matter" (Gardner 12–13). Particularly to Henry of Ghent, the most prominent theologian in Paris following the death of Aquinas, Scotus seems to loft a challenge: "If God's being *is in no sense* like that of creatures, then *in what sense* can we be said to know anything regarding His being?" (Tonner 141). Were God to be made "more accessible to our understanding" through an understanding of His creatures, then the very nature of Nature becomes that of a sermon, with each creature a unique manifestation of divine authorial intent, which Hopkins so eloquently expresses in his sonnet ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame") (ca. March/April 1877):

> Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
> Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
> Selves—goes its self; *myself* if speaks and spells,
> Crying *What I do is me: for that I came*.
>
> (*Poems* 141, ll. 5–8)

While examining Hopkins in theology on that July day in 1877, his superiors at St Beuno's would have recognized that, although Scotus's ontological celebration of *haecceitas* appears pantheistic, "for Scotus it is not. God is still transcendent, not knowable per se" (Sansom 50). Nonetheless, they would also have recognized in Faber's assertion that "the Tomist view is safer," with fewer "philosophical dangers," a tacit admission that, especially as expressed by Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, "the doctrine of analogy was a natural ally of the medieval hierarchical vision of the universe" (Tonner 142), especially the hierarchy of the church itself. Were Scotus correct that God is best approached through direct engagement with His creation, then anything interposing itself between man and His creatures, great and small, all "speaking and spelling," would be at the very least an unwelcome intrusion, be that intrusion a priest or a bishop or even the Bishop of Rome. Hence, Duns Scotus and his followers such as Hopkins posed an inherent threat not only to the hierarchy of the church, but also to the church itself.

"Hopkins felt that through the immediate sense perception of things in the world he could know God directly," writes J. Hillis Miller: "He did not want a world of abstract 'ideas' or 'forms' ('pinetreeness,' 'bluebellness' and so on) to intervene between himself and God" (303). As a result, according to Miller's friend Jacques Derrida, "Hopkins's poetic invention, his very *oeuvre*, gives itself as the reading of the work, *l'oeuvre*, of God" (696). In her consideration "The Sacramental Landscape," Pauline Fletcher elaborates on this: "(Hopkins's) landscapes are 'charged with the grandeur of God,' and even when they are blighted by industrialism, 'bleared, smeared with toil,' there is freshness beneath the corruption because 'nature is never spent' ('God's Grandeur'). So Hopkins can see Christ in the power of a kestrel's flight ('The Windhover'), and he can praise God for the beauty of all dappled and mutable things because 'He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change' ('Pied Beauty')" (503). That the three poems Fletcher quotes from above were all written in 1877 is noteworthy, for "Hopkins's keenness for Scotus was at its height in 1877" (White, *Hopkins* 284). Although, in most cases, Nathan Cervo is correct that "Hopkins is a pious poet" rather than a "sacramental" one (64), "The Windhover" proves an exception, for reasons associated with its entwining of Scotus's concept of *haecceitas* and Hopkins's of *inscape* and *instress*.

Defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, respectively, as "the individual or essential quality of a thing; the uniqueness of an observed object, scene, event, etc.," and "the force or energy which sustains an inscape," Hopkins's coinages "inscape" and "instress" made their first appearances in February 1868, in his undergraduate "Notes on the history of Greek Philosophy, etc.," though he would continue to develop these concepts, philosophically and poetically, long after graduating in *Literae Humaniores* at the University of Oxford (in June 1867) and becoming Professor of Greek at University College, Dublin, and a Fellow in Classics of the Royal University of Ireland (both in February 1884). In those undergraduate notes, Hopkins observes that "(Parmenides') feeling for instress, for the flush and foredrawn, and for inscape, is most striking and from this one can understand Plato's reverence for him as the great father of Realism" (*Journals* 127). As was his practice, Hopkins then personalizes the note: "Indeed I have often felt . . . the depth of an instress or how fast the inscape holds a thing" (127). He subsequently asserts that "the way men judge in particular is determined for each by his own inscape" (129), an intimate confession that is still recognizable a decade later in his unfinished commentary on St Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, where Hopkins luxuriates in an utterly sensual consideration of "my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things" (*Sermons* 123). This "selfbeing" is most cogently captured by the phrase "forgèd feature" in his sonnet "Henry Purcell" (1879): "It is the forgèd feature finds me; it is the rehearsal / Of own, abrupt self . . ." (*Poems* 157, ll. 7–8). That this "forgèd feature," this Scotistic *haecceitas*, also bespeaks the opening of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* (1855)—"I celebrate myself, and sing myself"—should come as no surprise, since Hopkins would later confess, in a letter to his closest

friend Robert Bridges, dated 18 October 1882: "I may as well say what I should not otherwise have said, that I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession" (*Letters* I, 155).[2]

Even as early as *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay towards the Understanding of his Poetry* (1948), W.A.M. Peters illustrates that "Scotus only confirmed what Hopkins had already discovered by himself" (Graziosi 80): that "pivotal experiences reveal the wonder and beauty of creation" (Sansom 48), that "in order to truly know the nature of a thing . . . its actions (must) be observed" (Doyle 5). Hopkins was ever an avid observer, evinced in journal entries such as the following from 6 September 1874: "Looking all round but most in looking far up the valley I felt an instress and charm of Wales" (*Diaries* 601). "Through optics inscape is caught," writes Jude V. Nixon (147), though the optics being considered are those of the eye not the camera—for, as Julia F. Saville stresses, "through the inscape or pattern of natural objects, the observer is permitted access to a beyond that transcends the contrived perspectives produced by innumerable nineteenth-century optical devices" (95). In his sonnet "Ribblesdale" (1883), Hopkins rhetorically questions: "And what is Earth's eye, tongue, or heart else, where / Else, but in dear and dogged man?" (*Poems* 171, ll. 9–10). For this poet, who was ever asserting, as he does in his sonnet ("I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day") (ca. 1885), that "my taste was me" (*Poems* 181–82, l. 10), *any* sense could "catch," unless hindered by the presence of others, as he explains in a journal entry for 12 December 1872: "With a companion the eye and ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come" (*Diaries* 544). Unhindered, Hopkins could ramble about the autumnal Welsh countryside or elsewhere, collecting inscapes and experiencing instresses, as he relates in his sonnet "Hurrahing in Harvest" (1877): "I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes, / Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour" (*Poems* 148–49, ll. 5–6).

On such rambles, Hopkins perceived the local birds with care: "As we were bathing at a cove near a big hawk flew down chasing a little shrieking bird close beside us"; "a hawk also was hanging on the hover" (*Diaries* 534, 589). In a letter to his father, dated 15 August 1877, he relates: "No sooner were we among the Welsh hills than I saw the hawks flying and other pleasant sights soon to be seen no more" (*Letters* III, 146). In Ireland a decade later, he would reminisce about the pleasant sights and sounds of St Beuno's, where he had been a seminarian from 1874 to 1877: "Wales (was) always to me a mother of Muses," for "Wild Wales breathes poetry" (*Letters* I, 227; II, 142). Noticeably, even the prose of his journals and letters ever displays that holistic assessment provided by W. H. Gardner, his aptest interpreter: "The most original and characteristic features of Hopkins's style were deliberately introduced to catch the immediate, significant personal impression; to fix in language, with the utmost precision, the inscape of the object as it instressed itself on the inscape of the poet" (15). This accords fully with Hopkins's explanation of his own style in a letter to Robert Bridges, dated 15 February 1879: "Design, pattern, or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what I above all aim at in poetry" (*Letters* I, 66). In a letter to another friend, Richard Watson Dixon, dated 30 June 1886, Hopkins merely glosses his coinage as "what I call *inscape* (the very soul of art)" (II, 135). That Hopkins's aim inevitably proved true is expressed by Jacques Derrida: "*Inscape* . . . seals and signs Hopkins's work" (700). Nowhere is this seal and signature more evident than in Hopkins's sonnet "The Windhover."

Although the commonest bird of prey in Britain, the kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*, colloquially dubbed "the windhover," displays one uncanny uniqueness, which is explained by Thomas P. Harrison in "The Birds of Gerard Manley Hopkins": "All birds occasionally pause in flight; only the kestrel, smallest of the falcons, habitually hovers twenty to thirty feet over open terrain in order to scan the ground for its food—mostly insects and mice. To perform this distinctive feat it necessarily faces into the wind and flies with the exact

velocity of the wind; to remain stationary with reference to the ground, the bird sharply depresses its tail, which increases the lifting surfaces" (458). In short, "the bird appears motionless" (White, *Hopkins in Wales* 148) until it "Buckles!": "The flight of the kestrel is characterized by a sudden dive, in which the bird drops on its prey like a falling stone. In current ornithological literature, the flight is said to *buckle*" (Hill 975). Hopkins's sonnet abounds with such falconry terminology, despite occasional contrary claims made by scholars, such as "Hopkins's calling his bird a 'Falcon' can be considered metaphorical, since custom once restricted the term to the larger sporting birds" (Gwynn 367), a claim easily dismissed by passages such as the following, from *The Art and Practice of Hawking* (1900), with its author E. B. Michell noting that, for this medieval pastime, "even the serf or villein was not forgotten in the field, and was expected, or at least allowed, to train and carry on his fist the humble but well-bred and graceful kestrel" (2).

"The Windhover" begins with Hopkins capturing, poetically, a kestrel "hanging on the hover," an image that would reappear in his "Epithalamion" (ca. 1888), composed a year before his death: "Rafts and rafts of flake-leaves light, dealt so, painted on the air, / Hang as still as hawk or hawkmoth" (*Poems* 195–97, ll. 25–26). In regard to "The Windhover," since it minutely captures the bird in flight "critics have read the octave in general agreement" (Woodring 53), an agreement that is particularly astonishing given that this poem, as Jerome Bump aptly observes, "exhausts the linguistic fields of words" (110). Even a brief perusal of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in regard to the diction by which Hopkins crafted the octave reveals a lush tapestry of interconnected meaning that, visually and otherwise, serves to affix the windhover in flight—Sovereignty with its dominions and hierarchies; troop movements and the accoutrements of war; the trappings of chivalry and flourishes of heraldry; archery and falconry; horsemanship and seamanship; hunting and metal working and ploughing; focussing the mind, the eye, the attention; rendering into language or visual art; recording events; polishing metal or a literary phrase; ringing bells or howling; experiencing mystical rapture or poetic inspiration; trusting in God or Christ; bringing into debate or focus; providing an example or establishing distinctions; winning a battle; measuring worthiness and courage; remaining horizontal, unwavering, disciplined; achieving a perfected style; handling expertly a horse's bridle and stirrups, a blacksmith's tongs and anvil, a nun's veil, a soldier's armour and weaponry, a farmer's wagon . . . Given this list, which is far from comprehensive, it is unsurprising that *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1898) should record "Rev. G. M. Hopkins" among its compilers (Wright, ed., I xii). For Hopkins, perhaps more so than any English poet save J. H. Prynne, poetry is ever constructed on the level of the individual word, illustrating the claim made by Percy Bysshe Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* that "a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought" (486).

The sestet of "The Windhover," on the other hand, is from where the legion of diverse scholarly interpretations arise, such as those arguing that the sonnet is primarily an expression of Decadent paganism or Christian devotion or simply a love for Nature. Whatever one decides in this regard, it is nonetheless clear that line 9—"brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume . . ."—displays a pair of tripartite attempts at "catching" the kestrel's inscape, with the second proving more successful, hence introduced by "oh," an interjection here of recognition, surprise, delight. The inscape of this creature, so unique among birds since it "appears motionless" as it hovers, displays a perfect buckling together of "air, pride, plume." Helen Vendler observes insightfully that Hopkins "sets us a riddle: what living thing exhibits all these qualities at once?" (112); and, had this been one of Emily Dickson's riddle poems purposefully lacking a title, there might have been some doubt as to the identity of this falcon whose "forgèd feature," whose *haecceitas*, would prove so poetically explosive: "the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion / Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!" Through his poem, Hopkins has

elevated the windhover, the kestrel, the commonest bird of prey in Britain, into the most glorious, superior even to the Peregrine or the gyrfalcon.

Echoing Geoffrey Hartman's disparagement that, if Christ appears in the poem at all, he does so "in clay and coal" rather than in this glorious chevalier, the windhover (71), critics have not infrequently suggested that the poem "moves *from* visual pleasure *to* ascetic duty" (Saville 203), that it "rejects force and virility for the sake of humbleness and self-sacrifice" (Sobolev 126). Ignoring that "the whole tone of the poem is that of joy" (Grady 27), such suggestions seem to situate the poem alongside a confession Hopkins would make his friend R. W. Dixon on 2 November 1881, expressing Jesuitical fears over having squandered time writing poetry, "for the backward glances I have given with my hand upon the plough" (*Letters* II, 88)—recalling Luke 9.62, where Jesus says: "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." However, a month later, on 8 December 1881, Hopkins would write regarding the Ignatian "Contemplation for Obtaining Love": "All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God, and if we know how to touch them give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of him" (*Sermons* 195). This echoes the opening image of his sonnet "God's Grandeur" (1877): "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil" (*Poems* 139, ll. 1–2). "All things" / "the world"—certainly these also include seemingly mundane activities abounding "in clay and coal," such as ploughing or stoking a fire. As he relates elsewhere: "To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dungfork in his hand, a woman with a sloppail, give him glory too. He is so great that all things give him glory . . ." (*Sermons* 241). Even God proves less prejudicial than Geoffrey Hartman, as Hopkins observes in his sonnet "In honour of St Alphonsus Rodriguez" (Version C, ca. 1888):

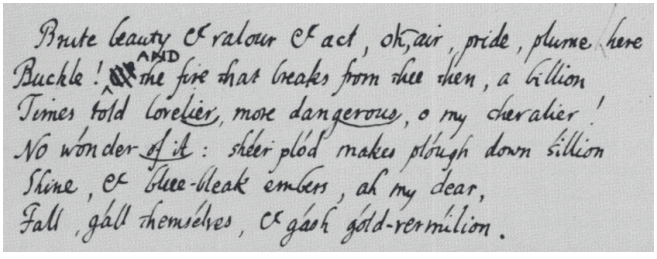
> Yet God (that hews mountain and continent,
> Earth, all, out; who, with trickling increment,
> Veins violets and tall trees makes more and more)
> (*Poems* 200–01, ll. 9–11)

The "windhover" / "clay and coal" / "mountain and continent" / "violets": "Anything becomes sacred," Brian J. Day emphasizes, "when we take the trouble to instress its inscape" (189). For Hopkins, instressing inscapes ever involved putting his hand to the poetic plough; and, as he asserts confidently in his last poem, the sonnet "To R.B." (1889), he does so "with aim / Now known and hand at work now never wrong" (*Poems* 204, ll. 7–8). This is the self-same confidence with which Hopkins begins his "Windhover": "I caught this morning morning's minion." Since this sonnet begins "I caught this morning" the inscape of the kestrel—caught with eye and mind and pen—and ends with "blue-bleak embers" gashing "gold-vermilion," Hopkins seems to challenge Shelley's claim, made in *A Defence of Poetry*, that "a man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness . . ." (503–04). Perhaps Hopkins, arguably a greater poet than Shelley, "with aim now known and hand at work now never wrong," could and did say so. In his hands, "chestnuts as bright as coals or spots of vermilion," a mere journal notation from 17 September 1868 (*Diaries* 469), could become the last lines of "The Windhover—"And blue-bleak embers, ah my dear, / Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion"—as well as the following, from in his poem "Pied Beauty" (1877): "Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches wings" (*Poems* 144, l. 4). These are the flourishes of genius, the perfected artistic style that Hopkins celebrates in his sonnet "Henry Purcell" (1879) as "meaning motion (that) fans fresh our wits with wonder" (*Poems* 157, l. 14).

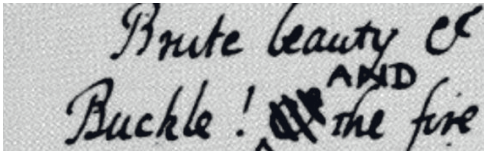
Sometimes, however, that meaning was far from fanning anything, a problem Hopkins considers in "To R.B.": "O then if in my lagging lines you miss / The roll, the rise, the carol, the creation" (*Poems* 204, ll. 11–12). Despite being established poets and literary critics, even Hopkins's friends Robert Bridges, Canon Richard Watson Dixon, and Coventry Patmore "found his poems difficult, and asked him for 'cribs.' They demanded a logical clarification of the many poetic ideas which seemed to peep out, fitfully, from a bewildering mass of irregularities: 'veins of pure gold imbedded in masses of impenetrable quartz,' as Coventry Patmore put it" (Gardner 3). In a letter to Bridges, dated 10 February 1888, Hopkins wrote concerning "Tom's Garland: on the Unemployed" (1887): "I laughed outright and often, but very sardonically, to think you and the Canon could not construe my last sonnet; that he had to write to you for a crib. It is plain I must go no farther on this road: if you and he cannot understand me who will?" (*Letters* I, 272). For "The Windhover," Hopkins provided a "crib," likely required because his three friends, his principal poetic audience, had all failed to appreciate, perhaps even to recognize, its theological implications, its Scotist underpinnings, its inscape *and* instress.

In *Unmediated Vision*, Geoffrey Hartman asks, "But why should the AND be in capitals and the resulting flame be described as a billion times lovelier (aesthetically seductive) and more dangerous (morally seductive) than the windhover's previous proud image?" (71). This question has been addressed by various critics, with F. N. Lees best encapsulating the dilemma: "It would seem very odd to me if a poet who went to the eccentric lengths of putting one word in the phrase in capitals ('AND') was not attempting to emphasize the meaning of that word" (673). On the mechanical level, "these two words ('Buckle' and 'AND'), appearing as they do near the junction of octet and sestet, provide the linchpin between the structural units of the poem" (Gleason 201). On the prosodic level, the poem "disposes itself around its sestet's 'AND'" (Golden 58). On the linguistic level, "AND" likely serves as "a Welsh imperative as well as an emphatic English conjunction" (Quinn 12–13), suggesting that the windhover's inscape is comprised of non-contrasting qualities—"air, pride, plume"—that can be fastened or "buckled" together by a cumulative, a copula.[3] Even on the typographic level, by elevating Bridges's simple "&" into "AND" in all capitals, Hopkins has, to some degree, elevated that word and lowered the cases of the others, hence demoting the others to "minuscules." [4] To conclude, I wish to posit yet another level, by applying the principle of parsimony (or "Occam's razor") to the poem and by aligning it with Hopkins's comments in a letter to Robert Bridges, dated 15 February 1879: "I cannot in conscience spend time on poetry, neither have I the inducements and inspirations that make others compose. Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always 'make capital' of it, it would be a sacrilege to do so" (*Letters* I, 66).

"The Windhover," MS.B.10v., ll. 9–14



(Hopkins, *Facsimiles* II, 123, Plate 309)



Hopkins made only a few alterations after penning "The Windhover" at St Beuno's on 30 May 1877, as its manuscripts and associated letters reveal.[5] Its earliest version (MS.A1), an autograph fair copy with two revisions, was given to Bridges sometime between August 1877 and July 1878. In reference to its second version (MS.A2), an autograph likely revised in summer 1877, Hopkins promises Bridges, in a letter dated 16 July 1878: "I am going to send you a slightly amended copy of the Falcon sonnet" (*Letters* I, 56)—and again, on 22 June 1879: "I shall shortly send you an amended copy of the *Windhover:* the amendment only touches a single line, I think, but as that is the best thing I ever wrote I shd. like you to have it in its best form" (85). Its final version (MS.B) is a transcription of A2 that Bridges made in 1883 and that Hopkins revised in 1884, most noticeably by extending its title with "to Christ our Lord" and replacing the ampersand in line 10 with that pondersome "AND."

While many scholars have claimed, as does Thomas J. Grady, that this added dedication is "not a key to the meaning of the poem" (25), I disagree, and claim instead that it and the capitalized "AND" constitute but a single change. While the windhover's *inscape*, its "forgèd feature," its *haecceitas*, can be more readily "caught," perceived in the "buckling" together of its physical qualities, that exquisite trinity of "air, pride, plume"—"the force or energy which sustains its inscape," its *instress*, usually goes unseen, unrecognized, uncelebrated. For this Jesuit poet, as much as for Scotus, God *is* that force or energy, that "AND" Hopkins "made capital of." To put this in typographical terms, God *is* Hopkins's sacred "font." By applying "Occam's razor," the simplest explanation for Hopkins changing the "font" to all capitals and adding the dedication is that Bridges, Dixon, and Patmore had all failed to see the poem's *instress* and needed a "crib." As Sarah Winters aptly observes: "On rereading his own poem over six years later, Hopkins thus acts as interpreter and recognizes how permeated in the Incarnation his vision was. The 'and' links every opposition . . . The Incarnation is one great and magnificent 'AND': it includes and combines, embraces and transforms, and bestows its overwhelming power on Hopkins's poem" (41).

Notes

(1) The poem's cultural impact and continued relevance is well document by Francis L. Fennell in "Familiar Hopkins: The Popular Use of His Poetry" (1995). An apt example is that "The Windhover," stumblingly quoted, provides the plot complication for Bart's friend Diggs, whose hobby is falconry, in Season XXV, episode 12, of the American animated television series "The Simpsons" (Fox network, 9 March 2014).

(2) See also my article "'Beautiful Dripping Fragments': A Whitmanesque Reading of Hopkins' 'Epithalamion'" in *Victorian Poetry* (2002) and my book *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* (2006).

(3) In "On Personality, Grace and Free Will," Chapter III of his commentary on St Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Hopkins writes: "It is choice as when in English we say 'because I choose,' which

means no more than (and with precision does mean) / I instress my will to so-and-so. . . . It is with precision expressed by the English *do* (the simple auxiliary) . . . (It is also at bottom the copula in logic, and the Welsh *a* in 'Efe a ddywedodd')" (*Sermons* 150–51). This Welsh phrase is "He said unto him" from Genesis 18.30.

(4) "This objective of detaching the inscape from the mind by means of deviations from accepted linguistic patterns is remarkably similar to the concept of foregrounding, a term first used by the Prague Linguistic Circle. These foregrounded features are reflected in a poem's phonology, graphology, lexis and syntax . . ." (Zonneveld 75–76). Since graphology includes typography, Hopkins's decision to capitalize "AND" provides an example of such foregrounding.

(5) See Hopkins, *Facsimiles* II, 120–123, Plates 306, 308–09.

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Botagoz Koilybayeva

No techno-human is an island: Non-anthropocentric dimensions in the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram

Abstract: *Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's later ontology, particularly his concept of the flesh, the paper explores the ecological dimension of Merleau-Ponty's thought and its emphasis on perception as an opening to other bodies and the world. The paper analyzes Merleau-Ponty as a precursor of eco-phenomenology, a field of study that develops a middle ground between phenomenology and naturalism. The contribution of the French phenomenologist is important because the thinker departs from the rigid Cartesian divide between man and nature. Following in the phenomenological footsteps of Merleau-Ponty, the American cultural ecologist David Abram develops the philosophy of the more-than-human world. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the embodied subject, perception as lived experience, and the entanglement of human and non-human perspectives in the natural world resonates with Abram's focus on the sensory and animistic dimensions of human engagement with the earth. While conventional eco-phenomenologists recognize that human perception is situated within a larger, ecological context, David Abram's philosophy of the more-than-human world beckons to non-human agents, highlighting the lived experience of animals, plants, and landscapes. In this paper, I trace a more biocentric paradigm that comes to the fore in a world engulfed in a climate crisis, and outline the strengths and possible shortcomings of eco-phenomenological narratives.*

Existential phenomenology looks at how humans *experience* life and existence. Defying scientific reductionism, phenomenologists agree that the experience is a point of departure to comprehending the complexity of the intersubjectivity and interconnectedness of the being of humanity and the being of nature. Phenomenologists resist Cartesianism by rejecting the strict separation between the thinking subject (the mind) and the external world. As Lawrence Hass succinctly puts it, "phenomenology seeks to illuminate our living experience in the natural world with other people and other living creatures" (Hass 8).

That said, some thinkers in the phenomenological tradition, like Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler, delineate an ontological break between human and non-human nature as only humans express "the orientation towards truth" (Toadvine 80) or Dasein. Phenomenology can be said to be humanist or anthropocentric. It centers on the lived experience of the individual and emphasizes the importance of human consciousness, meaning-making, and human subjectivity. In essence, it focuses on understanding what it means to be a human being, not as an object of scientific or external analysis, but from the perspective of the person experiencing the world. The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, however, shifts the locus of subjectivity from the human consciousness to what he refers to as the "body-subject" identifying the body itself as the conscious subject of experience. In what follows, I explore the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's philosophy embodies a non-anthropocentric dimension.

In both philosophy and the natural sciences, nature is deemed as an object of study, be it with benevolent or extractivist intentions. The climate emergency, the slow encroachment of the ancient cosmologies of various indigenous peoples into the contemporary ecological discourses, the emergent interdisciplinary studies of algae, fungi, plants, and animals, the posthuman turn, and the object-oriented ontology—all point to the immense complexity and polyvocality of the natural world. In this sense, the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, elaborated in the second half of the 20th century, beckons to the non-human nature as

an actor in the more-than-human world. Contemporary eco-phenomenologists like Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine suggest that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a precursor to the burgeoning field of eco-phenomenology. While eco-phenomenology indeed broadens and deepens the humanistic perspective by integrating the natural world and non-human beings into the phenomenological framework, it remains rooted in phenomenology's focus on human experience and subjectivity.

Contemporary American geophilosopher and eco-phenomenologist David Abram, however, believes that there is no separation between human consciousness and the consciousness of the biosphere. Instead, Abram argues that the human mind is what is realized in humans, which he terms the ecology of perception or the ecology of sensory experience—the myriad ways in which the phenomenological reality of the human body is interlocked with the surrounding environment. Simply put, according to Abram, the human mind is situated within the consciousness of the Earth. He highlights perception not as an internally subjective phenomenon but as a relationship between the sensing body and the sensible world, the synergy of the living body with other creatures and things. Abram's work challenges the anthropocentric view by focusing on the intersubjectivity between humans and non-human nature.

This paper will begin by identifying the non-anthropocentric elements in the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It will then explore how eco-phenomenology extends beyond traditional humanism. While conventional eco-phenomenologists such as Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine acknowledge that human perception is embedded within a broader ecological context, David Abram's philosophy of the more-than-human world goes further. Abram draws upon indigenous worldviews and alternative epistemologies, as well as his personal background as a sleight-of-hand magician and anthropologist. The paper will then analyze the relevance of Abram's work to the contemporary climate crisis. Finally, it will consider how intersectional and decolonial perspectives might be integrated into current eco-phenomenological discourse.

The relevance of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre to the field of eco-phenomenology

As scholars of Merleau-Ponty's work, eco-phenomenologists Ted Toadvine and Charles S. Brown, the authors of the volume *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (2003), believe him to be a harbinger of eco-phenomenology and find in his work a rich, creative and urgent vocabulary to illuminate nuances in the ambivalent relationship between humanity and nature and stipulate how continental philosophy can inform environmental ethics. Today, for instance, this ambivalence is expressed in people's reaction to climate change, which ranges from obliviousness and denial to compassion and depression. Speaking of the value of phenomenology in expressing people's feelings, Brown writes

> Experiencing the events of planetary destruction and waste that comprise the ecological crisis is increasingly *a morally charged experience* for many people. Such non-anthropocentric experiences could not and cannot be expressed within traditional anthropocentric moral discourse and with the instrumental value-free rationality that usually supports it. We can read a great deal of nature writing … as attempting to establish a new mode of moral and aesthetic discourse in which experiences of the intrinsic goodness of nature can be registered, expressed, and rationalized. Without such a vehicle of articulation, experiences remain mute and powerless and are relegated to the margins of rationality (16).

Experience is a key term in existential phenomenology. Rather than an abstract concept, 'experience' or 'lived experience' presupposes a personal involvement in the world. Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy,

particularly his *Course Notes on Nature* (1956–1960) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1961), resists Cartesian rationality by stating that thought and perception cannot be separated from the world in which we live. The mind ceases to be a detached overseer but instead becomes inseparable from the world it inhabits. Thus, the philosophy of the French phenomenologist offers a crucial vocabulary, such as expression, embodiment, and the flesh, for talking about this continuity between the body, the mind, and the surrounding environment.

To elevate an experiential modality of human existence, Merleau-Ponty fortifies a phenomenological 'experience' and reframes it as *expression.* The latter is a complex term that branches out into more specific ways of describing the embeddedness of humans (the human consciousness) in nature and the nature of this embeddedness. For Merleau-Ponty, expression signals something that abstraction and representation fail to elucidate. Such fundamental processes of human cognition and living experience, which are found in thinking, language, as well as embodiment, perception, and intersubjectivity, are, according to Merleau-Ponty, endlessly creative and dynamic. In *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, Lawrence Hass writes that "expressing the world is an endless task. It is the ongoing work of renewing our connections with the world, of embracing our very being as flesh and nature, of remaining alive to our being with each other" (9). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is expressive in myriad ways and is continually engaged with the world through embodied perception. In his paradigm of thinking, language ceases to be a Cartesian grid of signs of representation of thought, but is always embodied like gestures.

Merleau-Ponty sees expression not only as a property of humans but also of nature. The central principle of phenomenology is that of intentionality, which "specifically names consciousness as the central actor: "all consciousness is consciousness of something" (Brown and Toadvine 221), or as Evan Thompson puts it, "nothing, strictly speaking, *appears* unless it appears *to* some consciousness" (Thompson 14). Being a central actor, consciousness is not the sole one. It is activated, or comes into being, when it apprehends an object of our attention. This apprehension can be expressed in several ways, such as when we see certain fractions and colours of light in the sky that we later apprehend as a sunset. What consciousness does is reveal those lights and colours to us as a sunset. Coming back to intentionality, it can be concluded that

> All specifically directed intentional consciousness draws on the manifoldness of our sensory and cognitive capacities. Consciousness is a networked awareness, a with-knowing, a knowing that, even as it is separated into different modalities, draws one of those others (Brown and Toadvine 223).

The question that needs to be pondered is whether consciousness, perceived as a self-expressive element, simultaneously expresses itself through nature, or rather, nature expresses itself through consciousness? Already in *The Structure of Behaviour* (1942), Merleau-Ponty's earlier work, he attributes an experiential (and expressive) modality to consciousness. Toadvine claims that Merleau-Ponty saw consciousness as a gestalt, by explaining that "the prejudice of the objective world splits the pre-reflective unity of the body and the world, replacing this unity with an object treated as in-itself juxtaposed with a pure consciousness" (Toadvine 51).

A few years later, the French phenomenologist developed his philosophy further by overcoming an ambiguous position of the mind or consciousness as a gestalt. In his seminal work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty states that

> This disclosure of an immanent or incipient sense in the living body extends, as we shall see, to the whole sensible world, and our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other 'objects' *the miracle of expression* (230).

What becomes evident from this insight is the fact that the miracle of expression is as much a property of nature (or the sensible world) as it is of the living body. The ontological rupture between the human (the realm of pure consciousness) and the non-human (objective) nature is thus exposed and interrogated. The juxtaposition makes way for reciprocity. In *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty offers a system of "self-others-things" as a way of understanding the relationality and intersubjectivity of self and other:

> The first philosophical act would appear to be return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the world of pure objects, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover … the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system "self-others-things" as it comes into being (Hass 55).

Despite its promising potential, the system 'self-others-things' still presupposes a rupture between these entities as the perception opens up the self to 'others' and 'things.' There is a danger, Toadvine notices, in reducing "nature to the range of our perceptual faculties" (Toadvine 52). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, however, the collected and posthumously published work, Merleau-Ponty arrives at a concept that better elucidates a dynamic and evolving relationship between perception, the body, and the world—*the flesh*:

> We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? (Merleau-Ponty 138).

From expression, which foregrounds a constant binding of one's being and body to the world, and a more robust system of self-others-things, Merleau-Ponty's later ontology seeks to articulate a fundamental inescapable intertwining of the perceiver and the perceived. "Our hand is able to touch things," writes Merleau-Ponty, "because it is itself a touchable thing and thus is entirely a part of the tactile world that it explores" (Abram 66). The hand is both a sentient subject and a sensible object. When I move my hand against the coarse skin of the tree, I certainly feel the coarseness, but this coarseness manifests itself through my ability to be touched. Merleau-Ponty maintained that phenomenology is an attempt to make us see the bond (the flesh) between the subject and the world, between the subject and others, rather than explain it as the classical philosophies did by resorting to the absolute spirit. Hass reverberates Merleau-Ponty's famous example of the hand and uses another mundane example, that of a coffee cup, saying that

> The coffee cup on the counter bears the sense of how my hand might hold it. Everything we perceive in the world opens up these possibilities and direction for my behaviour. … This is why living perception is not experienced as a static spectacle, but rather as a "vital communication" with things in the world (Hass 61).

Definitively moving away from mind-body dualism, Merleau-Ponty arrives at an embodied ontology, leaving the rigidity of the subject and object distinction behind. "There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other," Merleau-Ponty explains. In *The Visible and the Invisible,* French phenomenologist searches for the words that could accurately describe what the flesh is (and is not). He calls it "an element", "the flesh of the world" (138), "a texture" (139), "a continuation" (144), "a pregnancy of possibles" (146). Arguably, the flesh remained an underdeveloped concept in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, a concept he would have fleshed out more had he not passed away unexpectedly. Although the flesh holds an ambiguous position in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, it has given rise to several phenomenological theories, including the theories of embodiment and environmental philosophy.

Maurice Merlau-Ponty's legacy goes against the Cartesian axiom that finds perception in the mind and not in the body. Perception is a key term in Merleau-Ponty's dimension of thought. Lawrence Hass clarifies that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception exceeds a myopic concentration on the self. "Perception is our opening onto things that are *not oneself,"* he notes (Hass 33). Despite Merleau-Ponty's contribution to explicating consciousness as an embodied phenomenon, it is important to point out the limits of his philosophy, particularly regarding its universal subject. The universal concept of the human (the heteronormative male subject) bars other positionalities, such as female, racialized, queer, disabled, and ultimately non-human. What Merleau-Ponty's philosophy achieves is that it overcomes the unquestionable dominance of the mind-body dualism and gestures towards the interconnectedness between the subject and the world mediated (or embedded) through the flesh.

When nature became environment: eco-phenomenology and the non-anthropocentric turn

The scientific consensus is that "consciousness, including pure awareness, is contingent on the brain" alone. Technology enables humans to reach the states previously insurmountable (the realms of atoms, DNA molecules, AI, to name a few), which implicitly reaffirms the allure of transcendence, which, in turn, lodges subjectivity under the auspices of consciousness, reinforcing the rupture between mind and body, nature and culture, the God and the Anthropos. The techno-human has replaced the divine order and embodies the potential for a new and better way of transcending the body.

Eco-phenomenologists like Toadvine and Brown commence their critique of scientific rationalism by reclaiming the term 'nature.' In *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, Toadvine blames the legacy of logical positivism that took 'nature' hostage as a subject of environmental ethics, the discipline that appeared in the 1970s. He writes that

> The legacy of this positivist viewpoint—the collapsing of the philosophy of nature into philosophy of science and the abandonment of metaphysical inquiry into the being of nature—made the emergence of environmental ethics appear as a radical departure from the philosophical tradition … (5).

Studying nature, which is as old as philosophy itself, has been relegated to the realm of science under the term 'environment,' borrowed from the natural sciences, an entity that can be controlled, reversed, if necessary, averted, tamed, or saved. "The 'environment,' as a reification that stands over against the human subject," Toadvine continues, "implies an artificial division between nature and humans and encourages us to view nature as a collection of things rather than in terms of mutually constitutive relationships" (6). In *We Have Never Been Modern*, French philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour succinctly puts it this way: "The natural sciences at last defined what Nature was, and each

new emerging scientific discipline was experienced as a total revolution by means of which it was finally liberated from its prescientific past" (26). Nature, stripped away from its myths and relationships with humans, gave way for the 'environment' to enter the realm of politics, knowledge, and law governed by the techno-human at the top.

Be that as it may, politicizing nature as the environment only solidifies it under the auspices of science. Acknowledging the agency of the non-human world and the human relationship with nature requires a paradigm shift, which will move beyond the dualistic views, such as philosophy versus science, nature versus environment, and object versus subject. Ultimately, such binary positions affirm a long-standing view (religious, Enlightenment, and modern scientific) that humans are apart from nature; it is them who assign nature meaning and symbolism; it is them who imbue it with an intrinsic value.

Contemporary eco-phenomenologists warn us against this rigid separation, and at the same time are wary of the opposite regressive fallacy that regards humans as part of nature (the spectrum of this 'connection' ranges from anthropomorphic and romantic to self-righteous and fascist). In the end, 'humans are *apart* from nature' and 'humans are *part* of nature' are both constructs of the same nature versus culture dialectic. In the article "The Primacy of Desire and Its Ecological Consequences," Toadvine writes that

> … perhaps the possibility of an ethical response to nature lies with the impossibility of trimming its (nature's) claws for adoption as our sibling or household pet. An ethical response to nature becomes possible only when we are faced with the *impossibility* of reducing it to the homogenous, the continuous, the predictable, the perceivable, the thematizable" (140).

Therefore, Toadvine's term "philosophy of nature" can serve as a springboard to a more integral discourse of acknowledging the constitutive relationships between the being of humanity and the being of nature. It brings back philosophy to the realm of science but infuses it with the questions concerning the relation between the being of nature and the being of humanity:

> What does it mean to understand human beings as a part of nature, and how can we think nature starting from our situation within it? … Is there a means of thinking nature that can take into account its excess over our projections and cultural stereotypes concerning it? (Toadvine 7).

These questions echo Merleau-Ponty's inquiry into the essence of our relationship with nature (Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?). Despite a host of technological advances at our disposal that could dissect and analyze all the impulses in our brain, the quality of our sleep, breath, and heart rate, it appears that technology is fundamentally unable to provide a full understanding of our own bodies. As Lawrence Hass puts it:

> These explanations (contemporary discussions in biology, psychology, and neurophysiology) don't exhaust the whole of embodied life. They do not and cannot, for methodological reasons, articulate and honour the dynamic, synergistic features of embodied experience. They don't speak to us as we live and breathe (76).

This brings us back to the phenomenological postulates of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Contemporary eco-phenomenology acknowledges Merleau-Ponty's research into the nature of the ambiguous Janus-faced

position of humanity in nature, at once embedded in and alienated from it. That said, eco-phenomenology, as an interdisciplinary system of knowledge that seeks to challenge scientific rationalism and its impact on nature, still remains anthropocentric at its core. By not directly integrating an intersectional and decolonial approach to class, gender, and race, and by excluding the non-human experience, eco-phenomenology as it stands today may not be as integral and all-encompassing of the more-than-human world as it aspires to be. To incorporate intersectional and decolonial perspectives, eco-phenomenology must transform its methodology and ontology. It should move away from abstraction and universalism, and toward situated, plural, and relational ways of dwelling, where being-in-the-world is always marked by history, power, and difference.

The more-than-human world as an antidote to the Anthropocene

In the contemporary environmental thought, American geophilosopher and cultural ecologist David Abram, in contrast to classical eco-phenomenologists, opens up a contemporary discourse of eco-phenomenology to the more-than-human agents. As a spiritual and intellectual descendant of Merleau-Ponty, he took the French philosopher's ideas of the primacy of perception and developed a theory of the ecology of perception or the ecology of sensory experience. His philosophy of living embodiment is thoroughly expressed in his most important book to date, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), a work that focuses on perception and language in the more-than-human world. Abram coined the now widely accepted term "the more-than-human" to bridge the convenient and artificial binaries or "perceptual boundaries" (Abram 9) between nature and culture, humans and animals, drawing from Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy. The more-than-human is a term that highlights humility over hubris, attention and solidarity over indifference and domination. It is inclusive of non-human beings, but unlike the term "non-anthropocentric," it does not exclude humans altogether. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram outlines the main thesis of the book:

> Today we participate almost exclusively with other humans and with our own human-made technologies. It is a precarious situation, given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscape. We still *need* that which is other than ourselves and our own creations. The simple premise of this book is that we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human (2).

In an earlier paper titled "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth" (1988), Abram states that the contribution of the French phenomenologist is radical in nature as it attributes transcendence to the body itself—"perception is this ongoing transcendence, the ecstatic nature of the living body" (2). According to Abram, the phenomenal body is "an insertion in the intersubjective field of experience" (44) so that its boundaries are not barriers or gates between us and the world but rather membranes.

In March 1961, shortly before his unexpected death, Merleau-Ponty wrote in his working notes, later to be published as *The Visible and the Invisible*, the following: "Where are we to put the limit between the body and world, since the world is flesh?" Both philosophers concur that the environment does not begin where our body, wrapped up in layers of fibers and dermis, ends. The body, thus, is an extension of this environment that accesses it through perception.

The figure of the flesh is a touchstone for Abram in relating Merleau-Ponty to the burgeoning field of eco-phenomenology and in outlining his own theory of the more-than-human world. Even though there are points of resonance with Merleau-Ponty's idea on 'the flesh,' American philosopher extends it to the

non-human agents while sharply critiquing modernity's separation from nature through privileging an abstract representation of reality. In reference to mostly Merleau-Ponty's last work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Abram writes that

> The "flesh" is the name Merleau-Ponty gives to this sensible-in-transcendence, this inherence of the sentient in the sensible and the sensible in the sentient, to this ubiquitous element which is not the objective matter we assign to the physicists nor the immaterial mind we entrust to the psychologists because it is older than they, the source of this abstractions (7).

Echoing Merleau-Ponty's corporeal metaphor, Abram adds that "we might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself through us" (66). What follows is that the flesh gives rise to the perceiver and the perceived, the sensible and the sentient, the visible and the invisible. Abram's understanding of perception originates in the simple acknowledgement of people's distrust in their own senses. On the contrary, Abram believes that our modalities of perception are not subjective and isolated but deeply influenced by the shifting character of the natural world around us. Our senses have co-evolved with the environment. The natural world is not inert; in turn, it espouses vibrancy and vitality but of a different kind. Thus, relationality comes to the fore, undermining the old dichotomy 'humans are part of nature' vs. 'humans are apart from nature.' In the article "Earth in Eclipse" (2003) Abram states that

> The human brain, that is, did not evolve in order to analyze itself Sebkrz, it evolved its particular structures as a consequence of our bodily engagement with the sensuous surroundings, and hence has a natural proclivity to help us orient and relate to those ambiguous and ever-shifting surroundings (11).

It is important to point out that the essential part of Abram's philosophy of the ecological perception comes from his own experience as an anthropologist and sleight-of-hand magician when he was travelling in various non-Western places across the globe and living among indigenous medicine persons. While traversing places like Nepal and Indonesia, predominantly inhabited by indigenous peoples, Abram encountered shamans and sorcerers who, according to him, could attune to the more-than-human world via rituals and ceremonies and speak the language of wind, mountain, and river. Abram states that

> The traditional or tribal shaman, I came to discern, acts as an intermediary between the human community and the larger ecological field, ensuring that there is an appropriate flow of nourishment, not just from the landscape to the human inhabitants, but from the human community back to the local earth (7).

In his latest book, *Becoming Animal* (2010), Abram describes his experience with bodily transformation, which allowed him to penetrate animal interiority. Abram states that rational thought and centuries of progress have led us to see our bodies as something monolithic and fixed, as mere machines for consumption, with only the brain as the seat of intelligence. Oral cultures see bodies and language as shifting, malleable, and changing entities—hence the use of dance, prayer, and animal imitation in many rituals to expand one's consciousness and one's body.

Particularly interested in the reciprocity between one's corporeality and nature, Abram spent years living with healers, magicians, and medicine men from oral cultures who were able to transcend their

bodies and minds to be nourished by non-human subjectivities. In the Himalayas, Abram spent some time living with Sonam, a local farmer and medicine man who taught him how to be present and attuned to the nature around him. For example, Abram gives an account of physical metamorphosis. Once, while hiking with Sonam, he witnessed him 'turning' into a raven. At first, Abram could not believe what he had seen, as the transformation looked very convincing. Later Abram realized that Sonam had spent years observing ravens, perfecting his mimicking of raven's croaks, staring at them for hours on end, talking to them:

> Sonam had long practiced holding himself in the various postures of that bird, had practiced Raven's ways of walking, of moving its head, of spreading feathered limbs. Learning to dance another animal is central to the craft of shamanic traditions throughout the world. To move as another is simply the most visceral approach to feel one's way into the body of that creature (238).

Abram sees reciprocity as a foundation of perception, i.e., our senses and their engagement with the surrounding environments. "Such reciprocity," writes Abram, "is the very structure of perception. We experience the sensuous world only by rendering ourselves vulnerable to that world. Sensory perception is this ongoing interweavement: the terrain enters into us only to the extent that we allow ourselves to be taken up within that terrain" (Abram 38). Evoking Deleuzian sorcerer and Haraway's *becoming with*, Abram embraces the alternative forms of knowledge production: human and non-human. Multispecies agency and more-than-human encounters subvert the anthropocentric status quo, highlighting multiple intelligences, subjectivities, perceptions, and forms of otherness.

By adopting such non-Western indigenous worldviews, Abram has made a few brows to frown, among them is the eco-phenomenologist Ted Toadvine, whose philosophy of nature has been discussed earlier. While acknowledging Abram's contribution to the field of eco-phenomenology, Toadvine counters that there are limits to the flesh. According to Toadvine's reading of Abram's work, it appears that Abram privileges the body over the mind, finding in the indigenous peoples a fine example of the bodily attunement with nature, and thus running a serious risk of orientalism and cultural appropriation.

In our reading of Abram's oeuvre, we find somewhat romanticized overtones regarding the indigenous, non-Western communities. A lack of discussion of the social and historical contingency of indigenous cultures overlooks the spaces of encounter with modernity (such as colonialism) and, as such, lends a heightened sense of 'purity' to oral-based cultures.

While both Merleau-Ponty and Abram recognize the experience of a universal subject, or the universal body, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all bodies experience nature in the same way. For example, Iris Marion Young draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to analyze women's movement, particularly how societal norms shape women's embodied experiences, especially regarding how they move and occupy space. She argues that "Merleau-Ponty's account of the relation of the lived body to its world applies to any human experience in general" (141).

That said, a critical question arises: whose embodied experience is being centered? Intersectional and decolonial approaches can expand contemporary eco-phenomenology by recognizing the experiences of colonized, Indigenous, and historically marginalized lifeworlds as valid phenomenological perspectives. While Abram highlights the notion of *the more-than-human*, the African notion of *ubuntu*, the Potawatomi concept of *gift economy*, the Andean notion of *pacha*, or the Māori concept *Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au* ("I am the River and the River is me") draw on non-Western ecological epistemologies that affirm interconnectedness and relationality. For example, the legal recognition of the Whanganui

River in Aotearoa/New Zealand as the first river in the world to be recognized as a legal person aligns with ecophenomenology's emphasis on attending to the river as a living, meaningful subject of experience, not as a mere resource.

Nevertheless, the most compelling aspect of Abram's work is his engagement—both practical and theoretical—with animism. This is not merely a gesture of appropriation of oral-based cultures, but rather a gesture of seeing animism as a *re-animation* of our participatory relationship with the surrounding nature, a *re-awakening* of a sense of solidarity with the more-than-human world.

Conclusion

The climate crisis is, at its core, a crisis of consciousness. It is no longer just a concern of trained environmentalists, ecologists, and policymakers, but also of informed citizens, eco-minded Swedish teenagers, corporate executives, and market strategists alike. Billions are being invested in renewable energy, electric vehicles, carbon capture technologies, and more. While many of these efforts are necessary, others serve more to polish reputations than to address the root of the problem—classic greenwashing. Because the climate emergency is largely human-caused, science—humanity's most authoritative domain—has taken center stage in leading the green movement. This aligns with a broader cultural narrative that places hope in technological fixes as the primary path to saving the planet, reinforcing a belief system that may overlook deeper ecological and ethical transformations. In the introduction to *Eco-Phenomenology* Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine wonder if philosophy can respond to the problems of our times since "biologists, earth scientists, and meteorologists offer us increasingly technical solutions to our problems" (46).

That said, the current milieu, with its colossal technological prowess and a growing interest in mycology (Tsing 2015), anthrozoology (Willerslev 2004; Hill 2013; Nadasny 2017), zooanthropology (Narby 2006; Yong 2022), and dendrology (Suzanne Simard 2021), opens itself up to the possibility of the more-than-human subjectivities. These disciplines, which have branched out further into biosciences, biosemiotics, bioacoustics, multispecies anthropology, and multispecies ethnography, form a biocentric, post-anthropocentric, and posthumanist paradigm that attributes intelligence to nature and other-than-human beings.

This paper has sought to recognize the philosophical perspectives that beckon towards a more biocentric paradigm. Taking a cue from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy of the living embodiment, the paper focused on rediscovering the importance of the relationship between our sensory attunement to the world and the realm of the symbolic expressed in our abstract thoughts about the world. Contemporary eco-phenomenology—which embraces "eco-friendly conceptions of rationality" (Brown and Toadvine 16)—remains committed to the metaphysical meaning-making while striving to acknowledge the kinship between humans and non-human nature. Lacking a clear political framework, eco-phenomenology does not engage with systemic causes of ecological degradation. Critical posthumanities, however, are informed by a different non-hierarchical logic of looking at entanglements between human and non-human subjects. Drawing on the post-anthropocentric theories of Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway and Braidotti, critical posthumanities interrogate human domination and its anthropogenic impact on the planet. The practitioners investigate complex ontological and epistemological entanglements between humans, animals, and the natural environment as relational.

David Abram's philosophical contribution lies somewhere in the middle between classical eco-phenomenology and posthumanism. While he calls for a profound re-enchantment with nature through

an ongoing reciprocal exchange between human perceptions and the things and beings around us, the American anthropologist, like his fellow eco-phenomenologists, does not address the material, socio-political urgency of the ecological crisis. Abram celebrates otherness—alternative animistic forms of oral-based wisdom—at the risk of idealizing a pre-industrial mode of living and being.

This paper has concentrated its attention upon the non-anthropocentric turn within the phenomenological and eco-phenomenological traditions, Merleau-Ponty and Abram in particular. The subject of their inquiry still appears to be universal, implying the heteronormative Eurocentric male subject, and thus excluding the female other, the indigenous other, the racialized other, the queer other, and the non-human other. Despite the fact that Abram underscores human subjectivity as embedded in the earth's biosphere, he draws heavily on his personal experience, which inevitably places him in a particular privileged context.

Incorporating intersectionality could reveal how environmental relations are unequally lived, exposing patterns of exclusion, dispossession, and ecological harm. Decolonial thought challenges the Eurocentric separation of nature and culture, instead foregrounding Indigenous and non-Western ontologies that emphasize relationality, reciprocity, and land as a living presence. Together, these perspectives call for a phenomenology rooted in situated, plural lifeworlds—one that is ethically accountable, politically engaged, and capable of confronting environmental injustice. For example, the following philosophical insights could offer a philosophical foundation for reimagining degrowth policies by reshaping how we understand our relationship with the world. Degrowth policies prioritize well-being, localism, and ecological restoration over economic growth. Moreover, such policies recognize non-human life and ecosystems as co-participants, not mere resources. This can support legal rights for nature, regenerative agriculture, and Indigenous-led conservation.

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Performing Leadership Through Language: Charlie Josephine's *I, Joan*

Abstract: *Leadership is not merely a position of authority; it is a performance enacted through language in both theatrical and real-world contexts. Charlie Josephine's 2022 play* I, Joan*, which reimagines Joan of Arc as a non-binary, queer leader, serves as the central case study for this paper. Drawing on Peter G. Northouse's definition of leadership as a relational process of influence directed toward shared goals, the paper emphasizes the distinction between assigned and emergent leadership, and how leadership is performed through discourse rather than inherited through position. It also considers Deborah Rhode's critique of the historically gendered paradigm of leadership, which constrains women and nonconforming individuals, and Jonathan Pryor's theorization of queer activist leadership as a disruptive, transformational force. By performing queerness through inclusive and resistant language,* I, Joan *illustrates how innovative discursive strategies can challenge hierarchical power structures and binary gender norms and offer alternative models of leadership.*

Introduction

Leadership is often understood as a static role, as a position of control and authority bestowed upon individuals within hierarchical structures. However, such a view overlooks the dynamic, performative nature of leadership as something continuously enacted, negotiated, and embodied through language. In both theatrical and real-world contexts, leaders do not merely hold power; they perform it, constructing authority and influencing others through discursive means. Language, therefore, is not neutral. It is a powerful tool that shapes identities, solidifies or subverts hierarchies, and constructs the very essence of leadership. This performative understanding of leadership resonates with Judith Butler's notion that "gender is performatively produced" (Butler 24), as well as with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model, which conceptualizes social interaction as performance: "A 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 15). Both frameworks illuminate how leadership, like gender, is not an innate quality but an ongoing enactment shaped by context and audience.

Among the many historical figures who exemplify the complexities of power and performance, Joan of Arc stands out as a symbol of radical leadership. Despite her humble origins, Joan was an autonomous woman who challenged traditions of masculinity and femininity. By heeding the voices of her visions, Joan set her own course of action. Joan fulfilled the traditionally male role of a military leader while maintaining her identity as a brave woman, thus merging masculine and feminine qualities. As such, she has continued to inspire artistic reinterpretations as a figure who unsettles binaries.

Charlie Josephine's play *I, Joan* (2022) offers a contemporary reimagining of this legacy. Rather than portraying Joan merely as a woman stepping into masculine roles, the play presents them as a non-binary, queer leader whose power does not stem from gendered assimilation, but from resistance to categorisation itself. In *I, Joan*, leadership is not only challenged but redefined through inclusive, yet disruptive linguistic strategies. The play thus presents a different form of leadership grounded in queerness and fluidity.

Defining Leadership

Peter G. Northouse, in his seminal book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, notes that "scholars and practitioners have attempted to define leadership for more than a century without reaching a universal consensus" (Northouse 2). Despite this lack of agreement, Northouse identifies four core components shared by most definitions: (a) leadership is a process, (b) it involves influence, (c) it occurs within a group context, and (d) it is directed toward achieving common goals. Based on these elements, he offers his own definition: "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse 5). Importantly, this definition moves away from viewing leadership as a set of inherent traits or fixed qualities and instead sees it as a relational, dynamic interaction between a leader and their followers. Leadership, in this view, is not static but performative; it is enacted and created through discourse. This understanding of leadership as a negotiated, discursive process resonates with the dynamics portrayed in *I, Joan*.

In addition, Northouse's distinction between assigned and emergent leadership is also relevant for Josephine's play:

> Leadership that is based on occupying a position in an organization is an assigned leadership. Yet, the person assigned to a leadership position does not always become the real leader in particular setting. When others perceive an individual as the most influential member of a group or organization, regardless of the individual's title, the person is exhibiting emergent leadership." (Northouse 5)

The play presents such a contrast through the figures of King Charles and Joan. Although Charles holds formal authority as the rightful King of France, he lacks the rhetorical and charismatic power to mobilize followers or inspire trust. It is Joan who performs leadership by inspiring collective action and challenging the rigidity of institutional power. Charlie Josephine depicts Charles as an essentially weak man whose initial infatuation with Joan's mystic power very soon turns into jealousy, envy and hatred:

> CHARLES. Fuck Joan! All I hear is Joan! Joan Joan Joan! Joan Joan Joan Joan Jooooaaaaaan you'd think she was king of France the way people persist in praising her fucking name! Joan did this, Joan did that, Joan won another battle, Joan / (Josephine 92)

In this way, the play dramatizes the idea that leadership is not simply about positional authority, but about influence enacted through relational and discursive means. Josephine makes it very clear that Joan's leadership arises not only from her visions, but from the recognition and trust of her followers that she earned as a military leader on the battlefield. In Northouse's terms, Charles represents assigned leadership, authority rooted in title, while Joan embodies emergent leadership, gaining legitimacy through the respect and commitment of her followers. The play thus insists that authentic leadership is performed, not inherited.

While Northouse defines leadership as a relational process of influence toward shared goals, scholars such as Deborah E. Rhode emphasize the historically gendered construction of leadership. Rhode argues that leadership has long been framed through a masculine paradigm, excluding or penalizing women and non-conforming individuals. As she notes, even when women entered positions of authority, their legitimacy was often defined in relation to men: "what is assertive in a man seems abrasive in a woman," creating a persistent "competence–likability trade-off" (Rhode 11).

In *I, Joan*, Charlie Josephine dramatizes this paradox through the character of Yolande, Duchess of Anjou, who finances the war effort and proudly declares, "I run both the house of Anjou and the house of Valois … I hold the purse strings, I guide my wayward son-in-law Charles, and I advise these men who sit safely in the palm of my hand" (Josephine 33). Yet Yolande's daughter quickly undercuts this portrayal, remarking that her mother "has a man's heart in a woman's body" (Josephine 33), implying that female power remains intelligible only when coded as masculine.

This dynamic is not unique to Josephine's play. Throughout history, women leaders have negotiated authority by adopting or blending masculine symbols of power. The ninth-century ruler Æthelflæd was described as "conducting… armies, as if she had changed her sex," while Elizabeth I alternated between calling herself "king," "queen," or "prince" strategically performing both masculine and feminine identities (Heyam 2022). Even Elizabeth II's ceremonial uniform, i.e. armour-like military dress worn alongside traditional gowns, illustrates the same negotiation within a male-coded framework of leadership.

Rhode's notion of the "double bind" (Rhode 11) aptly captures the dilemmas such figures faced and that persist today: women are expected to be both commanding and accommodating, yet any deviation from gender norms is penalized. In *I, Joan*, this tension becomes central to Joan's struggle at court and on the battlefield, where decisiveness and assertiveness clash with expectations of humility and obedience. Joan must balance authority and approachability, embodying Rhode's insight that women are "damned if they do and doomed if they don't meet gender-stereotypic expectations" (Rhode 11). Traditional leadership paradigms, rooted in binary conceptions of gender and heteronormative assumptions, offer little space for those who do not conform to normative expressions of masculinity or femininity.

While Rhode's analysis focuses primarily on women, her insights into the double standards and cultural constraints placed on leaders extend to anyone whose identity challenges these hegemonic norms, including Josephine's queer protagonist, who as a leader does not perform masculinity in conventional ways, nor align with traditional femininity. Jonathan Pryor's distinction between LGBTQ advocacy leadership and queer activist leadership further clarifies Joan's position. Whereas advocacy leadership seeks equity through institutional reform, queer activist leadership "pursue(s) transformational change" by disrupting power hierarchies themselves (Pryor 70). Joan embodies this latter model: their resistance to categorisation and their call for "a great Revolution… people powered" (Josephine 103) reimagine leadership as collective, inclusive, and insurgent.

As a radical queer leader, Joan encounters hostility not only from male authorities like Charles but also from women in power, such as Yolande, who exclaims, "You are not like a woman at all, are you? … Well, I don't know what you are?!" (Josephine 101). Even Joan's ally Thomas recognizes the personal cost of such resistance: "Not all of us can afford the luxury of revolution" (Josephine 89). These confrontations exemplify what Pryor terms queer activist leadership. Leadership that unsettles binary expectations and exposes the risks inherent in transforming hierarchies from within.

Furthermore, Josephine's *I, Joan* can be situated within a broader lineage of contemporary queer theatre that merges performance and activism. Like Travis Alabanza's *Overflow* (Bush Theatre, 2020), which transforms a trans woman's experience of public space into a site of resilience and resistance; Jo Clifford's *The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven* (Tron Theatre, 2009), which reimagines sacred narrative through a trans perspective; or Emma Frankland's *Hearty* (Brighton Festival, 2021), which fuses autobiography and classical myth to explore trans embodiment and transformation, Josephine's play reclaims historical and religious narratives through queer lens. Collectively, these works exemplify how performing identity itself becomes a form of leadership and political intervention.

Leadership and Language

If leadership is a performance enacted through discourse, *I, Joan* demonstrates this both within its historical narrative and its meta-theatrical frame. Charlie Josephine structures the play on two levels: the medieval story of Joan negotiating power at court and on the battlefield, and a contemporary layer in which Joan directly addresses the audience, breaking the fourth wall to reclaim authorship over their own story.

The opening prologue immediately establishes this duality. Under full lights, Joan speaks to the audience in colloquial, modern language, mocking centuries of male historians who have misrepresented them and insisting, "I am Joan. This is my story. This is my Truth." (Josephine 1). Through this act of direct address, Joan asserts narrative and linguistic authority, refusing both patriarchal authorship and historical erasure.

Throughout the play, language becomes both weapon and wound. Joan repeatedly exposes how gendered language fails to accommodate their identity, confessing to Thomas that the word woman "never felt like the right word" and that "there is not a word, I am wordless" (Josephine 81). Their frustration highlights how linguistic categories enforce power hierarchies: if language cannot name queerness, it excludes it from legibility and, by extension, from leadership. When Thomas later affirms Joan's identity by using a gender-neutral pronoun "They will be soon" (Josephine 81), the play stages language as a transformative act, turning recognition into relational power.

The linguistic struggle of *I, Joan* mirrors Judith Butler's insight that discourse both constitutes and constrains the subject. Josephine's play makes this visible: the inability to "fit inside the word" (Josephine 81) becomes a metaphor for resistance against all normative frameworks. Joan's performative language, simultaneously poetic, political, and intimate, constructs leadership as a shared process of meaning-making rather than a position of command.

In the final scene, Joan's defiant declaration, "I'm not a woman. I'm a fucking warrior!" (Josephine 150) epitomizes the culmination of this linguistic revolution. By reclaiming speech as a space of truth and power, Joan performs a new mode of leadership grounded in authenticity, community, and defiance of imposed labels. The play's metatheatrical address transforms the stage into a site of collective recognition, where language itself becomes an act of leadership. By ending with this uncompromising declaration, the audience are asked to see Joan as a strong queer leader who should be respected, not damned.

Conclusion

Charlie Josephine's *I, Joan* became a box office success at Shakespeare's Globe in the summer of 2022 and was widely praised by critics. Despite its length and occasional repetitiveness, the play offers a compelling reimagining of Joan of Arc that speaks directly to contemporary audiences. By reframing leadership as a performance rather than a position, it resonates with Northouse's concept of emergent leadership, Rhode's critique of gendered paradigms, and Pryor's vision of queer activist leadership as a disruptive and transformational force.

Most importantly, the play foregrounds the linguistic dimension of leadership. Through Joan's struggle to find words that fit and their insistence on inclusive language as a means of power and recognition, Josephine reveals how authority itself is constructed and contested through discourse. In this way, *I, Joan* transforms language into a site of performative agency capable of challenging hierarchies and redefining norms. It advocates for the necessity of inclusive language, presenting an alternative to the existing models of leadership

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Alice Tihelková

From Welfare to Workfare: Examining the Ideas Underlying the Recent Changes in Britain's Attitudes to Social Provision

Abstract: *Established on broad social consensus following the Great Depression and the wartime era in the UK, the welfare reform masterminded by the 1945 Labour government aspired to deliver social security from the cradle to the grave, with "freedom from fear" of destitution and insecurity being a major goal. However, the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s spawned new narratives related to poverty and worklessness, resulting in the application of coercive strategies of setting the poor to work, known from the old English Poor Laws but also inspired by the welfare overhaul of the Clinton administration. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper examines the attitudes underlying the transition from the understanding of unemployment-related poverty as a structural problem to its perception as an individual moral failure curable by "work for work's sake" policies that have largely ignored the precarization of the labour market and the new social risks engendered by the increasingly globalized economy.*

Introduction

The character and scale of poverty in Britain have been inextricably linked to the country's political, economic, and social developments throughout its history. With the advent of capitalism in the Early Modern Era, new forms of poverty and the resulting social instability emerged as individuals found themselves uprooted and displaced due to the break-up of the old feudal order and the rising inequalities engendered by the rapid economic change. Following Henry VIII's dissolution of monasteries, the traditional providers of poor and sick relief, the role of looking after the growing swathes of the poor fell to the state, giving rise to a string of legislation known as the Poor Laws (Slack 1995, 8). The underlying principle of these laws was the distinction between the so-called deserving and undeserving poor, i. e. those who *could not work* (the sick, the elderly, orphans, widows, etc.) and those who *would not work* (economically inactive able-bodied individuals). While some essential material relief was provided to the former group within their local parish, the other group was subjected to a series of punitive and corrective measures, from corporal punishment to institutionalisation in workhouse-style establishments, to discourage them from idleness and vagrancy. Under the influence of the Puritan mindset, work on its own accord was extolled as a virtue, while economic inactivity was construed as a sign of sinfulness and moral corruption. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, poverty was increasingly perceived as individual moral failure due to fecklessness and misguided life choices. Punishing the poor became the norm in a society obsessed with self-help and self-improvement (Tihelková 2016, 39).

It took some pioneering social research at the turn of the twentieth century, such as the surveys conducted among the poor by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, to help change the prevalent views of poverty. Far from being purely an outcome of personal irresponsibility and flawed character, poverty was revealed to be structural to a significant extent, caused by a combination of low wages, poor health and inadequate housing conditions. Subsequently, the twentieth century witnessed a development towards a comprehensive system of social provision, culminating in the establishment of the post-war welfare state that sought to ensure security for all citizens from the cradle to the grave. Since the 1980s, however, Britain has been witnessing a reversal of this trend. As the forces of neoliberal-led global capitalism were unleashed, the welfare-based society has been gradually transforming into

a bureaucratic-competitive social management system, with the care of the society's vulnerable increasingly subjected to market needs (Jessop 1993, 29). The human cost of this transformation has been considerable.

The article aims to elucidate the transition from Britain's solidarity-based Keynesian welfare system to the recent marketized "work-first" system, which strongly emphasizes conditionality. Using Critical Discourse analysis, a transdisciplinary research method focusing on "the discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities" (Fairclough 2010, 8), it also seeks to examine the language used by policymakers to explain the potentially unpopular changes to the welfare system to voters, with attention focused on the revived historical stereotypes of the poor purposefully employed to mitigate the public outrage at the retreat from the post-war welfare model. In addition to scholarly output dealing with social and economic history, the research sources include sociological and charity reports, newspaper coverage, and political speeches addressing welfare-related issues.

The path from welfare to workfare

Towards the end of the Second World War, a new social contract was drawn up in Britain, in which freedom from the most pressing problems identified by William Beveridge in his pioneering report became a social right. Given somewhat archaic names, these "Five Giants" included Want (poverty), Disease (inadequate healthcare provision), Ignorance (lack of education), Idleness (unemployment) and Squalor (poor housing). Though not free from imperfections, the universal needs-based welfare system was designed to protect both working and non-working individuals from destitution and the vagaries of the market. The traumatic experiences of the Hungry Thirties and the Second World War had created a consensus across society and among political parties on such a boldly designed system, and its parameters were largely accepted and kept in place by subsequent Conservative governments, along with the policy goal of full employment.

The discourse surrounding the welfare system inspired by Keynesian principles strongly emphasised a sense of security and freedom from socio-economic anxieties. Aneurin Bevan, Labour's most radical minister and the mastermind behind the creation of the National Health Service, wrote a book with the telling title *Freedom from Fear*, in which he argued that society "becomes more wholesome, more serene, and spiritually healthier, if it knows that its citizens have at the back of their consciousness the knowledge that not only themselves, but all their fellows, have access, when ill, to the best that medical skill can provide" (Bevan 1952). On another occasion, he declared, "If freedom is to be saved and enlarged, poverty must be ended. There is no other solution" (Poole, Higgo and Robinson 2014, *v*).

Although the universal provision for all citizens was a priority, the post-war welfare state had little intention of encouraging benefit dependence. The principal tenet of the system was full employment, with the government deemed responsible for providing stable living-wage jobs to Britain's workforce. The general availability of such jobs was assumed to prevent undue reliance on the benefits system. As trade unionist and Labour Minister Ernest Bevin argued,

> In laying down that it is the primary responsibility of the Government to maintain a high and stable level of employment, we are turning our back, finally, on past doctrines and past conceptions and looking forward with hope to a new era. The Welfare State is not enough: it's not enough to remedy, we should cure ("Ernest Bevin Speech to The House of Commons" 2021).

The commitment to full employment persisted for three decades; between 1950 and 1973, the unemployment rate averaged 2% and never rose above one million; in 1955, it was a mere 1%. Similarly, Britain became a much more equitable nation during the post-war era, with data showing that the share of income going to the wealthiest 10% of the population decreased from 34.6 % in 1938 to 21% in 1979, with the share of the bottom 10% also seeing some increases compared to the pre-war era ("How Has Inequality Changed?" 2024).

By the 1980s, however, the Keynesian welfare state had become subject to growing criticism by those who saw the unconditional welfare system as a moral hazard amidst concerns over unemployment, which began rising in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1970s, precipitated by the 1973–74 oil shocks. The rejection of Keynesian principles coincided with the onset of neoliberalism and globalism and the resulting changes in the economy, with the flexibilization of labour markets and structural—rather than cyclical—unemployment now posing a major risk. Countries across the Western world began to embrace, in various forms, the strategy of welfare retrenchment, defined by Peter Starke as a "political decision to reduce the level of social protection guaranteed by the state" (Starke 2008, 13). The aversion of the neoliberal ascendancy to the post-war welfare state was noted by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who made the following observations in his essay *The Neoliberal Revolution*:

> According to the neoliberal narrative, the welfare state (propelled by working class reaction to the Depression of the 1930s and the popular mobilisation of World War Two) mistakenly saw its task as intervening in the economy, redistributing wealth, universalising life-chances, attacking unemployment, protecting the socially vulnerable, ameliorating the condition of oppressed or marginalised groups and addressing social injustice. It tried to break the 'natural' link between social needs and the individual's capacity to pay. But its do gooding, utopian sentimentality enervated the nation's moral fibre, and eroded personal responsibility and the over-riding duty of the poor to work. It imposed social purposes on an economy rooted in individual greed and self interest. (…) The welfare state had made deep inroads into private capital's territory. To roll back that post-war 'settlement' and restore the prerogatives of capital had been the ambition of its opponents ever since Churchill dreamt in the 1950s of starting 'a bonfire of controls'. The crisis of the late 1960s-1970s was neoliberalism's opportunity, and the Thatcher and Reagan regimes grabbed it with both hands (Hall 2011,11).

Under the pressures of the increasingly post-industrial set-up, an alternative concept of welfare was pushed by British Conservative politicians; a model referred to by Bob Jessop as the Schumpeterian workfare state (Jessop 1995, 8). Within it, the state's principal role of demand management, aimed at securing full employment, was replaced by supply management designed to promote labour market flexibility. This resulted in increased subordination of welfare to market forces.

The idea of the welfare system's marketization was readily embraced by the Thatcherite administrations of the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher herself maintained that excessive government intervention and over-generous provision stifled individual aspirations, spawning a culture of dependency. Her concerns over the creation of a class of long-term benefit dependents mirrored the discourses of the underclass spread in the United States by New Right theorists such as Charles Murray. Thatcher fully subscribed to the deserving-undeserving poor dichotomy and the Victorian concept of poverty as an individual failure. From her perspective, unemployment and the resulting increase in the reliance on state assistance had little to do with the effect of deindustrialisation and the break-up of working-class communities and much

to do with the inability of individuals to take initiative and actively seek work outside their comfort zones. In her memoir *The Downing Street Years*, she made the following point:

> But the Victorians also had a way of talking which summed up what we were now rediscovering—they distinguished between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor'. … The problem with our welfare state was that—perhaps to some degree inevitably we had failed to remember that distinction and so we provided the same 'help' to those who had genuinely fallen into difficulties and needed some support till they could get out of them, as to those who had simply lost the will or habit of work and self-improvement (quoted in Walker 1994, 104).

Turning to the Reagan administration for welfare-to-work solutions to rising unemployment, such as Job Clubs or Employment Training Schemes, Thatcher began the transformation from the Keynesian welfare state into a system based on forcing the economically inactive into the labour market, regardless of the ability of the market to deliver jobs enabling long-term sustenance. Unemployment benefit claimants were re-branded as "jobseekers," their entitlement to the benefit being made conditional on proving that they were actively looking for work and prepared to accept any job on offer. The concerns about the availability of adequate jobs were disregarded as a lack of initiative, an attitude immortalised by the then Secretary of State for Employment, Norman Tebbit, who responded to riots against unemployment by stating that "I grew up in the '30s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot. He got on his bike and looked for work" (quoted in Elledge 2023). The expectation was to take action individually and through individual effort, rather than by addressing the underlying systemic problems.

Although the first steps towards the Schumpeterian welfare system were taken by the Conservative administrations of the Eighties and early Nineties, it was Tony Blair's New Labour that introduced the first well-defined and fully integrated workfare regime. As Jamie Peck and Nick Theodore demonstrated, workfare became central to New Labour's "Third Way" ideological course that sought to avoid both the budget-cutting tendencies of the Tories and the tax-and-spend policies of Old Labour. Blair's government, Peck argues, took great pains to distance itself from the traditional Labour policies, especially job creation and pressure for higher benefits, perceived by the Blairites as outdated and lacking in hard-headed pragmatism (Peck and Theodore 2001, 441). Upon taking office, Blair announced that his government would be a "welfare to work" government. In a speech at Aylesbury estate, he declared:

> Now at the close of the 20th century, the decline of old industries and the shift to an economy based on knowledge and skills has given rise to a new class: a workless class. … A large minority is playing no role in the formal economy, dependent on benefits and the black economy … Today the greatest challenge for any democratic government is to refashion our institutions to bring this new workless class back into society and into useful work, and to bring back the will to win (quoted in Theodore 2007, 930).

This proclamation is interesting for several reasons. First, it regards economically inactive people as a class in their own right, with the absence of a job being the primary identity indicator. Although avoiding the term "underclass," popularised in the United States by right-wing sociologist Charles Murray, Blair basically refers to the same phenomenon, defining it by the same criteria. Secondly, his discourse implies that those who do not work are somehow not part of society; that they are *excluded* from it. This is closely related to New Labour's preoccupation with the concept of social exclusion, used by policymakers to

explain poverty in the post-industrial setting. And thirdly, the phrase *useful work* here basically means *paid work*, i.e. work generating income that produces taxes. The usefulness of unpaid work, especially work performed by mothers and other carers, is not recognized, a fact demonstrated by the inclusion of lone mothers into Blair's workfarist policies.

The Blairite welfare-to-work programmes were closely modelled on the US welfare reform rolled out by President Bill Clinton to "end welfare as we know it" (Caraley 2021–22, 527). Passed in 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act severely restricted welfare payments in an attempt to wean Americans off benefits and force them into any low-paid job while also introducing mandatory community work in return for unemployment support. The cornerstone of this new approach to welfare was the idea of a social contract between the citizen and the State, "one that invoked ideas of individual responsibility and duties on the part of the citizen to a State which had his/her best interests at heart" (Barrie 2013). The New Deal programmes (for young people, lone parents and the disabled) rolled out by the New Labour government contained both activating and punitive measures, such as mandatory consultation sessions, job placements, training schemes, as well as benefit sanctions. It was a strictly supply-side approach, not aiming to create jobs but to recreate work ethic, to increase employability, with the underlying belief in the redemptive powers of work not dissimilar to the views held by the architects of Victorian welfare reforms. Accepting a job, however low-paid or precarious, amounted to a form of moral rehabilitation and re-integration into society. On the other hand, prolonged economic inactivity amounted to a loss of a stake in society; indeed, to a form of *anti-social behaviour*. As argued by Peck and Theodore, the reform failed to consider the demand side and structural causes of unemployment. Likewise, the trend towards the low-pay precarious labour market was not reversed, making any long-term positive outcomes of the work-first policies difficult to achieve.

However, worse was to come. In 2010, the Conservatives, in a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, took over from Labour amidst the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis. The massive budget deficit, caused partly by the Labour government's bailout of the banks, steered the Conservative-led government towards an agenda of austerity, despite David Cameron's early attempts to espouse a form of compassionate Conservatism to detach the party from its Thatcherite legacy. However, the liberal "hug-a-hoodie" course was swiftly abandoned for a welfare reform intended to deliver swingeing cuts to welfare payments and public services.

In an attempt to justify the potentially unpopular welfare overhaul, the government adopted two strategies. The first involved stigmatising benefit claimants as feckless "scroungers," the new form of the undeserving poor leading a parasitic and entitled life at the expense of hard-working taxpayers (also referred to as "alarm-clock Britain" to emphasize their commitment to job-related dutifulness). In a speech laying out the planned welfare crackdown, Cameron presented his view of welfare dependency as a lifestyle choice made by entitled, workshy, and irresponsible individuals:

> We have, in some ways, created a welfare gap in this country… between those living long-term in the welfare system and those outside it. Those within it grow up with a series of expectations: you can have a home of your own, the state will support you whatever decisions you make, you will always be able to take out no matter what you put in. This has sent out some incredibly damaging signals. That it pays not to work. That you are owed something for nothing. It gave us millions of working-age people sitting at home on benefits even before the recession hit. It created a culture of entitlement (Cameron 2012).

The second strategy consisted in framing the painful welfare cuts as a well-intentioned and helpful initiative to assist claimants in regaining their agency, independence, and, ultimately, dignity. The effort to put a positive spin on the benefit reductions is apparent from the 2013 speech made by the then Minister of Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith, in which he argues the following:

> It should be about helping people to take greater control over their lives. For all those who are able, work should be seen as the route to doing so—for work is about more than just money. It is about what shapes us, lifts our families, delivers security, and helps rebuild our communities. Work has to be at the heart of our welfare reform plan (…) "Reform," often overused, is in reality about transformation and life change. Improving people's lives through the choices they make. A journey from dependence to independence. Our mission is to put hope back where it has gone, to give people from chaotic lives security through hard work (...) helping families to improve the quality of their own lives (Smith 2012).

Similar to the Thatcherite "on your bike" ethic, this approach disregards the plethora of structural factors that keep people on benefits, presupposing that the welfare-to-work trajectory simply depends on an individual's will. However, as numerous researchers and journalists demonstrated, the reality is far more complex. In her book *Hard Work*, Guardian journalist Polly Toynbee relates her experiment of attempting to live on the minimum wage for a period of time. Despite the advantage of having a council flat at her disposal, the obstacles and financial strains of making a living from a string of precarious jobs, including zero-hour contract positions, made it impossible for her to survive without accumulating debt due to unforeseen costs related to her jobseeking activity (Toynbee 2003, 47). Her findings were supported by numerous sociological studies, including the *UK Poverty 2019/20* report by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which stated that 56% of poor individuals were part of working households ("UK Poverty" 2020, 5). Clearly, the government's argument about work being an automatic path out of poverty did not stand up to evidence.

Nevertheless, the existence of widespread in-work poverty did not stop the government from implementing a series of workfarist policies that were both coercive and punitive in nature, ranging from the fit-for-work assessments of incapacity benefit claimants, outsourced to for-profit private companies, to benefit sanctions involving withdrawal of support from claimants who have in some way failed to comply with the labyrinthine process of jobseeking, often due to illness, a difficult family situation or simply a lack of funds to travel to interviews. The subordination of workfare-based approach to the needs of the market is best illustrated by the Cameronite policy of unpaid "work experience" placements within which jobless individuals were sent to work for free in multinational corporations such as Primark, Asda, Tesco or Hilton Hotels by Jobcentres and companies in charge of administrating the government's welfare reform. The placements often involved working up to six months, thirty hours a week in return for unemployment benefits of £67.50 a week or less, with the prospect of losing the benefits if the placement was refused. The government defended the policy as a means of helping people to "gain vital experience and prepare them for the workplaces," while labelling its critics as elitists, with Iain Duncan Smith claiming that as "it's better to be a shelf stacker than a job snob" (quoted in Holehouse 2012). After a public backlash following revelations that the unemployed were working for free alongside the paid staff while performing the same kind of work, some of the companies withdrew from the scheme or started paying the participants. To many critics, the welfare provision conditional on unpaid labour was uncannily reminiscent of the philosophy of 18th and 19th century workhouses, run for profit under the guise of their "rehabilitation" mission of salvaging paupers from idleness (Tihelková 2016, 40).

Though staunchly defended by the government, the welfare reform drew widespread criticism from numerous experts and public figures (including the left-leaning filmmaker Ken Loach, director of the iconic *I, Daniel Blake*) seeking to refute the underlying claim that work-first policies led to increased personal independence and dignity. Professor Ian Gough of the London School of Economics was among the prominent critics, stating the following in an article on the LSE blog:

> Workfare as defined above is harmful to autonomy. Punitive, demeaning, stigmatising programmes of work and unending job search activities harm the bases of self-respect. The activities required of benefit recipients are not seen as contributing to the common good but towards their shame. Self-respect, a crucial component of autonomy, is undermined not enhanced. (Gough 2020).

The issue of the discrepancy between the job-focused attitude to welfare and the precarious nature of the labour market was also being raised by the Labour opposition, with shadow employment spokesman Stephen Timms, for instance, arguing that "There is a big problem about a lack of jobs for people to move into. There just aren't the jobs there" (Cameron Sets Out Welfare Reform Bill Plans, 2011). Therefore, the Labour election victory in 2024 raised some hopes concerning the reassessment of the workfarist course followed thus far. However, recent developments indicate that those hopes may have been premature. In the face of continuously strained public finances, Keir Starmer's government has shown a surprising taste for austerity, with claimants of sickness and disability benefits among the early targets. Starmer himself described the cost of benefits paid to these people (whose numbers increased during the Covid-19 period amidst the rampant mental health crisis as well as delays in NHS services) as "devastating" to the economy, arguing that the benefits "prevented" people from accessing jobs. He further claimed that they "wreaked a terrible human cost" as they were "actively incentivizing" people away from work, thus representing "an affront to the values of our country" (Adu 2025). In the same vein, Labour Minister for Work and Pensions Liz Kendall spoke about "perverse incentives" driving people to depend on benefits ("Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Speech" 2025). Rather than being a safety net in a climate of rampant social risks, welfare assistance is thus being reframed as a social ill standing between people and jobs.

While more cautious in its use of the underserving poor or "scrounger" tropes than the previous Conservative administrations, Labour's discourse does contain statements where the stereotypes are implied. For instance, upon delivering her 2024 budget, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves declared, "I'm doing this for hardworking families up and down the country who have been crying out for change. (…) To these people I say, I've got your back. This is your Budget. I will deliver for you. It's a Budget for the strivers" (Devlin 2024). In her choice of the word "strivers," Reeves was reiterating the rhetoric of George Osborne, Conservative Chancellor at the time of Cameron's welfare overhaul, when the dichotomy between tax-paying aspirational hard workers and "parasitic" benefit dependants was exploited to justify the government's workfarist agenda. Other statements by the Labour government, such as the warnings of a "painful budget," "tough choices," "difficult decisions," and the need to end the government "overspend" (Toth 2024) provide more evidence of the curious affinity of its rhetoric to the Cameronite welfare discourse. In this context, we can bring to mind the key argument made by Tom O'Grady in his book *The Transformation of British Welfare Policy*, namely that the welfare retrenchment policies pursued since the 1990s by Conservative and Labour governments alike have managed to stave off electoral backlash and even garner public consent due to the systematic use of discourse stigmatizing welfare dependants, a trend far more widespread in the UK than in other European countries (O'Grady 2022, 15).

Concluding remarks

At the time of writing, the shift from welfare to workfare experienced over the past four decades shows no significant signs of reversal, and austerity is becoming the new normal, almost irrespective of who holds office. The lack of political will to acknowledge that, on the whole, the various welfare-to-work incentives are unlikely to succeed in the long term if carried out in the environment of the gig economy and mounting social risks is somewhat puzzling. A salient explanation for the consecutive governments' adherence to the workfarist course is being offered by popular economist and broadcaster Gary Stevenson, who points out that the current economic set-up is predisposed towards massive wealth transfers away from both working- and middle class to the ultra-rich, leaving governments with ever scarcer resources to battle the widespread (and pernicious) effects of inequality (Stevenson 2025). This inevitably leads to the imposition of various austerity programmes, however reluctant and under whatever explanatory language. The question of whether it is possible to reject the workfarist agenda and return to the ideas of the post-war Keynesian welfare state depends on the will and courage of political actors to address the root causes of inequality and deliver an economy where work pays not only in government rhetoric, but in real terms. Until then, regrettably, the language of "tough choices," "hard decisions," and "strivers versus scroungers" is here to stay, along with the corresponding policies.

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Agata Walek

The Trap of The Anthropocentric Great Chain of Being Metaphor: The Process of Carnal Reawakening as the Way out (of Metaphor)

Abstract: *The subject of the study is the non-fiction text* Becoming Animal *by David Abram, in which the key notion of becoming is understood as a way of cultivating heightened sensory awareness and deeper receptivity, enabling humans to attune to the agency of other beings and experience a unifying exchange. Attention is given to the use of metaphors as a first step that has the potential to lead the reader from linguistic representation to the carnal dimension of the world. Through metaphorical language, the reader then can awaken their more subtle perceptiveness and open themselves to the possibility of becoming the Earth, the animal, and a more humble version of man. Only after are they able to disclose that personification metaphors reflect an anthropocentric perspective, leading them to question the metaphorical as-if status and possibly leave the rigid hierarchy of the Great Chain—a longstanding Western metaphorical model that organizes existence in a strict ladder from minerals and plants up to animals, humans, and God. The paper argues that Abram's metaphors, when taken as literal, destabilize the traditional hierarchical model. The theoretical approaches applied in the paper are conceptual metaphor theory and new materialist insights.*

Becoming Animal: Rediscovering an Ethical Relationship with the Earth

David Abram is an acclaimed American thinker best known for his work at the intersection of ecology, philosophy, and perception. His non-fiction works and numerous essays represent a substantial contribution to eco-phenomenological literature in which he attempts to bridge scientific, indigenous, and phenomenological ways of understanding the natural world. Abram's texts along with a call for reviving our animal senses in order to experience the connection with the intelligence of the living land. He frequently emphasises the need to reinhabit our local landscape with attentiveness and reverence, stressing the enormous potential of our bodies to weave us into the terrain which we corporally inhabit. He challenges commonly held assumption of a strict boundary between humans and other beings and invites readers to merge with the pulse of the living Earth and experience that the mind is not a human possession but belongs to the earthly biosphere. He argues that we are not the owners of an autonomous mind but participate in the common awareness into which we are embedded (*Waking Our Animal Senses* 1997, *The Air Aware* 2009).

Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology (2010) represents a cross between fiction and non-fiction, and it is a first-person narration told by a homodiegetic narrator who is also the main and the only (human) protagonist in the story-world. The text abounds with descriptions of the inner state of the narrator/protagonist and his comments on the way in which the external surroundings act and manifest themselves. Acting in the joint position of narrator and protagonist, the main character repeatedly forges a connection with his readers, blurring the boundaries by addressing them, instructing them, questioning them, socializing with them, inviting them to self-observe and co-experience. Abram, as an internal element of the story, seemingly operates as an internal focalizer, complementing reality with his own perspective, refining the world through his own perception. Only later, however, does it become apparent that the anthropocentric position of the internal focalizer is ineffective as he becomes aware that he is

acting within the zone of reciprocity and alliance. His perception and perspectives are constantly influenced by, modified by, and exchanged with every single object and the all-encompassing power of the Earth itself as living, fully agentive entities. He places himself in the world which is not a set of isolated, determinable objects over which he might exercise a perceptual dominance but one which serves as an extension of his own corporeality where all participants are interconnected by the tensions and rhythms of a wider life.

In his text Abram proposes a form of ethics not based on abstract moral codes, but on *embodied reciprocity* with the living world, on our corporeal entanglement with soil, rivers, forests, animals, and even weather systems. The Earth is communicative, expressive, erotic, as he vigorously claims, which does not allow us to linger in a human-centred stewardship any longer, but causes us to engage in a *dialogue* with another presence. Abram recognizes the human body as the gateway to wild ethics—by attuning our body to the rhythms, sounds, and texture of the landscape, we might break he illusion of separateness and start to sense responsibility as the ability to *respond*. Practising wild ethics implies respecting the creativity and agency of a more-than-human world and resisting attempts to dominate it and control it.

Reading Abram: The Significance of Metaphor

Abram repeatedly emphasizes that language as representation distances humans from the Earth, and while echoing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, he insists that its meaning emerges from the carnal dimension of the world. The language used in *Becoming Animal* is profusely interwoven by metaphorical expressions and rebounds Abram's vision that humans have always been carnally rooted in the environment and that the metaphorical language we use so frequently is a direct reflection of this pre-linguistic experience.

The role which metaphors plays in *Becoming Animal* has been largely neglected by critics who have typically described the work as a text whose aim is to connect the reader with the world. Many commentators focus on the process of becoming as a means of unifying but have not noticed that the metaphor so abundantly used by Abram is another important tool which unites, which connects the abstract with the physical, i.e., the mind and the sign with the flesh of the world. This paper then strives to fill that gap and advocates for the importance of metaphor in Abram's text—the usage of language as embodied since it allows us to be *active respondents* of it, the ones who configure and are configured, transform and are transformed by re-animated body of words. Abram's rich metaphorical imagery can encourage the reader to avoid merely going through the text in a passive, receptive manner when reflecting intellectually on the meaning. It instructs the reader not to focus on interpreting the meaning but to "make the meanings into objects," experiencing a kind of intercourse with the (fictional) objects and situations, if we are to adapt a vivid suggestion made by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden.[1] Moreover, metaphor possesses the capacity to explain the abstract with the physical, allowing the reader to encounter the pre-articulated world in which they are physically situated. Metaphor directs us from the linguistic sign to the body, allowing us to re-live and re-experience situations in which we exist as a movement and gesture.

Abram's text shares rich commonalities with the ideas of New Materialists by opening the reader to the concept of a "more than human world." This term was coined by Abram himself to describe nature as a living, vibrant, and expressive organism.[2] Numerous thinkers including Jane Bennett (2010), Karen Barad (2007), or Rosi Braidotti (2002) have emphasized the agency of matter, relationality, and the

entanglement of human and non-human worlds. The question remains, however, of how to cause people to experience this bond and thus feel the urge to care. After all, it seems far-fetched to manipulate oneself intellectually into forming a caring relationship with a tree, for example. It is important to accentuate again that in *Becoming Animal* the desire to rebuild the alliance starts at the linguistic level. Here, language is not employed as a looping path from path sign to sign within a system which, as conceived by Saussure, produces meanings and value through the relationships between signs. Abram's material language does not separate the observer from the world—the embodied nature of his existence intensely experienced is profoundly interwoven into the fabric of his figurative speech that allows him to form an intimate union with the living world. The first step is, therefore, to concentrate on the metaphorical expressions used in *Becoming Animal*, as these provide the initial lens through which we can perceive the connection between abstract concepts and the physical world. It should be emphasized, however, that if we are constantly trapped by our habitual reading metaphors, namely personification, in terms of "*as-if*" connection between the source and the target, we will hardly ever step into the realm of intertwining with the living earth. The intention of the paper then is to analyse the selected metaphorical expressions to demonstrate that only after we start playing with the idea that Abram's metaphors might be interpreted in terms of *identification*, we can experience the language which has the potential to awaken "a new humility in relation to other earthborn beings" and "open our senses to the sensuous in all its multiform strangeness."[3] The focus on metaphor then directs us to Abram's premise of carnal reawakening as re-experiencing the co-vibration with the animated world. Physical intertwining that might be sensed by virtue of figurative language becomes an important prerequisite for admitting that the world is not distant, inanimate but profoundly evocative, agentive. Metaphors therefore, which once described the world as the one which looked *as if it were animate*, suddenly lose their relevance—they slip out of their usual role and become *identification*, thus avoiding the trap of the anthropocentric Great Chain of Being.[4]

Our examination of *Becoming Animal*, therefore, applies the core ideas of conceptual metaphor theory to support and develop the argument stated above.

Critical Perspectives on Abram: Debates and Reflections

Let us examine the critical approaches which discuss possible limitations of Abram's work. An urgent tone is adopted by the theologian Sam Mickey (2012: 100) who maintains that the crucial task for humans today is "to become fully human, which requires becoming animal, enacting the reciprocal participation of our animal bodies in the earthly cosmos." As he points out, however, Abram's approach to this task suffers from certain weaknesses such as the tendency to idealize indigenous cultures and his preference for pre-reflective modes of interacting with the world rather than those of literate modernity. The first of these objections does not seem to be wholly pertinent, since Abram himself has explained (2005) that he had spent many years living among indigenous peoples, familiarising himself with their cultures including oral storytelling; it might be expected, therefore, that his observations and insights are the result of well-considered reflection based not only on his thorough knowledge but also on his direct experience. Taking into account the perspective of eco-criticism, Mickey argues that Abram undermines his preference for perceptual immediacy beyond writing by expressing this idea in words; indeed, the more he attempts to elucidate his thinking, the more he comes to depend on language. Mickey (2012: 101) summarizes his remark by stating that Abram, a strong opponent of dualism, is himself guilty of dualism when privileging "felt experience over "representation.""

A similar objection is raised by the American philosopher Ted Toadvine (2005) in his analysis of Abram's earlier writing *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997), a work which was deeply inspired by Merleau-Ponty's method of perception. Toadvine asserts that despite Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the continuity between perception, expression, and reflection, Abram again falls prey to a body-mind dualism when prioritizing corporeal sensibility over reflection 2005: 159). If we allow Abram himself to counter this point, we find that he does not polarize but in fact connects, as he considers reflection as a process which "unfolds not within me but rather between me and the world" (2005: 172). His reflection then, so abundant in both texts, always incorporates the primordial interchange between the body and the world, positing verbal thought and sensorial perception as two complementary "forces." The interplay between the body and the concept, in other words the continuity between perception, expression and reflection is also aptly illustrated by the metaphors which Abram applies extensively throughout the text, since the abstract concepts in the target domain grow out of and are explained by physical experience in the source domain.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Conceptual Metaphor Theory and New Materialism

Abram's poetic imagery is deeply pervaded by a reciprocal, chiasmic, interrelationship with one's surroundings, as reflected in his rich use of metaphorical expressions. This influenced the decision to employ the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) as the primary analytical tool.

Metaphors We Live By (1980) by the cognitive linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson is a key text in the field of cognitive linguistics which introduces a novel, experientialist (as opposed to objectivist) apprehension of metaphor. From this perspective, metaphor is no longer understood as a decorative accessory of language but instead as a regular bearer of thought, a conceptual device for structuring and constituting reality which thereby enables a meaningful, coherent experience. The experiential or perceptual conceptual system is characterized by its embodied nature in which concepts are derived from image schemata constituting pre-conceptual experience and interactional, sensorimotor activities (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987). All concepts are highly schematic and are determined in terms of prototypes which represent the most appropriate examples of a given conceptual category.

The theory of conceptual metaphor has been greatly developed since Johnson and Lakoff's original studies, with the American psycholinguist Raymond W. Gibbs (2008) or the Hungarian cognitive linguist Zoltán Kövecses (2002/2010) making significant contributions to the field among others. The conceptual metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a structure which determines one domain of experience (typically abstract) by means of another (typically physical, concrete). Kövecses complements this by stating that it is "a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience:" the target domain (more abstract, less tangible or accessible) and the source domain (physical, more tangible).[5] In order to make the world meaningful through metaphor, we conceptualize cognitively more difficult domains with reference to easier concrete domains. It is nonetheless important to emphasize that the process of mapping is not a random, fragmentary act but a highly organized mental work in which the source domain maps a coherent structuring of experience onto the target which is then constituted equally as an organized domain.[6] The correspondences of the source domain constitute a specific conception of the target domain relative to the source. The pairing of a particular source domain with a target domain is grounded in similarity or a correlation in experience (for example,

the sensorimotor experiences which form the basis for primary metaphors). The choice of source domain is determined by the human factor which reflects "non-objective, non-literal, and pre-existing similarities between a source and a target domain." In other words, a source is usually more physical, for example, "motion," while a target is more abstract, for example, "time;" the resulting conceptual metaphor is TIME IS MOTION in which "time" represents the target domain and "motion" serves as the source domain.[7] A considerable number of conceptual metaphors derive from "image schemata" which are "abstract, pre-conceptual structures that emerge from our recurrent experiences of the world."[8] These structures make us aware of the fact that the imaginative structures of comprehension originate in our body and its interaction with an environment. Our understanding, as Johnson emphasises, "involves many pre-conceptual and non-propositional structures of experience (such as image schemata) that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings."[9] As an extension of our body, they possess the capacity to open up and connect a sign system or a text to the natural world.

The theory of conceptual metaphor (CMT) differentiates between conceptual metaphors which are considered to be conceptual patterns (for example, EMOTIONS ARE FORCES) and linguistic metaphors, specific metaphorical expressions based on more general conceptual metaphors (for example, *She swept me off my feet*). In CMT discourse, conceptual metaphors are written in upper case to indicate that "the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it."[10]

Recent developments in CMT (Cameron 2003; Gibbs and Cameron 2008; Kövecses 2010) accentuate not only the importance of embodiment and cultural specificities which affect the emergence of metaphors but also a wide range of diverging contextual factors. Studies by Kövecses (2015, 2020) have emphasised the importance of context, with the Hungarian theorist arguing that metaphorical concepts do not rely solely on the symbolic representational system existing in long-term memory but are in fact largely dependent on the situational and linguistic context. Similarly, it is possible to suggest that the external context of the intimate relation with Nature and the aspect of reversibility in Abram's text play a crucial role in shaping his metaphorical creativity.

In the following analysis we address one of the two general systems of metaphor, the Great Chain of Being metaphor, the concept of which was introduced in *More Than Cool Reason* (1989) by Lakoff and Turner. The model was qualified as a predominantly unconscious cultural model that categorises objects and beings on a vertical scale from "lower" to "higher." Its more detailed premises are addressed in the upcoming chapter.

The New Materialist perspective which views the mind as always already material very much complements the fundamental CMT standpoint. Along with the urge to blur the opposites and boundaries while being in performative intra-actions, New Materialism echoes the very idea of *becoming* animal as advocated by David Abram.[11] Our analysis therefore, takes advantage of some of its concepts developed by the most prominent new materialist scholars, i.e., the American feminist theorist Karen Barad or the Italian philosopher Rosi Braidotti.

New Materialism emerges as a redefinition of contemporary materialism while questioning the modifications of the advanced capitalism. It becomes a conceptual frame and a political platform "which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power" (Dolphijn 2012: 20). This theoretical approach involves the contributions of feminist philosophy which champions the necessity of a new brand of the embodied and embedded materialism, while drawing from phenomenological theory of embodiment.[12] One of

its main tenets is rejecting dualistic divisions (body/mind, nature/culture, subject/object) and rather than separating entities, it searches for their entanglement called the phenomena. Barad further explains that "objectivity, instead of being about offering an undistorted mirror image of the world, is about ... responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part" (2012: 52). She makes a stimulating point when defining the concept of *agency*, since she understands it as mutual response-ability, i.e., responsibility for relationalities of becoming, which opens humans the same way as non-humans to the possibilities of (presumably ethical) re-configurings. She complements it by the idea of diffraction, the term coined by the American biologist Donna Haraway, when emphasising the relational nature of difference which helps to treat diverse entities not as pre-existing ones, but as intra-active forces from which different patterns of thinking-being might emerge (2012: 57, 69).

As Abram's text revolves around the term *becoming animal* as the act of entering the intelligence of the other, it is vital to take into account the new materiality proposed by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their theory of Otherness. They explain that the act of *becoming* is by no means an imitation but "entering into composition with *something else*", a process of extracting "particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes" (1980/1987: 274, 272). David Abram himself does not consider this a metaphor and clarifies that "becoming animal" as a way of "acknowledging, affirming, and growing into our animality" is a means of evolving ourselves into a more essentially human condition.[13] He admits that there is a certain overlap between his understanding of the concept and that introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As he explains, he shares with them "a commitment to a kind of radical immanence—even to *materialism* (or what I might call "matter-realism")" along with "a keen resistance to whatever unnecessarily impedes the erotic creativity of matter" (2010: 10). While placing a strong emphasis on his phenomenological anchoring, Abram notes, however, that his approach is distinguished by its intensely experienced encounter between his flesh and the Earth, while, "(a)s a metaphysician, Deleuze is far too given to the production of abstract concepts to suit mine" (2010: 10).

New Materialism as a cultural frame is obviously a lot more complex than what has been introduced in the paper, but we highlight only these aspects which are vital for our analysis below.

Analysis: Agential Realism in Abram's Metaphors

Metaphors which thrust through the text so ferociously do not want to keep the reader outside of the world they are supposed to reflect on but personify a passionate call to bring the reader to a halt and experience the dynamism of matter they are entangled with. The reader is enveloped by metaphors so excessively that s/he cannot help but be dazed by the enchanting realm of their awakened power to soften the dividing walls between representation and the word, animate and inanimate, subject and the other, letting the reader experience an intra-active becoming. S/he is struck by the disorientating realisation that their body is not their private possession under their ultimate control. As they merge more closely with this all-embracing world mediated by the metaphor, they become increasingly sensitive to the foreign rhythm of a different entity which possesses the capacity to enter their own internal environment and transcode it. Abram ushers the reader into the land of "*sunlight* (…) *that coloured* all my thoughts," making them aware that "the slow spread of a *mountain's shadow alters* the insect swarms" (112). He exposes the reader to the dynamic, all-pervading wind that trails in its wake the personae of all the regions through which it has passed and accentuates that "a wild *wind can return us* to our own vitality" (148). This sense of reverberatory quality is not restricted to Nature alone, however, but is also found in non-natural

objects as cars, shoes or houses. Exposed to rain, and wind, and sun, "old *buildings* (…) finally *become gestures* of the local earth (…) which *seeps into* the very core of our own rhythm" (134). Every place, each piece of land and entity is vibratory and displays a code which is "in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction" (1980/1987: 313).

The reader notices with a sense of growing disquiet that the vibration of another entity is like amoeba capable of producing "a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu"; the rain is modifying the atmosphere of the land, deterritorializing itself by adapting to the form of the Earth (1980/1987: 314). The Earth in return, is at first deterritorialized by the torrent of water, but soon absorbs it and incorporates it into its own rhythm in the process of reterritorialization. All of these titanic movements alter the tenor and temper of the reader's thoughts and perceptions, rapidly dissolving their own code of being. Vaguely sensing that "*seeing was a steady trading* of myself here with the things seen there" (251), they gradually begin to accept the idea that the body is not an airtight casemate but is instead an open refrain whose intention is not necessarily to overwhelm or destroy other refrains but to integrate them as motifs for its own (1980/1987: 314). Most importantly, they see that the fact of interchange does not leave them adrift in agonizing arrhythmia or an intermediate state without any rhythm whatsoever; instead, they observe the creation of a new plane, a new territory with an innate drive to borrow "from all the milieus (…) since it is built from aspects and portions of milieus" (1980/1987: 314). Even in the existence of endless realms, the beat of the single metronome does not fade away, but keeps its rhythm, beating out the bounds of the territory.

The previous chapter offered the reader the opportunity to step off the pedestal of self-centred individualism and recognize that they inhabit an articulate, eloquent landscape in which all things and beings have a vibrant communicative power and can convey something of themselves to others. The reader also learned that their body is an expressive medium, a source of emotional intensity and erotic impulse, existing in a vivid interaction and ongoing corporeal exchange with its external environment. The series of metaphorical expressions provided above left the reader to enjoy "the swirling *winds that embrace* you" (109) along with "a palpable *magnetism between my torso and* that steep *slope*" (98), concisely conceptualized as ATTRACTION IS PHYSICAL FORCE. This conceptual metaphor once again reminds us that our understanding of abstract "attraction" draws from the experience of physical forces.

The following group of metaphors may be even more effective in dislodging the reader from their separation, since their embrace, caress, and delicacy work to soften, melt and transcend reader's anthropocentric position. By enticing them with the promise of an erotic union, they can recognize their deep interdependence with a world no less intelligent or vital than their own. Any readers, then, who are still pinned to their seats with the surrounding objects overwhelming their minds rather than their bodies, are slowly persuaded to rise to their feet while being aware of their posture. They are urged to start moving *towards* the objects and finding their face to which they could turn and talk. The group of metaphorical expressions selected in this chapter are intended to persuade the reader to move forward from mere existence with objects or thinking and talking *about* them towards intimate conversation *with* objects. Through their devoted talk and passionate touch, they can discover the strong point of orientation anchored in their own body. The aim is to evoke the understanding that "beneath intelligence as beneath perception we discover more fundamental function, a vector mobile in all directions like a searchlight, one through which we can direct ourselves towards anything (...) and display a form of behaviour in relation to that object."[14] This newly revealed body grants them access to a true sense of groundedness and self-coherence; through this carnal stability they can act and respond confidently to the world they are merged with. Abram's unbridled imagination opens up a magical world of being flesh of its flesh in

which "each *being radiates* into the world around it, and each *is affected (even infected) by the* others" (51); "you are also *being touched by* the tree (...) *the leaf is gently exploring your fingers*, its pores, *sampling the chemistry* of your skin." Even the act of walking barefoot becomes conceived as the ultimate pleasure, sensing the soil which "*presses up against* my bare feet and *shapes itself to them*" or feeling the trampled grasses which "*massage and wake up my soles*" (58). We learn step by step that we are not necessarily "centrics" who handle and expropriate objects, but that the objects themselves possess the capability to respond actively to our physical emergence.

As the above section was trying to display, metaphor in exactly the same way as matter is an animated and animating entity, inviting the reader not to the stiff unchanging objects it is expected to *represent* but to vibrant *phenomena* it is intertwined with.[15] The following chapter aims to demonstrate that its capacity goes even further after realizing that there is an option to understand the metaphor also literally, or that the expression *is* in fact literal rather than metaphorical, which rather dramatically casts us off the homocentric pedestal where the reality used to be "an external imposition of human-based conceptual schemata."[16] As we claim, literal reading of metaphors has the ability to cause a great change in perception and thinking since the reader becomes straightforwardly exposed to the fact that s/he is not a privileged detached spectator anymore but a continually modified and modifying phenomenon who is no more than a part of a larger web of life.

The Great Chain of Being Metaphor at Odds with Agential Intra-Actions

The metaphors given as examples above can be analysed with reference to one of the two general systems of metaphor, the Great Chain of Being metaphor.[17] By attributing human qualities to nonhuman entities by means of personification, metaphors allow us to gain a fuller understanding of the complex attributes of human beings. When performing this transition, we apply the Great Chain of Being, a cultural model which arranges living and non-living entities on a hierarchical scale from high to low. Humans share higher-order qualities (aesthetic, moral, rational) leading to higher-order behaviour, and their innate animal desires and untamed emotions are glossed over or disregarded; instinctual behaviour of this nature is instead attributed to lower forms of life, namely animals. Further down the Great Chain we can find plants representing biological attributes and complex objects manifesting structural and functional features. Natural physical objects are located at the very bottom of the scale, displaying natural physical characteristics and behaviour (Lakoff and Turner 1989). The key function of the Great Chain Metaphor is to present the idea that human beings can be better understood in terms of animal features or that the less comprehensible qualities of animals and the inanimate realm can be more easily grasped in reference to human qualities. The Great Chain metaphor is therefore a powerful conceptual tool since it conditions how we conceive of all of the world's entities.

Our examples in which "*shadow alters* the surroundings," or "*sun colours* one's mood," "*wind returns* us to our vitality" seem to be at first sight straightforward cases of personification. The attributes like altering the environment, affecting someone's inner state, or rejuvenating another person are considered to be "higher order human qualities" since humans presuppose the power to act intentionally. These qualities are mapped to "lower-order" phenomena perceived as passive, non-volitional, to understand their manifestation in terms of human behaviour. Abram goes further and offers the expressions like "each *being radiates* into the world around it, and each *is affected (even infected) by the* others"; "you are also *being touched by* the tree (...) *the leaf is gently exploring your fingers*, its pores, *sampling the chemistry* of your skin." He constantly reminds us that while our bodies can be perceived as a dividing

border separating the internal from the external, they are also a meeting and melting point for all of the fleshes involved, participating in a perpetual exchange by "*breathing*.(...) *offering ourselves to* the world at one moment and *drawing the world into* ourselves at the next" (61). During every communication "*the boundary* between the human and the-more-than-human world *stayed* (…) *permeable* (…) that boundary *never hardened into a barrier*, but *remained a porous membrane* across which nourishment flowed steadily in both directions" (236). His metaphors have the capacity to challenge our "higher order qualities" even more since we realize that human ability *to affect*, *to touch*, or *to see* is always accompanied by the dimension of *being affected*, *being seen*, and *being touched* not necessarily by humans.

If we accept the New Materialist position, however, and we do not pursue our habitual belief of matter as being lifeless and unresponsive, but we awaken in ourselves the experience of matter as vital and agentive, we can come to a surprising conclusion that those metaphors do not have to be understood as metaphors anymore.[18] The target domains (shadow, sun, tree, leaf, grass as non-agentive phenomena) are not necessarily in a metaphorical "*as if*" position but instead adopt a direct "*is*" position, which suggests the possibility of literality, thereby manifesting that the expressions cannot be considered as metaphors and are thus excluded from the Great Chain of Being structure. The abilities of the source domain (i.e., of a human agent), such as to "return somebody to," "alter," "colour, "touch," "explore," "sample" are all higher-order human capacities since they "exercise voluntary control" (1989). These qualities are then mapped onto lower-order entities in order to allow a better understanding of their behaviour. When we make use of the conceptual metaphor NON-AGENTIVE PHENOMENA ARE HUMAN AGENTS (1989), we are saying that "non-agentive lower-order phenomena" are *only as if* "human higher-order agents," because they follow biological or physical laws in an automatic manner and lack the properties which humans have. In essence, this approach to the denizens of the non-human world deprives them of their capacity to exercise voluntary control. As Lakoff and Turner have noted, "(t)he cultural model of the Great Chain concerns not merely attributes and behaviour but also dominance" (1989: 208). In other words, by ranking humans as the pinnacle of creation, we are claiming the right to dominate animals and nature, because "to subvert that dominance in any microcosm is to challenge the correct order of the macrocosm" (1989: 210). This hierarchical thinking has enormous social, ethical, political, and ecological consequences, but a deeper examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. Non-metaphorical reading of metaphors in Abram's text, however, has the capacity to break free from the shackles of the *as if* condition, drawing us into the world of inter-action where humans have lost their monopoly of imposing control on the Earth, emphasising instead a reciprocal confirmation between the self and the other, while inter-weaving an individual's pulsing threads with those of the other into a single fabric.

Conclusion: Non-Metaphorical Reading Metaphors as the Way to Participatory Mode of Perception

Our paper seeks to portray *Becoming Animal* as a work which wishes to raise the Earth from its inanimate, detached position by intensifying the importance of figurative language that reflects this animistic quality. Metaphor strives to direct the reader out of the re-presentational dimension of language—it does not want to merely re-present the world but invites us to be present in the world, singing the user into a unity with the other. On their journey, the reader was supposed to recognize the importance of metaphor as a means which grants them the sense of existing as a physical body carnally rooted in the pre-linguistic

world. Awakened in their sensuous and sensitive flesh, they could open themselves to the process of *becoming* as the possibility of inter-being, thus developing a new, more humble awareness. Only after can the reader begin to question the *as-if* status of the personification metaphor and expose themselves to the idea that the world might be a breathing, experiencing presence, a bearer of sensitivity and radiant life. As soon as they let go of their habitual *as-if* perspective, the reader is prepared to admit that the Earth does not belong to man but man belongs to the Earth. Man did not create the fabric of life but is a thread in a wider web in which no one is privileged and no one is degraded.

Notes

(1) Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 38.
(2) New Materialism is a cross-disciplinary area of study established at the start of the millennium which attempts to challenge the anthropocentric and constructivist direction of much of 20th century theory by arguing that matter is as alive, active, creative and agentive as humans (Bennett 2010).
(3) Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 3.
(4) The Great Chain of Being, originating in classical philosophy and systematized in medieval Christian thought, is a hierarchical model of existence in which all entities are ranked from God down to minerals. As Arthur Lovejoy (1936) demonstrates in his seminal study *The Great Chain of Being*, this framework has profoundly shaped Western metaphors of human superiority, perpetuating an anthropocentric worldview.
(5) Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 2, 4.
(6) The term "mapping" is explained in CMT "as a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target" (Kövecses 2010: 7).
(7) Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 88.
(8) Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 9.
(9) Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xvi.
(10) Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 4.
(11) The term intra-action was introduced by Karen Barad who explains that it is an essential element of her agential realist framework. It "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies, That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction, which assumes there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33).
(12) Body as understood by NM feminist theorists "refers to the materialist but also vitalist groundings of human subjectivity and to the specifically human capacity to be both grounded and to flow and thus to transcend the very viable ... which structure us. ... The body is a surface of intensities and an effective field in interaction with others.". (Dolphijn and van der Tui, New Materialism: *Interviews&Cartographies*, 33, 34).
(13) Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 10.
(14) Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 157.
(15) Phenomena are understood by Karen Barad as "the ontological inseparability of intra-acting 'agencies'", see *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matte and Meaning* (2007).

(16) Karen Barad uses this formulation when explaining the nature of phenomena, see Barad: *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matte and Meaning*, 338.

(17) The concept of "The Great Chain of Being" (as a metaphor) appeared in *More Than Cool Reason* (1989) by Lakoff and Turner, being qualified as a largely unconscious cultural model which categorises objects and beings on a vertical scale from "lower" to "higher."

(18) The idea of vibrant, agentive matter is explored by Jane Bennett, see Bennett: *Vibrant Mater: A political Ecology of Things* (2010).

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