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19/2

COMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY  
IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Edited by Karolina Janczukowicz  
and Beata Karpińska-Musiał

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## **BEYOND PHILOLOGY 19/2**

### **Contents**

Foreword BEATA KARPIŃSKA-MUSIAŁ KAROLINA JANCZUKOWICZ	7
The extraordinary discourse of the Anthropocene EWA BIŃCZYK	13
An infelicitous agreement – the writing of education in relation to its practice MARTIN BLASZK	43
Professional identity shifts of academic teachers in response to recent (g)local critical incidents: Preliminary research results BEATA KARPIŃSKA-MUSIAŁ JAROSŁAW JENDZA	73
A few words about dignity: An introspective study of a person with disability AGNIESZKA DUL	93
Science fiction and fantasy in general education RYSZARD WENZEL	119
Languaging and interactivity in the self-scaffolding space: How cognitive change happens in one coaching dialogue GRZEGORZ GRZEGORCZYK	165
Information for Contributors	195



## Foreword

BEATA KARPIŃSKA-MUSIAŁ  
KAROLINA JANCZUKOWICZ

Although methodological and epistemological cross-disciplinarity in the humanities and social sciences seems to be the *sine qua non* of all contemporary research, its application is often only declarative and depends to a considerable extent on the socio-political and cultural context of a specific time and place. Reconstructing and reinterpreting these liminal areas between close, but still discipline-specific research areas is a dynamic, complex, and always contextualized process that needs the development of a new language of scientific discourse.

That is why, as editors, we decided to meet this challenge and call for papers for an interdisciplinary, thematic volume of *Beyond Philology* entitled "**Communication and Identity in Times of Crisis**". Finding a theme that would initiate discussion among representatives of various disciplines was not an easy task. We hoped to create space for voices from literary studies and linguistics, as well as philosophy, pedagogy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, or studies related to education, culture, or communication. We were particularly, but not exclusively, interested in contributions discussing the categories of **communicative awareness, discursive identity** and those related to studying new "**languages of research**", all regarding the post-anthropocentric cultural turn, the performative turn and poststructuralist methodological approaches. As a theoretical framework we proposed, as one of the viable options, Jürgen Habermas' *theory of communicative action* and the category of *communicative rationality*, as well as *narrative theory*

(McIntyre 1981, Fisher 1984). We trusted that despite (and even due to) the contemporary geopolitical situation and multidimensional aspects of the global crisis experienced at the present time, we would manage to invite researchers to share their perspectives in relation to the above-mentioned areas.

Our goal has been achieved. Authors of different institutional and disciplinary affiliations sent in articles. As a result, this edition of *Beyond Philology* contains six texts, each of which, in a unique way, addresses the leading theme of communication and identity in times of crisis.

The volume opens with an article by **Ewa Bińczyk** entitled ***The extraordinary discourse of the Anthropocene***. This well-known and eminent philosopher and researcher of the Anthropocene epoch, introduces us to the complexity of discourses surrounding the crisis in the relationship between nature and human beings in the context of their individual agencies, their interdependence and the objectification of nature by culture. The author poses many important questions about our understanding of the concept of *nature* and recalls the dichotomy of the *preservation vs restoration* of nature, already existing in the anthropocentric debate. She draws attention to the validity of the latter, as well as focuses on post-anthropocentric propositions related to the reorientation of the concept of 'geo-historic time.' Post-anthropocentric scientific discourse, as the scholar emphasizes, calls for a better understanding of the ever decreasing time-frame for planet Earth, taken as a complex organism made up of humans and non-humans, which takes into account their mutual agency and not simply the one-sided agency of man.

Another look at the meaning of the discursive building of reality, this time educational, is presented by the author of the next article, **Martin Blaszk**. In his text entitled ***An infelicitous agreement – the writing of education in relation to its practice***, the educator draws attention to the importance of the way in which education is described discursively (*the writing education*) in connection to its practice. This dependence is ambi-



guous and reciprocal, but also carries certain risks. The author attempts to show the power of the linguistic description of educational reality, first invoking *the ideal speech situation* of J. Habermas as a particular type of communicative pattern, a model whose application to educational reality is, to his mind, open to question. The author also questions Bloom's taxonomy, which is widely used to indicate the mechanics of the educational process. Learning and teaching situations are neither schematic nor hierarchical, as the author points out by analyzing various educational paradigms and emphasizing that only the behaviorist-functionalist approach proposes a mechanics of predictability and pre-ordered structuring for students' cognitive processes. He argues that the educational situation is *infelicitous* (in accordance with J.L. Austin) in the sense of references to ideal schemata.

The next text in the volume entitled ***Professional identity shifts of academic teachers in response to recent (g)local critical incidents – preliminary research results*** addresses the idea of building academic identity in the context of specific socio-cultural, critical circumstances. These have been caused, among other things, by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the administrative and political transformation of universities in Poland. **Beata Karpińska-Musiał** and **Jarosław Jendza**, like Martin Blaszk, locate learning and teaching within constructivist and socio-humanistic paradigms, while in their empirical research they follow the idea of *narrative theory*. The focus of the authors is on the changes and shifts in the professional identity of Polish academics related to the need to respond to critical, external circumstances, such as the intensification of requirements imposed on researchers and educators due to the transformation of academic policy. As a result, the multiplicity and diversification of demands on academics means the concept of *an individual nexus of multimembership* takes on a unique meaning and capacity. In connection with this, the article reviews the demographics of recent years and provides a brief overview of institutional changes leading to the current situ-

ation. In addition to this, the authors present selected results of a longitudinal study carried out among scholars of the University of Gdańsk in 2011 and 2022, from which they draw interesting conclusions about the (g)local reasons for 'shifts of identity' in Academia.

Yet another perspective and a unique representation of identity is proposed by **Agnieszka Dul**. In her article entitled ***A few words about dignity: An introspective study of a person with disability***, the author focuses on issues such as the dignity of the disabled person, that person's acceptance by society, as well as philosophical approaches to the category of *presence* and *absence* in relation to the realities of the life of a person with disabilities. In this volume, the text presents a unique voice on identity in crisis, as Dul makes an autoethnographic analysis of her own physical and mental states in confrontation with selected aspects of her life story, being herself a person with disability. She touches upon the existential crises she has been through, the support she received from a significant person, and at the same time the lack of support in other institutional contexts. This text is a strong, emotional manifesto about the social empowerment of people with disabilities, and at the same time a personal testimony to the extraordinary individual strength it takes to overcome the problems inherent in the activities of everyday life. Beyond this, it calls attention to the fact that the presence (authentic, not apparent) of people with disabilities in society is an important cultural and educational factor to be incorporated into the mental framework of all its members.

The authors of the last two articles take up an interdisciplinary approach to the field of educational practice. First, **Ryszard Wenzel** in the article entitled ***Science Fiction and Fantasy in general education*** discusses the potential of SF and fantasy literature as a point of reference for not only second language didactics, but general education within the domains of human cognition, creativity and coexistence. In this context, samples from SF or fantasy literature become something more than teaching materials. Discussing them with students can

provide an opportunity to trigger critical thinking, creativity, and can even be a source for understanding social relationships, something that the author calls 'decent behaviour'. The author presents this potential assuming the possibility of activating various motivational processes with the help of appropriately selected elements of original literary texts, thus going beyond purely instrumental didactics. At the same time, however, the didactic process itself is no longer confined to teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), but to an interdisciplinary approach to general education. The overall aim of this is to raise the degree of our awareness and knowledge of ourselves and the world around us, in Wenzel's words, to increase the *intensity of consciousness*.

Cognitive processes as a principal element of human existence are also the focus of the last text in the volume, by **Grzegorz Grzegorzcyk**. In his article, ***Languaging and interactivity in the self-scaffolding space. How cognitive change happens in one coaching dialogue***, the author analyzes not so much educational and didactic discourses at school, but the symbiotic relationship of communication through language (a complex process called *languaging*) with the identity of interlocutors, including its biological aspect. Grzegorzcyk draws attention to the organic nature of communication, which does not occur without considering the other factors of human existence, including body language, the ability to contextualize meanings, as well as the implementation of other mental processes unnoticeable in traditional Conversational Analysis. With this symbiotic, linguistic-biological approach, the author presents an empirical case study: an example of a coaching conversation between a client and a coach. Grzegorzcyk's text returns, in a sense, to Ewa Bińczyk's concerns in the article that opens this volume. It addresses the discourse of biodiversity in language, which is viewed in broader terms than just a structuralist, abstract system of signs. It shows it as a holistic human activity related to the ecology of communication and its 'biology', going far beyond the pure symbolism of the language code. Indeed, in

this article, it may be stated that human communication is shown as going “beyond philology.”

To conclude, all the articles in the volume entitled ***Communication and Identity in Times of Crisis*** shed a new light on the categories in question. Each makes references to the discursive realities of the present time – be they social, educational, cultural, or scientific – and, as such, the authors have contributed to an understanding of where the ‘new discourses of science’ may appear. This may happen on the borders between philosophy, educational studies, linguistics, pedagogy, psycholinguistics, and communication. Discourses may be formal and informal, encoded in research or educational practice, or even in one’s own autoethnographic meta-reflection. One thing is certain, however: they all intertwine and help us to understand the “pressing problems” of the contemporary world.

We would like to thank all the authors for their invaluable contributions to this volume.

## **The extraordinary discourse of the Anthropocene<sup>1</sup>**

EWA BIŃCZYK

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### **Abstract**

The text presents the extraordinary discourse and surprising grammar of the Anthropocene discussion. It introduces the most relevant terms making up the unique lexicon of the Anthropocene epoch. Much like the debate on the epoch of man itself, this lexicon has an interdisciplinary dimension. Terms which are used include post-nature, climatic divide, Gaia, eco-justice, human environmental rights, irrecoverable/irreversible loss, geohistory and Plantationocene, while in the text topics covering criticism of anthropocentrism, human agency and natural agency, all of which are so crucial to the Anthropocene debate, are discussed.

### **Keywords**

Anthropocene, the anthropocentrism's criticism, post-nature, geohistory, Gaia

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<sup>1</sup> The text is an English and modified version of chapter 4 of the book "Epoka człowieka. Retoryka i marazm antropocenu" (Warsaw: PWN, 2018). The text is published for the first time in the form presented here.

## Unikatowy dyskurs antropocenu

### Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia unikatowy dyskurs i zaskakującą gramatykę dyskusji na temat antropocenu. Wprowadza on najważniejsze pojęcia konstytuujące unikatowy słownik epoki antropocenu. Podobnie jak sama debata, słownik epoki człowieka ma interdyscyplinarny charakter. Znajdziemy tu takie terminy, jak: postprzyroda, podział klimatyczny, Gaja, ekosprawiedliwość, środowiskowe prawa człowieka, nieodwracalna/niepowetowana strata, geohistoria, plantacjocen. Tekst podejmuje również analizę takich tematów, jak: krytyka antropocentryzmu, sprawczość ludzka czy sprawczość przyrody.

### Słowa kluczowe

antropocen, krytyka antropocentryzmu, postprzyroda, geohistoria, Gaja

### 1. The loss of nature

In 2000, the American biologist Eugene F. Stoermer and the Dutch atmosphere scientist Paul J. Crutzen (1995 Nobel Laureate in chemistry) suggested that the current geological epoch be called the Anthropocene – “the epoch of man”. Stoermer and Crutzen wrote of the unprecedented scale and intensity of humanity’s current impact on the planet. In their opinion, *homo sapiens*, as a species, have become an agential force of geological significance, with humanity introducing dangerous modifications to many vital parameters of the planetary system (Crutzen, Stoermer 2000).

The epoch of man – the Anthropocene – is a tumultuous time of irreversible environmental losses. It relates to escalating climate change, a great mass extinction of species, the acidification of the oceans, increasingly tenuous relations between hu-

mans and nature (pandemics, weather aberrations, climate migration), and conflicts arising from a lack of access to energy and other resources. Earth system science research as well as reports, show that we are now standing at the threshold of likely destabilisations of the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and lithosphere (Rockström 2009; cf. Hamilton, Bonneuil, Gemenne 2015; Hamilton 2016).

One of the most apparent motifs in the Anthropocene debate is the subject of nature being irreversibly lost. The Earth is losing coral reefs, tropical forests, the seasons, the stability of the Arctic ice cover, and many individual animal species. In 2011, the environmental scientist Vaclav Smil performed calculations regarding the total body mass of land vertebrates on the planet. In accordance with these calculations, 30 % of the total mass is human mass, while 67 % is the mass of domestic animals and livestock kept by humans. Only 3 % of the world's total vertebrate body mass is made up of wild animals (Smil 2011).

Scientists estimate that 41 % of the planet's known species of amphibians are currently facing extinction, 13 % of the known bird species, and 26 % of the known mammal species. The causes of this are habitat destruction, climate change and hunting. In the case of amphibians, an additional cause is an epidemic of chytridiomycosis, a fungal skin infection affecting amphibians (Monastersky 2014: 159). In addition to this, a study performed by German scientists in 2017 showed that over the last 27 years, in 63 protected regions in Germany, there was at least a 75 % loss of the flying insect biomass (Hallmann et al. 2017).

In the widely-discussed book *The Sixth Extinction. An Unnatural History*, first published in 2014, Elizabeth Kolbert, a science journalist for The New York Times, states that by 2050, 24 % of all species of flora and fauna inhabiting the Earth today will have become extinct, with that number potentially reaching 50 % by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Kolbert warns that, each year, 14 species become extinct (the majority of them insects),

while the current rate of extinction is 10,000 times faster than that of natural extinction (Kolbert 2014: 129, 142).<sup>2</sup>

It appears, however, that unlike the problem of climate change, the crisis of biodiversity loss has yet to garner the level of public interest it deserves (cf. Crist, Rinker 2010: 14). That being the case, the American environmental historian Justin McBrien has proposed that, rather than being called the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch be dubbed the Necrocene – an epoch of extinction and “planned obsolescence of all life” (McBrien 2016).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Earth System science research shows that by allowing biodiversity loss to continue, humanity is, in a sense, ‘shooting itself in the foot’. In line with the aforementioned soft Gaia hypothesis, it is organic life that supports the planet’s geophysical and chemical stability.

The problem of biodiversity loss also possesses an undeniable metaphysical side. Kolbert (2014: 201) writes: “Right now, in the amazing moment that to us counts as the present, we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy.” From the point of view of the foreseeable future, it is evident that the modern fixation on issues like economic growth and access to cheap crude oil and leisure is simply irrational. How will this attitude be judged in light of the consequences of the great extinction of species? Some scientists believe that the destabilization of planetary systems in the Anthropocene epoch is evidence not of humanity’s power but its irrationality (Crist, Rinker 2010: 15).

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<sup>2</sup> This relates to background extinction, expressed in the number of extinct species per one million years. With respect to mammals, this is 0.25 per million species annually, which equates to one species per 700 years (Kolbert 2014: 17).

<sup>3</sup> McBrien likens this to the notion of planned obsolescence, which involves products being designed so as to become outdated, out of fashion and non-functioning after a certain amount of time (cf. Perelman 2005: 27–30). The term was popularized in the 1950s by Steven Brooks, an American industrial designer.



In his most recent book, the American zoologist and co-founder of sociobiology, Edward O. Wilson, proposes a radical solution to the Anthropocene's environmental crisis – letting half of our planet's land area be reclaimed by wilderness (Wilson 2016). It is known that the leading causes of the mass extinction of species are habitat loss and climate change, and Wilson's suggestion arguably presents a fair compromise to tackle the problem of biodiversity loss. What if we agreed that our anthropocentrism entitles us to occupy *only* (?) 50 % of the Earth's area? But even this assumption would require justification. In accordance with this, Wilson argues that his premise of leaving half of the Earth to nature is a vital condition to humanity's survival in the Anthropocene epoch. Although Wilson's proposal seems to be out of touch with reality amidst the current priorities of global politics and economics, the zoologist's proposal does lay out the proportions we ought to observe as we ponder the challenges of the Anthropocene epoch. Sadly, national parks currently account for only 6 % of the planet's land area. We can still hope, however, that Wilson's proposal will play a meaningful, if rhetorical role, in the discussions on the Anthropocene epoch.

At the same time, the Anthropocene can be called a post-environmental epoch. Many environment researchers argue that the boundary between that which is natural and that which is man-made, between the unspoiled environment and the domain of human *praxis*,<sup>4</sup> is impossible to define today, having no absolute value (Passmore 2002: 608). At the present time, it is difficult to speak of any facets of nature as virginal, harmonious or wild (see Dalby 2016). Already, in 1989, in his book *The End of Nature*, the aforementioned Bill McKibben, an American journalist, environmental activist and advocate for initiatives to counteract climate change, described Earth as something of an

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<sup>4</sup> The term *praxis* originating from the theories of Karl Marx refers to the historical context of human practices, to actions that are always supported by cognition of theoretical reflection. This category transcends the theory-practice dichotomy.

artefact, dubbing it “Earth 2” or “Eaarth” on account of the degree to which it has been modified by human activity (McKibben 1989, 2010, cf. Yearley 2006).

The post-natural epoch we find ourselves in is an extraordinary time in which a return to nature (including human nature), as a stable, God-given, passive and silent canvas for our actions, is simply impossible. Nature as we know it has been altered by human hyperagency. In the Anthropocene epoch, almost every “natural” catastrophe – be it flooding, fire, plague or famine – bears the mark of human involvement. These could be more accurately defined as “post-natural” catastrophes. In light of this, we ought to be thinking in terms of post-nature and the post-natural history of nature (Raffnsøe 2016: 14).

Attesting to the fact that we are dealing with post-nature are, among other things, the discussions on relocating endangered species (Minteer, Collins 2010). The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) employ the term “assisted species migration” (IPCC 2014: 15). There are plans to create migration corridors by way of which plants and animals will be able to migrate as they flee the effects of global warming. Additionally, there are plans to introduce a range of practices intended to allow us to reproduce the aspects of nature we have lost: the reintroduction of species to ecosystems, assisted colonization, population reinforcement, artificial fertilization, the transplantation of embryos to related species, and attempts to revive extinct species (Maris 2015: 127–128). Here, human agency converges with animal agency in response to the effects of climate change caused by human activity.

An interesting example of the kind of post-natural objects that will surely become a more frequent sight in the Anthropocene epoch is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Drifting in the northern regions of the Pacific Ocean, the garbage patch is refuse made up of 90 % synthetic material suspended in the water and forming a plastisphere – a breeding ground for bacteria and other organisms (Moore and Philips 2011, cf. Lewis 2013: 28).

Here, inanimate man-made substances and natural entities mingle to form a hybrid mass.

The World Economic Forum currently estimates that more than 150 million tons of plastic is floating in the Earth's oceans. By 2050, the mass of plastic will likely exceed the total mass of fish in those same bodies of water (WEF 2016, cf. Angus 2016: 167). Because of this, it has been suggested that the current geological epoch be called the Plasticocene – the epoch of plastic. As we discuss our attitudes, values, costs of risks and economic priorities, we increasingly talk about factors which have hitherto been considered purely natural: the weather, which ought to be unmodified, the dwindling bee population, the shrinking water resources feeding our rivers, and ecosystems in need of protection.<sup>5</sup> We are also involved in diplomatic disputes over the human environmental rights to the melting Arctic in order to exploit its oil reserves (e.g. the dispute between Denmark and Russia). It is becoming clear, therefore, that nature can no longer be viewed as a non-problematic commodity. As the British environmental sociologists Phil Macnaghten and John Urry concisely put it, "There is no nature simply waiting to be conserved, but, rather all forms of its conservation entail judgements as to what indeed is nature" (Macnaghten and Urry 1998: 23).

Though the idealized "nature fetish" (Preston 2012: 195) continues to resurface in the current debate on the environment, the ideas for nature's restoration are intended to manage natural conditions and even to manage what remains of nature as it was. Parks, reserves and gardens are enclaves created by humans. Conversely, epidemics, insect infestations and droughts,

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<sup>5</sup> On the dispute surrounding particular communities' rights to unmodified weather, see e.g. Turner, 2004. On the controversy surrounding the decline of bees in the United States and the use of pesticides, see Suryanarayanan, Kleinman 2012. The history of fruit cultivation in China, where bees also declined due to excessive pesticide use, shows that the function of bees could be performed by humans. New orchard workers were recruited to pollinate the crops, which not only created new jobs and boosted demand thanks to the new income generated, but also improved the output of orchards. Since human pollination was more systematic and precise, a thirty percent increase in yield was noted (Adler 2016).

which we are trying to control, viewing them as being outside of that which is desirable or good, are very natural. Meanwhile, the splendid vistas of tourist regions or countryside hideaways are often not as natural as they seem in that many of them have undergone extensive human transformation. In our pursuit of nature in the Anthropocene epoch, we attempt to imitate that which has been lost and what we imagine nature was in the past. Yet, the imitations we create are always merely interpretations of what we think nature ought to be.

And here, there is a dynamic dispute currently unfolding concerning environmental reflection: between a model advocating for nature preservation and a model for nature restoration. This dispute is connected with the philosophical question of the conditions necessary for nature to be authentic. We must, however, note that the issue in question is also tied to our perception and valuation of time. Traditional programs to preserve and restore nature were interpreted as a means of reversing time and returning nature to its former state. Yet, in the twenty-first century, narratives which romanticize the past and bygone states of ecosystems are clearly waning in popularity. A return to untouched or wild nature is no longer tenable, while, as mentioned earlier, the very concept of nature is a problematic one. We are increasingly aware that our imagination and values shape our definition of nature and wilderness.

The idea to protect parts of the natural environment which are completely virginal and untainted is by now unfeasible. Modern reserves and national parks are more reminiscent of theme parks, amusement parks or Jean Baudrillard's precessions of simulacra than a wilderness understood as terrain untouched by human intervention. Because of this, critics of the nature preservation paradigm discount this approach as outdated, calling for the need to restore nature – to compensate the planet for the damage done by human hands. This involves ecosystems being rebuilt, with the process being understood in different ways: as a kind of planetary gardening, or a form of design, engineering or management. In the restoration model, we

ask the question as to what extent we can responsibly remove human influence from specific areas to allow other species and ecosystems to flourish (or perish) there, without human interference. The priority would be to maintain harmonious efficacy and coherence in self-reproducing ecosystems.<sup>6</sup> It is entirely possible, therefore, that at best, human influence can only be reduced and judiciously minimized wherever possible. That is about as much as humanity is capable of at present, if it wishes to move past anthropocentrism in its actions.

Yet, is it even possible to completely eliminate nature understood as a sovereign and untouched setting for our actions from modern reflection on the environment? Paradoxically, the answer is most likely no. Every artefact created by humankind seems, one way or another, to defy the intentions of its creator, often generating surprising side effects. In this sense, the autonomously natural is always imminent in our achievements. The wealth of nature's agency plays a certain rudimentary and indelible role: this power manifests itself in the undesirable consequences of our innovations, unplanned by the creators and out of their control (cf. Preston 2012: 194–195). In a certain important sense, the Anthropocene is an epoch of the unintended consequences of human action.

## **2. Nature's agency hastily ignored – the arrogance of anthropocentrism**

In one article on the Anthropocene (Hamilton 2015: 35), it is written that “The human has always been the anomaly, the creature both natural and unnatural. The Anthropocene is so momentous because nature's anomaly is now restructuring nature itself.” The narratives on the Anthropocene are grounded

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<sup>6</sup> This premise also appears in the permaculture conception inspired by Robert Hopkins, the English town of Totnes and the Transition Towns initiative launched in 2006. This relates to local initiatives aiming to identify possible ways to transition to an emissionless future by reducing dependence on fossil fuels at municipal and community levels.

in an interesting transformation of our present way of thinking about agency. This is a shift that continues to take place in opposition to anthropocentrism. It relates to the anthropocentric paradigm dominating the humanities, history, sociology and philosophy, which acknowledges the existence of human agency alone. Environmental humanities, sociology of technology, actor-network theory, and science and technology studies, add non-humans and their agency into the spectrum of possibilities: technological infrastructures, machines, other species, microbes, systems determining the condition of soil, weather, rivers and oceans, and other planetary limitations and ecological conditioning factors. As argued by authors opting for a post-humanist understanding of agency, the main protagonists in history and the social sciences (the outstanding individuals, heroes, elites and their intentionality and individualism) are not the only possible factors to explain the situation.

In the Anthropocene, the paradigm of human agency and top-down intentionality is being challenged for methodological reasons (as being overly simple) and philosophical ones – as an expression of anthropocentric arrogance in an epoch of planetary system destabilization. The Anthropocene debate thus stimulates thinking on various possible kinds of agency and even on alternative visions of intentionality. With regard to this, Studies conducted in the area of actor-network theory have revealed that our actions are mediated by non-humans and defined by decisions taken earlier, and also that agency can be “delegated” to the environment. In light of this, it is possible that the agency of infrastructures can be maintained without human supervision, as in, for example, gates regulating passenger traffic in airports or speed bumps on internal streets regulating a driver’s speed (see, e.g., Winner 1986, Latour 1991, Callon 1986, 1987). Consequently, how we understand human agency also undergoes significant modification. It is a result of relationships, taking various shapes, undergoing gradations and fluctuations – it can be blocked, inhibited, or defined through technological or

natural factors. It can even be almost entirely eliminated in an appropriately configured environment.

The problems characterizing the Anthropocene epoch, such as the issue of planetary boundaries or global climate change, further stimulate the question of agency, intentionality and responsibility from the perspective of the individual and in the moral dimension. We certainly need responsible human agency in the Anthropocene epoch (cf. Barry 2019: 208, Arias-Maldonado and Trachtenberg 2019: 9). Yet, where should we put individual intentions (and actions) in the context of the climate catastrophe and irrecoverable biodiversity loss? Do we not all feel alienated and helpless? Is this not a cause of the apathy of the Anthropocene epoch? We understand very well that each one of us on their own is isolated from planetary-scale threats and deprived of influence on the situation. So, in these circumstances, on what terms can we continue to employ the old category of agency?

Significantly, the narratives on the Anthropocene epoch have accentuated the problem of the undesired side effects of human activity and of the systemic risk we face. Theories on undesired consequences, meanwhile, transcend means of thinking based on notions of intention, rational aims, predictability and controlled progress. Because of the existence of planetary boundaries, the existing conceptions of human action must change due to a lack of any external space into which we can push the undesired effects of our conduct. Because of the need to expand the category of responsibility to include that which is unintended, we must also modify our understanding of progress.

Ignoring nature's agential power and of humanity's place among non-humans may be interpreted as evidence of a form of humanistic cynicism or arrogance (Plumwood 2010: 36). But, as to what lies at the foundation of this separation of the human species from nature at large, we can only guess. Was it the image of nature being a collection of lifeless, passive matter? Was it the interpretation of nature as a super-resource to be colonized and utilized? Perhaps it was the capitalist prerogative of

unhindered access to all that is within reach for the sake of accumulating capital? Maybe it was seeing only the functional side of nature? The search for “cheap natures”<sup>7</sup> to be exploited? The recognition solely of the instrumental value of nature within the spectrum of needs of *homo sapiens* – the “pinnacle of evolution”? Finally, could it be our tolerance for the unscrupulous moral attitudes of (anti)environmental nihilism?

As an example, in narratives dominating the neoliberal market viewpoint today, nature is reduced to little more than what the market sees in it. In this sense, it is deprived of its autonomy. Market logic dictates that whatever is still available to us on the planet ought to be commodified. Nature’s agency is thus cynically reduced to a lone, select dimension: its ability to generate profits. Following market logic, nature’s protection must pay off, it must cover its own costs, making monetary calculations indispensable. The reclassification of forests and trees as “timber,” fish and aquatic life as “fisheries,” animals as “livestock,” or lakes and rivers as “water resources”, also did much to legitimize the processes of commodification and extermination (cf. Crist 2016: 29). This explains the great “career” made by terms like “ecosystem services” or by branding particular regions or ecosystems as “banks” mitigating environmental dangers (Robertson 2004, cf. Maris 2015: 123, 127). Increasingly, institutions today demand that ecosystem services be assessed, like the European Union with its Horizon 2020 program. Many are also attempting to assess the costs of biodiversity loss. There are even estimates of the total value of ecosystem services and of the natural capital of the planet. In 1997, this value was estimated to be twice the global GDP (Maris 2015: 128).

In one of his radio programs dedicated to the Anthropocene, the American radio journalist Simon Adler invites his on-air guests to contemplate the rationality of the strategy of assessing the market value of individual ecosystems and species (Adler

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<sup>7</sup> This is a term used by an American sociologist and geographer Jason W. Moore.



2016). What value do we put on the agency of lifeforms like insects, which pollinate plants, or bats, which feed on and curb the populations of crop-destroying insects? Experts are able to more or less reliably assess the value of nature to particular economies. Often, it is only economic arguments that can sway decision-makers on matters related to the environment. Yet, does this mean that the use of economic arguments ought to be an acceptable rhetorical strategy? Regardless of how we answer this question, we must bear in mind that by opting for such an approach we will never break free of the mindsets and practices which, according to many experts, ushered in the environmental crisis to begin with.

It is emphasized that a significant number of classic social theories, like, for example, that of Émile Durkheim, functionalism and even social ecology, have rashly ignored the subject of nature (see Murphy 1995). Clearly, the intuitive acceptance of anthropocentrism in sociology and even the humanities at large, inherently results from the need to make specific disciplines autonomous. The significance of the social world is accentuated, along with humankind's exceptional ability to adapt and the importance of individual agency. The uniqueness of the human species within the animal kingdom is also underscored, as is our freedom, propensity to develop cultures, and the ability to overcome nature's obstacles through cooperation on an unparalleled scale. Anthropocentrism of this kind was often accompanied by biophobia – a conviction that nature is chaotic, unpredictable and cruel (Washington 2013: 77). This biophobia made it easier to interpret nature as an axiologically neutral backdrop, a collection of passive matter, or a resource, whose contemplation is incongruous with the moral mode of thinking.

The Canadian environmental sociologist Raymond Murphy thus criticizes social science as being theoretically myopic, writing about its inclination for a form of detrimental idealism (Murphy 1995: 691). For instance, from Murphy's point of view, the concept of the social construction of reality and poststructuralism are responsible for dangerously radicalizing the theory that

humanity freely shapes nature as it builds its surroundings, living exclusively in a world of symbols, discourse and language. More recently, similar criticism has been directed at the superficial interpretation of constructivism, attributed with the notion that nature is a human construct. I tend to believe, however, that criticism of this type suffers from a reliance on major oversimplifications and unfavorable interpretations. Yet, Murphy is most likely correct about one thing: that the variable of nature has, with excessive rashness, been needlessly and consistently avoided in the theoretical discourses of the humanities.

Haydn Washington pursues a similar line of thinking. In his book *Human Dependence on Nature: How to Help Solve the Environmental Crisis* (Washington 2013), he argues that narratives treating nature as a human product or artefact or stating that we are dealing with a loss or end of nature are fundamentally anthropocentric and arrogant – even those arising from a pro-environmental stance. Washington shows that the approach of many academics, as well as UN environmental programs, is deeply anthropocentric, viewing the value of nature exclusively through the prism of its utility to humans.

The belief, so characteristic of the Anthropocene, that the human species is the measure of all things – even of how we ought to classify planetary changes – simply attests to human megalomania. Washington denounces the attitude that the species and ecosystems around us could be nothing more than social constructs. After all, they are not merely the product of our imagination. Washington's opinion is that anthropocentrism is a manifestation of *homo sapiens*' self-obsession; one that, in the long run, may prove to be evidence of our ill-adaptedness. In maintaining the illusion that humankind "creates" nature, forests, rivers or the weather, we open the door to a number of dubious ideas, such as human engineering or projects to control the Earth's thermostat. The environmental crisis does not mean there is no nature. If civilization collapses, nature will remain and only humanity will perish. It is humankind that depends on nature, not the other way around.

For this reason, even the modern rhetoric of nature's and humanity's interdependency is, according to Washington, overly anthropocentric (Washington 2013: 79 ff.). It is equally true for trying to change nature, the climate or ecosystems. It suggests that we understand precisely what we are doing – that we are maintaining control. As the Canadian sociologist notes, however, humanity is not shaping the planet in this way at all. Thus, it seems, the anthropocentrism of social theory (cognitive, ontological and methodological) largely handicaps the possibility of accentuating that which is common to all species on Earth – the fact that they are critically dependent on ecosystems and planetary conditions. As Hamilton puts it, social scholars have no choice – in the Anthropocene epoch, everyone must be a geophysicist (Hamilton 2015: 36). Our social problems are inseparably linked with the state of the Earth's systems.

None of these theses are new. The problems of resources being exhausted, the limits of economic growth and demographic explosion were already demanding attention in the second half of the twentieth century (Ehrlich 1968, Meadows et al. 1972).<sup>8</sup> At that time, postulates were being formulated on the need to recognize the significance of hitherto-neglected natural processes, environmental costs and the agency of non-humans. Sociological discussions began to centre around problems like energy security, climate threats and the dangers of epidemics. That which was social began to be framed in environmental terms. In this way, in many discussions, nature reclaimed its due recognition.

To recapitulate the issues examined so far: as stressed by those involved in the Anthropocene debate, nature is currently a problematic category. Not only must it not be dislodged from the spectrum of humanistic discourse but it must also cease to be thought of as a silent and docile backdrop for our actions.

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<sup>8</sup> The scenarios envisioned in the report, *The Limits of Growth*, published forty years ago, coincide closely with real-life trends. They were vehemently criticized, although the criticism proved unfounded (cf. Popkiewicz 2016: 102–103).

Today, it is not as easy to reduce nature to a collection of “natural resources” objectified by market logic and technology; a trove of resources we can exploit interminably with no costs incurred. In the epoch of planetary crisis, nature is vehemently claiming its normative stake as it constantly reveals its active and agential face.

### **3. Geohistory, a new concept of time and responsibility for the future**

Phenomena like the “wicked” climate destabilization problem or the irreversible acidification of oceans pose daunting challenges to our current modes of thinking and to how we understand history. The historian and post-colonialism scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about this in his article *The Climate of History: Four Theses* (Chakrabarty 2009). Chakrabarty states that full-fledged public discussions on the problem of climate change first arose in the 1980s – at around the same time as discussions concerning the phenomenon of globalization began to grow. After the year 2000, problems like droughts in Australia, wildfires, melting glaciers in the Himalayas and polar regions, ocean acidification, and species extinction became impossible to ignore in public debate (Chakrabarty 2009: 199). So, how is this reflected in the study of history?

Above all, destabilization of the climate caused by humans means that natural history and human history have converged to form an area of study known as geohistory (Castree 2014: 240). Previously, the tempo of geographic and environmental changes was considered too slow to serve as a key factor in historiographic study. Such a view was expressed by scholars like Giambattista Vico, Benedetto Croce, and R.G. Collingwood, who stressed the need to distinguish between human history and natural history. It was only in the twentieth century, with the emergence of environmental history, such as, for example, the perspective taken by the aforementioned Crosby, that the human species was depicted as a protagonist of biological signifi-

cance impacting other species and the environment. Yet, the concept of humans being a force of geological and ecological importance so characteristic of the Anthropocene epoch, is still something greater than the idea of *homo sapiens* being a factor in terms of a biological impact. After all, to change the chemical conditions of the atmosphere is something different to transporting species of flora and fauna between continents.

By endangering the socio-political order we are used to, the climate catastrophe complicates the very assumption of the continuity of human existence on Earth, exposing the finite nature of the “project” of humanity. Chakrabarty believes this will forever alter the former perception of time (Chakrabarty 2009: 197–198). The threat of a climate catastrophe suggests that history has arrived at a posthuman, or post-civilizational, stage. The understanding of history in the Anthropocene epoch cannot be built on short-term perspectives however. Our thinking about time today ought to be in line with the rule of preventiveness and moderation. In this sense, the perspective of the “investment horizon,” which, in economic models usually does not exceed thirty years, is a vastly improper timeframe for any consideration of the future. The debate on the Anthropocene epoch, however, is a very important development in that it forces us to define the very limits of historical thinking.

As Chakrabarty states, in the Anthropocene epoch we must think jointly about the global and the planetary, about history based on records and on the time prior to history understood as such, about the criticism of capital and about what type of thinking characterizes humankind as a species. The geological hypothesis on the Anthropocene forces historians to confront the global history of capital with the history of the human species (Chakrabarty 2009: 212–213). This is no easy feat. Chakrabarty predicts that the climate change problem will likely exacerbate the tensions resulting from the uneven distribution of resources and power on the planet. In the future, demographic growth is most likely to affect big cities in poor countries. So, how will politics and conflicts look on a planet of slums plagued

by aberrant weather? It is important to remember that we are not a single humanity but a collection of many different worlds, polarized along the climatic divide between rich and poor.

More than just the name for a new geological epoch, the “Anthropocene” label can also be seen as a metaphor for the planetary climate and environmental crisis. Chakrabarty cannot imagine how ecomodernists can speak of a good Anthropocene. Is it a good crisis that rouses hope? The author stresses that periodization is a normative activity. Thus, the introduction of the Anthropocene category in geology possesses axiological significance. I agree with Chakrabarty – the potential arising out of this ought to be harnessed.

Chakrabarty asks the same questions as Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, namely: is the Anthropocene an effect of the actions of *homo sapiens* or a consequence of the actions of the economic elite in developed countries? It was, after all, the capitalist system that proliferated the extensive use of energy derived from fossil fuels in the industrial age. Yet, Chakrabarty believes that the Anthropocene crisis goes beyond the framework of capitalism and concerns something more serious – the cycle of life on the planet (Chakrabarty 2009: 217). The universal nature of the crisis means that all of us have fallen into the trap of the Anthropocene epoch, regardless of historical accountability of certain nations toward others. Because of this, a hermeneutics of suspicions characterizing the post-colonial and post-imperial approach is not a good starting point for thought on our maladies in the Anthropocene. This is not the time to dwell on how greatly divided we are. Even the rich and privileged will not escape the destabilization crisis unscathed. Regardless of how great humanity’s potential is and how much freedom we have secured for ourselves, Chakrabarty believes that we cannot afford to allow the destabilization of the planetary parameters that condition the existence of life on the planet.

At the same time, in *The Climate of History*, Chakrabarty asks the question of who are “we” as a species in the epoch of human-

kind. Never before have we had to experience ourselves as a species, nor experience all of humanity simultaneously (Chakrabarty 2009: 220). The risk of climate collapse resembles the risk of a nuclear holocaust, although the former relates to the undesired consequences of our own actions, the cumulative effect of a series of small decisions made over a span of time and not to decisions that can be avoided by abandoning the use of nuclear weapons. Up to this point, we have only been interested in short-term success in survival and securing access to resources. Chakrabarty thus asks: why would we change now? Has human activity become one of nature's conditions or, conversely, is it that, for the first time, we really find ourselves in a situation where humanity literally constitutes itself? For Chakrabarty, the key problem of the Anthropocene is whether we will be able to assume total responsibility for the future.

#### **4. The boundary of what is imaginable?**

Many commentators have noted that the "Anthropocene" label possesses an overtone of boastfulness or even arrogance, being an expression of our triumphant uniqueness. As a case in point, in the debate on the new geological epoch, it is sometimes gloatingly stressed that humanity's "stratigraphic signal" will be observable for millions of years to come. In this sense, the idea of the Anthropocene really is evidence of "anthropomorphism on steroids" (Latour 2011, cf. Raffnsøe 2016: 11). This is one of the reasons that the American sociologist Eileen Crist, an advocate for human population planning via reproduction restrictions, is against the Anthropocene as a label. Crist believes the category embodies our complexes and yearning for supremacy. Can the Anthropocene be a reason for pride? Is it not better to use the term Misanthropocene in this epoch of denial and disillusionment with environmental policy (cf. Angus 2016: 226, 230)? What justifies the Anthropocene label? By accepting this term, do we not simply accentuate the possibility of humanity's complete control over natural conditions?

Malm and Hornborg also lament the fact that, in debating the Anthropocene, we revel in the power of *homo sapiens*, once again making our species the center of attention. In the course of the debate, humanity can continue its narcissistic self-admiration. Does such a categorial structure help us put up a fight against the planetary crisis and dismantle the economic order built on environmental exploitation and continued fossil fuel combustion?

The Greek term *anthropos* refers to a species existing on Earth. Similarly, the etymology of the Latin words *homo* and *humanus* relates to humankind understood as a being that lives on Earth. Yet, as Lovelock, the father of the Gaia hypothesis, states, *homo sapiens* have declared a form of war on Earth; the twenty-first century wages a war on Gaia (Lovelock 2006: 13). How can that be, given that the human condition is inherently dependent on earth, soil, clay and sand (cf. Raffnsøe 2016: 4)? Is it not heartbreaking to witness that the category of human continues to dominate and repress other categories even in an era of dramatic environmental challenges? Could it be that the notion of what is “earthly” is too mundane, pedestrian, prosaic?<sup>9</sup> It seems that the category of earth is forever too unspectacular to effectively represent the crises and challenges of the Anthropocene, and, above all, the necessity to implement a decisive climate policy.

Many scientists hope that the idea of the Anthropocene will not simply accentuate the arrogant relish of human agency and the planetary scope of human influence but instill in us a sense of responsibility and sensitize us to the necessity of scrutinizing humanity and its exploitative behavior while acknowledging the rights of other entities. In this way, the Anthropocene has the chance to ascend as the first epoch to be free of illusions, one in which there is no longer room for carefree optimism. It appears, however, that our chances are shrinking and the possi-

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<sup>9</sup> This is noted by Latour, who introduces the term “the Earthbounds” to the Anthropocene lexicon (Latour 2015: 148).



bilities open to us evaporating, as we are mired in a stalemate. This is also not simply a matter of voluntary redefinition, because the existence of the planet's boundaries drastically reduces the range of choices available to humanity.

In light of this, can we advance to a responsible, post-anthropocentric Anthropocene? Or will we flounder at the impasse of irreversible losses, observing the dramatic shrinking of our natural setting? Already, we have lost nature as a stable and unproblematic backdrop for human activity. So, is the Anthropocene an epoch in which we must redefine planetary boundaries or the very meaning of boundaries themselves?

I agree with the opinion that, from the political point of view, the greatest challenge of the Anthropocene epoch is to devise means for managing irreversibility (cf. Hamilton, Bonneuil, Gemenne 2015: 10–11). There is a difference between the modern systemic risk described by Beck and catastrophes like climate collapse or irrecoverable biodiversity loss. In a risk society it is still not too late; risk represents a possible threat that we assess and try to avoid. In a catastrophe society, we sound the alarm because it is already too late. This is underscored by Hamilton: “it is too late to negotiate with Earth” (Hamilton 2015: 39).<sup>10</sup> This is an epoch of irreversible loss, inevitable feedback and tipping points being passed. We are left with having to devise ways to manage irreversibility – if that is still even possible.

In another sense, it is also about managing that which is inevitable (Blühdorn 2015: 165). To be able to do that, however, would require a new type of politics and leadership. The current system of unfettered progress, with individual nations negotiating for their own interests and profits, must be put aside. The problem is that we are still unable to make these changes. It also seems that we are not well prepared to do so. Our institutions suffer from built-in short-sightedness as we enter a new era of global politics aimed at adapting to “irrecoverability”. We operate in conditions like unforeseeable futures, climate-driven

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<sup>10</sup> On the topic of the “It’s-too-late-o-cene” see White 2019.

migration, irreversible decisions, and inconsolable losses. Environmental policy in the Anthropocene epoch must under no circumstances be limited to only protecting ecosystems or individual species, and political thinking must focus on Earth as a whole.

Looking at it from this perspective, it is possible that the Anthropocene is more a boundary than just another one in a series of epochs (cf. Haraway, 2015: 160). In her ironically-titled article *Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene. Making Kin*, Donna J. Haraway asks whether we have crossed a point after which the consequences of our actions have irreversibly changed the very essence of the “game” of life on Earth – the life of everyone, of all living things (Haraway 2015: 159). What evidence to support such a statement could we need: climate change, toxicity norms being surpassed, or perhaps, data on the drastic costs of employing extreme technologies like those for the extraction of natural gas and oil from shale?<sup>11</sup> As Haraway writes, we live in an epoch of “mourning irreversible losses” (Haraway 2016: 160). This is an epoch in which shelter for living things is being destroyed and the system is collapsing. In Haraway’s opinion, it is impossible that the epoch of great changes (which we desperately need) be dubbed the Anthropocene (Haraway 2016: 34) as long as we keep the existing anthropocentric categories. The American philosopher thus contemplates whether it would not be better to introduce more adequate terms.<sup>12</sup> One of these is the Plantationocene. We live in a time of vast, soil-depleting monocultures, and industrial farming, fishing and the raising of livestock. In transforming the planet into a plantation, we slash and burn tropical forests, inviting catastrophic wildfires and causing irreversible processes leading to the destruction of biodiversity and even entire eco-

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<sup>11</sup> This applies to shale gas fracking and “tight oil.”

<sup>12</sup> However, if we had to decide on just one label, Haraway believes it should be Capitalocene, as long as this term does not lead to the acceptance of modernistic premises on history and progress connected with Marxism (Haraway 2016: 51–53).

systems (Haraway 2015: 162). The Earth has become one gigantic botanical garden of disappearing specimens to delight the eyes of the human-imperialist.<sup>13</sup>

Another potential alternative is the Chthulucene, inspired by the spider species *Pimosa cthulhu* native to California, whose name comes from the language of the Goshute tribe of Shoshone native Americans in Utah. The word *chthonic* refers to the Earth powers present in all things (Haraway 2016: 35). Haraway is interested in accentuating the deep-running interdependencies of the living things composing an ecosystem and her writing often returns to the subject of species diversity. This philosophy dovetails quite well with the concepts proposed by Latour and Stengers, with categories like Earthbound beings, setting, stable collectivity and Gaia. She writes: “Gaia is autopoietic – self-forming, boundary maintaining, contingent, dynamic, and stable under some conditions but not others. Gaia is not reducible to the sum of its parts, but achieves finite systemic coherence in the face of perturbations within parameters that are themselves responsive to dynamic systemic processes” (Haraway 2016: 48).

According to one of Haraway’s collaborators, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, in the postnatural epoch, even human nature ought to be viewed through the category of multi-species interdependency (Tsing 2012: 144). She argues we should refrain from talking about humanity’s uniqueness and autonomy; that these kinds of narratives could lead us astray. History interpreted through the prism of the species accompanying us reveals deep interdependencies. Each living thing affects other organisms through its seasonal patterns of reproduction and development and through its geographical range. Not only humans create their environment. By turning our logic upside-down, we could say in the Anthropocene epoch that it was grains that

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<sup>13</sup> The Plantationocene category is less confusing than that of the unifying category of the Anthropocene, which does not accentuate the specific responsibility of white people and Western civilization for the destruction of the environment.

domesticated humans, forcing us to abandon our nomadic lifestyle. The history of agrarian societies and the colonial era both indicate a close entwinement of human and non-humans. Without maintaining the right balance based on the preservation of ecological niches necessary for the development of other species, we too will not survive.

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Tsing argues that the organisms which most extensively shaped the planet prior to the arrival of humans are bacteria and fungi (Tsing 2015). So, have we replaced them; have we taken their place as beings which transform their environment on the most ubiquitous scale and in a zealous manner? The history of humanity's relationship with various species of fungi – ones that live closely side by side with us – is fascinating. Fungi live in symbiosis with other species, with the roots of plants; they are responsible for processes that enrich the soil and allow decomposition, they absorb heavy metals and enable fermentation, so important in the production of food, alcohol and antibiotics. Yet, the history of our relationship with fungi is also the dramatic history of the great plagues devastating monocultures and plantations (like potato blight) and a history of agricultural disasters caused by mold.

By definition, the Anthropocene is an epoch in which human intervention is stronger than the impact of other geological forces (cf. Tsing 2015: 19). It is one in which “ontological uncertainty” (see Veland and Lynch 2016: 4) and instability are a condition of the times. But, to look at it another way, uncertainty can also mean being open and sensitive to external factors. Unpredictable encounters transform us (Tsing 2015: 20). The uncertain, unstable world of the Anthropocene is also a world without aim, beyond teleology: “The problem is that progress stopped making sense” (Tsing 2015: 25). Capitalism has become a dead-end street. In this sense, perhaps more useful than the notion of progress would be that of assemblage, coordination, collective efforts to survive alongside other species.

For reasons such as this, Haraway suggests that we compose a common future. “Make Kin Not Babies!” – meaning let us be together regardless of blood ties. Let us not reproduce but relate (Haraway 2015: 161). Can the future of the Anthropocene bring multi-species ecojustice? Time will tell.

*Translated by Szymon Włoch*

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## **An infelicitous agreement – the writing of education in relation to its practice**

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### **Abstract**

In the article, the author aims to problematize the notion that education as a practice can be written *a priori*. In doing so, first of all, an outline of Habermas' work in connection with the *ideal speech situation* is given, to show its importance in conceptualizing educational practice in democratic society. This is followed by a description of Austin's concept of the infelicitous functioning of the performative as a way to critically view the activity of teaching in general and then, more specifically, to bring into question the writing of education in connection with the discourses and philosophizing which govern its practice – what is done in the classroom by teachers and learners. In developing this idea, a number of discourses that underpin the practice of teaching (among others, functionalist-behaviourist, developmental-constructivist, critical-emancipatory) are discussed to highlight their similarities but also their fundamental differences and how, when one of the discourses dominates educational practice, it can lead to the distortions in the understanding and implementation of that practice. Additionally, instrumental and post-critical relations of philosophizing to the practice of education are described with the aim of posing the question of whether educational practice can actually be written *a priori*. In conclusion, the author suggests the writing of education would appear to be a “tool” to be used in the further “coloniza-

tion of the lifeworld” rather than a support for the emancipatory projects that Habermas and Dewey pursued in relation to society and society and education, and that this may have consequences for democracy itself.

### **Keywords**

ideal speech situation, the performative utterance, discourses of education, functionalist-behaviourist discourse, developmental-constructivist discourse, Bloom’s taxonomy, instrumental relation, post-critical relation, democracy

## **Niefortunne porozumienie – pisanie edukacji w odniesieniu do jej praktyki**

### **Abstrakt**

W artykule autor dąży do sproblematyzowania poglądu, że edukacja jako praktyka może być pisana *a priori*. W ten sposób, podany jest zarys pracy Habermasa w powiązaniu z idealną sytuacją komunikacyjną, aby pokazać jej znaczenie w konceptualizacji praktyki edukacyjnej w demokratycznym społeczeństwie. Następnie podany jest opis koncepcji Austina dotyczącej niefortunnego funkcjonowania performatywu aby krytycznie spojrzeć na działalność nauczania w ogóle, a następnie, bardziej szczegółowo, zakwestionować pisanie o edukacji w powiązaniu z dyskursami i filozofowaniem, które regulują jej praktykę – co robią w klasie nauczyciele i uczniowie. Rozwijając tę ideę, omówiono szereg dyskursów leżących u podstaw praktyki nauczania (m. in. funkcjonalistyczno-behawiorystyczny, konstruktywistyczno-rozwojowy, krytyczno-emancypacyjny). Omówiono te dyskursy, aby podkreślić ich podobieństwa, ale także podstawowe różnice oraz to, w jaki sposób, gdy jeden z dyskursów dominuje w praktyce edukacyjnej, może prowadzić do wypaczeń w rozumieniu i realizacji tej praktyki. Opisano także instrumentalne i postkrytyczne relacje filozofowania z praktyką edukacyjną w celu postawienia pytania, czy praktykę edukacyjną można napisać *a priori*. Podsumowując, autor sugeruje, że pisanie o edukacji wydaje się raczej „narzędziem” do dalszego „kolonizowania świata przeżywanego” niż wsparciem dla projektów emancypa-

cyjnych, jakie Habermas i Dewey realizowali w stosunku do społeczeństwa oraz społeczeństwa i edukacji i że może to mieć konsekwencje dla samej demokracji.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

idealna sytuacja komunikacyjna, wypowiedź performatywna, dyskursy edukacyjne, dyskurs funkcjonalistyczno-behawiorystyczny, dyskurs konstruktywistyczno-rozwojowy, taksonomia Blooma, relacja instrumentalna, relacja postkrytyczna, demokracja

## **1. Introduction**

In the article, the writing of education – in the form of discourses and philosophy – as an equivalent for the practice of education (what occurs in the classroom), is problematized with the aim of challenging a present-day and all-encompassing belief within the administration of education that words are an equivalent for the world of classroom activity. To develop this idea, in the first part of the article, Jurgen Habermas' (1984, 1987, 1996) concept of the *ideal speech situation* is described, where rational and consensual interaction, free from coercion is viewed to be the basis of democratic society. Furthermore, this concept is linked to education and the idea of the American philosopher, John Dewey (1966), who states that a fundamental purpose of education is to prepare learners to live in and develop society along democratic lines. This consideration of Habermas' concept and Dewey's purpose for education, prepares the ground for the main discussion in which a concept that underlies Habermas' *ideal speech situation*, John L. Austin's (1975) linguistic-turn, is used to investigate education. More especially, Austin's schemata for the felicitous functioning of the performative is applied to the activity of teaching to show how its practice, including the writing of that practice, might be brought into question. This is followed by brief descriptions of a number of discourses, after Klus-Stańska (2009), which underpin teaching: among others, the functionalist-behaviourist, developmental-constructivist and

critical-emancipatory. This is done to 1) highlight the diversity of these discourses and the implications they have for the practices of teaching that each one proposes and 2) to show how the practice of teaching, as well as an understanding of that practice, may be distorted by the application of one particular way of writing it: the predominance of a functionalist-behaviourist approach through the application of Bloom's taxonomy. To show the problems that this may cause, descriptors from Bloom's taxonomy are then applied to the developmental-constructivist model. In the final part of the article, Zamojski's (2015) instrumental and post-critical views of education are outlined and the question is posed as to whether the writing of education can actually convey the dynamics of what is done in practice. Finally, it is proposed that the writing of education would appear to be a "tool" to be used in the further "colonization of the life-world", rather than a support for the emancipatory projects that both Habermas and Dewey pursued in relation to society and society and education.

## **2. Conceptualizations towards democracy according to Habermas and Dewey**

Habermas' work as a sociologist and philosopher was to understand social change, while "A core objective [...] [was] to reconstruct historical materialism in order to reflect more accurately the concerns of the present day and the shifting sands of Western politics and economics" (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 4). Central to this project, was the development of "a Critical Theory of society with emancipatory intent [...] [including the construction of] an overarching 'grand' theory of capitalist modernization and colonization, combined with an ongoing defense of modernity and a desire to further the aims of democracy" (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 4).

Habermas' project, therefore, was to try and find a middle way between the essentialism of modernism and the relativism of postmodernism: to move on from the one-sided rationalization of capitalist modernization without resorting to the decon-

structive strategy of postmodernism. As part of this, Habermas proposed that the state and the market had gone beyond the limits of their powers and interfered in the personal sphere – the colonization of the lifeworld, which consists of essential activities such as socialization, the reproduction of culture and upbringing of children. A situation where “the pursuit and maintenance of state political agendas, alongside the ability of capitalism to exploit new avenues for wealth creation, have resulted in more and more decisions affecting the lives of citizens being based on the ‘bottom line of power/money’” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 6).

To facilitate a critique of this situation, Habermas developed the Theory of Communicative Action, which utilized ideas from the linguistic turn. This restated problems connected with consciousness in terms of language which, for Habermas, meant that he was able to view the development of the self as intersubjective, a process that occurs through social interaction with others rather than individual contact between monological selves in isolation. Accordingly, the subjective interests of a self are confronted by intersubjective interests that cannot be reduced and as such this allows for the existence of “truth claims” independent of a particular cultural context. In addition to this, Habermas offers the premise that when people engage in communication, they commit themselves to an *ideal speech situation*, where the interaction is rational and consensual, as well as free from any form of force. Accordingly, any communication can be tested with regard to validity claims that judge its comprehensibility, sincerity, truthfulness, as well as appropriateness in terms of the way it is expressed. Moreover, these validity claims are applied in “good faith” in communication with a second person – the interlocutor assumes that what the partner communicates is true and sincere up to the point that what is being communicated no longer fulfills one or more of the validity claims. Importantly, a person’s engagement in the discourse of the *ideal speech situation* (the application of the validity claims), engenders two results for the operation of the self in the public sphere:

- 1) “real needs can be identified, agreed on and the process begun of transmitting these needs (discursive will-formation) to the political sphere for inclusion in public policy [...] [and] law” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 7),
- 2) because there are a set of rules for public discourse provided by the validity claims, “all are heard, no one is excluded, all have equal power to question the ideas and justifications of others, to ask questions, all are equal in making a decision and reaching a conclusion, coercion is excluded and the only power exercised is the power of the most reasonable argument” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 7–8).

In connection with the above, Habermas viewed such a rule-led engagement in the sphere of public discourse as a condition for the functioning of democratic society. Additionally, and equally important and relevant to this article, Dewey saw the role of education to prepare learners to participate in but also perpetuate and develop such a society. With regard to this, Dewey believed that: “Democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human” and “A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest” (Dewey 1966: 192). Indeed, Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* is a treatise that lays out the way in which education needs to be linked to developments in society as it is, itself, important for the maintenance and development of democracy within that society. As Dewey writes in the preface: “the philosophy stated in this book, connects the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and is concerned to point out changes in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments” (Dewey 1966: iii). And, although Dewey’s manifesto for education was published over one hundred years ago, its message still holds true for the present time, when educators such as Tomasz Szkudlarek



(2009: 65) and Zbyszko Melosik (2007: 316) view Dewey's project as bringing together ideas concerning democracy, society and the individual in a way that is relevant for the contemporary world, and especially Poland.

However, for such an educational model to be successful, the same set of circumstances that Habermas advocates for society as a whole have to prevail in the classroom; that is, an engagement in which the needs of each of the participants is acknowledged and where there is a possibility for conclusions to be reached through balanced discussion. Moreover, as with Habermas' proposal for society, the bottom line for this cannot be purely financial. In relation to education at present, where there is pressure to follow fixed patterns of activity (Klus-Stańska 2010: 234–244), to give “the one right answer” (Nowicka 2009: 265), and where a neoliberal agenda predominates (Potulicka and Rutkowiak 2012), and in line with its agenda, a particular model of how education as a whole is conceptualized, circumstances conducive to the fostering of a democratic society may not exist.

In the following section, an outline of Austin's schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative utterance is given and then applied to the area of education to problematize its practice and the writing of that practice – the discourses and philosophizing that inform teaching. This is done as a first step to show how education as it is practiced at the present time is failing to fulfil Dewey's aspiration for it as a source for democratic continuation and renewal.

Furthermore, this application of Austin's schemata, does not appear to be out of line with that author's understanding of what a performative actually is when he states that the concept applies “to all ceremonial acts, not merely verbal ones, and that these are more common than is appreciated” (Austin 1975: 25). Nor is it contrary to ideas about teaching that place it as a ceremonial – ritual – practice (McLaren 1993; Dembiński 2005).

### **3. The performative utterance and the performative**

Something that will seem quite obvious now, more than 60 years after John L. Austin gave a series of lectures on the subject, is that there is a linguistic construction we can call a performative utterance as opposed to simply a statement.

In the lectures Austin gave in 1955, we follow the “highways” and “byways” of the philosophers’ thought as he builds a case for the performative. This is done through the exposition of the performative utterance in terms of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, as well as considerations of it as an area of grammar or vocabulary, behavior (including body language) and/or context. In the course of doing this, Austin also builds and discusses a detailed schemata of what is needed for the felicitous – happy – functioning of a performative as opposed to an infelicitous – unhappy – functioning. And, it is this schemata that I would like to present here in relation to teaching as an act which is performative.

What then is Austin’s schemata for a felicitous functioning of a performative and in what ways might it be said to relate to education? In answering these questions, the six different criteria that must be fulfilled to achieve the proper functioning of a performative will be outlined followed by a proposition of how these relate to the practice of education.

#### **3.1. Schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative utterance**

Austin’s schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative are as follows:

- (A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure involved.

(B.1) the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of the participant, then a person participating in and so involving the procedure must in fact have thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (Austin 1975: 14–15)

Overall, in accordance with the above, it is apparent that for a performative to function felicitously, there must be a known procedure in which language is used and which involves a definite set of people in an appropriate context. Furthermore, the people involved must implement the procedure exactly and fully, while the person leading the activity (resulting from the implementation of the procedure) must be fully aware of what it entails and, along with the other people that participate, agree to abide by the rules that govern it.

### **3.2. The performative and its relation to the practice of education**

In terms of the relation of Austin's schemata to education it is possible to say that for (A.1), the accepted conventional procedure is that of the teaching that takes place during the years of compulsory education and the conventional effect is the learning that ensues. Both of these include the uttering of certain words by teachers and learners, and mostly during lessons in a classroom. Additionally, with regard to (A.2), we can say that the teaching is carried out by an adult who has attained the appropriate qualifications to **teach a subject (or range of subjects – with regard to primary education) to a particular age**

**group, while the learners are children or adolescence who are attending classes to learn the subject (or subjects) the teacher presents.**

For (B.1) and (B.2), the procedure of teaching is executed correctly and completely by the teacher and likewise the procedure of learning by the learners, when the teacher presents information and prepares materials and tasks for the learners and **the learners note down and learn the presented information as well as work with the materials and complete the given tasks.** We may also say that a sign that this procedure has been followed correctly and completely by all the participants is when the learners achieve good marks with regard to formal assessment. **As well as this, the schools and classrooms within which this takes place will be furnished with the appropriate equipment and materials to facilitate the teaching-learning process, while the learners will possess the necessary books and materials.**

In connection with (Γ.1), it might be said that there are **procedures designed for use by teachers** who have certain thoughts and feelings, or who want to inaugurate certain consequential conduct on the part of the learners. It might also be said that these are usually **informed by discourses of teaching that the teacher is aware of and aims to implement in the classroom and (Γ.2), in accordance with which the teacher and learners subsequently conduct themselves.**

From this very brief outline it can be noted (already) that problems might occur in terms of the felicitous functioning of education with regard to the schemata for the performative as outlined by Austin:

For A1/2, for example, do all learners actually want to be at school and do they have an interest in the subject being taught? Are all schools appropriately equipped?

For B1/2, do all learners do what is asked of them all of the time? With (Γ.1/2), are all teachers aware of the discourses that inform teaching and learning, and do they actually plan their teaching following these models and then teach accordingly?

Concentrating on (Γ.1) and (Γ.2), it would seem that in relation to education these criteria uncover a further problem: differences between the discourses that inform teaching and learning, which can lead to confusion when it comes to the implementation of the practice of teaching.

#### **4. Five educational models – discourses that inform teaching**

The “problem” at the theoretical level is that there are at least five educational models – discourses – seen to underlie school education (Klus-Stańska 2009: 46). This “abundance” of discourses is not without its problems however, as they are not wholly compatible, and so by using one with the other the teacher may negate the very effect she/he is trying to achieve. The discourses include the functional-behaviourist, humanistic-adaptive, developmental-constructivist, social-constructivist and critical-emancipatory. And, to gain an idea of the similarities but also the differences between them, it is informative to look across a number of categories that describe the functioning of the discourses given in Table 1. These include: the development of the child, the creation of knowledge, type of activity, typical lexis for the discourse, metaphors, and how the mechanics of learning might be described in everyday language.

Looking horizontally across the discourses and vertically down to the different categories that describe their functioning, it can be seen that there are areas of similarity in the discourses across the areas of the Development of the Child and Creation of Knowledge. In the humanistic-adaptive discourse and developmental-constructivism, for example, there is an emphasis on the self-development of the child. Meanwhile, the humanistic-adaptive discourse and social-constructivism respectively, place importance on interpersonal relations and work with others – the child with an adult. Similarities also exist in the areas of

**Table 1**

Categories of comparison between educational discourses.  
Adapted from Klus-Stańska (2009: 46–74 – translation MB).

<b>Discourse and Main Postulate</b>	<b>functional-behaviourist</b> “To educate is to direct”	<b>humanistic-adaptive</b> “To educate is to accept”	<b>developmental-constructivist</b> “To educate is to organize the surrounding environment”	<b>social-constructivist</b> “To educate is to support / work together”	<b>critical-emancipatory</b> “To educate is to lead to critical engagement”
<b>Development of the Child</b>	linear and hierarchical; reaching set standards; given levels of educational achievement	potential for self-development and gaining of self-knowledge; cannot be measured	individual growth of competence as a researcher: trial and error; testing of hypothesis and reconstruction	movement from everyday understanding to learning takes place through work with an adult and is determined by education	initiated into the tension between cooperation and resistance; acquisition of emancipatory competences and ability to stand up for one’s rights
<b>Creation of Knowledge</b>	memorisation of information; following external instruction	personal; individualized; concentrated on interpersonal relations	independent; active construction and reconstruction of models of	negotiation between everyday knowledge (constructed by the child) and public /	ability to engage critically and activate one’s own intellectual

			thinking about reality that do not need an adult	scientific knowledge (represented by the adult)	strategies
<b>Type of Activity</b>	drill-correct-intervene	flexible; process orientated; based upon unhindered communication and play as well as the needs of the child	organisation of experimental workshops and problem-solving tasks; effects are relative and unforeseeable	helping; working together	symmetrical; uncovering the political and the need for engagement
<b>Typical Lexis</b>	memorize, practice, drill, form, familiarize, teach	partnership-therapeutic; caring acceptance	research; explore; experiment; learn	support; form; lead	involvement; understanding; emancipation
<b>Metaphors</b>	teacher – crafts-person; learner – empty vessel; classroom – workshop	teacher – gardener; learner – valuable plant; classroom – sunny field	teacher – patron; organizer learner – scientist; classroom – research laboratory	teacher – advisor, guide; learner – assistant, apprentice; classroom – master’s workshop	teacher – revolutionary, moderator; learner – fighter, apprentice; classroom – discussion forum, centre for

					initia- tives
<b>Mechanics of Learn- ing</b>	“Listen and learn”	“Allow the child to be a child”	“Keep trying until you grow and under- stand”	“Can do a lot but needs some help”	“Think for your- self. You have the right to do so”

Activity Type, Typical Lexis, Metaphors and Mechanics of Learning. In the humanistic-adaptive and developmental-constructivist discourses, the learner is viewed as someone with certain needs and skills that are central to the educational enterprise. With the humanistic-adaptive discourse, these needs and skills are the child’s propensity for communication and play. With the developmental-constructivist discourse it is the innate inquisitiveness of the child and the willingness to experiment. Additionally, in both discourses, because the child takes an active role in the process, flexibility is part of the educational encounter along with an understanding that not everything can be determined *a priori*.

However, there are areas in which differences are also apparent. In the areas of Activity Type, Typical Lexis, Metaphors and Mechanics of Learning, the humanistic-adaptive, social-constructivist and critical-emancipatory discourses, emphasize partnership between the teacher and learners. With the humanistic-adaptive discourse, acceptance and understanding are the basis for the relationship with the child; where the teacher, by providing the appropriate conditions, allows the child to develop and grow in accordance with her/his own abilities (what Bruner (1999) would term native endowment). Thus, in connection with the mechanics of leaning, the role of the teacher is to “allow the child to be a child.” With the social-constructivist discourse, a similar form of partnership exists, **but** here the teacher takes on a more directive role, supporting the learner to understanding, where the learner “can do a lot but needs some help.” Similarly to the social-constructivist discourse, in the critical-emancipatory discourse, the teacher supports the learners towards



understanding. However, that understanding is now focused on developing awareness in the learner about the political grounding of knowledge and the surrounding world, as well as the learner's position with regard to it. Hence, the mechanics of learning is based upon "think for yourself – you have the right to do so." Indeed, returning once again to the areas of the Development of the Child and Creation of Knowledge, the critical-emancipatory discourse places emphasis on self-awareness in connection with critical thinking, a form of engagement that is not part of the other discourses. The greatest contrast with regard to the discourses, however, exists between functional-behaviourism and all of the others: functional-behaviourism conforms to external standards, is directed and tightly structured. It also expects learners to accumulate a given knowledge. This is in contrast to the other discourses that follow the needs of the learners and rely more upon their involvement with regard to abilities and interests in a personal exploration of the world with varying degrees of support.

In the practice of teaching, if the aim is to follow a particular discourse as an underlying "inspiration" for classroom activity, then the teacher needs to be aware of the "demands" of that discourse and that to mix the discourses may not produce the desired effects or actually be detrimental to the teaching-learning situation and what is trying to be achieved. For example, following the model of developmental-constructivism, if the teacher organizes experimental workshops with problem solving tasks, then the logic of this discourse dictates that the learners will be actively involved and that the role of the teacher is to set up what is needed and then let the learners "find out" for themselves – to create a path to understanding rather than follow a path (Klus-Stańska 2002: 221–252). In such a situation, it would be out of place to expect the learners to simply listen and learn, or follow the drill-correct-intervene scenario which is advocated for the functional-behaviourist discourse and which is very teacher controlled. Neither would the teacher work together with the learners to help them discover meaning as in the social-constructivist discourse, or uncover the political dimensions of

society and the need for engagement as with the critical-emanipatory discourse. In addition to this, and in connection with the functional-behaviourist and humanistic-adaptive discourses, the latter's focus on the personal attainment based upon the learner's personal capabilities and needs would be out of place in a discourse (functional-behaviourist) where the emphasis is on reaching the level of given standards of education: ones which are external to the learner.

However, at the present time, the most detrimental situation is the domination of the functional-behaviourist discourse in connection with the writing of education – the “production” of curricula, syllabuses and lesson plans. This is something that Klus-Stańska touches upon this in her alternative analysis of the practice of teaching, in which it is viewed not as an ordered and ordering discipline, but one where chaos is a defining characteristic (2010: 9). In her study, Klus-Stańska concentrates on the influences of behaviourism and constructivism on various didactic projects. Especially interesting for the purposes of this article, is Klus-Stańska's consideration of the way the practice of education is influenced by behaviourism and the way it creates a restrictive practice of teaching as a whole.

#### **4.1. The dominance of a functional-behaviourist discourse in the “writing” of education**

As Klus-Stańska describes it, behaviourism was born out of the positivist-modernist project, where it was believed the social sciences were similar to and could be carried out in a similar way to the natural sciences. For behaviourists, this meant that “the subject of psychological research is that which can be observed and measured” (Klus-Stańska 2010: 210 – translation MB), while the whole of human behaviour was seen to consist of “the relation ‘stimulus-reaction’, connected with the belief in total control over and predictability of human behaviour” (Klus-Stańska 2010: 210 – translation MB). In the field of education, these ideas connected with an instrumental conception of teaching, led to the creation of an educational model based on

the assumption that the behaviour of the learner can be controlled and in that way changed. It also resulted in propositions in the pursuit of that model<sup>1</sup>, as well as procedures and practices described in curricula and syllabuses, of which ultimately the lesson plan and how it is written is an important part. Klus-Stańska (2010: 218 – translation MB) writes: “A necessary but sufficient condition to achieve the given aims is a precise plan of action written using a language that describes observable activity (what the teacher says and does; what the pupils say and do in answer).” In addition to this, these propositions of behaviourism have become an integral part of the practice of teaching generally (Klus-Stańska 2010: 218), so that now the idea of the success is to what extent the teacher and pupils follow and achieve the aims set in curricula and syllabuses. Indeed, this way of working is so ingrained in teaching as a whole that student teachers on their practices are assessed positively and remarked upon favourably when they follow what is given in the curricula and syllabus, rather than reacting to the needs of the students and modifying their planned actions accordingly (Klus-Stańska 2010: 234–239). This, along with the ‘naïve’ adoption of the “precepts” of behaviourism, without understanding or realizing to the full their application, leads to frustration both on behalf of the teacher and pupils alike. A situation that inevitably leads to the pupils being blamed when things do not work out as planned (Klus-Stańska 2010: 252–253).

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<sup>1</sup> Klus-Stańska (2010: 217–253) gives ten propositions for the functional-behaviourist discourse which she then elucidates upon. The ten propositions are as follows (translation MB): 1. The main object of reflection and design in behavioristic instruction is the act of teaching; 2. The managerial role of the teacher is the basis of the teaching process; 3. The student's learning is in reaction to the teacher's activities; 4. Both teaching and learning are expressed in the performance of observable activities; 5. The observable activities of the student must follow a strictly defined pattern; 6. The learning material must be organized according to its elementary parts; 7. Every activity of the student should be controlled and reinforced; 8. Student mistakes are undesirable; 9. It is possible and advisable to precisely formulate educational goals expressed in terms of changes to behaviour; 10. A necessary and sufficient condition for achieving the goals is the exact implementation of the teaching plan.

Klus-Stańska restricts her comments to how functional-behaviourist discourse influences the writing of education (curricula, syllabuses, lesson plans) and how, consequently, lessons are viewed. However, at the present time, in a world of education governed by the neoliberal agenda, where measurable effects are all important (Potulicka 2012: 177–201), the functional-behaviourist discourse offers the favoured means of describing and assessing educational practice as a whole. This shows itself most clearly in the adoption of Bloom’s taxonomy, which is part of the “language that describes observable activity” mentioned by Klus-Stańska above.

#### **4.1.1. Bloom’s taxonomy – language that describes observable activity**

The taxonomy offered by Bloom was created to provide teachers greater precision in understanding the educational processes they were engaged in as well as to facilitate exchanges of information, especially in the areas of curriculum development and assessment. Originally, three domains were to be classified, the cognitive, affirmative and the psychomotor, although work on the final domain was never published. Of interest here is the cognitive domain.

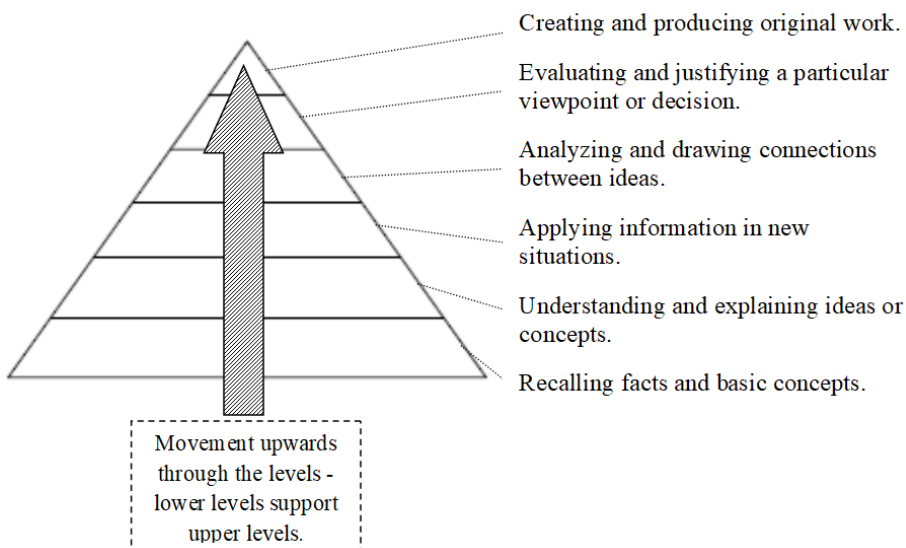
In the taxonomy for the cognitive domain as it was first developed there were six categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom et al. 1984: 201–207). These: “were ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Further, it was assumed that the original Taxonomy represented a cumulative hierarchy; that is, mastery of each simpler category was prerequisite to mastery of the next more complex one” (Krathwohl 2002: 212–213). In 2001 a revised version of the Taxonomy was published to provide a model that was more in keeping with advances of understanding with regard to education but also because of the fact that in relation to curriculum and testing too much emphasis was placed “on objectives requiring only recognition or recall of information, objectives that fall in the *Knowledge* category”

(Krathwohl 2002: 213). This was seen to be to the detriment of: “objectives that involve the understanding and use of knowledge, those that would be classified in the categories from *Comprehension* to *Synthesis*, that are usually considered the most important goals of education” (Krathwohl 2002: 213). The overall effect of this was the creation of a set of categories that would be more multi-dimensional in their application, to provide “a basis for moving curricula and tests toward objectives that would be classified in the more complex categories” (Krathwohl 2002: 213). As a result, the original categorizations were changed to: *Remember* – Retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory; *Understand* – Determining the meaning of instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic; *Apply* – Carrying out or using a procedure in a given situation; *Analyze* – Breaking material into its constituent parts and detecting how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose; *Evaluate* – Making judgments based on criteria and standards; *Create* – Putting elements together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product (Krathwohl 2002: 215).

In connection with the cognitive process dimension of the revised taxonomy, Krathwohl (2002: 215) believes it retains the hierarchical intent of the original (something he suggests might be supported by empirical evidence – see Anderson et al., 2001) in that it moves from less to more complex operations: for example, to remember poses less challenges than to understand, to understand is less challenging than to apply, and so on. Although, in connection with this, he suggests the revision allows for more flexibility, with movement between the categories being possible without adherence to a strict linear process: with *Understand*, for instance, the process of *Explaining* is deemed to be cognitively complex than *Executing*, which appears in the category of *Apply*.

#### 4.1.2. The taxonomy as a “Christmas tree” – arboreal model

In spite of the movement towards a more flexible framework, the revised taxonomy remains hierarchical and as such it can probably still be visualized in the form of a triangle consisting of six levels. At the base of the triangle the ability to recall facts and basic concepts is seen to underlie (support) all of the other five levels which are: to understand and be able to explain ideas or concepts, to apply information in new situations, to analyze and draw connections between ideas, to evaluate and justify a particular viewpoint or decision, and finally, creation, which includes the production of original work. This suggests movement up through the levels, where creation is at the apex of achievement supported by the other five levels, giving a “Christmas tree” arrangement – see Figure 1.



**Figure 1**

“Christmas tree” model – the revision of Bloom’s taxonomy as a linear and hierarchical model

### **4.1.3. The problem of “writing education” through the prism of Bloom’s taxonomy**

As was mentioned earlier, Bloom’s taxonomy (the original and the revision) were created with the intention of providing teachers with a tool to bring greater precision to their understanding of the educational processes they were involved in and to facilitate exchanges of information connected to curriculum development and assessment. However, when this way of writing education becomes the way of viewing it overall, harmful distortions may occur. As Gerd Mietzel (2002: 444) comments, after Rohwer and Sloane (1994), there are a number of reasons for a critical view with respect to the taxonomy. One is that there are as many taxonomies as there are disciplines, a situation which is made even more complex by the fact that each discipline covers different areas of knowledge and involves different processes. As a result of this, aims for teaching and learning need to take into account such diversity. Another reason is that the knowledge and skills in each of the disciplines are different, consequently, transfer may only occur when dealing with a problem in which the different disciplines are represented. Additionally, while some areas of teaching and their aims lend themselves to being placed in a hierarchy others do not. With regard to this last point, there are also approaches to teaching, such as learner-centered educational models – 2, 3, and 4 in Table 1 – that would appear to eschew hierarchical possibilities. In the following section, the developmental-constructivist discourse model is analyzed more closely in connection with the problems outlined above.

### **4.1.4. The application of Bloom’s taxonomic categories – rhizomic model**

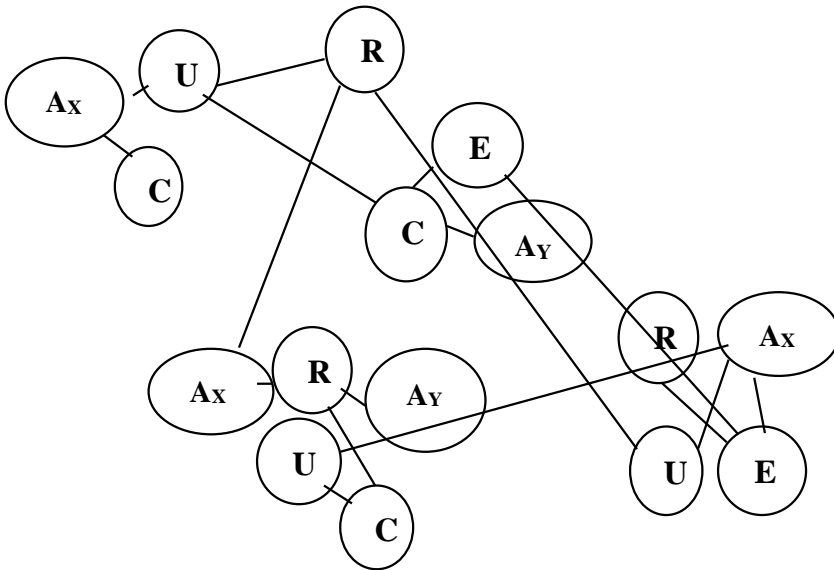
In connection with the model of the taxonomy shown above, contrary to functional-behaviourism, developmental-constructivist discourse has as its starting point individual creativity, where hypothesis making and testing are encouraged, along

with the active construction and reconstruction of models of thinking. This being so, the potential use of the taxonomy can no longer lie in the fact that it provides layers of achievement where the movement is from one level to another involving the acquisition of evermore advanced abilities which support and build upon one another. The developmental-constructivist approach foregoes this controlled and structured development. Learning is now “messy”, where there is room for trial and error, where individual hypotheses can be made and tested, and where thinking about a particular problem involves processes of building and rebuilding rather than being led in one direction towards one possible answer: a difference which, as was mentioned above can be conceptualised as following a path already laid out or creating the path for oneself (Klus-Stańska 2002: 221–252). In connection with this, the triangular model described above is made redundant. In its place a nodular model appears to be appropriate, where involvement and abilities once laid out in a linear and hierarchical scheme now become atomised and can affix to one another at random depending on the activity engaged in and the stage of its progress. Indeed, appropriating models elucidated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 23–24<sup>2</sup>), the developmental-constructivist approach can be viewed as rhizomic as opposed to arboreal (the “Christmas tree” model discussed earlier). Figure 2 shows a reinterpretation of Bloom’s taxonomy with regard to a nodular scheme representing developmental-constructivist activity in a classroom.

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<sup>2</sup> The page numbers given here are those in which the rhizome is summarized “in opposition” to the arboreal, although a fuller idea of these complex models is given by reading the whole of the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 3-28).





R = remembering, U = understanding, AX = applying, AY = analyzing, E = evaluating, C = creating

**Figure 2**

The developmental-constructivist approach viewed as a rhizome using the categories from Bloom's taxonomy

With this nodular, developmental-constructivist scheme, there are possibilities, of course, for the areas of cognitive activity that the Bloom taxonomy suggest. However, its more strictly hierarchical nature is lost. As a result, there is now a situation where, following the model above, creativity leads to application, application to understanding and understanding to either remembering or further creativity, and the routes which these connections consequently open up. In such a case, is the chosen language for the writing of educational practice, Bloom's taxonomy, adequate to describe (dictate) the processes resulting from a developmental-constructivist approach to teaching? And, if Bloom's scheme is applied to each of the other discourses, is the language of the taxonomy adequate to describe (dictate) the relations and processes that they propose? To provide considered

answers to these questions lies beyond the length and scope of this article. However, if Table 1 is viewed once again, it is noticeable that of the five discourses described, only functional-behaviourism advocates such a determined practice of teaching where learners submit themselves to an external logic. With the other discourses the learner is an integral part of a teaching-learning process in which their capabilities and needs are taken into consideration.

But there is, perhaps, an even more fundamental question: can language as a whole actually represent the practice of teaching?

### **5. Writing education – instrumental and post-critical relations**

Piotr Zamojski (2015) proposes a new space for philosophizing<sup>3</sup> about education that moves beyond instrumental and critical relations to an area he designates as a post-critical relation. In connection with Zamojski's "exercise in thought"<sup>4</sup>, an outline of the instrumental relation is given as an example of a type in which philosophizing about education dictates the action of education. This is done to provide a contrast to the post-critical relation, in which Zamojski questions whether the action of education can (should) actually result from theorizing and writing about it (for example, the discourses which Klus-Stańska describes). Instead, he proposes that philosophy can only make

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<sup>3</sup> As described by Zamojski (2015), philosophy can be the mastering of a professional set of knowledge (133) or a process of thinking (145). In the instrumental relation the emphasis is on a professional set of knowledge leading to theories to be implemented. In the post-critical relation, the emphasis is placed on the act of being involved in the process. In this case, the philosophizing that occurs is about the space that is opened up for thought. In connection with education, this translates into a space for action. Thus, as is described in this section, the philosophy of the instrumental relation leads to theories and procedures to be implemented, while in the post-critical relation a space for action that is not pre-determined is offered.

<sup>4</sup> Zamojski describes his discursive article as "an exercise in thought" after Arendt's (2006) suggested procedure for gaining deeper insight into a particular issue.

suggestions about the space in which the educational encounter will occur, not dictate what should happen there.

The instrumental relation resulted from the project to understand the causal relationships which govern the world and to make science and rational thought the basis for modern society. It also resulted from the need for a state controlled education system to help society adapt to the rapid changes brought about by the industrial revolution – one of the “successes” of the application of science – as well as contribute to its further development. This meant that education on a national scale was needed, while the theorizing and writing linked to that education was to provide instrumental guidance – to say ‘what to do’ in the form of guidelines and instructions. In such a case, as Zamojski (2015: 132) writes: “philosophy gives practical guidelines to educational practice, [...] it functions as a legislator for this practice.” More fully, it “has the status of an exponent of the truth, it is [...] the beginning and the highest ideal for all educational practice [...] Thus, philosophy sets norms which cannot be undermined, which should be realized, incorporated into the body of practice” (Zamojski 2015: 133). In line with this, the primary aim of the activity of education is to satisfy the needs of the philosophy that inform it. As such, educational practice is a “manageable process”, “a purely executive activity”, where “The practitioner’s task is [...] to act according to authoritative procedures, [...] [to be] an executor and not a creator of her own practice” (Zamojski 2015: 134). This, in turn, leads to a reification of the educational process, one which is dehumanized and where procedures are technical and repetitive and, importantly, implemented to produce particular effects derived from theory and the writing of education.

On from the instrumental relation, and in a number of ways standing in opposition to it, is the post-critical relation. In its relation of philosophy to educational practice, “theory [...] [is] a rationality of action, a horizon of educational practice [...] as a practice of thinking, [it] enters into a relation with educational practice, it creates a space for it to happen” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In addition to this, and importantly, in the post-critical

relation, “The horizon which creates thinking, can be managed in different ways” (Zamojski 2015: 144). Consequently, and unlike the instrumental relation, philosophy does not say ‘what to do’ with regard to education, rather it provides conceptualizations for a space and the time to experience and become involved in thinking. It is “an area for acting which gives the possibility to initiate [...] a kind of explicitly marked empty space which is yet to be filled or managed by educational practitioners” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In the post-critical relation, therefore, philosophy does not dictate what should be done and how it should be done over and above the people who are engaged in the educational process. It gives the practitioners the opportunity to find their own way in the process and discover meanings that are important to them: it provides “a space in which everyone has a chance to come into presence in [their own] unique way [italics as in original – MB]” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In this situation, therefore, the philosophy of education is not the educational practice, although it constantly tries

to impose itself on the practitioners. However, this imposition is a far more intimate relation than a directive instruction [...]. The theory offers itself as the logic of the practitioners’ action. This means that **the sense of practice, or telos of education does not lie in its effects, nor in its curriculum, nor in what justifies it, but in the way it happens** [emphasis MB][...]. The most important concern of educational practitioners is thus what happens between people while they act. Exactly this concern frames the way of understanding old and new answers to the question ‘what is education?’. Regardless of what is their claim on education, in the post-critical type they make sense only if they can be conceived of as rationalities of action, as symbolic horizons in which there is an opportunity to act meaningfully with others. (Zamojski 2015: 145–146)

The post-critical relation, therefore, places the action that occurs in the educational exchange at the very heart of what education is, while the theorizing and writing of education is an attempt to understand the actions that take place. Additionally,

these actions are always in the form of “inter-actions”, as the educational exchange is prefigured as a meaningful exchange that takes place between people, not the implementation of a set of written procedures that produce predictable results and where it is the individual in contact with those procedures that is the primary form of engagement.

## **6. Conclusion**

Looking at the situation outlined above, the question arises of whether the “favoured” language chosen to describe educational practice as a whole is actually adequate to the task. On the one hand, if education is seen to be a culturally situated process whose purpose is to prepare learners to engage with the wider world (Klus-Stańska 2002: 390), then the practices it engages with ought to be adequate to providing those learners with the means to function successfully in that world. Consequently, if the contemporary world is viewed to be dynamic, where former certainties no longer hold (Beck 2003), then education needs to be responsive to this. It should promote approaches that do not only replicate what already exists or has indeed passed, but encourage learners to continuously engage with what is present in the “here and now” and to construct meaning adequate to the present time to move into the future. The writing of educational practice in terms of functional-behaviourism, would appear to run the danger of locking learners into a rationalist framework in which they will seek somebody else’s truth – to follow a path that has already been laid out – rather than searching for their own path. Over and above this, the rationalization and schematization of the education process that an unquestioning application of a model grounded in functional-behaviourism creates, runs the risk of preparing learners to become uncritical and easily absorbed into prevailing tendencies. In accordance with Potulicka and Rutkowiak (2012), this might be the unthinking consumerism promoted by corporations and a neoliberal agenda. It might also lead to a situation where the democratic project that Habermas (1987) envisaged, where individual life-worlds

partake in the advancement of society, as well as Dewey's (1966) belief in education to facilitate that project, are abandoned for other forms of government (Fukuyama 1992: 13–38)<sup>5</sup>, or even other forms of democracy (Fukuyama 1992: 314–315)<sup>6</sup>, in which the majority of individuals and their influence on the advances to be made are less clear or even non-existent.

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<sup>5</sup> Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, was written at a time of great changes in the world politically and socially, and at a point where liberal democracy appeared to be "succeeding" in relation to other forms of government. In the two chapters that are referred to in this citation, *The Weakness of Strong States I* and *The Weakness of Strong States II*, Fukuyama describes countries and forms of government that had been "unsuccessful" in relation to liberal democracy, i.e. they had turned away from the forms of government they previously had – totalitarian, authoritarian – and adopted liberal democracy (see also the table *Liberal Democracies Worldwide* – Fukuyama 1992: 49-50). The different types of government he writes about in these two chapters are what I am thinking about above when I write "other forms of government".

<sup>6</sup> Fukuyama believes liberal democracy is more likely to change – to "be subverted internally" (Fukuyama 1992: 314) – by an excess of *megalothymia* (an excess feeling of individual greatness). Recent events in the USA and President Trump, would appear to show what is possible with regard to this.

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**Professional identity shifts of academic  
teachers in response to recent  
(g)local critical incidents:  
Preliminary research results**

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**Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic, 2020-2022, has been defined as a turning point and possibly a critical incident (Tripp 1993) for the workstyle, professional well-being, and quality of work of thousands of academics worldwide. This type of uncontrolled, unexpected, and multifaceted event: political (procedural and administrative), biological (coronavirus inflicted deaths) and cultural (normative), has never before been experienced by the contemporary generation of professionally active academic teachers. As we assume in the presented research findings, two years of a global lockdown and the implementation of regulations which have had a destabilizing effect, must have affected the dynamics of *identity shifts* experienced by this professional community. Paradoxically, however, alongside this, endless possibilities have opened up for new research concerning the hardship experienced during the adaptation undertaken to deal with global and local (g/local) socio-cultural changes in policy and work conditions in academia. One such

study, led by two co-researchers at the University of Gdańsk, shall be introduced and partially described in the following text. Selected findings shall also be demonstrated and tentative conclusions drawn.

### **Keywords**

identity shifts, academic nexus of multi-membership, professional development, engaged teaching

## **Przesunięcia w tożsamości profesjonalnej nauczycieli akademickich w odpowiedzi na (g)lokalne wydarzenia krytyczne: Wstępne wyniki badań**

### **Abstrakt**

Pandemia Covid-19 w latach 2020–2022 została zdefiniowana jako punkt zwrotny i prawdopodobnie incydent krytyczny (Tripp 1993) dla kondycji psychofizycznej oraz stylu i jakości pracy tysięcy naukowców na całym świecie. Tego typu niekontrolowanego, nieoczekiwanego i wieloaspektowego zwrotu politycznego (proceduralno-administracyjnego), biologicznego (zgony spowodowane koronawirusem) i kulturowego (normatywnego) współczesne pokolenie aktywnych zawodowo nauczycieli akademickich nigdy wcześniej nie doświadczyło. Zakładamy w przedstawionych w artykule wynikach badań, że 2 lata globalnego lockdownu i wdrażania regulacji o destabilizującym wpływie na codzienność zawodową wpłynęły na dynamikę *zmian tożsamościowych* doświadczanych przez społeczność akademicką. Zarazem otworzyły się nieskończone możliwości dla nowych badań dotyczących trudności doświadczanych podczas adaptacji podjętej w celu radzenia sobie z globalnymi i lokalnymi (tj. g/lokalnymi) zmianami w warunkach pracy w środowisku akademickim. Jedno z takich badań w swoim cząstkowym wymiarze i ograniczone do jednego z polskich uniwersytetów przedstawione zostaje przez autorów poniższego tekstu.

## **Słowa kluczowe**

zmiany tożsamości, akademickie ogniwo wieloprzynależności, rozwój zawodowy, nauczanie zaangażowane

### **1. Introduction of leading categories and conceptual research framework**

Defining academic *identity* provides many options when it comes to scholarly approaches to this multidimensional, theoretical concept in the educational setting. Almost every research discipline in the humanities and social sciences has developed its own contextualisation for the term *identity*. Many of them refer to the sociological works of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of “cultural capital” as a value which is built up in education. For example, Bonny Norton (2013) did this in her attempts “to integrate poststructuralist conceptions of identity and human agency by developing a construct [...] called ‘investment’” (Norton 2013: 2, Norton and Toohey 2011). She elaborated on the notion of motivation and literacy in the area of speaking a foreign language, understanding literacy as an overly complex social practice of exchange (of facts and ideas) aiming at gaining more agency in the educational context and, in this way enhancing one’s own and the learner’s cultural and social capital, but also reaching out to develop their **identity through literacy**. In the context of Academia, the research on teachers’ identities and their shifts includes the analyses by Bourdieu in his famous *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu 1984). Betcher and Trowler (2001) also investigated this notion in the context of disciplinary identities and the conditions of their possible alterations. Van Lanveld et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of fifty-nine research reports devoted to the issue of academic teachers’ identity shifts and development. Their synthesis showed that the quality of contacts with students as well as staff development programmes contributed to the clarification and strengthening of teachers identities (2017: 328–331). This report also presents identity shifts

as phenomena that are far from smooth processes. On the psychological level, there are five processes that play significant roles in the processes of both building the identity and changing it: “a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of commitment and imagining a future career trajectory” (2017: 325).

As we need, however, to limit our choice to the context of academic reality and our research aims, we refer to the *social theory of learning* and *situated learning* (cf. Wenger 1998), which also relates to the theories of identity developed by Norton (2013) and Luke (1977). “As Luke (1997) notes, while earlier psychological perspectives conceived of literacy as the acquisition of particular behaviors, cognitive strategies, and linguistic processing skills, more recent insights from ethnography, cultural studies, and feminist theory have led to increasing recognition that literacy is not only a skill to be learned, but a practice that is socially constructed and locally negotiated” (cf. Norton 2013: 2). The social theory of learning focuses more on the interactional and relational aspects of learning and teaching more than the purely cognitive, with regard to the individual aptitudes of a human being as iconically defined, for example, by Piaget. Thus, the framing of *identity* shall be viewed as a pulsating pattern “of several negotiated meanings of our experience of membership in social communities” (Wenger 1998: 145). Following Wenger’s idea, we must also view it through the prism of a dynamic *learning trajectory* (which is like a constant social interplay of the social roles performed (cf. Goffman 2008) during which academic teachers experience and co-construct and re-construct their specific *nexus of multi-membership*. This metaphorical entity, also recalled by Wenger, provides an adequate conceptualization of what happens today with shifts of social and personal identity constructs of academics in their processes of *social learning*. Not only has global lockdown and the transfer to online teaching enforced the reorganization of their professional lives, but it has also effected their private territories. Social interaction face to face has been challenged by a mediated contact, which

shed new light on digital literacy levels or – even if this was not a problem – a new affective (emotional) and cognitive (rational) attitude towards a teaching/learning process and its subjects. Teaching practice has become dispersed and represented through multiple, usually individual, approaches, methods, tools, and channels of communication, which on the one hand greatly accelerated the teachers' methodological creativity, but on the other hand, opened up new grounds for their malfunctioning. It needs to be remembered that the *academic nexus of multi-membership* of academic teachers includes not only their teaching activities, but also running research projects, doing administrative tasks, and, very meaningfully to our analysis, initiating or continuing their *professional development*. Grant winning and bureaucratic accountability, being a result of neoliberal research funding mechanisms, adds even more to doubling or tripling of the above mentioned workload in different and new contexts. Faced with such a scope of identity related complexity, it is important to go into more depth about some categories which constitute the “floating character” of the contemporary *academic nexus of multi-membership*. This is done to give a conceptual framework to the research project introduced below.

First, it must be noted that all these academic practices, although performed autonomically, are never isolated from social interactions and practices of others in the academic community. Hence, *situated learning* appears as a natural context for academic work. Especially, when we understand it as a “transitory concept, a bridge, between a view according to which cognitive processes [...] are primary and a view according to which social practice is the primary, generative phenomenon, and learning is one of its characteristics” (Lave and Wenger 1991: 34). Wenger based his model of learning on the interaction between **practice, meaning, community** and **identity**. If we view teaching as a correlate of learning (disregarding any direction of dominance and without prioritizing), we must also see teaching as a highly meaningful, social acti-

vity which incorporates the creation of identity (of those who are subjected to teaching and those who teach).

Consequently, socially marked *situated learning*, as constitutive to teaching, needs some more identifying descriptors and representations, which we have turned into framing categories for our research results analysis. Again, to limit the discussion only to categories contributing to our research, we recall **self-reflection** (Schoen 1983). Because our empirical research, described and introduced in more detail in part 2 of this chapter, aimed, among other things, to measure such phenomena as *Teaching Satisfaction*, *Self-Perception of Didactic Success/Failure* and *Self-evaluation of own Competencies*, **self-reflection** is to our mind a pre-condition to any academic activity. It relates directly to the next subjects of analysis: *Models of Self-education and Professional Development*, covered by research but not included in the present analysis. There is no other way to assess whether teachers experience success or failure if they do not reflect upon their own practice in the exchange of feedback with students and colleagues. A teacher's own professional competencies can be subjected to constant re-evaluation and self-reflection once the teacher is ready to receive and adequately provide feedback based upon the merits of what has been achieved. Thus, *self-reflection* becomes a natural habit and *professional development* turns into a mindset.

We label the *nexus of multi-membership* with the additional category of **Engaged Teaching**. Not disregarding *Self-reflection*, we dare to assume that *Engaged Teaching* is even more sensitive to geopolitical and health related (Covid-19) critical incidents. Hence, we make it a framing category for analysing phenomena such as *Sources of professional support*, *Need for didactic training* and, very importantly, the way teachers view the *Role of research they do for the quality of their teaching*. This is a delicate area of academic activity which is mostly exposed to ideological clashes between neoliberal demands calling for being both a good researcher and a teacher, as well as the cognitive and affective need for consonance between internal (motivational) and external (institutional) pressure to

constantly professionalize teaching skills and research achievements. All this has been drastically challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, which changed the form of education without changing the level of demands and thus enhanced the dissonance experienced **while shifting academic identities**.

*Engaged Teaching* constitutes a meaningful framing category for one major reason: the levels of engagement of academics (cognitive and emotional) with teaching may vary due to their very individual responsiveness to (1) the institutional policy at the university, and (2) the group dynamics in the local *communities of practice*. The aforementioned *social theory of learning* draws on the essentiality of social interaction with all the other agents related to teaching. This interaction may be with students or other teachers (and even non-human objects), depending on the organisational policy and local culture of studying. One way or another, to operate in the fields of emotional energy (EE; Collins 2011), which affects sense-making, there needs to be constant reflection on what else is needed to be a member of a particular *community of practice* and an agent in a particular field of emotional energy (EE). To follow this approach, however, it is important to inquire whether teachers subjectively need more didactic training to self-assess as competent teachers.

Last but not least, *Engaged Teaching* appears a worthy category for another reason: the Humboldtian university model, of which Polish Higher Education (HE) seems to be highly respectful, values the relation between teaching and research highly. We share this approach and believe that for meaningful teaching the educator-researcher needs to make research in their field and share (or even better co-produce) new scientific developments with their students. In this we agree with Teresa Bauman, who wrote that being a researcher is a condition for being an academic teacher and that “nobody starts working in academia to teach students but to explore the world” (Bauman 2011: 6).

**Table 1**  
Framing categories vs researched categories

FRAMING CATEGORIES	RESEARCHED CATEGORIES
Self-reflection	Teaching Satisfaction
	Self-perception of Didactic Success and Failure
	Self-evaluation of own Competencies
Engaged Teaching	Need for Didactic Training
	Role of Research for Engaged Teaching

## **2. Elements of HE policy and demographic turns in Poland as conducive to the identity shifts of academic teachers**

Our research was conducted in 2022 among academic teachers at the University of Gdańsk. In order to ground our research, in some historically meaningful perspective, we decide to briefly sketch out the recent macro-social context of HE in Poland. Our longitudinal, comparative study consisted of two stages. The first part was conducted in 2009 by the late professor Teresa Bauman (Bauman 2011) and the second one, as presented here, in the year 2022. Over this period of time, more than a decade, a number of significant factors have greatly changed the landscape of academic education, critical incidents such as Covid-19 and the 2.0 Constitution for Science Higher Education (HE) Reform being dominant. However, to understand the grounds for the shifts in academic identity we need to go back to 1989, when Poland regained freedom, implemented democratic governing and accepted the free-market economy. A crucial part of the changing picture of HE was also demographic in nature.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the number of students in Poland stood at around four hundred thousand (400 000), and most of them were full-time students. The total number of students was significantly lower than in other European societies, so one of the first ambitions of the newly elected



governments was to make higher education as accessible as possible to anyone willing to study. As a result, in 1993, the Polish government passed a bill allowing private entrepreneurs to establish educational institutions – including private colleges and universities. At that time, it was unquestioned that HE may serve as a “lever” to provide a “better-off” life. Graduation from a HE institution was considered a *sine qua non* condition if one wanted to achieve success in a market-driven, neoliberal reality. In 1998 the number of students in Poland (by the gross enrolment index for HE) had tripled. Accordingly, the number of HE institutions rapidly grew. From 2000 until the moment of the first stage of our research in 2009, the number of HE institutions grew by nearly 50 % (2003–2012 – 46 % increase), including over 450 colleges, universities, and other higher education institutions. Two-thirds of them were not state led but were either non-governmental business entities or belonged to religious associations (usually the catholic church). In 2004 there were more than two million people studying in Poland, and the gross enrolment index for HE was one of the highest in OECD countries.<sup>1</sup>

This phenomenal growth had, naturally, both positive and negative consequences. Egalitarian social fractions emphasized the role of HE in building a mature democracy, civic society and competitiveness on a global job market in knowledge-based EU societies (and beyond). The more elitist perspective underlined the decrease of HE quality, especially in the context of academic teaching, types of requirements and the lowering of studying conditions. The competencies of academic staff were not properly verified and holding a number of posts in several HE institutions at the same time was not rare for many academics. In addition to this, the institutional facilities were at times far from optimal: sometimes they did not even provide a small library. It cannot be disregarded, moreover, that the total number of stu-

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<sup>1</sup> Source: (<https://thinkco.pl/liczba-studentow-w-polsce/>).

dents reaching more than 2 million in 2005 was achieved thanks to the enrolment of part-time or extramural students.

Due to the above complex reasons, demographic ones included, this 2004–2005 peak started to “go down” slowly by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in Poland, settling at 1.2 million students in 2018/2019 (while the number of institutions was still growing). This fact seemed to have created a situation which we could call favourable for the first round of research introduced in this paper and conducted in 2009. In a noticeably brief period (5 years) one quarter of the total number of students “evaporated” and numerous HE institutions started to compete even more fiercely to attract candidates. The quality of academic teaching became a “buzz word” both in informal conversations, organizational policies as well as in formal political decisions. In 2005, an important bill on HE was passed and a market driven, job oriented, accountable, high quality HE was postulated, thus meeting the standards of the EU Higher Education Area, and correlating Polish HE even more to global solutions and aims. In other words, the first research “snapshot” was taken when it became clear that academic teaching was particularly important for the universities to survive both locally and globally, meeting global, or at least European, requirements of various stakeholders. In relation to this, the academic teaching competences of teachers became as important as their research results, and legal state regulations at international, national and local levels, focused on the necessity to master didactic excellence. At this particular turning point, research into the diverse aspects of this excellence and levels of teachers’ self-reflection upon their teaching practices became the target of interest for the research undertaken by Teresa Bauman in 2009.

The 2022 research stage, as run by the co-authors of this chapter, has been marked by a student decrease to slightly less than 1.2 million people, which in comparison to 2010 means a fall of around 34 %. As a result of this, Polish universities need to pay attention to the quality of academic education more than before, but for apparently different reasons. At the same time,

teachers are faced with a growing multiplication of demands and requirements: their scientific production and high fidelity research are the main factors for their prestigious position in the field and their institutional evaluation as researchers, while they are also expected to perform high quality and engaged teaching. This multitude of roles: of a productive researcher and publisher, a beneficiary of grants, a dedicated academic teacher as well as a public distributor of scientific knowledge define the academic *nexus of multi-membership* identity in the Poland of today.

### **3. Research methodology and selected findings**

As has been mentioned, the research as a whole consisted of two rounds, both at the University of Gdańsk. The first round was completed in 2009 and the second in early 2022. The sampling scheme was in both cases non-randomized, quota sampling. The sample comprised between 222 academic teachers in 2009 and 279 in 2022. The samples consisted of academic teachers at various levels of their academic careers and from all eleven faculties present at the researched university. The main research tool was a questionnaire with a similar number of both open and closed questions, all of which asked detailed questions, possible to be grouped during analysis according to the Framing Categories and Researched Categories shown in Table 1. The questionnaire was distributed in paper form in 2009 and in an online form in 2022. The findings were analysed using a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The closed questions were analysed statistically by their occurrence, while the open-ended questions were semantically coded and categorized by fitting the researched categories as described. Tentative conclusions have been drawn based upon deep insight into the observed numbers and frequency of qualitative answers. For this article, the findings related to five selected researched categories will be presented and discussed (Table 1). The choice of the relevant questions has been arbitrarily made by the authors and was agreed upon based on their close proximity to the aim

of this chapter. This aim was to highlight the complexity of academic identity shifts in the times of critical turns experienced globally and locally in recent years.

Within the researched category of *Self-reflection* we briefly discuss the answers to the questions related to:

- Feeling of Teaching Satisfaction
- Self-perception of didactic success
- Self-evaluation of own Teaching Competencies

Within the framework of *Engaged Teaching* we discuss the answers to the questions related to:

- Need for Didactic Training
- The Meaning of Research for Engaged Teaching

The types of questions within the research categories taken into consideration, along with the quantitative analysis of answers, are given in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Selected quantitative research results  
in the 2009 and 2022 rounds

<b>RESEARCH CATEGORIES</b>	<b>Answers in 2009/2010</b>	<b>Answers in 2021/2022</b>
<b>(1) Teaching Satisfaction</b> Q: how often does teaching give you satisfaction?	Always 28 % Often 56 % Sometimes 15 % Usually/rather not 1 %	28 % 48 % 21 % 2.5 %
<b>(2) Self-perception of Didactic Success</b>	Open ended	Open ended

<p><b>(3) Self-evaluation of own Teaching Competencies</b> Q1: How do you assess your own didactic knowledge?</p>	<p>as very good 23 % as good 61 % as good enough 13 % as not satisfactory 0.4 %</p>	<p>31 % 46 % 19 % 3.5 %</p>
<p>Q2: How do you assess yourself as an academic teacher?</p>	<p>excellent 2 % very good 25 % good 69 % not good enough 4 %</p>	<p>1 % 35 % 61 % 2 %</p>
<p><b>(4) Need for Didactic Training</b></p>	<p>(Q 2009: declarations to take didactic/pedagogical courses) 66 %</p>	<p>(Q 2022: should university provide didactic training?) Yes: 93 % There is no need: 7 %</p>
<p><b>(5) Role of Research for Engaged Teaching</b> (Q: Research ....)</p>	<p>... does not affect teaching 13 % ... helps to teach 72.5 % ... impedes teaching 23 % *</p>	<p>14 % 55.5 % 30 %</p>

\* the more than 100 % result to this question stems from the fact that 22 persons indicated a double factor (research both helps and impedes teaching) (Bauman 2011: 131).

#### 4. Discussion

- (1) It has been preliminarily observed that the levels of **Teaching Satisfaction**, measured by the indication of the frequency adverbs, turned out to be comparable in 2009 and 2022. However, a slightly lowered frequency occurs in the answers “often” against a growth in “sometimes,” which might suggest that **teaching satisfaction shows a tendency towards a slight lowering over the last decade**. This appears to be the case, especially when we consider the

growth by 1.5 % in the indications of “usually/rather not”. This result is not a surprise if we consider all the above mentioned changes related to the HE state reforms in Poland, by which productivity in publications and research are more valued, as well as the pandemic crisis and the chaos connected to the growing demands put on teachers to meet the challenges of their multi-layered duties with regard to their positions.

- (2) **Self-perception of didactic success** requires a qualitative analysis of answers to the open – ended questions asked in the survey. In the future we intend to make a thorough comparison of the results and for this aim to consider in detail the parameters enlisted by Teresa Bauman in 2009. Here we can only indicate that the parameters for success which appeared dominant in both research stages were (a) appreciation shown by the students during their chosen courses and (b) success of students in their further education or professional lives. Some new categories of success appeared uniquely in the research round of 2022. They seem to relate directly to the Covid-19 pandemic and accountability related requirements: (c) online teaching challenges and (d) overload with administrative tasks.
- (3) **Self-evaluation of own teaching competencies** provides evidence for an unstable self-assessment performed by teachers in this year round of research. On the one hand, they seemed to assess their own competencies as higher than the respondents 13 years ago, as a growth in the descriptor “very good” is noticeable (by 8 %). On the other hand, 15 % fewer teachers have labelled their skills as “good”, a few more as “not good enough” and markedly more (by 3.1 % more) believed their skills were “not satisfactory”. This picture shows a divided opinion among 2022 respondents: 31 % of teachers trust their competencies and claim they are “very good”, almost a half say they are “good”, but still approximately one quarter are not so sure about their

teaching competencies (good enough or not satisfactory). 13 years ago many more teachers claimed they were “good” and significantly fewer seemed to be dissatisfied with themselves. **This might suggest that that the level of self-confidence in this matter has become lower over a decade**, which may again originate in situating teaching alongside the range of many other duties performed by teachers or other socio-cultural aspects such as the generation gap or differences in students’ expectations.

The variance of this result grows even more if we look at the remarkable growth of teachers’ self-assessment in the question about self-evaluation as a teacher. 10 % more teachers in 2022 indicated that they were “very good” teachers. Slightly less claimed to feel “good” or “not good enough.” Would it be too risky to conclude that the growth in feeling “very good teachers” along with the lowering feeling of having “good” teaching skills suggests that being a good teacher does not relate – to the teachers’ minds – to teaching excellence in academia? To what does it relate? Does it have anything to do with the connection of research with teaching and vice versa? And how does it reflect in the need for didactic training then and now?

- (4) **Need for didactic training** appeared to have changed most evidently over the years. The analysis performed by Teresa Bauman in 2009 (2011: 84) represented a hybrid methodological approach (Jendza 2017), as she collected numbers of declarations to participate in various courses, didactic ones being among them. The overall number of declarations Bauman achieved in connection with the mastering of academic skills in terms of teaching and pedagogy was 147, which gave 66 % of the entire population tested (although, without a guarantee that this is the number of persons, as some pointed to a few types of courses, and some did not indicate anything). This number could be compared, however, to the “yes” responses to the question in 2022, as to whether the university should provide didactic training: 260 out of 279,

which suggests that 93 % of teachers consider this as important and would potentially take part. **This data allows the claim to be made that there is a remarkable change in the declarative need for didactic training if compared with the situation 13 years previously.** If we combine this result with the lowered self-trust of teachers in their own teaching skills and parallel (paradoxical?) high self-assessment as “very good teachers,” we are led to a possible conclusion that **training courses are beginning to be viewed as a good (and easy?) way to professionalize.** On the other hand, this might equally well be a side effect of a neoliberal policy which calls for collecting credentials and mastering new skills to catch up with growing demands of new regulations/students’ needs/labour market requirements etc.

- (5) **Role of research for engaged teaching** is a researched category which appears controversial, taken as the climax of the neoliberal policy development at Polish universities. All the academics experienced an overload of administrative tasks related to grant applications, report writing, quantified and parametric ways of evaluating their teaching and publishing activities. This controversy is by no means new, as it was discussed in the academic milieu as early as the nineteen-twenties. At that time, academics agreed unquestionably that teaching rather negatively affected research activity (Bauman 2011: 130). The millennial discussions around the year 2000, changed this view in Europe towards a Humboldtian model, where teaching and researching need a balanced approach. Both research rounds in 2009 and 2022 proved that this controversy continues, but the majority of teachers in both rounds claimed that doing research helps to teach (and viewed this dependency positively). In comparison, several percent of respondents do not see any relation between their research and teaching in both samples. If we are to observe tendencies over the last decade, however, **nowadays the number of those who view this relationship as helpful has decreased by 20 % when**



**compared to 2009, whereas those who believe that research impedes teaching has grown by 7 %.**

This result blurs the optimistic, provisional conclusion that the advantage of the postmillennial academic situation is the direct connection of teaching and research. The complexity of the educational field over the last two decades in Poland suggests that academics often experience the phenomenon of *decoupling* in their careers. This is one of the potential metaphors for their continuous necessity to readjust and re-create their *nexus of multi-membership* in academia.

## 5. Conclusions

The article aimed at presenting selected results of empirical research concerning the identity shifts of academic teachers who are faced with critical incidents such as the global Covid-19 pandemic and the politically induced transformation of HE institutions in Poland. The authors have chosen only a few research categories for presentation, as the whole, elaborate longitudinal study requires a wider and longer analysis of the results. The results presented above have, however, shed some light on aspects which relate to academic teachers' job satisfaction, self-evaluation of their teaching skills and the declared need for professional development. A "good teacher" profile, as parts of the presented research show, is that of a teacher whose academic success is mostly defined by the success and appreciation of their students. It is an academic who believes her/himself to be a "very good" teacher although s/he does not feel fully competent didactically, although s/he is aware that training in this field will help her/him to professionalize. Hence, s/he declares a need to participate in diverse professional teaching courses. The academic of 2022 seems to separate research activities from teaching more than the decade earlier, which does not exclude her/his belief in the positive impact of one over the other. This *decoupling*, which appears on many levels, seems to be the outcome of institutional policy and govern-

mental regulations, which have introduced a 'set of schizophrenic rules of the game' into the university of today: ones which promote the development of didactic skills through diverse national (e.g. Masters of Didactics or Didactic Excellence of HE Institutions) and international projects, motivate to professionalize through training courses, conferences and workshops, but at the same time do not provide space, time and funding for a qualitative combination of both research and teaching. Academic teachers are pushed into living a form of institutionally chameleonic life: they must frequently shift their social identities and are increasingly self-reflective about this process. This self-reflection is a double-edged sword, as it may lead either to a spectacular academic career or to a decision to quit the university. Critical incidents and turns, as we experience them nowadays, appear to pose challenges for the academic community all over Poland and may result in another, serious transformation of HE institutions.

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**A few words about dignity:  
An introspective study of  
a person with disability**

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**Abstract**

In the article, I present issues of presence, existential absence, and the sense of dignity of a person with a disability. I present these issues for the first time and attempt to show disability “from within”, a perspective to which I am no stranger as I myself am disabled.

The issues of presence, absence and human dignity have always fascinated me. Hence, in this text, they are “filtered” through my dramatic and sometimes even traumatic personal experiences. In conveying these experiences, I never forget what human existence should be – the fact that there should be dignity, presence and being. Is my human experience marked by this? At some point in the text I make a “moral accusation” in connection with this issue. Additionally, I have never forgotten (and will never forget) the person who helped me to “reborn” for myself, people and the world. “The significant person and her achievement in relation to the author” is my modest expression of gratitude to someone because of whom I LIVE. However, the central points of reference in this text are questions of *human dignity* and *presence*. They form its axis and are its guiding categories of analysis. I conclude by stating that these are important, even essential issues

in order to understand the phenomenon of what it is to be human. And to be unique in that humanity.

The main research question which I pose is the following: **Does society see that people with disabilities have dignity? Furthermore, the thesis I propose and which I believe arises from this question is: society has little recognition of the dignity of people with disabilities.** More specific research questions will be quoted below in the text which, in terms of methodology, has been written using an auto-ethnographic approach (Wolcott 2004, Kacperczyk 2014, Urbańska 2012). The choice of this highly qualitative methodology was guided by the assumption that autoethnography allows a subjective presentation of specific fragments of those events inscribed in the category of *human dignity* described here. This will be an analytical autoethnography, after Canagarajah (2012), because through writing I analyze the emotional, mental and situational states that I have had to face in the past, while some of the experiences that generated these states resonate with me to the present. Last but not least, it is my hope that my openly described states of mind will contribute to some betterment of this particular area of human existence in its extremely important, social and cultural dimensions.

### **Keywords**

disability syndrome, presence, absence, dignity, moral accusation, autopoiesis, paradoxes, deed, Deus.

## **O godności słów kilka: Introspektywne studium osoby z niepełnosprawnością**

### **Abstrakt**

W artykule przedstawiam zagadnienia obecności, egzystencjalnej nieobecności oraz poczucia godności osoby niepełnosprawnej. Przedstawiam te zagadnienia po raz pierwszy i staram się pokazać niepełnosprawność "od wewnątrz", perspektywę, która nie jest mi obca, ponieważ sama jestem niepełnosprawna.

Kwestie obecności, nieobecności i godności ludzkiej zawsze mnie fascynowały. Stąd w tym tekście są one "filtrowane" przez moje dramatyczne, a czasem wręcz traumatyczne osobiste przeżycia. Przekazując te doświadczenia, nigdy nie zapominam, jaka powinna być ludzka egzystencja – o tym, że powinna istnieć godność, obecność i istnienie. Czy moje ludzkie doświadczenie jest tym naznaczone? W pewnym momencie tekstu wysuwam "moralne oskarżenie" w związku z tą kwestią. Ponadto nigdy nie zapomniałam (i nigdy nie zapomnę) osoby, która pomogła mi "odrodzić się" dla siebie, ludzi i świata. "Znacząca osoba i jej osiągnięcie w stosunku do autorki" to mój skromny wyraz wdzięczności dla kogoś, dzięki komu ŻYJĘ. Jednak centralnymi punktami odniesienia w tym tekście są kwestie *ludzkiej godności* i *obecności*. Tworzą one jego oś i są jego przewodnimi kategoriami analizy. Na zakończenie stwierdzam, że są to ważne, a nawet istotne kwestie, aby zrozumieć fenomen tego, co to znaczy być człowiekiem. I być wyjątkowym w tym człowieczeństwie.

Główne pytanie badawcze, które stawiam, jest następujące: **Czy społeczeństwo widzi, że osoby niepełnosprawne mają godność? Co więcej, teza, którą proponuję i która, jak sędzę, wynika z tego pytania, brzmi: społeczeństwo w niewielkim stopniu uznaje godność osób niepełnosprawnych.** Bardziej szczegółowe pytania badawcze zostaną przytoczone poniżej w tekście, który pod względem metodologicznym został napisany w ujęciu autoetnograficznym (Wolcott 2004, Kacperczyk 2014, Urbańska 2012). Przy wyborze tej wysoce jakościowej metodologii przyświecało mi założenie, że autoetnografia pozwala na subiektywne przedstawienie konkretnych fragmentów tych wydarzeń wpisanych w opisywaną tu *kategorię godności ludzkiej*. Będzie to autoetnografia analityczna, po Canagarajah (2012), ponieważ poprzez pisanie analizuję stany emocjonalne, mentalne i sytuacyjne, z którymi musiałam się zmierzyć w przeszłości. Niektóre doświadczenia, które wygenerowały te stany, rezonują ze mną do chwili obecnej. Wreszcie, co nie mniej ważne, mam nadzieję, że otwarcie opisane przeze mnie stany umysłu przyczynią się do poprawy tego szczególnego obszaru ludzkiej egzystencji w jego niezwykle ważnym wymiarze społecznym i kulturowym.

**Słowa kluczowe**

syndrom niepełnosprawności, obecność, nieobecność, godność, oskarżenie moralne, autopoiesis, paradoksy, czyn, Deus

**1. Introduction**

“Does the world need such weak and disabled people and why?” As a person with a severe physical disability, my answer is obvious and unambiguous. The answer is yes, they are needed. Weak and disabled people are needed to sensitize others, to teach humility and distance to what is difficult, to what hurts and to what is painful in a disability. They are also needed to show what or who a person with a disability can become, and they can become a hero / a superhero in an unequal fight with regression and limitations from the very beginning. It is a struggle for existential normality, as if *in spite of being abnormal*. Weak people are needed by the world and people to show and make manifest a person’s humanity from the point of view of the authentic principles, rules and truths that underlie humanism, gone astray and even lost in the zeal of a contemporary desire for consumer ownership. People with disabilities are needed by the modern world more than ever, because they constitute a kind of bridge between the earthly world and the world of transcendence. There was a reason why these people were called “God’s children.” Wait though ... is it a better or worse God? This question is extremely intriguing and a provocation to engage with this issue intellectually from a critical perspective and then submit oneself to its conclusions. At the same time, it definitely inspires to enter deeply and more broadly into the axiological problem under discussion, which is difficult to unravel much like a Gordian knot. Reflection on it becomes entwined in the entangled portrait of the Creator: on the one hand, a “supposedly” very clear message of unconditional love for man, and on the other hand, the deafness of the same Absolute being, blinded to human evil, lawlessness, and harm. Hence we can be



“children of a better God” or “children of a worse God.” Everything depends on reflection and what can be inferred from it. Therefore, I am needed so that I can testify to myself and at the same time show that my existence, unworthy in the eyes of people and the world, is noticed, appreciated, “distinguished” and especially valuable in the eyes of the Creator. This testimony is also needed to give other People, like me, a new perspective on what is, as far as possible, a normal, independent and completely free existence. It is a true revolution in connection with how the issue of human disability is viewed which, in the case of being able to function within society, is an important factor that can cause tensions or conflicts of interest. The world also needs me for a completely different and prosaically obvious reason: as proof that I am (?) a human being, be it one clothed in the armour of a disabled body. It is strange to admit the connection. Hybrid? I reflect on these thoughts in the presented text, hoping that it shows the essential reality and drama of human dignity and humanity which, because it is innocent, forms one of the most strongly felt and irreversible of existential crises.

## **2. Are they present on the same and equal terms?**

At this point, perhaps a completely different, more specific question should be asked, as if from the opposite perspective: **Is the postmodern world and culture inscribed in contemporary civilization ready to accept mentally, on fair and equal terms, and in all existential areas, people classified as weak and disabled?** For me, this question opens up the possibility of interpretation and the opportunity to reveal my own opinion and position, which may significantly differ from the interpretations accepted by and presented in the scientific literature. I will make observations and formulate conclusions based on examples taken from my own perception and the reception of experiences that have affected me personally. This will include reflection resulting from my own perspective of disability in terms of the question I posed above.

With regard to my own attitude to the above question, I have formulated the thesis that the contemporary world, so firmly fixed in the postmodern culture of modern technologies, ubiquitous consumerism, the culture of success, mental well-being and an adherence to the values of individualism, is not able to accept a weak or disabled person on fair and equal terms within the social and cultural parameters it now operates. The world would never do that. Such an approach would require a completely different philosophy in terms of looking at a person who is weak: not to see her in the context of a patient, a ward, a dependent or someone that is submissive, but as someone on equal terms. Such a view would depend on openness and a sense of partnership, on being equal and involving equality. However, it would take a change in attitude, courage and an enlightened, critical mind to be able to understand, or at least try to understand, the individual diversity of a weak or a disabled individual. Few can afford the great effort needed to change their attitude towards such a person, who is often completely socially and physically absent from the social sphere of life. And even then, when the disabled person herself tries to signal her presence, she encounters indifference and ignorance on the part of society.

Weak and disabled people, although they are actually physically present, are in fact mostly absent from the social sphere. And, more often even, they are absent from the cultural sphere: in the area of artistic expression, where it is possible to fully reveal one's inner world, often closed in for fear of being ridiculed in an external world full of egocentrism and criticism. The external world of the able-bodied and the strong rejects what is difficult, that which causes suffering and pain. From my personal perception and experience – it shies away from taking any responsibility for the weak, disabled person. To assume responsibility for another human being requires superhuman courage to undertake the challenge of showing the disabled person an expression of empathy, acceptance or support in her existential drama, which she has been involved in from the beginning of her life. This is inherent to the drama until the very end. For the

disabled person, the present is mostly existence within the four walls of their own apartment or just a room – they are absent. Nobody will ask disabled people for their presence, nobody cares about them, nobody even asks for their purely human empathy. The unproductive, the inactive, the closed-in, and not only within four walls, but locked into weakness and disability, suffer terribly physically. However, they feel their spiritual and mental suffering much more strongly and more powerfully than their physical suffering. They suffer alone and in solitude, locked inside deformed bodies, unable to do anything on their own. This is the everyday situation that affects them. Sometimes they are even unable to express the pain and suffering they experience on their own, because they cannot speak. At this point, the drama deepens, it becomes even more difficult and painful. The eyes, which are the mirror of the soul, reveal this tragedy. **This is why I put forward another thesis, however subjective, that the modern world is not ready to accept on fair and equal terms a person with a disability – she is present, but in fact she is absent.** Absent from the social and cultural spheres. Non-disabled people will never be able to “fully understand”, even minimally, a disabled Weak person, until they have felt the effects of exclusion for themselves, have touched it ... The Present, who should also be known as the Absent, are silent heroes in the unequal fight in the war caused by their disability, which totally enslaves them, drastically limits and poignantly degrades them socially and culturally. Unless... they meet a significant Person or Persons and get helped to become recognised publicly, like it was in the case of my own painting exhibition.

### **3. A war to regain human dignity**

In the context of the topic of human dignity that has been taken up here, fundamental questions should be asked from the very beginning. Does a disabled person feel their own dignity? Does she experience and feel self-esteem? Does she feel respect for herself/towards herself? Disability is always and inextricably connected with the feeling of being inferior, uglier, unnecessary.

It irreversibly discriminates, marginalizes, excludes and stigmatizes. It causes pain and suffering. It intensifies isolation and feelings of being closed in. The mere fact of being present, but in fact absent on the existential plane as a whole, does not contribute to the building of self-esteem, which in the case of a disabled person is relatively low. Self-esteem in a person with a congenital disability, as in my case, is formed in the family environment. For as long as I can remember, I've had relatively low self-esteem, "always". It was only by being with Mum that it grew in some way. Perhaps it was because in her eyes I was a "normal" child, who was required to do many things, often on my own. Perhaps this increase in self-esteem in relation to Mum resulted from a strong emotional bond in terms of the parent – child relationship. Building human dignity – self-esteem and self-respect – are like the trials of Sisyphus: never ending work on oneself.

What is dignity to me? It is freedom. The freedom that I have gained after experiencing decades of existential bondage. My self-esteem is strengthened by a significant person and the small successes connected with living that bring me closer to greater existential independence as well as independence in all areas of everyday life. The two most important components that build and shape personal dignity are self-esteem and self-respect. Being present and absent at the same time, with a sense of guilt for being there at all, and the feeling of inferiority generated by a disability, are existential factors that were and, indirectly, are still present in me. One must undertake a never-ending total war on them, one which is waged on all existential fronts. Disability is associated with limitations, loneliness, fear, suffering, and inequality. From my point of view, the most overwhelming feeling currently felt – apart from the ones mentioned above – is the feeling of loneliness – both in the physical sense and in the area of transcendence. Loneliness in disability is perhaps a new dimension of existential reality that I have to face in this never-ending war to regain human dignity. The disabled person's own humanity trampled on by the arrogance of those who are strong and able-bodied, who consider themselves

almost *Homo Deus*. Over the course of modern history, such an attitude has led to an unimaginable genocide, while weak and disabled people were the testing ground for this genocide: economically too expensive, socially unnecessary, a disruption to the beautiful image of the Aryan ideal of the human being – to be healthy, beautiful and fit. Will the modern *Homo Deus* play God and strip mankind of his inalienable right to human dignity? The question I pose here echoes the one asked by a generation at the crossroads of uncertain and unclear historical events. Entangled in the incoherent and mysterious future of some yet unknown human being. The feeling of loneliness strikes with redoubled strength and power – as in the case of a disability that robs the individual of the ability to recognize and feel a sense of dignity – self-esteem and self-respect. Let it sound out incessantly: *Homo sacra res homini*.

#### **4. Human dignity in the dignity of God**

The idea of human dignity is internally justified only in Christian philosophy: for dignity to come from an inner source that source must exist. Every man is worthy of respect because he was created in the image of God. (Filińska et al. 2010: 35)

In the modern world, the image of Deus, the portrait of God, is presented from the position of His non-existence, negation, and exclusion. This phenomenon can be compared indirectly to the present situation and that of the weak person, but as one who is actually absent on the existential plane. The exclusion of Deus, who is the highest axiological dignity, from social and humanistic narratives, results in the exclusion of the weak, disabled person from the holistic, social and existential plane. If we do not show respect for Deus, why should we show respect towards a disabled person? This question pushes, even “forces” you to confront it intellectually, to have your own ideas about the issue of dignity. Human dignity that is threatened with being trampled on, depravation and diminishment. This in turn leads

to a diminishment of the highest axiological dignity of Deus – the dignity of God himself.

Why do this? Why Show Respect? Why this dignity? This one-of-a-kind and unrepeatable belonging to Him – to Deus – makes man more sensitive, more sensitive to suffering – not his own, but the suffering of others through the experience of the “spiritual encounter”. I felt this “inner source” personally, perhaps it is truer to write that I felt the majesty of God, powerful in otherworldly sensations and feelings. I come to the limit of meaning through words – writing after Bakhtin – the Absolute surrounded me and, apart from fantastic and beautiful divine love, He showed me respect and for a few seconds noticed my trampled, violated transcendence devoid of self-esteem and human dignity. In the eyes of the Creator, I was a human being, someone “worthy” of dignity, especially respect and LOVE. A fantastically unearthly, beautiful love. I refer to this love of Deus constantly and I miss it very much. It is – both the love and the dignity of the Absolute – indescribable. Divine dignity enclosed in the experience of the “spiritual encounter” is an amazing testimony to the power of the majesty of Deus. The Creator's show of respect for me is amazing. It is a beautiful gesture of the Creator towards the absent, weak and disabled person.

Touching the “inner source”, just touching and meeting the power and majesty of the Creator allowed me to verify everything, change it, turn it around one hundred and eighty degrees. My previous axiological order was overturned. Dignity is no longer only freedom. From the experience of the “spiritual encounter”, it is also related to the Absolute, whom I could “know”. In the end, it allowed me to reach for a different thought, a different view of the category of Deus, as well as the category of that which is simultaneously Present and Absent. This fresh, invigorating “breath”, which belongs to the future, will become the nucleus of successive changes in all existential areas of my life.

Human dignity is not only revealed through the Christian image of the “inner source” of the figure of God. Dignity as a superior category of the highest value is inscribed in all religious and

spiritual systems of the world, but also in atheistic ethics. Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity follow their own paths to the achievement and respect of human dignity. The category of human dignity remains a universal and inalienable one. At this point in time, I have come to the conclusion that the “inner source”, the figure of God, is the same for the four major religious systems of the world. DEUS IS ONE. The hallmarks of the One Deus are: goodness, love, and the dignity bestowed upon man. I have also come to a second conclusion: in the eyes of God, the good done to another human being is the only true measure of that which is human and positive.

## **5. Loss and the sense of dignity**

It should be emphasized that man does not lose his dignity, even if he has lost everything else – which implies, against all expectations, the constancy of a person’s ability to remain convinced of the need for dignity. One could say that dignity manifests itself more, not in the sense that it exists more, but that it is more evident in a man who has lost all his other qualities. (Filińska et al. 2010: 38)

The feeling of being weak implies a lack – a lack of that which would increase self-esteem, which would raise a low sense of human dignity from almost zero level. Disability is connected to a feeling of some sort of loss. This loss will never be recovered by anyone. Nobody can verify or repair it. It is the kind of loss that affects your entire existence, and it is an irreparable loss. With this “unfair” loss, resulting from being affected by a disability, which is a form of stigmatization, the human being does not lose the dignity assigned to her. She never loses it, even if she has lost everything else – even self-respect. She feels wronged by fate. On the one hand, she feels anxious, and on the other, she would like to do something. She would like to rid herself of the pain and existential hatred of bodily garments, shout out to the world about her own anger at the existing state of affairs, and very often she cannot. Sometimes she does not even know how. She often feels angry but does not take it out on

others. Very rarely I direct this anger towards myself. An accumulated anger for the existing state of affairs, one which has built up over time and which erupts with the force of a deadly volcano. It is hard to visualize. All self-respect has gone. At this point, everything has gone. Combined with negative self-esteem, it leads me to an existential drama. It leads to an “assassination attempt”, which I write more about below. It is a borderline event. The axiological distortion that affects me does not even allow me to have a minimal feeling of dignity towards myself! This axiological bias, the result of evaluation undertaken after an “attack on myself”, leans towards closure and isolation, and a subjective sense of dignity towards myself disappears. It simply does not exist. Dignity has “died”. By committing an act ethically and morally axiologically unworthy and inconsistent with all the professed norms, I made the most difficult and extreme choice. At that point, I lost everything, but I did not lose dignity in the gaze of Deus, which is worth discovering and taking note of. Dug and excavated from under the rubble of shattered dreams that will never come back, this Dignity ultimately triumphs along the lines of the existential drama that has unfolded. To lose all this, “to die” while still alive. So, although I have lost everything in an ethical and moral sense, I still call myself a hero, a hero who has gained existential freedom. And the dignity bestowed by Deus.

The feeling of human dignity with regard to my own example carries an important message for me, about which I must write and I do write below. This message is hope and the birth of self-esteem, essential components of a humanity grounded in limitations and disabilities. I do not give in to disability, but face up to it, going beyond all the limitations that have been designated as impossible for human beings to overcome. A dignity by your side that gives you wings.

## **6. (Un)banal paradoxes**

I am an endless string of existential tragedies entwined in the (un)banal paradoxes that I face. Second by second, minute by



minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, decade by decade. The tragic aporia of existential contradiction, inconsistency, and illogicality is noticeable from the very beginning of our earthly life. It is my hallmark. The contradiction of being and non-being is the field of action of the first paradox: that which should die lives, against logic, against all the signs, both earthly and other-worldly. In this paradox, existence won. In this particular portrayal, (un)banal life triumphed. For me, at the moment, non-being is losing to being in this fight. Lack of any coherence or logic are characteristic elements of existence and they belong to me. My life is in the paradoxes.

Another paradox is the disproportion between the physical and intellectual spheres. The physical sphere remains in significant regression, while the intellectual sphere works at a high level. In this contradiction, which is a tragic example of aporia, I see a tremendous tension resulting from my inability to physically do anything that would allow complete physical independence. The paradox of this situation generates negative emotions, feelings and mental states. Existence in this developmental paradox is difficult. It requires intellectual flexibility and unearthly patience to deal with all the elements of existential dependence and a great level of self-awareness. Such a high level of intellectual development also creates another developmental paradox, in the area of education. This paradox begins with the legal and statutory requirement of a child to be involved in compulsory education. In terms of physical development, I did not qualify for compulsory education at all. In terms of intellect, I was eligible for the normal system of public education. From the very beginning, this developmental paradox was associated with a struggle at institutional level for the right to a normal and universal education. At this point, I would like to introduce another research question posed by this article: **How do institutions established to care, support and protect people with disabilities, carry out these tasks when people with disabilities find themselves in a state of existential crisis?** I will try

to explore this issue below, from the perspective of challenges posed by school as well as in other areas of life.

Facing up to all these paradoxes helped, however, build a sense of dignity. It broke up and reduced the tragic aporia. It reduced a feeling of loneliness in a world unfavorable to those who are present, but who "do not fit" into the picture of what it is to be present as a whole. I still hold this statement to be true: I am present, but in fact I am absent from the existential space of human action. Absence does not "hurt" physically. It only hurts psychologically – it stigmatizes, excludes, definitely marginalizes, strongly and effectively. As (not) present I am permanently faced with an eternal existential dilemma: to fight or to surrender to this strange presence with no prospects. From this perspective, without a future, the most important existential ingredient has been forgotten – the ingredient of dignity. More precisely, to actually establish it (institutionally?) has been forgotten. In this moral and ethical paradox of presence and absence, dignity and lack of dignity, I am trying to find it, have found it, bravely facing the challenge of an existence marked by the onerous stigma of disability – difficult, tiring, sometimes even brutally dramatic. To face this challenge is to enter into a losing battle and win it. To be a moral winner in this battle in which one side is "destined" to lose from the beginning. To face it is to take up challenges and, above all, to take up the challenge of being in the world. When this modern world mocks authority, the ideal, values, the Absolute, it is extremely difficult.

Dignity cannot be limited, diminished or neglected in any way. It is the most important value given to the human being. Self-esteem, which is a component of dignity, is difficult to attain. To have it, however, guarantees an easier and more effective existence. It is impossible to explain the coherence and logic of this tragic aporia which is inscribed from the very beginning. Everything, all these personal – subjective tragedies and dramas take place somewhere in between. Between something known and unknown. Between the possible and the impossible. Between being present and absent in the world. Between that which is known to reason and that which is unknown to reason.

It is this *between* which allows for a new perspective on issues relating to the existential when it comes to a person with disability. Except it stands in the way of gaining a sense of dignity – an integration of the self and being. You are “here and now”, you are personally present. For example, at school, in classes. But is it being present? I pose this question as a provocation. I pose it to make the reader think, in order to trigger a discussion on the change that needs to take place in the paradigm that, overall, views the person with a disability as helpless, unhappy, completely dependent, suffering, and so on. I can confirm that I suffer, but I also love, I am happy, joyful, open to new things, as well as resourceful – all, of course, to the extent that is possible. I am also independent as much as is possible and to the extent that is physically possible. I am completely independent in the sphere of transcendence and the sphere of the written word. These two spheres give total existential freedom. The road to this was and, in part, still is rough, winding and uneven. However, it has become a challenge. A challenge that can lead me to gain self-esteem and to retrieve an unknown human dignity. As a consequence, it may lead to the emergence or development of a completely new paradigm for the disabled person – loving, happy, joyful, helpful and resourceful, very independent and existentially self-sufficient. No, it does not have to be a utopia. It can come true. In part, it has happened, and it has happened to me.

People with disabilities not only can become authors of themselves, in a certain sense, they must become authors of themselves. Autopoiesis for them is not something they can get as a handout, as a fortuitous gift, or as an unexpected privilege. Autopoiesis for them is a hard-won necessity, a ruthless challenge, a heroic destiny. The tragedy and, at the same time, the heroism of this situation consists of the fact that surrendering to the challenges of autopoiesis – that is, rejecting the model of the “man of a particular role” and the “man of learning”, contrary to expectations, pressure and “humanitarian laws” – is the only way to maintain a sense of personal, human dignity. (Filińska, Momot, Wojciechowski 2010: 96)

How incredibly hard and how incredibly difficult it has been/is, to become the author of myself, struggling with a stigmatizing disability that takes away almost everything from me. However, I became the author of myself when I got the opportunity to “transfer” my thoughts, feelings and emotions through the written word: first poetry and later prose, which gives greater possibilities. Autopoiesis is a never-ending process – a process of becoming oneself, a human being – from absence to presence. Being the author of yourself is one of the greatest feats for an “actor”, a long, hard, and at times, even painful process. This play, before which destiny set me, turned out to be a hellishly difficult one, a brutally painful and dangerous one to perform. While creating myself, I was not, could not be totally alone. The stigma of my disability shaped the psychological portrait of the character that I have had to play in this drama, along with the countless unpredictable twists and turns I have experienced in my life. There was no prospect for the self-esteem which is a major component of human dignity. Dignity was trampled on, ignored, diminished, and even killed. There was no consent whatsoever for me to have dignity or to be able to experience it – especially in this performance, where I am subjected to violence of various kinds. By creating myself, being the author of myself, I do not consent to pigeonholing, isolation, exclusion, or marginalization. Such an attitude makes me a lone gun, a person on a quest, who in this existential drama constantly fights for herself with all her power and strength. I fight for the creation of myself with the feeling of a minimum of elementary dignity. “Self-assassination” has become the calling card of this dignity – a dignity, however, that is still absent – in this art of looking for myself.

## **7. Moral accusation**

My will TO BE from the very beginning was enormous. As someone present, I was condemned to medical malpractice from the beginning of my earthly existence, and from maturity, to the “mental destruction” resulting from acts of violence of various

kinds. However, I had the force of will to break free from the destructive forces that pushed me towards the abyss of complete annihilation and non-existence. How strong this will was, and I think it still is, can be shown by the fact that I was triumphant twice when confronted with a terrible death. I outsmarted death and thereby showed its existential inferiority. My willpower allowed me to rise above the terrible destiny of the existential death that stalked me right next to a cold hospital cot among alien faces, and alien voices and hands. I was not yet fully aware that the will to live had won this clash with death at the earliest moment of my life. The force that was liberated at that time could not have come from earthly time and space. After all, the strength of death was much greater in those circumstances than the energy of life. And yet ... against all odds, life won. Life was granted to this BEING, who was not completely aware of what she would have to face in the future. **This is why I dare to put forward a third and a fourth thesis: The world needs people with disabilities for reasons that nobody can yet imagine. It also needs them because they remind us that institutions can often neglect their moral duties or distort them.**

And I would have to face disability, developmental regression, loneliness, acts of violence, as well as various other traumas, including an “assassination attempt” and an attempted suicide. In addition to mis-understanding me as Different. I would have to face INDIFFERENCE, CALLOUSNESS towards the tragedy and drama of the acts of violence that affected me, assisted by the silent consent of others. At this point, I bring the heaviest moral accusation to bear upon those who could have stopped this spiral of violence [the high ranking employee of the care institution, as well as its management]. They didn’t stop it. Nobody tried to stop it. Apart from a significant Person, whose words broke through the concrete walls of institutional indifference and the cynical disregard of the dramatic situation of a client: *nota bene* a care institution and one which was supposed to prevent violence. All these moral perpetrators were against me: the victim of acts of violence. As a result of their

attitude, moral permission was given to the perpetrators of violence to use it. According to these officials and their reasoning, the victim is the guilty one. She provokes by her behaviour [non-acceptance of acts of violence] and needs to be brought to “order” by the perpetrator of acts of violence. I rebelled against such cruelty – mental and emotional violence which left no visible traces. A cruelty meted out by a perpetrator who was always right, although he was not right at all. By this moral accusation, which is the main form of my opposition to institutional hypocrisy and ignorance, I want to communicate to everyone that lack of reaction, indifference and callousness, puts perpetrators of moral violence on an equal footing with perpetrators of real violence. I will repeat: ON AN EQUAL FOOTING! It places them all in the worst possible light. The morality and professed values of such people are debased. Their attitude led me to the suicide attempt I mentioned above. If at that most dramatic of moments someone from the senior staff of the institution had believed me and shown the smallest amount of understanding or supported me, if only slightly, in the fight for my own human dignity, there would have been no dramatic choices, decisions, or events. I know that with the “assassination attempt” that was carried out on me, I reached an existential abyss. With this dramatic deed I showed that there is a border that no one can ever CROSS in relation to any person. This border is that person’s sense of human dignity. Violation of human dignity in an extremely traumatic and violent form led me to make FINAL decisions and choices which, in turn, led to the events which occurred.

How strong one becomes in the context of moral accusation, of the will to show the perpetrators of violence, that being in the worst possible position, completely lost, I am able to come back from the existential abyss and reach the highest point possible with regard to my regressive development. I have tried to prove this each day from the moment I first made the accusation. Standing as one with the significant person who has supported me I WOULD SURVIVE AND I WOULD BE. Destiny, as if in spite of these moral perpetrators of violence, has shown great generosity towards me. It has given me the will to make spectacular

changes. It has taken me to the very height of my own developmental capabilities. It has been discovered slowly and then revealed to the world by the significant person. At this point, the significant person is an unquestionable SYMBOL of a human approach to the issue of attitudes towards acts of violence and towards the victims of such acts. He shows disinterested interest and concern. He supports me, as much as he can and is able, in my existential tragedy and the drama of my situation. It is a symbol of pure humanity in a world of indifference, heartlessness and mental cruelty, as well as desensitization to the harm, pain and suffering that have become part of my life. The significant person as a symbol becomes a positive, characteristic, charismatic figure. By standing as one with the victim, he exposes herself clearly to all – the moral perpetrators of violence and the real perpetrators of such violence. He is, like the victim, misunderstood, accused, sometimes even despised by those moral perpetrators.

Indifference and heartlessness KILLS. Efficiently. And helplessness is terrifying. The existential drama described above marked the beginning of a long-term recovery. It initiated perhaps, a most difficult process, because it is a process of “rebirth” from a position of “transcendent death”. From the lowest and most difficult position in the case of a human being affected by a disability. Without this support, commitment and work from the significant Person, I would not be here at all. This significant Person is the most important figure in my entire recovery process. Steadfast determination and the will to achieve the greatest possible existential independence and self-reliance with the support of a significant person and in all areas, after so many years, has such an effect that no one could ever have believed it. The effect of the possibility of an independent, and as far as possible, self-sufficient existence.

Willpower conquered everything. In the beginning, this willpower overcame a terrible death, and in an already mature existence, the same willpower overcame acts of violence, “psychic destruction” and “self-assault”, in order to reshape me. Absent,

but slowly emerging from the dark abyss of existence marked by disability – Present. Human. Persons. Identities.

### **8. Being human by doing**

I cannot exercise my freedom by violating my dignity. I have to respect my body as well as the bodies of others. I must respect the ideal of humanity that I carry within me. I am setting an example for future generations through the actions I do in my daily life. (Fil-ńska, Momot, Wojciechowski 2010: 113)

There is never freedom without self-determination. Without freedom, there is no sense of one's own personal dignity. As long as I can remember, I have had a big problem with self-determination, freedom and dignity. Disability effectively prevented me from having respect for my own body, which greatly limited me, stigmatized me and made me dependent on others. How can I accept my own body over which I have no control and have never had any control? I pose this question because no answer will ever resolve the moral dilemma of such a conflict of interest. After several decades of existential being, I am of the conviction, have come to the conclusion, that the acceptance of one's own imperfect, uncontrollable body is possible only when one has matured to this extremely difficult psychological process within oneself. Becoming mature enough to accept one's own body is a process that should also end with the acceptance of oneself as a valuable human being, someone that is needed by people and the world. To let future generations see me as someone who has attained the most wide-ranging of existential freedoms. This maturation can be viewed in terms of perpetual action. In connection with this, I believe the underlying reason for my existence is to set an example for others, for society, for those who are similar to me and those who are different from me.

I present myself to future generations through creation, a deed that I have to struggle with every day. This form of action, in the broadest sense of the word, is familiar to me. In Karol Wojtyła's Christian personalism, I have encountered the state-



ment that a person only ever becomes fully human when he acts, is active. Man realizes himself, becomes present through deeds, actions, cooperation, not only in relation to himself, but especially in relation to a weaker person, one who requires support, help and understanding. Through the act of creating successive cultural texts (?), I show future generations, as well as the present one, what my deeds and actions can lead to. And this is from a person who is physically able to do very little. In contrast to this, in writing and the intellectual field, I do spectacular things that should be completely impossible. I reveal disability from the inside, with regard to the most difficult issues and problems that I constantly have to deal with, and which are existentially important both for people today and for the generations to come. I became aware of this while reading Peter Sloterdijk. This philosopher has coined the term “action creates the thing that is done” (Sloterdijk 2014: 442), with which he himself identifies. Sloterdijk’s statement fully reflects the mainstream of existential being. With regard to writing a text, I reveal to people and the world little-known and still insufficiently understood aspects of a person with a disability. Sometimes it evokes contradictory feelings, from simple disagreement to basic human anger towards the things that a person wants to limit, exclude and stigmatize. However, over decades of a limited existence, I have developed my own system of coping with negative feelings and mental states. This is important in order to maintain the relative balance of my inner existential world. Obtaining this inner balance or, putting it another way, gaining spiritual peace, has given me a greater willingness to act not only in the fields of writing and science, but also in the wider existential field. Following Sloterdijk’s “action creates the thing that is done,” has allowed me to cross the sometimes artificially established borders of those things which are (im)possible for human beings, borders which I constantly cross. And all of them. It is a kind of challenge or a call to radically and definitively change how people see and perceive disability in the currently functioning paradigm, which puts the person with a disability in a totally inferior position both for the person and for the world that

surrounds her. Now is the time to change this. Changes occur very slowly. This paradigm shift should take place, not with the unilateral participation of a person in the traditional sense, of the able-bodied person, but with the involvement and active participation of people with disabilities. This should include all its forms, ranges and types. Without such a perspective, the anticipated change in the perception and understanding of a person with a disability will never take place. This proposition is a call for discussion within the entire community of people with disabilities. It is a very varied, diverse community with a variety of needs, challenges and problems to face up to and overcome. On the one hand, this diversity may have a destructive effect on the processes of consolidation that need to take place. On the other hand, an overall rapprochement may be possible within the whole of the disabled community, in order to establish a shared front for action aimed at a positive change in the current paradigm. It will be a difficult task, but not impossible. Everything is possible. After all, it is “the deed creates that which is done” / “action creates the thing that is done,” and Peter Sloterdijk’s categorical imperative “you must change your life” calls for this.

## **9. The significant person and his achievement in relation to the author**

I became present, first of all under the influence of my mother, and after her death, that of a significant Person. Disability effectively prevents presence. As an individual, I was not able to become present by myself, to show myself to people and the world. Having such a limited existence, I was not able to mark my presence. Because how was it possible for me to distance myself from the person I was, to become an independent person, to present myself? This question gives an idea of the range of often extreme difficulties that had to be solved and overcome. It involved a change in approach, not on the basis of a mental dictate, but on the basis of an equal partner relationship with another person who fully accepted me as a person. All these

elements were connected by a significant Person, someone who became the main instigator of the internal changes that took place within me. Full acceptance and an approach based on partnership with the significant Person caused me to open up to Him as a partner, to become involved in what was a regular conversation between two People. With this Person, it was the first time that I had entered into a discussion, and one that was equal. For the first time in a relationship with someone from the outside, I voiced my own observations, conclusions and thoughts. For the first time I started to talk about my feelings, emotions, doubts and fears. The significant Person put in considerable work, commitment and patience to draw me out of myself and to help me break free of the blockade of mental fear of talking to someone from the outside, someone alien. The significant Person created an atmosphere that was extremely friendly and full of emotional warmth enabling me to open up to him, to other people and the world itself. It was a long-term process. The significant Person was close, the closest he could be including transcendentally, as a person in relation to another person. However, at the same time, he not only gave me a great sense of mental and emotional security, emotional stability and emotional support, but he also shaped my sense of personal separateness and individuality. He led me from complete closure, he brought me back from the dark abyss of verbal silence. A silence which was meaningful, painful, tragic and even dramatic in its portrayal of a human identity. The significant Person brought to presence the (non) present me; a person wanting to free herself from internal despair, suffering, pain and loneliness. This making-present shows that you CAN pull an individual back from the abyss of being closed in on herself and lead that person towards a spectacular, beautifully transcendent openness which includes another person and the surrounding world. This became possible thanks to the selfless commitment of the significant Person who undoubtedly believed in my capabilities and saw a great, natural but deeply hidden potential for development. The significant Person has contributed and continues to contribute to my success – being able to

achieve the best I can in terms of my development as a human being. This is an unquestionable and irrefutable fact.

### **10. In way of an ending**

From what I can see and what I have experienced on an individual level, Polish society does not yet fully recognize and accept people with disabilities, despite the adoption of an increasing amount of normative legislation in all types of institutions. The reality in contemporary Poland, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is that a person with a disability still feels a great deal of humiliation, pain, intolerance and dissatisfaction. The dignity of people with disabilities is violated, as was the case in the famous spring protest in 2018. From an axiological point of view, the attitude of political decision-makers was morally the worst one possible. Society was shown the place of people with disabilities or rather, it was shown that there is simply no place for them on the ladder of social coexistence. Indeed, as far as society is concerned, people with disabilities should be barred from the possibility of any form of social coexistence. The truth, however, is just the opposite; people with disabilities contribute to the development of moral empathy, social networks of institutional support, and inclusive practices which should become the norm of a humanistic society. The challenge to return to a humanistic concept of civil society is of the utmost importance. The call for such social insurgency runs along the fault line that prevents man from doing evil. It is a line that has become dangerously thin, even transparent. A hidden evil shines through it, dormant, but now given the opportunity to wake up. Such an awakened evil may turn out to be more destructive in reality than it actually looks. Hence the idea of humanism is so extremely necessary and important on the threshold of the twenty-first century. That and the fact that the dignity of the human being, as a value superior to all existing values, becomes a fundamental prerequisite of humanity.

*Translated by Martin Blaszk*

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## **Science fiction and fantasy in general education**

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### **Abstract**

This article deals with the possible application of the genres of science fiction (SF) and fantasy – novels, short stories, films, dramas, spectacles etc. in secondary schools as part of the programme of general education. The discussion concerns both the production and the reception of such works by the students. The purpose of this educational proposal is to introduce in the system an opportunity for the students to coordinate and consolidate creatively the knowledge and the skills acquired in the classes of all the other disciplines of the curriculum. The basic assumption of the thesis is that the characteristic features of these genres, i.e., their appeal to the imagination, curiosity, and the natural need of the students for their own artistic creation, may prove effective to elevate the educational targets beyond the pragmatic level of absorbing information for the sake of the formal requirements of the school programme. These aims, which transcend the level of the practical utility of existential and psychosocial needs, concentrate on the search for objective knowledge about the world through the development of the skill of critical thinking in the domain of cognition, the search for the artistic talents and predispositions of all the students in the domain of creation, and on the essential issues of educating the need for harmonious and peaceful coexistence with other people and

with the environment. The article presents the essential features of the theoretical grounding of this conception, the pedagogical implications of its introduction into the system and suggestions for its practical realization illustrated with examples of possible activities for students and teachers. The essay is concluded with a speculation on the future perspectives of a reciprocal reinforcement of the quality of general education and the development of the literary genres of SF and fantasy.

### **Keywords**

SF and fantasy, general education, educational domains of cognition, creation and coexistence, critical thinking, verification and falsification, cognitive appeal of the teaching materials, creative aspect of the mind

## **Literatura SF i fantasy w systemie edukacji ogólnokształcącej**

### **Abstrakt**

Tematem tego eseju jest możliwość zastosowania gatunków literackich SF i fantasy – powieści, nowel, opowiadań, dramatów, widowisk, itd. w szkołach średnich jako elementu programu edukacji ogólnokształcącej. Dotyczy to zarówno produkcji tych utworów przez uczniów jak i ich odbioru. Celem tej propozycji edukacyjnej jest wprowadzenie do tego systemu okazji do skoordynowania i twórczego utrwalenia wiedzy i umiejętności nabytych podczas nauki we wszystkich pozostałych dyscyplinach programu szkolnego. Podstawą teoretyczną jest tu założenie, że charakterystyczne cechy tych gatunków literackich, czyli wyobraźnia, ciekawość, oraz naturalna potrzeba uczniów do własnej twórczości artystycznej mogą okazać się skuteczne do wyjścia ponad pragmatyczny poziom wchłaniania informacji na potrzeby formalnych wymagań szkolnych. Cele, które wykraczają ponad poziom praktycznych potrzeb egzystencjalnych i psychospołecznych wiążą się z dochodzeniem do wiedzy obiektywnej o świecie poprzez rozwijanie umiejętności krytycznego myślenia w dziedzinie poznania, z poszukiwaniem talentów i predyspozycji artystycznych u wszystkich uczniów, oraz



z kształceniem naturalnej potrzeby harmonijnej koegzystencji z innymi ludźmi i ze środowiskiem. Przedstawia ona zasadnicze cechy podejścia teoretycznego, implikacje pedagogiczne jej zastosowania i sugestie jej realizacji w praktyce, które są ilustrowane przykładami możliwych działań uczniów i nauczycieli. Esej zamyka spekulacja na temat przyszłych perspektyw wzajemnego oddziaływania edukacji ogólnokształcącej i utworów SF i fantasy z wzajemną korzyścią dla ich rozwoju.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

SF i fantasy, edukacja ogólnokształcąca, edukacyjne dziedziny poznania, twórczości i koegzystencji, myślenie krytyczne, weryfikacja i falsyfikacja, atrakcyjność poznawcza materiałów nauczania, twórczy aspekt umysłu

### **1. The approach**

The educational targets of this proposal are based on a system whose principles transcend the pragmatic level of general education (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021, Wenzel 2020). The main idea of this system is that general education first of all should deal with phenomena which make it possible to search for truth about the nature of the world and people, to develop sensitivity to the beauty of artistic creation through the production of works of art, and to educe the natural need for peaceful and harmonious coexistence with other people and with the environment. Correspondingly, these general aims, which transcend the level of practical utility, are realized in the educational domains of cognition, creation and coexistence. Since this system precedes the university level of specialization or other forms of education which deal with professional training and instruction, its pedagogical issues and suggested activities are valid for all forms of general education at secondary school level (Wenzel 2015). The educational targets and teaching points that are presented, concern the domains of cognition, creation and coexis-

tence, with frequent attempts to combine these domains in an interdisciplinary way. The point of this three-dimensional system of education is the possibilities it offers to balance the three major functions of general education, namely, helping to understand the nature of the world and approach the truth about it through cognition, developing sensitivity to the beauty of the world through artistic creation, and educating a natural feeling of empathy towards the fate of other people and of the world, which is realized in life practically through decent behaviour.

It should be noted that the proposed system of general education stands radically against the common practice of the early specialization of students in some chosen disciplines of the curriculum at the expense of others. The popular conviction that some students will succeed better in the 'sciences' while other students are 'humanists' may easily be falsified. There are a great number of factors; predictable, unpredictable and incidental, which may lead to gradual recognition by the student of which discipline suits best his or her natural talents and predispositions. Besides, the very idea of a difference between the 'sciences', i.e. disciplines in which mathematics is the working tool, and empirical evidence and data dominate the programme, and 'humanities', in which natural language and its higher, argumentative-poetic function is used as a tool for the acquisition of knowledge, has no justification in light of the development of critical thinking. Both of them equally require precision and logical reasoning to formulate ideas, statements, theories, opinions, assertions, etc. and therefore are equally 'scientific'. General education ought to help students to discover their individual predispositions, not to determine arbitrarily and mechanically, what they formally ought to become. In connection with this, the programme should move towards a synergy of the domains and favour an interdisciplinary approach to one which relies upon a choice of teaching points.

It seems, therefore, that the approach to the notion of what the function of general education should be in the domain of cognition needs to be reformulated. Instead of being the initiation of the process of educating a professionally prepared mem-

ber of a given social group, community, clan, tribe, nation, etc. and the determination of his or her place in it, as proposed by Dewey (1966), general education should be directed towards opening new fields of interest in the programmes of all the disciplines which are included in the curriculum (Wenzel 2015). Accordingly, syllabuses in the domain of cognition would change their character from being descriptive and informative vehicles for conveying knowledge, into becoming guides for teachers to work with adequate teaching materials in their search for particular teaching points. Thus, the content of teaching materials ought to become the source of problems for a debate in the classroom (Rychło 2008), whereas the informative element of the content should be used argumentatively in the ensuing discussion and the formulation of opinions, assertions or theories. Such procedures are characterized by a high degree of individual contact between the teacher and the students. They activate individually the minds of the students, so that they themselves discover things which may fascinate them beyond the official requirements, and prove worthy of specialization in future adult life.

The distinction between the pragmatic and 'beyond-pragmatic' levels of general education rests in different approaches to the phenomenon of learning motivation (Wenzel 2020). On the pragmatic level education is seen as training and instruction of offspring in order to develop their manual and intellectual skills, as well as social awareness, so as to prepare them to cope with matters concerning their existential and psychosocial needs. Accordingly, learning motivation is defined in terms of drives which push and prod individuals to actions in order to achieve goals which fulfil these needs (Reber 1985). According to this view, didactic activities focus on ways to evoke this kind of motivation. As long as the didactic activities are bound to natural and genuine needs, not artificially and formally invented for their own sake, e.g. 'to make the lesson interesting', they are effective in achieving the targets of teaching. The point is that there is an observable tendency of these activities to overuse the practical approach as a way of appealing to learning motivation.

For example, the teaching materials for second language teaching may be guided by the conviction that learners who are going to spend their vacation abroad will be motivated by the acquisition of a great number of lexical items denoting all possible elements of tourist equipment, gadgets, places, vehicles of transportation, etc. The effect of such procedures may be quite the opposite. Since genuine language interaction never consists of paradigms of semantically and structurally similar lexical items, the students are not able to make practical use of them in their own texts. The basic natural need of the learner to become able to shape thoughts in the second language so as to say what he or she means has been ignored. In effect, the great number of lexical items become an unnecessary burden to the memory and are promptly forgotten after passing the test or examination.

The necessity to cope with existential and psychosocial needs is obvious and natural, and didactic activities of the 'beyond-pragmatic' type also have to deal with them. However, the activation of the higher mental processes and creative aspect of the mind, greatly broadens the scope of what is possible. Consequently, teaching procedures and materials also have to become adequate to these new challenges. The three-dimensional system of general education, which is realised by the application of basic aims concerning the domains of cognition, creation and coexistence, attempts to evoke learning motivation which exceeds the level of existential and psychosocial needs and therefore may become capable of dealing with the new teaching targets (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021).

The domain of cognition is basically concerned with gaining knowledge in an objective sense through the constant challenge of theories about the phenomena and the laws of particular disciplines of cognition which appear in the curriculum as subjects of teaching, e.g. physics, chemistry, biology, history of civilization, geography, history of literature, social studies, philosophy, etc. These challenges are based on the empirical and informative knowledge available at the time of teaching and are carried out in the form of debate and discussion. The educational targets and teaching points should lead to the development of

critical thinking and an urge to improve current objective knowledge through its verification and falsification with the help of the teacher. The teacher's activities concentrate on evoking genuine interest in phenomena and the laws of nature, so that the learners become willing to transcend the knowledge which is required in the programme and the formal and obligatory elements of education such as grades, tests, examinations, homework assignments etc. Such forms of interest may be the result of the teaching materials, and the intuition and talent of the teacher to make use of the materials for the realization of the teaching points. The teaching materials and the teacher's activities to evoke such interest will be referred to as having *cognitive appeal* (Wenzel 1994, Rychło 2008).

The domain of creation is essentially focused on the discovery of the artistic talents and predispositions of the students. The educational treatment deals with the development of skills which are necessary for the creation of artefacts – dramas, music compositions, lyrics, paintings, novels, poems, films, sculptures, and various combinations of these artistic disciplines and their syntheses. The teacher's activities concentrate on the way of developing genuine sensitivity to the artistic value of these artefacts, and concerns the production and reception of the works by the students, resulting in a genuine aesthetic experience as described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The teaching points deal with the techniques of the artistic disciplines which are the subjects of teaching, e.g. counterpoint and tonal harmony in music, stylistic problems in relation to dialogues, descriptions and narration, the use of metaphors and symbols, etc. in literature classes, the use of perspective in classes connected with the art of painting, as well as operating the camera in film production, etc. These activities are realized with the help of the teacher and should be concluded with the award of a diploma for the production of an artefact of the chosen discipline, or performance of a work which has a well-established artistic reputation, e.g. a music composition. The teaching materials come from the outstanding works in the history of a particular discipline while the teacher is an artist in this discipline. A cha-

racteristic feature of this domain is the freedom of the teacher to choose the teaching materials and to make personal decisions concerning students' participation in the classes of a particular discipline. Such a system of the organization of the domain of creation implies a great flexibility in the formation of groups, namely, they are formed according to the level of the advancement of the students instead of the criterion of age. The formal requirements such as grading, examinations, etc. should be the same as in the domain of cognition.

The domain of coexistence deals with ways of preventing the learners from engaging in destructive behaviour in families, clans, tribes, nations and any other socially structured communities. The educational aims are concerned with educating the natural need for peaceful and harmonious coexistence with other people and the environment according to intuitively sensed universal moral principles. These principles consist of the ability to behave decently, i.e. not to kill, cheat, steal, lie, devastate nature, provoke social conflicts and wars etc. Such behaviour is motivated not only by fear of punishment or expectation of reward, but transcends such pragmatic motives, so that decent behaviour becomes the normal and natural characteristic of a human being. The educational aims focus on genuine understanding of the nature of the acts of destruction, their origin and ways of preventing their occurrence. The characteristic feature of this domain is the lack of an organized programme and the lack of formal ways of testing theoretical knowledge, which are part and parcel of the scope of the domains of cognition and creation. The teaching activities and the selection of the teaching materials are carried out by the teachers in the domains of cognition and creation. They do it through the form of spontaneous digressions while dealing with their own subjects. The targets concern current events which generate conflicts, social pathologies, devastation of natural environment, etc. They ought to be in some way connected with the subject matter of the class. The digressions should be brief. They take the form of debates and discussions with the help of the teacher who aims at eliciting from the students a genuine

understanding of the reasons why and in which sense these events have been destructive or pathological.

What these three domains have in common is the necessity of involving a form of motivation which makes it possible for the students to transcend the motivational drives which are characteristic of the usual pragmatic approaches to general education. In the domain of cognition it is the motivation to engage mentally in the teaching points beyond the requirements of the official programme, and is recognizable by the fact that the acquired knowledge is not forgotten after the required aim, i.e. test, examination, grade, etc. has been achieved. In the domain of creation it is the motivation to create works of art which transcend aesthetic pleasure and entertainment in their reception and aim at developing sensitivity to the beauty of the artistic value of such works. In the domain of coexistence it is the motivation to behave decently, notwithstanding the punishments and rewards of the regulations of law, social tradition, rituals, customs, habits, etc. In all these three domains the educational treatment aims at developing the imagination to see beyond the immediate and obvious advantages of the acquired knowledge, artistic skills and behaviour. The kind of motivation which triggers the learning processes characteristic of this level of education will be referred to as the 'cognitive-creative type of learning motivation'.

The genres which involve science fiction (SF) and fantasy works are in a position to deal with the educational targets and teaching points of all these three domains. These works include dramas, novels, short stories, films, spectacles or other forms of fiction which draw imaginatively on current scientific, psychological, sociological and philosophical knowledge, and then speculate in their plots, settings, themes, messages, etc. about their possible development and directions. The setting of these works typically takes place in the future, but may also concern the past and the present time. The range of scientific, psychological and social disciplines to be taken into account for such purposes is very broad, since the non-pragmatic pedagogical base transcends on principle the usual utilitarian objectives of

education, so as to open the way to imaginative thinking. In this way, SF and fantasy works provide an opportunity for the idea of 'general education' to become really 'general' in an interdisciplinary sense.

However, as far as the domain of cognition is concerned, the procedures which make use of SF works will be effective only on the condition that the scientific, psychological and sociological knowledge to which the works refer is reliable and credible. Thus, when the educational targets are concerned with objective knowledge in the domain of cognition, or with social relations in the domain of coexistence, the SF works should be clearly distinguished from such literary or film genres as fairy tales, horrors or thrillers in pseudo-scientific disguise. Works of this kind have their place in the domain of creation in their own right. As far as the genre of fantasy fiction is concerned, thanks to the literary conventions of symbolizing, allegory, the usage of metaphors and generalizations, it may realize specific functions in the domain of coexistence. Fantasy or scientifically unreliable works may also appear in the domain of cognition as a starting point for the development of critical thinking, i.e. finding the points which contradict current objective knowledge, so that the students themselves will place them among fairy tales, horrors or thrillers. Generally, the educational targets of teaching procedures with the application of science fiction and fantasy include the development of critical thinking, the acquisition of objective current knowledge of the disciplines which are represented by school subjects in the curriculum, and the development of sensitivity to current social problems connected with coexistence.

Issues which may trigger critical thinking appear when the students find in the teaching materials an opportunity to falsify the speculation of the author concerning the imagined situation, plot and action. The issues which are connected with the acquisition of knowledge may emerge while familiar problems from the classes are met with in an imaginative plot, setting and themes. In both these kinds of targets, the teacher may successfully search for the cognitive appeal of the content of the tea-



ching material. The issues which deal with the social problems of coexistence may appear in the artistic production of the students as the substance of creation.

An example of a SF work which may serve as teaching material in order to become a starting point for a critical debate could be its way of dealing with the problem of the relativity of time. In a class of physics, the students learn that the flow of time depends on the velocity of a moving object in relation to a definite point of reference, e.g. the Earth. According to current objective knowledge, the closer the velocity approaches the speed of light, i.e. about 300 000 km/per second, the slower the flow of time of this object in relation to the point of reference. This phenomenon is known in physics as time dilation. If the teaching material presents a character who in a special kind of vehicle comes back to his or her childhood, meets people who had died a long time ago, and then implies that this is the result of the relativity of time, the students may recall from the class that time is but one of the four dimensions of space-time, or space-curvature, not space in itself. They may also observe in a debate that one cannot travel in a dimension as if it were a form of space in which one can travel and stop wherever he or she wants. As a result of the debate the students may themselves place such works in the genres of fairy tales or fantasy.

Reliable teaching materials give the students an opportunity to consolidate their knowledge of various phenomena which are the subject matter of the scientific, psychological or social disciplines while developing the skill of critical thinking. For example, a SF work –a novel, a drama, a film, etc. may place its fictitious action on Mars. A reliable teaching material must have a setting which includes all phenomena with which the students are familiar thanks to the current knowledge gained from the probes equipped with instruments which have actually been sent there, and from which scientists have received information. When the characters of the work of fiction face a sand storm, the students must be able to compare the action of the work of art with real knowledge about such storms. When they have problems with moving on the surface of the planet, the students

should also have the opportunity to compare these problems with the knowledge about gravitation which they have acquired in a class of physics. On the one hand, the students may then consolidate their knowledge about the forces of gravity, on the other hand, the setting must be correct in every detail, so as to be convincing as a work of art. Thanks to the possible cognitive appeal of such teaching materials the students may remember the knowledge of sand storms, gravitation, etc. far better than the knowledge about the same phenomena presented to them in a class in the form of a lecture or information to be tested or otherwise formally graded.

Placing SF and fantasy works in general education is marked by the combined and cooperative action of the three educational domains as far as the disciplines and the teaching points are concerned. These relationships result from the fact that the teaching materials and the problems with which they deal may actually involve all possible subjects of the curriculum in an interdisciplinary way. Moreover, the scientific, psychological and social issues of the domains of cognition and coexistence may be used by the students in the domain of creation as elements to be used in analyses of the situation and the action of the produced work. The coordination of the three educational domains on the basis of the teaching materials implies strict cooperation and mutual consultations of the teachers of the engaged disciplines.

An example of such interdisciplinary requirements is the phenomenon of the origin and evolution of life in the universe. It involves the physical, chemical and biological processes which might have caused the appearance of life. Also, it deals with the question about the environment which is indispensable for the existence of life, e.g. whether life could exist without water, or what kinds of atmosphere, temperature, chemical processes, ecological conditions are necessary for living organisms to survive. The key problem of these processes is connected with the agencies of the evolutionary changes, e.g. natural selection, genetic mutations, adaptation to the environment and to its changes, hybridization, sexual selection, the social problems of sur-

vival, the emergence of civilizations, and the possible role of technology in the evolutionary processes, etc. Finally, there are questions about the emergence of the phenomenon of consciousness manifested by the self-consciousness of individuals and the higher mental processes which it generates, the potential role of education in evolutionary changes and speculations about its future development. SF and fantasy works are capable of dealing with all these problems thanks to the convention of creating fictitious situations, characters, plots and action.

## **2. Pedagogical implications**

### **2.1. Procedures**

The search for teaching points and the teaching materials for this educational proposal is carried out by the teachers of the particular disciplines which are in the school curriculum. Since they are determined by the synergy of the three educational domains and by an interdisciplinary approach to teaching procedures, the didactic suggestions are concerned simultaneously with a variety of issues which belong to the different subjects of teaching, e.g. they may deal with the issues of physics, chemistry, biology and ethics in one lesson unit. The teaching points are to be found in a chosen of source material, e.g. a SF novel or film. They may also be prepared by the teacher in the form of a text, e.g. a definition, a statement, information about a current theory of some phenomenon, and/or sensational news in the mass media, etc. which opens up the possibility for debate, argument and interpretation. The procedure begins with the introduction of the teaching point which is carried out in the form of a discussion that consists of the teacher explaining things that are new to the learners and eliciting from them what they already know or are able to interpret. The students are allowed to make wild guesses and suggestions, however, the teacher must, at this phase, control the situation, so that it is always to the point. Such introductory procedures are within the scope of the domains of cognition and coexistence.

The teaching procedures which are within the scope of the domain of creation are viewed in this proposal as a bond of the synergy of the three educational domains, in which the acquired knowledge and the skills of critical thinking are realized practically through the creative activities of the students. The natural disciplines which are in a position to deal with the issues of SF and fantasy are literature classes, e.g. the creation of novels, short stories, dramas, various kinds of spectacles and film production. The teaching points deal with the possible ways of establishing fictitious settings, themes, plots, action, metaphorical expressions, symbols, and satirical visions, etc. for the problems which have been discussed in the domains of cognition and coexistence. The students are free to choose the forms of expression, i.e. internal monologues, narratives, descriptions of places or actions, reminiscences, recollections or memoirs. Also, they should be allowed to make use of stylistic devices in order to achieve realistic and psychologically convincing dialogues, sardonic humour, emotions, moods, etc. The scientific, psychological, sociological or philosophical knowledge demonstrated in the students' works ought to be consulted with the teachers of the disciplines with which their creation is connected.

The products of creation which concern the domain of coexistence are not to be isolated from those of the domain of cognition because the social and psychological problems of decent behaviour in all socially structured communities and groups must be placed in a scientifically reliable context. The teaching points whose target it is to suggest the ways of developing sensitivity to these problems deal with these matters in an artistic way. The setting of such works is similar to any other setting of literary fiction or films, e.g. family life, social and political conflicts and satire, intrigues, comedies of manners, adventures, interstellar travels, meeting aliens, catastrophic predictions, etc. Attempts must be made, with the help of the teacher's suggestions, to overcome the usual tendency to focus solely on possible technological inventions, which limit the educational scope of the procedures to an obvious pragmatic level. Instead, they should encourage the students to imagine situations of peaceful

and harmonious coexistence between the members of the social groups, tribes, nations, or between people and aliens. In such attempts, the students should avoid direct didactic messages or suggestions of moral and ethical behaviour, but take advantage of their own personal characteristics, e.g. their sense of humour, interests, temperament, etc. in order to create convincing situations, in which such behaviour is natural.

The teaching points which develop critical thinking and which search for objective knowledge about the world may help the teacher to elicit from the students the observation that most of the present SF works manifest a lack of imagination as far as the development of the phenomenon of consciousness is concerned. The aliens, whether ridiculous monsters, or normal individuals, turn out to be aggressive conquerors who are going to enslave or exterminate mankind, explore new sources of energy or acquire supernatural mental powers which are used for the sake of imperial targets. The point is that the phenomenon of consciousness is definitely connected with the activation of such higher mental processes as reasoning, creation of metaphors, argumentation with the use of the higher language functions, artistic creation, poetic imagination, as well as mental development thanks to the changes of the cognitive structure of the mind (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021). These processes represent the creative aspect of the mind and are independent of biologically determined survival drives and psychosocial needs. A popular conviction connected with the nature of SF literature, is that evolutionary development is estimated by the development of technology, whereas people themselves, as well as aliens, do not show any real evolutionary changes. Actually, the usual vision of people in SF works is that they retain the same pathologies of the domain of coexistence which plague the world today, e.g. greed, corruption, cruelty, vanity, and a lack of sensitivity and imagination as far as the fate of other people and the environment are concerned. Such critical observations may result in a willingness to create SF works in which the decent behaviour of people, as well as aliens, is a natural charac-

teristic of any individual gifted with consciousness, whereas all these pathologies belong to an animalistic past.

## **2.2. The role of the teacher**

The synergy of the three fundamental educational domains and the interdisciplinary approach to teaching procedures imply a special position for teachers. Their work is determined by a high degree of individual contact with the students, and by the necessity of constant self-education. These characteristics result from the broad range of engaged disciplines, themes, subjects, problems, fields of interest, etc. in the domains of cognition and coexistence, and by the obligation of the teacher, who is an artist of the discipline in the domain of creation, not to overlook and waste the talents and artistic predispositions of the students by a wrong choice of didactic activities. The disciplines engaged in the creation of SF works involve the teacher's interest in genetics, nuclear physics, classical music, literary criticism, history of art, philosophy, history of civilization, astronomy, evolution of life, technological inventions, theological dogmas, pop-culture, physiology and anatomy, language – its structure and functions, the relativity of time, the mass and velocity of movement, biological systems of the classification of organisms, statistics, politics, economics, ecology, etc. Such a universality of interests requires the teacher's constant self-education which becomes an essential element of the system of general education preceding vocational training and instruction in his or her chosen professional specialization.

The need for constant self-education is determined by the content of the teaching materials, i.e. SF and fantasy works, definitions, news, etc. and by the requirements of the themes of the works which the students plan to create and which the teacher must be able to control as far as their reliability and validity are concerned. This requirement is obvious on the descriptive and informative level, and the content of the themes may be easily verified and falsified. However, the involvement of the teacher in this subject matter is much deeper than just the

level of the information and description provided by the text of the teaching material or by the product created by the student. The teacher who intends to introduce SF in education must be prepared to deal with the knowledge of the disciplines which are not within the scope of his or her specialization and grasp the new knowledge in a way which is similar to that of a teacher who is a specialist in this discipline. The interaction based on the new themes, i.e. a discussion, debate, public speech, criticism or written composition, essay or novel, requires the teacher's full understanding of the basic issues of the text. For example, while working on sociological themes, the teacher must become acquainted with the problems of social order and social change, social conflicts and problems of social institutions such as the family, law, church, etc. as well as with the concepts of social norms, roles, culture and other issues characteristic of the study of people in their social environment. While working on popular psychological themes the teacher becomes interested in the roles of instinct, heredity, perception, learning, motivation, lower and higher mental processes, the functioning of thought, intelligence, language and the phenomenon of consciousness. Similar requirements concern the technological, biological, astronomical, physical, medical, and any other potential issues of the SF and fantasy works produced by the students. In a way, the teacher becomes a student of the rudiments of each of the scientific, social and psychological disciplines which are the subject matter of the SF and fantasy works used in general education.

### **3. Practical suggestions**

The following examples are suggestions for ways of using SF and fantasy themes as sources for teaching points, teaching materials and the teacher's didactic activities with respect to the synergy of the domains of cognition, creation and coexistence. They deal with each of these domains or with all of them in an interdisciplinary way, so as to illustrate a variety of possible procedures. The commentary below addresses the reasons why they

were selected with regard to their educational capacity, their potential in terms of cognitive appeal, their possibilities for evoking a cognitive-creative type of learning motivation, and their value as a substance of creation.

The teaching materials – SF and fantasy novels, films, opinions, definitions, quoted fragments, etc. are used by the teacher as points of departure for a debate or discussion on a definite point, scientific, psychological or social, which may be compared with the knowledge gained at school (Chirlesan and Chirlesan 2014), develop the skill of critical thinking, or serve as the substance of creation for the student's own artistic production. They may concern all disciplines which are in the curriculum as subjects of teaching. It should be noted that the material is to be used by the teacher, whereas the students may or may not become acquainted with it. However, if the students do read or see the original material, it is advisable that they invent their own setting, theme, plot and action, so as not to repeat it from the original.

The following illustrations refer to several SF and fantasy works which deal with scientific, psychological, social, political, and philosophical problems. They represent a spectrum of various approaches to the idea of the function of the genres of SF and range from scientifically plausible predictions and speculations on the mental development of people, to social and political allegories, utopias and dystopias. Also, there are works which may be classified as fantasy as far as the scientific aspect is concerned, but are reliable as speculations on political and social relations or philosophical ideas.

### **3.1. Source material: *Project Hail Mary* by Weir (2021)**

This example illustrates the possibility of finding teaching points for all three domains with references to a broad range of engaged disciplines of the domains of cognition and coexistence. The teacher's intention is to trigger the willingness of students to apply the encountered problems, themes and stylistic devices in their own SF works.



### 3.1.1. Summary of the content

The novel is about the threat of the extinction to life on Earth due to an invasion of special kinds of microbes which have come to our solar system in search of new sources of energy. In the millions of years of their evolution, the microbes have acquired the ability to move through space to neighbouring star systems in order to 'feed' on the energy of their suns. In this way, they have infected a whole cluster of stars, including our solar system. Scientists on Earth have formed an international committee to study the microbes in order to prevent the extinction. They have discovered a star, about twelve light years distant from our system, which has proved to be immune to these microbes. An international mission has been formed to find out what protected the star from infection. A spaceship suitable to undertake such a voyage is constructed and sent there in order to solve the problem and try to save life on Earth. The mission consists of an international crew of three astronauts, of whom only the main character awakens from the coma into which the astronauts were put to survive the journey. The reader learns about the organization of the mission from his fuzzily returning memories. The astronaut manages to recall what the purpose of the mission is and to navigate the spaceship so as to approach the target star system. When orbiting the star, he encounters an alien spaceship and rightly concludes that its aim is the same as his: namely, to save from extinction life on a planet from a different star system and cluster of stars infected by the same microbes. It turns out, however, that all but one of the crew of the alien spaceship has died of cosmic radiation. Notwithstanding the remarkable physical, anatomical, physiological, cultural and technological differences, they manage to communicate thanks to a similar level of intelligence and a knowledge of the universal laws of nature. They cooperate in their endeavours to find out what could possibly protect both their planets from the infection and discover that the microbes have a natural predator – a special kind of amoeba. They succeed in examining its life-cycle and find out how to 'farm' it. Finally, samples of the amoeba

and all the essential scientific information are sent to both planets so that life there is prevented from extinction.

### **3.1.2. Suggested procedures**

The discussion concerning the domain of cognition may begin with the problem of the plausibility of an invasion of microbes which feed on the energy of the sun. The controversial point is the assumption that the microbes are able to approach the surface of the sun, whose temperature is about 5 500 degrees Celsius. Such high temperature makes it impossible for water to exist while, according to contemporary knowledge, no life-forms can exist without water, whereas after about 3 000 degrees Celsius the hydrogen and oxygen atoms, which constitute water, cannot stay bound to each other. Thus, when the SF work introduces microbes near the surface of the sun, either we deal with a life-form which is not water based, or this work should be classified as fantasy. Having introduced this debatable problem, the teacher of any of the engaged disciplines – chemistry, astrophysics or microbiology, elicits from the students their opinions on what should be done to make the SF work reliable. In this way, the teacher of the domain of cognition incites activities in the domain of creation, e.g. the students may be asked to write a composition, short story, essay, etc. in which this problem is framed in an imaginative way. For instance, it is possible that a student may write about a scientist who has discovered that the sun was invaded by microbes which in the course of their evolution have developed a mechanism which makes them resistant to such temperatures. Another possibility might be the idea that life in the environmental conditions of a planet of a different star system might have evolved without the need for water, some students may speculate that life might not have evolved on Earth at all but came in the form of single-celled organisms from other parts of our galaxy, while others may suggest that the terrestrial life-forms and the extra-terrestrial ones have a common ancestor etc.

The teacher's role is to help the students with the scientific aspects of their creation. For example, the teacher may explain to the students that the inside of the microbes was not much different from the inside of any other single-celled living organisms which may be found on Earth and which have to produce complex proteins required for DNA, mitochondria, and all the other parts of a cell. To produce such proteins the microbes would need carbon and oxygen. So, if the SF work which they are going to create deals with microbes which are water based, it must also deal with the supplies of carbon dioxide. Such details are essential to make the SF work plausible and reliable for the prospective reader.

The point which is of vital importance for the domains of cognition and coexistence is communication and the functions of natural language. In SF genres, it is connected with contacts between people of different nations or cultures, and, most frequently, between people and aliens. The plausibility of the work depends on the ways humans and aliens establish common platforms for the fundamental concepts of time, space, mass, energy, life, intentions, agreement, negation, civilization, intelligence, consciousness, artistic creation, etc. so as to become able to exchange messages and to coordinate activities. The source material deals with this issue through the establishment of contact between the human and the alien astronauts. Such contact is possible only thanks to the technological equipment of both spaceships, which, as it happens, is more or less at the same advanced level.

The teacher presents the main problem for the discussion, namely, how to establish the common platform for the fundamental concepts, which are indispensable for sending and receiving messages, and which on Earth are represented by human natural language. The planet from which the alien comes and the Earth have radically different environmental conditions. For example, the alien planet has an atmosphere which is poisonous to humans and is so dense that the light waves which reach its surface have frequencies invisible to any sense of sight in the human sense of this word e.g. ultraviolet. The only signal

of the fact that the alien can notice at least something is that he responds to gestures, e.g. waving hands, for greetings. Consequently, the intelligent creatures who have evolved on the planet have not acquired the sense of sight and live in complete darkness. However, they do not have any problems moving around and they perceive and understand the three-dimensional environment equally to humans. The human astronaut, thanks to his biological knowledge about bats and dolphins, in particular, their use of echolocation, rightly guesses that the alien noticed the gesture of hand waving because he was able to 'see' with sounds, and instead of electromagnetic waves used the various frequencies of sound waves to perceive and understand the world and to communicate. The alien produces sounds which the human can hear and makes it clear that he can hear him. There is no pronunciation or inflection of the sounds, just regular notes and chords which again remind the human astronaut of whale song. Indeed, in spite of coming from different planets and a totally different evolutionary line, they have compatible sound ranges. Both spaceships, the alien and the human, are also equipped with instruments which can 'translate' the frequencies of electromagnetic waves into the frequencies of sound waves and the other way round.

The introduction of the problem to the students is followed by a discussion during which the teacher elicits from the students their conceptions about the fundamental notions which should be chosen to start establishing a mutually shared 'vocabulary' and 'grammar' so as to be able to continue the further expansion of their acquisition. Simultaneously, the teacher elicits their suggestions concerning the medium which could function as the vehicle of meanings of such a kind of translations. Probably, the students would agree that a starting point could be the gesture of waving the hand with the meaning 'yes, I understand', which could then be followed by a different gesture with the opposite meaning 'no, I don't understand.' Some other students might suggest the gesture of holding up the thumb with the meaning of 'yes, OK' and suggest that the 'vehicle' of the meaning might be regular sound waves in the form of 'tap,

tapping' or in some form otherwise achieved. The suggestions of using the frequencies of sound waves which they both understand in the same way may be inspired by classes in the domain of creation where the students learn about rules which are universal, no matter in which part of the universe they appear. For instance, the rule that the octave means doubling the frequency of every note is not specific to humans but applies to any species which are able to produce sound waves, whether for artistic purposes or for communication. While eliciting from the students their ideas for expanding a mutually shared 'vocabulary' and suggestions of adequate 'grammar', the teacher has an opportunity to convince the students that language learning is an exponential system. The more words you know, the easier it is to learn new ones.

The discussion on establishing a system of communication between alien races coming from entirely different environmental conditions may prove a rich source of ideas for imaginative situations to be used in the students' own creative production. At this point, it would be advantageous to consult the teacher of literature classes, in the domain of creation, whose task it would be to carry out a workshop in which students would learn how to construct dialogues and narratives of everyday humorous situations in order to create a friendly atmosphere for contact. Types of exchanges and stories which might be expected from two intelligent creatures. The source material provides an example of humorous confusion in a typical everyday situation, one which results from the misunderstanding of particular phrases due to the lack of adequate extra-linguistic features of communication. The example illustrates the initiative to establish a common platform for the vocabulary items 'yes' and 'no' (Weir 2021: 201):

"Okay, we have 'yes' in our vocabulary now" I say.

Tap – tap – tap.

I look over. Once he knows he has my attention, he does jazz hands again and says the same chord as before, tap – tap – tap.

"Yes", I say. "We covered this."

He holds up a finger for a moment. Then he balls two of his fists and taps them together.

Tap – tap.

...What?

“Ohhh” I say. I am a teacher. What would I teach someone who just learned the word ‘yes’?

“That is ‘no’.

At least I hope so.

I ball my fists and tap them together. “No”

Tap – tap – tap he says. I check the laptop. He just said yes.

Wait. Does that mean it is not no? Is that another yes? Now I am confused.

“No?” I ask.

“No”, he says.

“So, ‘yes’?”

“No, yes”

“Yes?”

“No. No.”

“Yes, yes?”

“No!” He balls a fist at me, clearly frustrated.

Enough of this interspecies routine. I hold up a finger.

He unballs his fist and returns the gesture.

I enter the frequencies for what I think is “no” into my spreadsheet.

If I am wrong, I am wrong and we will work it out later.

The novel frequently deals with matters of the relations between the fundamental properties of matter, i.e. mass and energy in connection with the velocity of the moving object, which in the novel concerns the velocity of the spaceship. Since the knowledge of these relations is the subject matter of classes of physics, the solutions and explanations which the students find in the novel may be coordinated with the programme of the school subject and substantially reinforce it. For example, interstellar traveling depends on a supply of energy, which makes it possible for the spaceship to accelerate according to the needs of navigation. In the novel, this problem is solved by a reference to the rule of mass conversion into energy if the velocity of the spaceship approaches the speed of light. The internationally organised scientists of the Earth discovered, while studying the microbes

which invaded the sun, that they had evolved the capacity to take heat energy from the sun, converting it into mass and storing it in ATP, i.e. a coenzyme which is found in the cells of all organisms and provides a means of storage of energy for cellular activities. Then, when they need the energy back, they turn the mass back into energy in the form of light frequency. The microbes use this regained energy for interstellar travelling. In this way, the microbes, which threatened the existence of life on the Earth, turned out to have become a perfect medium for the storage of energy, and also an ideal supply of the energy necessary for the spaceship to navigate. Thus the students learn from the teaching material that the two fundamental properties of the physical world, namely mass and energy are inter-convertible. They also learn that this process is the source of energy in a nuclear reactor, or in an atomic bomb, called nuclear energy.

Knowledge about the inter-convertibility of mass and energy is reinforced in the class of physics by the usual programme which includes the first law of thermodynamics. The law states that when energy in one form disappears, an equivalent amount of energy appears in some other form and may be converted into work. The mutual reinforcement of the knowledge about the inter-convertibility of mass and energy which has been gained in the discussion of a SF problem, and the study of the relationship between heat and other forms of energy which comes from a class in school, is likely to evoke a cognitive-creative type of learning motivation and stimulate the willingness to search for other such relationships in other disciplines of the domain of cognition. Then, thanks to cooperation with the teacher in the domain of creation, e.g. in literature classes, the knowledge of such relations may become the inspiration for the student's own SF production.

### **3.2. Source material: *The Lost World and Other Stories* by Doyle (1995)**

The teaching point of this example concerns the fundamental questions of the functions of science, namely, why people should gain objective knowledge about the nature of the world and about their existence in it. This issue appears in the source material in the form of a discussion between an eccentric science professor and a journalist who interviews him about his experiments. The subject matter of the discussion in the short story is the professor's fantastic notion that our planet is in itself a special kind of a living organism with circulation, respiration and a nervous system. The professor sets out to drill the earth's crust to reach the living matter of the planet. When the journalist asks what the object of so extraordinary an experiment is, the professor responds in the following way:

Raise your mind above the base mercantile and utilitarian needs of commerce. Shake off your paltry standards of business. Science seeks knowledge. Let the knowledge lead us where it will, we still must seek it. To know once for all what we are, why we are, where we are, is that not in itself the greatest of human aspirations? (Doyle 1995: 445)

With this quotation, the teacher initiates a debate which concerns the basic educational aims of the domain of cognition. The students are expected to establish a clear idea about the function of the non-pragmatic level of education. The students may exchange arguments which will focus on the advantages of the utilitarian targets of gaining knowledge as opposed to the fantastic and illusory search for the answers to general and philosophical questions. The source of the problem, i.e. the idea that the planet, which is in a geological sense is made up of inanimate matter, could possibly experience typical processes for animate matter such as circulation, respiration and a nervous system, may be easily falsified and therefore it indirectly supports



the arguments of the need for the utilitarian targets of education in the domain of cognition.

The key to change this line of reasoning is the teacher's explanation that there are two levels of targets, – utilitarian and non-utilitarian, which do not exclude each other and therefore should not be opposed in an 'either-or' relation. Actually, they may be related in a hierarchy of inclusion, i.e. any attempt to gain knowledge beyond the pragmatic targets naturally includes the practical ones, whereas attempts which focus on practicality are frequently limited to the pragmatic level. After this clarification, the teacher's task is to elicit from the students examples of scientific research which aim at approaching the truth about the nature of the world and simultaneously turn out to be useful for medicine, technology, space exploration, etc. The discussion may provoke some new ideas about possible fields of experimentation in various disciplines, e.g. biology, chemistry, physics, or psychology, with which the students are familiar from classes at school. Also, the students may invent fantastic notions which are not reliable or plausible from the scientific point of view. Both kinds of ideas may become an inspiration for the products of the students' own works in the domain of creation – the scientifically reliable ideas for SF works and the fantastic notions for fantasy works or fairy tales. In all the ideas which are suggested by the students, there should be attempts to see beyond the direct pragmatic targets, so as to deal in some ways with the nature of the world, the sense of the existence of people in it, and the acute problems of coexistence with other people and with the environment.

### **3.3. Source material: *The Songs of Distant Earth* by Clarke (1998)**

The search for teaching points in this SF novel basically concerns the domain of coexistence. Its theme is envisaging the reaction of mankind in the wake of the inevitable death of the Earth due to the sun going nova, and the possible fate of humanity afterwards. From a scientific point of view, the novel is

created in a realistic and plausible vein, since it refers to known or foreseeable technology and current objective knowledge of the laws of nature. Thus, the novel also provides the teacher with an opportunity to search for teaching points in the domain of cognition. However, the essential problem posed in this novel is how to save humanity from complete extinction, which implies the need for a debate on various moral and ethical issues in the domain of coexistence. The solution to this problem is found in the idea of interstellar colonization which is realized in several stages in the span of approximately two thousand years. First, spaceships are sent to other solar systems with frozen embryos and automatic equipment to revive them in planets with acceptable environmental conditions. Then, spaceships are invented, which can store and carry millions of genotypes and replicating equipment. Finally, with the discovery of a source of energy labelled 'quantum drive', a giant spaceship is built which carries about a million people in hibernation, who escape from the Earth just before its end. The target of this spaceship is a planet five hundred years distant. In the meantime, the spaceship has to stop by a habitable planet to repair the drive mechanism. The planet turns out to be populated by people replicated from the genotypes which had been sent in one of the spaceships almost a thousand years previously. Thanks to the technology available at the time of leaving the Earth, the inhabitants of this planet formed a utopian social system. The setting of the novel, its plot and themes deal with the relations between the crew of the spaceship and the inhabitants of the planet.

**Suggested procedures:**

The teaching point in the domain of coexistence which the teacher may choose for a debate is the question whether it is possible to establish social relations devoid of any political, economic, or any other conflicts of coexistence by means of artificially superimposed decrees or rules. The teacher initiates the debate with the following quotation of the internal monologue of one of the major characters of the crew of the spaceship:

It is possible to build rational and humane culture completely free from the threat of supernatural restraints. Though in principle I don't approve of censorship, it seems that those who prepared the archives for the Thalassan colony succeeded in an almost-impossible task. They purged the history and literature of ten thousand years, and the result has justified their efforts. We must be cautious before replacing anything that was lost – however beautiful, however moving a work of art.

The Thalassans were never poisoned by the decay products of dead religions, and in seven hundred years no prophet has arisen here to preach a new faith. The very word 'God' has almost vanished from their language, and they are quite surprised – or amused – when we happen to use it.

My scientist friends are fond of saying that one sample makes very poor statistics, so I wonder if the total lack of religion in this society really proves anything. We know that the Thalassans were also very carefully selected genetically to eliminate as many undesirable social traits as possible. Yes, yes – I know that only about fifteen per cent of human behaviour is determined by the genes – but that fraction is very important! The Lassans certainly seem remarkably free from such unpleasant traits as envy, intolerance, jealousy, anger. Is this entirely the result of cultural conditioning? (Clarke 1998: 55–56)

The debate on the content of the quoted impressions may begin with encouraging the students to discover points which are either controversial or clearly fallacious. For example, the statement that someone does not approve of censorship and at the same time tacitly accepts and justifies purging the history and literature of ten thousand years of artistic and philosophical creation simply because of the appearance of some phrases, words or topics in texts which may suggest the destructive influence of 'supernatural traits', definitely shows inconsistency in their argumentation. In other words, the statement disapproves and at the same time approves of censorship. The observation of the fact that 'purging' is synonymous to 'censorship' may lead to the next point of the debate, namely, to the character's conviction that the very mention of religious matters is 'poisonous to the society'. The teacher might expect here that the

students would formulate ideas that convictions of this kind represent an illogical belief: that a given problem disappears when nobody mentions its existence.

However, what is more important for the debate at this point, is the fact that the issue of the ‘threat of the supernatural traits’ is much too complex to be simply ‘liquidated’ by purging it from history and literature and by the disappearance of ‘prophets preaching new faith’. It is the teacher’s task to elicit from the students the notion of the intuitively felt phenomenon which may be labelled “metaphysical inclination” (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021), and which people have evolved in the course of their evolution together with the phenomenon of self-consciousness. This phenomenon consists in the feeling of the possibility of the existence of a higher ordering of the world in which the search for the truth about its nature, the pursuit of its beauty through artistic creation and decent behaviour, are normal and natural characteristics of mankind. Within the framework of this higher ordering of the world, the familiar, recognizable and understandable universe of time and space is only a functioning part. Paradoxically, this feeling, although impossible to be scientifically verified and falsified, plays a positive role in the educational domains of cognition, creation and coexistence. It is the dynamic force which ‘pushes and prods’ individuals to discover the true nature of phenomena which seemingly are beyond the capabilities of the senses and of the mind of people to understand, but with the improvement of objective knowledge gradually become familiar to them. Thus, it turns out that it is possible for the ‘threat of supernatural traits’ to disappear, however, not by purging history and literature, but by an adequate and balanced education in the domains of cognition, creation and coexistence, which lasts from birth throughout the whole life of every individual human being. After such clarification the students are free to provide all kinds of examples of phenomena which in the history of civilizations changed their status from ‘supernatural’ to a ‘regular law of nature’, e.g. electricity, evolution, gravitation, origins of time and space, etc. Also, they are free to mention examples of myths, superstitions, misconceptions,

fallacies, references to magic in all kinds of rituals, miracles, etc. which can be easily verified and falsified.

Another debatable issue in the quoted impressions is the idea that it is possible to establish a rational and humane society by the application of a genetic selection of the people who have been chosen to survive. This opinion is supported in the novel by the fact that the inhabitants of the planet, thanks to this selection, are free from several traits which cause trouble in the domain of coexistence such as envy, intolerance, jealousy, or anger. The teacher may elicit from the students the observation that the traits which have been mentioned have psychological grounding entirely different from one another, and exert a different kind of influence upon the behaviour and coexistence of people. For instance, 'anger' may turn out to be advantageous when it motivates actions against the harmful decisions of rulers or acts of destruction, 'intolerance' depends on what is expected to be tolerated, e.g. there is nothing wrong when one does not tolerate crime, cheating, treachery, or devastation of nature, 'envy' and 'jealousy' are biologically motivated instincts of the equipment of survival, and any genetic manipulation with such instincts may have unpredictable, if not disastrous consequences for emotions or other lower mental processes, etc. Also the rhetorical question at the end of the quoted internal monologue, namely, whether the disappearance of socially unpleasant traits can be attributed solely to 'cultural conditioning', or perhaps to some extent also to genetic selection, may become a point of departure for a serious discussion on the nature of the phenomena of culture and education. The teacher may encourage the students to define these notions and elicit from them the observation that the author of these impressions, by contrasting the ideas of 'genetic selection' and 'cultural conditioning', evidently confuses the notion of 'conditioning' with the notion of 'education': 'conditioning' denotes the particular kind of education which deals with stimulus-response learning, which leads to the formation of habits, whereas the notion of 'education' has a much broader meaning and apart from S-R type of learning includes mental changes of the cognitive struc-

ture of the mind. These changes occur thanks to the activities of the higher mental processes and represent the creative aspect of the functions of the mind, namely, those functions which deal with critical argumentation, the creation of poetic metaphors, logical reasoning, and artistic production, etc (Bruner 1997). Mental changes of this kind are unpredictable and evade any kind of 'cultural conditioning'. The teacher's role here is to help the students to understand these ideas and to formulate them.

At this point of the debate, the teacher may suggest that the students become acquainted with a variety of classical dystopias, i.e. anti-utopian works which depict imaginary societies, whose purpose it is to warn against the social and political evils resulting from the manipulation of people. Works of this genre may be used as teaching materials in the domains of coexistence and creation, provided that the students read them of their own accord. Typical themes include: genetic selection, a pre-ordained caste system and obligatory use of narcotics (Huxley 1994), the menaces of increasing greed, territorial expansion, corruption, vicious behaviour, and inveterate hostilities which destroy the seemingly happy lives of utopian societies (Huxley 2005), massive political propaganda, total invigilation of individuals and depriving them of their privacy (Orwell 2021), the total oppression and misery of human beings (Aldiss 2008), absolute mistrust and suspicion in a society where everybody is a spy, agent, double or triple agent, informer, traitor, provocateur or denouncer but no-one knows what the purpose of his mission may possibly be (Lem 1976). Teaching points in the domain of coexistence would deal with such dystopias and the nature of all kinds of evils as well as the reasons they exist in society.

As far as the domain of creation is concerned, the students are free to invent settings for imaginary societies with allegoric references to the actual situation of the world, its wars, conflicts and devastation of nature. The themes of this creative production may also include the literature genre of fantasy with allegoric references to the history of civilizations, the collapse of empires, the restoration of democracies and spiritual revival. The

students are expected to make use of the technique of magic realism, i.e. they invent fantastic situations in which the teaching points of the domains of cognition and coexistence appear as constituents of the setting, themes and action, and are treated realistically in their own right. The teacher in the domain of creation, who is an artist in the discipline, should make it clear to the students that they should not confuse this literary genre with SF works. The subject matter of the content of fantasy fiction is first of all concerned with its artistic quality, whereas in SF works the content may be compared with current objective knowledge and can be evaluated according to its plausibility and credibility. In fantasy fiction, the setting, themes, characters and action function as the substance of creation of works in which the psychological truth of the motivational drives of the characters and the skill of telling a story play a decisive role for their estimation, no matter whether the action takes place in a pseudo-medieval setting full of monsters, ghosts, goblins, dwarves, wizards and people with supernatural mental capacity, or in galactic empires in which the characters travel in spaceships from one end of the galaxy to the other – a distance of seventy thousand light years in a couple of weeks.

### **3.4. Source material: *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien (1969: 45–47)**

From the educational point of view, both SF works and fantasy fiction may be used as teaching materials, however, the students should, by no means, be forced to read them, since any artificial imposition of formal requirements will destroy the major principle of the domain of creation, namely, the spontaneous initiative of the student. The teacher's suggestions and encouragement may focus on the subject matter of the content rather, than on a particular work. For example, the teacher may use a definite quotation to illustrate an important point in a literary workshop, so that the students realize the complexity of the storytelling, dialogues and narratives. The following quotation manifests such a possibility:

'Everything?' said Gandalf. 'The ring as well? You agreed to that, you remember' 'Well, er, yes, I suppose so,' stammered Bilbo. 'Where is it?' 'In an envelope, if you must know,' said Bilbo impatiently. 'There on the mantelpiece. Well no! Here it is in my pocket!' He hesitated. 'Isn't that odd now?' he said softly to himself. 'Yet, after all, why not? Why shouldn't it stay there?' Gandalf looked again very hard at Bilbo, and there was a gleam in his eyes. 'I think, Bilbo,' he said quietly, 'I should leave it behind. Don't you want to?' 'Well yes – and no. Now it comes to it, I don't like parting with it at all, I may say. And I don't really see why I should. Why do you want me to?' he asked, and a curious change came over his voice. It was sharp with suspicion and annoyance. 'You are always badgering me about my ring; but you have never bothered me about the other things that I got on my journey.' 'No, but I had to badger you,' said Gandalf. 'I wanted the truth. It was important. Magic rings are – well, magical; and they are rare and curious. I was professionally interested in your ring, you may say, and I still am. I should like to know where it is, if you go wandering again. Also, I think you have had it quite long enough. You won't need it any more, Bilbo, unless I am quite mistaken.' Bilbo flushed and there was an angry light in his eyes. His kindly face grew hard. 'Why not?' he cried. 'And what business is it of yours, anyway, to know what I do with my own things? It is my own. I found it. It came to me.' 'Yes, yes,' said Gandalf. 'But there is no need to be angry.' 'If I am it is your fault,' said Bilbo. 'It is mine, I tell you. My own. My precious. Yes, my precious.' The wizard's face remained grave and attentive, and only a flicker in his deep eyes showed that he was startled and indeed alarmed. 'It has been called that before,' he said, 'but not by you.'

This fragment of the story shows the conflicting motivational drives characteristic of the internal struggles which usually accompany taking decisions which have great consequences for life. It introduces the main point of the trilogy, namely, the influence of the possession of absolute power upon an individual and the resulting addiction to it, even of individuals who are naturally immune to this influence, as was the case with the characters of the story, i.e. the hobbits. These struggles were expressed by gradual realization of the unwillingness to part with the Ring of Power which, in the trilogy, epitomizes the



possession of such power. The hobbit hesitates, then becomes determined to keep it, even fight for it, to be finally greatly relieved when, unwillingly, he gave it up. The setting of the story, the characters and the action are imaginative and fantastic, but the behaviour and reactions are true to life and psychologically credible in every detail.

Fantasy fiction of this kind may serve as teaching material in the domain of creation, first of all because of its artistic quality, which is achieved thanks to the skill of storytelling, the psychological truth of the motivational drives, the realistic language of the dialogues, vivid action, and colourful description of landscapes, objects and characters who express a variety of moods ranging from a subtle and robust sense of humour to that of the greatest panic. As far as the domains of cognition and coexistence are concerned, the teaching points must be selected spontaneously, in the form of casual digressions. For example, current events which have a negative impact on social, political or family life such as wars, revolutions, the destructive decisions of rulers, etc. may be compared with the negative characters of the story and the dramatic events of its content. However, such digressions should not dominate the discussion in the literary class, so as not to lose sight of the artistic aims of the creation of literary fiction and the skill of telling a story. The teacher's task here is to cooperate with the student in the act of discovering such analogies and relationships and in expressing them in the discussion.

#### **4. The future**

The general education of people meets the literary genres of SF and fantasy on the ground of their future perspectives. Education as such should be considered as a dynamic process, beginning at birth, which consists in the occurrence of behavioural and mental changes throughout the whole of life. These changes occur thanks to the learning processes which take place and concern both changes of the cognitive structure of the mind and social awareness, and changes of the behavioural and proce-

dural patterns which may be conditioned by causing responses to stimuli and then reinforcing them to form habits, procedures and patterns of behaviour. The characteristic feature of changes to the cognitive structure is the activation of the higher mental processes, which result in the emergence of the creative aspect of the mind (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021) and which are independent of the S-R conditioning processes. The general education of people, thanks to this capacity, becomes involved with the ways of developing critical thinking, imagination, sensitivity to the truth of the nature of the world and to its beauty, sensitivity to the fate of mankind, the urge to create artefacts, the capacity of discovering new and unpredictable phenomena, the capacity of formulating thoughts and ideas which have never been formulated before, and free will to make decisions about the future. The literary genres of science fiction and fantasy are in a position to deal with the same fields of interest by means of imaginative artistic creation – fictitious setting, characters, themes, action and plot, which are used to produce a complete work of art. Thanks to these common fields of interest and possible development, the works of art may influence the direction of general education, whereas the educational domains of cognition, creation and coexistence may become decisive factors in developing the scope and future direction of SF and fantasy.

In the domain of cognition the new directions of general education given above, may shift towards the potential force of the higher mental processes which are necessary to transcend the usual practical advantages of acquiring and collecting information. Thus, the direction of general education will focus on the skill of critical thinking with the application of logical falsification of theories or statements. Such broadening of the scope of educational targets may open the way to discovering new fields of interest for scientific research. For example, such a field could be the study of the creative aspect of the mind with references to the outstanding achievements of philosophers, artists, scientists, or teachers in the history of mankind. Naturally, the usual study of the functioning of the brain would continue with the same efficiency as it does today. However, the focus on pro-

ducts of the creative mind, transcending its neurological or physiological grounding, is likely to accelerate the search by mankind for objective knowledge of the world.

SF and fantasy works may help in discovering new fields of interest thanks to the imagination and intuition of their authors, who are not limited by the rigours of formal measurements and strictly controlled experiments. For example, in the domain of cognition, thanks to the focus of attention on the higher mental processes and the creative aspect of the mind, the new themes of SF and fantasy works may deal with possible evolutionary changes in the capacity of the mind towards increasing the intensity of self-consciousness (Janczukowicz and Wenzel 2021). Aspects of this phenomenon, such as the cognitive-creative type of learning motivation, the natural drive to search for beauty in artistic creation and the natural need for peaceful and harmonious coexistence with other people may provide new and unpredictable themes and ideas. At present, fantasy fiction mostly tends to deal with the issue of the evolution of the mind in terms of the emergence of the supernatural capacity of controlling the minds of others, enslaving them or otherwise manifesting fantastic powers, which rather qualifies this genre as a variety of fairy-tale. The advantage of the theme of increasing the intensity of self-consciousness is that it is feasible, even in the present system of general education, provided that the system becomes elevated beyond the pragmatic level.

In the domain of creation the reciprocal reinforcement of general education and SF and fantasy works may concern the consequences of its becoming a universal and obligatory element of the system at secondary school level. In other words, it means placing this domain in the system of general education on equal terms with the domain of cognition. The consequences of the introduction of a system that encompasses a universal search for artistic predispositions and talents may result in the appearance of unpredictable new directions of the art of the future. New forms of expression may be suggested, which are based on the synthesis of various artistic disciplines. Such attempts have already taken place in the history of art. For example, Richard

Wagner (1994) formulated and realized in practical terms, a conception of the synergy of various disciplines of art, e.g. music, setting and poetry, to form the genre of music drama, while Hermann Hesse (1972), in an allegoric novel, developed a theme in which there is a synergy of art, science and literature. The setting and themes of such works of art as Wagner's 'The Ring of the Nibelung' (Der Ring des Nibelungen) or Hesse's 'The Glass Bead Game' (Das Glasperlenspiel) have their setting and themes in the convention of fantasy fiction, whereas their form of expression manifests the discovery of entirely new ways of conveying their message in order to deal with the most serious matters of the fate of mankind, e.g. the evils of the greed for power and wealth, with the accompanying corruption of character and devastation of nature, which are part and parcel of the domain of coexistence. At the same time, they belong to the greatest achievements in the history of art in the domain of creation.

The future of the educational domain of coexistence depends on the effectiveness of educating the natural need of decent behaviour and the social awareness of the existence of such needs in others. Since the result of educating these features of character is observable as the growth of the intensity of self-consciousness, its teaching procedures have to be viewed in the context of the domains of cognition and creation and the synergy of all of them, which may have a beneficial influence upon the scope and themes of the genres of SF and fantasy at present and in the future. The works which serve as teaching materials should have as part of their focus artistic values and cognitive plausibility and reliability, therefore the reciprocal reinforcement of the domain of coexistence and the future perspectives of these genres will be indirect and carried out in a casual way. A major role should be granted here to the teacher's intuition and talent to make the moral and ethical problems that these works contain clear to the students without resorting to direct and didactically formalized 'moralizing'. The teacher's activities will concentrate on the practice of argumentative discussion and critical thinking, so as to take advantage of the potential of the teaching material to involve the students in discovering these problems

for themselves. For instance, they may discover them on the basis of a comparison of current social or political conflicts, events, wars, etc. with the themes of the material. The artistic quality of this material may help the teacher to trigger the cognitive-creative type of learning motivation. The following example illustrates the possibility of discovering a variety of issues which concern all three educational domains.

The procedures may begin with the introduction of a problem which is characteristic for the domain of cognition, in particular, of the discipline of social studies. It concerns the reasons for the inevitable outbreak of a new war, even though the aggressor of the previous war was defeated. Before the presentation of the material the teacher does not make any suggestions of an analogy to the situation before the outbreak of World War II, or to numerous recent aggressions and invasions.

Fruitless did I call the victory of the Last Alliance? Not wholly so, yet it did not achieve its end. Sauron was diminished, but not destroyed. His Ring was lost but not unmade. The Dark Tower was broken, but its foundations were not removed; for they were made with the power of the Ring, and while it remains they will endure (Tolkien 1969: 264)

The students may recall from history classes the situation in Europe after World War I and in a debate are likely to conclude that wars may be avoided when the direct reasons are removed. Also they may discover a similarity between the situation described in the quotation and the historical events. At this point, the teacher may suggest that the problem is much more complex, involving a great number of economic, psychological and sociological issues, and therefore recommend reading Tolkien's trilogy as an enjoyable way of combining these issues artistically. The themes of the One Ruling Ring which may be discovered in the novel are potential teaching points to be discussed informally with students. These themes include the ring's power to control the minds of those who desire to possess it, addiction to the Ring, immunity against its evil influence, the conse-

quences which the greed for absolute power has for the fate of people, the tacit social acceptance of the rulers responsible for the destruction of harmonious relations, and a great variety of other matters in the domain of coexistence. It may happen that the students themselves will discover that it is not enough to create fantasy novels peopled with strange magical creatures and make the novel 'action packed', but that it is possible for the setting, plot and action of fantasy fiction to become a great work of art. There is only one condition for such procedures to be realized practically – the students should read the teaching material of their own accord.

A promising field for providing new themes for SF or fantasy fiction is the way authors deal with the span of time between the present and the time of the setting, themes, plot and action of the work. They may be concerned with the near future, the span of centuries, millennia, millions of years or, rarely, milliards of years. The issue of time has important consequences for the activation of the imagination of the students. The closer the distance to the present time, the greater the influence of current objective knowledge and contemporary technological advancement upon the credibility and plausibility of the works, which makes them convenient teaching materials for the domain of cognition. The greater the distance, the more opportunities for the activation of imagination. For example, broadening the span to millions of years implies the necessity to imagine the likely directions of scientific disciplines, technological inventions or the development of the intensity of consciousness. On the other hand, if the works belong to the genre of SF, they must avoid the temptation to resort to the supernatural elements, e.g. magic, miracles, extraordinary powers of the mind, the supernatural capacity of 'artificial intelligence', or other forms that contradict the universal laws of nature.

An attempt to combine scientific plausibility with the activation of the reader's imagination may be found in the SF novel of A. C. Clarke (1973). Its action takes place in the future, at a time when men have colonized the planets of the solar system. The technological details of the story are realistic, based on credible

solutions to interplanetary communication. However, in spite of the Earth's technological advancement, when a strange object the size of a planetoid approaches the sun, nobody is able to guess who controls it and how it is controlled, where it comes from and what its purpose is. What is more, on the part of the possible crew of the object there is a complete lack of interest in any contact with people, their affairs, activities, intentions, culture, etc. Even the threat of a nuclear explosion does not make any impression on them and is treated as a slight and insignificant disturbance. It seems that mankind and its civilization is believed to be part of the natural environment and the animate matter of our planet, which is not worth any interest. When the mysterious object leaves the solar system, the only possible explanation for this event is that its purpose was to accumulate the energy of the sun to make interstellar travelling possible. This example shows the possibility of a great discrepancy between what people believe to be advanced technology and technological research which is beyond the scope of present-day imagination. Teaching materials of this kind may inspire the students to search for such discrepancies in other disciplines of cognition and the creation of a curriculum to be used in their own artistic creation.

A special position in future relations between the genres of SF, fantasy and general education may be expected from themes concerned with the directions of evolutionary changes in the world. Most importantly, they require the broadening of the span of time to millions of years, which entails unpredictable consequences and challenges to the imagination, e.g. the creation of a setting, environment, culture, behaviour, language, science, arts, philosophy, and, most intriguing, the possible changes of the intensity of consciousness. The students may realize that the biologically determined features of the evolution of living organisms like natural selection, genetic mutation, adaptation to the environment, hybridization, sexual selection, survival of the fittest, including all the social problems of survival, etc. are not in a position to deal with the phenomena activated by the emergence of the self-consciousness of people and the

higher mental processes which are generated by it. If such a notion appears in the debate, the teacher may find an opportunity to elicit from the students the observation that the creative aspect of the mind could become a new agent of evolutionary changes, which implies the introduction of an adequate system of general education. The educational advantage of discovering such notions could be the emergence of the cognitive-creative type of learning motivation.

Finally, it seems advisable to suggest that the genres of SF and fantasy should include the phenomenon of education itself and its predictable future among their fields of interest. Education, understood as a dynamic process, has to evolve together with the development of the creative aspect of the mind, so as to be adequate to the new challenges posed by it. The significance of this problem is apparent in the novel by P. Boulle (1964) who, in the convention of satiric dystopia, illustrates the discrepancy between a fossilized system of education and the new challenges generated by the creative aspect of the mind. The action of the novel takes place on a planet with environmental conditions similar to those of the Earth. However, the position of men and apes are reversed. The apes, who rule the planet, believe that they are the only intelligent creatures in the world and that their planet is the centre of the universe. They make scientific and exactly controlled experiments on people, who are degraded to the role of unintelligent animals and believed to be unable to learn a language. When a spaceship from the Earth with a human crew lands there, the main character of the story and the crew are taken prisoner and exposed to the same experiments which were carried out on the human inhabitants of the planet. It becomes apparent that the scientists amongst the apes, represented by orang-utans, are not able to accept the notion that men can speak, even though the main character demonstrates that he has learned their language quickly and effectively and is able to express the most complex and sophisticated ideas. In spite of this manifestation, the official scientific report classifies him as a man with particularly sharp instincts, but totally devoid of the capacity for thought.



The basic principle of the science of the apes, which has determined their education, is the conviction that if something can be explained in terms of higher mental processes and also operant conditioning based on the lower, biological processes, then science and the resulting system of education should apply the evidence given by the lower processes. In other words, only what has been learned due to conditioned responses to prearranged stimuli is considered to be reliable knowledge. Therefore, any instance of the manifestation of intelligence which evades such experimental techniques is ignored by the apes as unscientific or believed to be a pathological case.

The effect of such dogmatic principles on general education is that there is a serious limitation in the development of the creative aspect of the mind. The higher mental processes have the capacity of generating new and unpredictable ideas which it is not possible to measure statistically and control experimentally. SF and fantasy works are open and free to develop such ideas and in this way inspire educators to introduce in the system principles which could overcome such limitations. One of the characteristic features of such attempts is the transcendence of the pragmatic level of targets and ways of teaching.

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**Languaging and interactivity  
in the self-scaffolding space:  
How cognitive change happens  
in one coaching dialogue**

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**Abstract**

Tracking the performance of a coach and her client conversing during a demo coaching session we find that languaging provides a cognitive space for the client's problem determination and solution creation despite the cognitive complexity of the issues she languages about. We apply here qualitative methods (Peräkylä, Antaki, Vehviläinen and Leudar 2008), specifically microgenetic analysis. On a more general level, our study proves that languaging aids in the construction of self-scaffolding space in which cognitive change emerges. This is because languaging mediates mental processes, thought completion and brings cognitively complex ideas to the physical domain. We also find that sense-making is achieved through the integration of languaging and bodily actions.

**Keywords**

Polish forms of address, subtitles, corpus, non-professional translation, discursive approach, (im)politeness

**Języko-działanie i interakcyjność  
w przestrzeni uczenia się: jak  
dochodzi do zmiany poznawczej  
w pewnej rozmowie coachingowej**

**Abstrakt**

Obserwując zachowanie coacha i jej klientki podczas demonstracyjnej sesji coachingowej, można zauważyć, że przestrzeń poznawcza, w której obydwie uczestniczki procesu pracują jest nakreślona przez język. Dzieje się to na każdym etapie rozmowy, zarówno w fazie definiowania problemu, jak i tworzenia rozwiązania przez klientki. Do zbadania złożoności procesu komunikacyjnego zastosowano tu metody jakościowe (Peräkylä, Antaki, Vehviläinen i Leudar, 2008) ze szczególnym naciskiem na analizę mikrogenetyczną. Na bardziej ogólnym poziomie, opisane badanie dowodzi, że język pomaga w konstruowaniu przestrzeni dialogicznej, w której dokonuje się zmiana poznawcza. Dzieje się tak, ponieważ języko-działanie (languaging) pośredniczy w procesach umysłowych i przenosi złożone poznawczo idee do domeny fizycznej. W ten sam sposób można zauważyć, że również procesy sensotwórcze przebiegają poprzez integrację języka i działań ucieleśnionych.

**Słowa kluczowe**

języko-działanie, interakcyjność, coaching, sensotwórczość, koordynacja, ucieleśnienie

**1. Introduction**

What underpins communication is sustained coordination with others, the world, and its dynamics (or events). Also, the source

of human development can be found in the social (and in the cultural). Linell (2009) observes that human beings are constantly making sense of the physical and social worlds, other people, and themselves in direct and/or indirect interaction and interdependencies with others. Therefore, any possible cognitive and behavioural change will have its beginning in dialogue understood as a process characterised by clarity, openness, symmetry (equal distribution among participants), mutuality, harmony, rationality, and sincerity. Dialogue is also situated as a result of coordinative dynamics between two (or more) humans. What makes dialogue a territory for cognitive change in educational, therapeutic, or coaching processes is its two-fold structure involving the external element, usually referred to as 'communication', and the internal part where cognitive processes such as thinking, planning, imagining, remembering occur (cf. Linell 2019). These paired with the perception of the agent's physical and social environment constitute a complex system of external (speaking, words, sounds, etc.) and internal (thinking) activities between and inside human agents who in conversation develop their understanding. One such activity is languaging which mediates cognitively complex ideas (Swain 2006).

Languaging in a broad sense is an "activity in which physical wordings play a part" (Cowley and Vallee-Tourangeau 2013) and, therefore, it is contingent on interactivity or sense-saturated coordination (cf. Steffensen 2015) which arises as observers draw on multi-scalar dynamics. This is in line with Vygotsky's claims on the significance of language in the development of higher mental functions. As such, language becomes a naturally dialogical entity affording learning, cognition, and transformation. Evidence demonstrates (e.g. Swain and Lapkin 2011) that languaging fuels some therapeutic and coaching processes as it contributes to the client's cognitive and behavioral change. In this text we address the following question: How does language and languaging mediate sense-making in a coaching conversation? By addressing this question we intend to capture those moments in linguistic interaction between two conversing

humans which yield transformative effects for at least one of them.

## **2. Interpersonal synchrony in coaching interactions**

The premise upon which coaching is based, is that there is no objective world. As such it rests on James' pragmatism and Watzlawick's acceptance of human vulnerability to the imperfections and distortions of perception and then interpretation (Watzlawick 1983). As a form of talk within a specific coach-as-guide/counsellor framework, coaching draws heavily on methodology found in cognitive-behavioural psychotherapy. The interaction between participants is essentially oriented towards constructing a solution to the client's 'problem' or 'issue'. In integrative terms, it exemplifies a complex bio-psycho-social system in which each participant introduces his/her bio-mental sub-systems (e.g., cardiovascular, neural, etc.) that mutually influence the other as they engage in talk-in-interaction. From this perspective, how the two as system components coordinate is crucial for the effective functioning of each of them and the system as a whole. Evidence shows that interaction between humans in talk rests on participants' movement coordination (Abney et al. 2015), communicative behaviours (Louwerse et al. 2012), neural activity (Likens et al. 2014), physiology (Palumbo et al. 2016), and voices (Imel et al. 2014; Reich et al. 2014).

Coaching sessions as language-based collaborative communicative events provide a data-saturated context for investigating the characteristics of human interaction dynamics beyond ordinary daily talk. When two people work together towards a solution to a client's issue we, as observers, encounter numerous questions regarding the understanding of the potential functional benefits of their dialogical coordination. This is because in human interaction multiple timescales and types of behaviour merge (Davis et al. 2016, Steffensen and Pedersen 2014, Tilsen 2009). The coordination of bodily movements, gestures, gaze, vocalizations, wordings, etc. as elements of language



ging all contribute in the same way to establishing a certain type of synchronic partnership in a coaching conversation. Conclusive confirmation can be found in studies on psychotherapy which find a link between coordinated body-work patterns, physiology and nonverbal forms of behaviour (Bryan et al. 2018, Bar-Kalifa et al. 2019) with a positive sense of collaboration between the counsellor and the client (Ramseyer and Tschacher 2014, 2016, Tschacher and Meier 2019) and with what Bandura refers to as self-efficacy (Ramseyer and Tschacher 2011). The question that can be posed then is that of how interaction and the resulting coordination in dialogue become possible (e.g., Cowley 1994, Linell 2009, Linell, Gustavsson and Jovonen 1988).

### **3. From language through languaging to change**

Understanding what others are saying is the result of taking a language stance or sensitizing and, consequently, attuning ourselves to the utterances of others. This, among other things, helps us predict what people will do, think, and feel. This is the result of linking the experience of bodily coordination with wordings that are heard on those occasions when the other uses the constraints of a cultural tradition. Stance taking makes us-as-agents into observers who construe and shape the lived environment while at the same time integrating what they perceive with what they do. This claim links very well with the one made by Maturana (1990) who states that when languaging we make observations and observations of observations in the process of learning through cognition. Through language conversing humans transform themselves communicatively as a result of perturbations experienced in a particular interaction. In Steffensen's terms, this might be referred to as interactivity or 'sense-saturated coordination' (Steffensen 2015).

In light of the above, the classical description of language via code-metaphor appears useless. Such notions as patterns, encoding, decoding, transmission, reception, etc. reduce language to a tool or a vehicle while pushing aside the significance of real-time interpersonal activities. In the long-standing tradition

engendered by Maturana, Bateson, Mead, and others, language is a set of phenomena that occur between people rather than inside their heads. Such thinking about language entrains the postulate of ecological psychology and shifts our focus from asking what is in our heads to asking what our heads are in. In line with this, the heads of two interlocutors are definitely in a dialogue which is on the outside. Cowley (2011a, 2019) and Thibault (2011), drawing on Love (2007), propose that language be seen in dual terms. However, rather than dividing it into form and content, they opt for observing how abstract text-like entities emerge as we think, feel, and act when communicating with each other.

In a similar vein, Kravchenko (2016) remarks that describing language by mainstream linguistics as an “autonomous system of signs devoid of any previous history” is burdened with a flaw. He proposes to abandon the structuralist maxim of synchronicity by orienting towards language as “a functional behavioral feature of humans as an emergent architecture which cannot be understood outside the domain of biological organization” (Kravchenko 2016: 102). If this is so, language occurs as a consequence of spontaneous speaker-environment interactions rather than by ‘using’ a set of arbitrary pre-existing rules. In this paradigm, linguistic units are conceived in the interactional space co-constructed by talking humans, not as regular and predictable objects (such as phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, etc.). Language then is not a static, rule-oriented set of linguistic units and forms where meanings are secondary. Before them goes “a face-to-face routine activity in which wordings play a part” (Neumann and Cowley 2017: 180), or languaging. Instead of interpreting language as an innate faculty, it is, rather, a mode of social coaction, coregulation, and cooperation. On the one hand, languaging is “a first-order activity of making and interpreting linguistic signs, which in turn is a real-time, contextually determined process of investing behaviour or the products of behaviour (vocal, gestural or other) with semiotic significance” (Love 2004: 530). On the other hand, it can be defined as what people ‘do’ as they interact communicatively with

themselves, with each other, and with the environment. Knowing how children acquire language (e.g. Love 2017) and drawing on Maturana (1970, 1978), we prefer to think of language in terms of a human-specific and, as such, a biologically grounded interactional behaviour. Through language, humans interact in their consensual domain, by co-adaptation and coordination of individual activities. What we say depends to some degree on the way we perceive a particular situation, so linguistic interactions between individuals are meaningful if occurring in a consensual domain in which linguistic signs are perceptually and experientially grounded (Harris 1978).

The consequence of thinking about language primarily as an activity and secondarily as 'forms' is the rejection of it viewed as a code. However, to avoid simplifications and reductionist claims it is important to expand this picture. Observing talking humans we have to note three aspects of language: the (co-) activity itself, the products of this (co-) activity (gestures and sounds), and related phenomena, or wordings. These are understood by Cowley (2011a: 2) as "readily repeated aspects of vocalizations that, for speakers of a community, carry historically derived information". Summing up, the semiotic significance of any conversation is contingent on the speakers' artful combinations of wordings, gestures, and other aspects with vocal dynamics. According to this view, "language becomes a mode of coaction used in social life" (Cowley 2011a: 3).

Humans act linguistically (and they most often do it together), due to perceptual skills they have developed over time. Any activities people perform are only in part motivated by what they use, perceive, and conceptualise as wordings. The meaning we ascribe to wordings is not the process of hypothesising or making assumptions but the product of what Dennett (1969) labels as taking a physical or design stance. They link principles of physics or design to practical and cognitive skills that inform observations. Stance taking thus replaces hypothetical individual knowledge. Forms (or meanings) are not *a priori* but they arise as, using different timescales, we integrate our behavioural dynamics with the constraints of a particular system of

language. Language appears then not only as a dialogical occurrence but is also a distributed and embodied entity contingent on numerous constraints (as in Harris 1996) that harness its expressive dynamics. Using this nomenclature we link embodiment to a range of behavioural contingencies. In languaging, people make use of local affordances while consequently enacting bodily dynamics. The wordings they use in the I-other/the world of interaction can only function when bound to what the 'I' knows. Because of that, language is well integrated with one's own perception, activity and feeling. When humans engage in talk, they "take a language stance by 'hearing' things in what others say", they treat speech "as if it consisted of verbal patterns".(Cowley 2011b) In talk-in-interaction individuals connect spontaneous and fast-paced acts of behaviour, such as mimesis, gaze-following, and gestures, and connect them with extended cultural processes (Neumann and Cowley 2017). They use their bodies to produce their own verbal images. Languaging (not 'using language') allows talking humans to establish a symbiotic system with the environment, part of which are other humans who engage in talk.

If, as in the Vygotskian sociocultural theory of mind, language mediates the development of higher mental processes, then languaging plays a paramount role in the cognitive functioning of each individual. A person's voluntary memory, attention, thinking paradigms, etc. originate in the ways he/she interacts with other individuals and the social world and its artifacts. Over time, these interactions undergo transformation and internalization with language and other semiotic tools entering as mediators of the interactions and internalizations. The external world with its objects (e.g. persons, animals, material things, natural phenomena, etc) controls mental processes. Then through languaging with others these mental processes are further guided by other individuals. As language becomes internalized, it is finally controlled by the person's cognitive processes. In Swain and Lapkin's words, "[a]lthough described as a developmental sequence—from object regulation to other regulation to self-regulation—the locus of control moves among them, depending on

an individual's need for support from the environment to carry out the mental tasks at hand" (Swain and Lapkin 2011: 106).

#### **4. Case study**

The material we choose to analyse and discuss is a nearly four-minute opening fragment of a coaching demonstration given by Ailbhe, who is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC). Her coachee for this session is Julie and, since this is supposed to present some key techniques used in talking to a client, the conversation is managed in front of a group of trainees. We are aware that both this circumstance and the presence of the camera might have affected certain forms of behaviour on the parts of both Ailbhe and Julie. Nevertheless, we choose to ignore this element and focus entirely on the dialogue between the two participants. The coachee's issue is how to prepare for an exam which she is about to take to receive her coaching certification. Our idea here will be (to employ the words of Garfinkel) to do some work "in the area of 'fact production' in-flight" (Garfinkel 1967: 79). In our analysis, we go beyond what the entire toolkit of Conversational Analysis offers intending to grasp the brief moments of interaction where languaging becomes the flywheel in the client's sense-making. The rationale behind this methodology is that a conversation does not take place inside each other's heads alternately, nor at the surface of our bodies in their overt behaviour; it is really in the region between the speakers that the conversation takes place (Barrett 1979). Therefore, rather than looking at what happens between the coach and the coachee from a turn-to-turn perspective, we adopt a microgenetic approach so as to observe the subtle cognitive-behavioural changes required, as it is such methods which yield high-density data. Microgenetic study allows for the observation of people in brief moments of such change and yields results inaccessible to CA. We intend to illuminate not only the turn-taking procedures and the speakers' behaviours while doing so but the surrounding short-lived transition moments. The initial two minutes and forty-five seconds of the

conversation seem to be crucial for what happens in the bulk of the session (the remaining 18 minutes). Here the coach and the coachee are in the process of goal clarification for the meeting. As they are conversing they are sat facing each other with their hands on their laps. The space between them establishes the physical environment. The coach opens the first part of the conversation by defining the situation:

- 1 A: So: Judy we have (.) twenty minutes.
- 2 J: Yhm.
- 3 A: E:: I'm delighted to have this opportunity to work with you. So in: this twenty minutes (.) what would you like to focus on?
- 4 J: .hhhhh ok (.) I was thinking about this for the last couple of days
- 5 A: Yhm:
- 6 J: A:::nd e:hm:: (.) the initial thought (1.0) and intent (.) and it still is (.) is t:oo explo:re (.) furthering my credentialing.
- 7 A: Yhm.
- 8 J: which is congruent with >what today is all about< .hhhh a:n::d[1.0] yes it's it's about: [2.0] how I go about that.
- 9 A: (1.0) °°ok°°
- 10 J: Uhm: hhh

In the beginning, we can see the two participants sitting in mirroring positions. As Ailbhe leans forward speaking, she also makes an inviting opening hand gesture which results in Judy

reciprocating not only the leaning and settling in the chair but also the smile. Ailbhe takes charge of the dialogue by defining verbally the situation but then withdraws by merely confirming her listening with discrete sounds. At the same time, she invites Judy to enter the interaction by appropriate gesturing. Judy willingly joins in reciprocating the coach's body movements. In this way, they quickly become interlocked in a dialogic interactive relationship with their bodywork aligning with their lines. It seems that Judy was prepared for the question she hears and she understands the specificity of the conversation. This is what helps them move on in their conversational flow. The coach discretely affirms what the coachee says until the moment when the latter reaches a point of 'suspension' in her languaging about the issue that concerns her.





**Figure 1**

So: Judy we have(.)twenty minutes.

It is also interesting to note Judy's work on the timeline as she employs her hands turning them around to illustrate returning to a past moment. By employing her hands she orients herself and her interlocutor to the changing temporal perspectives.



**Figure 2**

the initial thought (1.0) and intent

Judy's bodywork helps her not only express herself more effectively but also reach a better understanding of what she is saying. We can observe her activating her hands in moments when



she describes a situation. In contrast, when she comes to realise something important she does it inwardly. So the outward-inward bodywork vectors allow her to build a dialogue with herself with the assistance of her interlocutor.

Then she returns to the present and talks about her plans:



**Figure 3**

t:00 explo:re (.) furthering my credentialing

At this point she begins to prepare the ground for a concluding thought, this time freezing her body and suspending her talk as if trying to ‘hear’ a revealing thought. Ailbhe attunes to Judy’s dialogical behaviour by a subtly voiced “OK” and a gentle nod. Her eyes become focused on Judy and her neutral yet welcoming seated position (hand, head and back arrangement) add to the listening mode she presents here. The short moment of silence offers Judy a space in which she begins building her sense-making. From now onwards we will refer to such moments resulting from dialogical interaction as self-scaffolding space.



**Figure 4**

yes it's it's about: [2.0] how I go about that

Judy's forthcoming vocalisation [Uhm: hhh] appears as pivotal for the entire analysed fragment as it ultimately takes the coachee to goal defining. She seems to have reached a point from which she starts realising what her goal for the session might be and at the same time, what the issue is that she needs to work on. She confirms this in the next fragment:

- 11 A: So:: I (.) I'm hearing that you've quite a strong [intent that you want to forward]
- 12 J: [hhhhhhhh]
- 13 A: this process
- 14 J: Yes=
- 15 A: =of credentialing >and I noticed< you take a (.) deep [breath in as I say that]

- 16 J: [hhhh] yes (2.0) yes
- 17 A: So: [.] >and you want to be able to move it forward<
- 18 J: Yes.
- 19 A: So with the ti:me that we have here [0.2] wwhat would be most useful to focus in on in relation to that?
- 20 J: (.) And the intake of breath thing all just was the question that dropped in me↓. And that question was all about what's getting in your WAY.
- 21 A: °M::: °
- 22 J: An:d what you notice is (.) >because we have more to get< I go here and up when I'm processing. When something is dropping then my eye is going up here hhh so it's wonderful to have light (.) yeah on that side.
- 23 A: °Mhm°
- 24 J: And so what's getting in my way? (1.0) E:::m it's the question that dropped inside me where that came from and I'm not quite sure
- 25 A: °Ok°
- 26 J: Yes::

Ailbhe evokes Judy's languaging by paraphrasing her words, which seems to bear paramount significance for this phase of the conversation as it becomes an invitation for Judy to continue discovering and constructing her message. This might mean that Ailbhe addressed an important aspect of what Judy realised in line 10 but did not manage to verbalise it. The sigh

she makes on hearing the coach's words (lines 11 and 12) accompanied by her arms going up and eyes closing seems to be a preparation for the convincing and definitive "Yes" in the aftermath. Rather than provoking, pressing, or simply interviewing Judy., the coach offers her a lot of room for relating to her own words in reflexive self-reference. As Judy languages about the nature of her issue, she becomes both a participant and an observer of her sense-making. She gives vent to it in line 22 where she realises and clarifies her cognitive process by introducing space in her languaging. Wordings combined with gestures, gaze, and elements of the room when narrating about her thinking processes confirm the claim that language and cognition are distributed (Thibault 2011, Linell 2013, 2014, Cowley 2007, 2009, 2011a).





**Figure 5**

Judy works in space clarifying her goal

In this phase, the coach seeks confirmation and clarification from the coachee and indeed, she receives it (lines 14, 16, and 18). Then acknowledging Judy's words Ailbhe picks up the conversational lead again (line 19) by moving forwards on the timeline. Judy decides to go in the opposite direction (line 20) clarifying to the coach what significance the expression in line 10 had. Ailbhe immediately accepts and assumes a neutral position in further conversational steps. Interestingly, each of them concentrates on the other's words: Judy as a way of confronting what she intends to say and Ailbhe in order to take Judy through a goal-defining process. Despite orienting to different goals and assuming different roles they manage to engage in sense-saturated coordination which takes them to the goal confirming phase.

- 27 A: °Ok°. So I'm hearing two things. I'm hearing some information about how you work [and]
- 28 J: [\$Yes\$]
- 29 A: Such huge value it had for me so when I noticed you looking all of up here=
- 30 J: =Yes
- 31 A: Ym::: yyou're processing.
- 32 J: Yes.
- 33 A: °Ok°. And also that this question dropped.
- 34 J: And [laughter] dropped \$just forward\$. Yes:
- 35 A: And it's what's stopping [you]
- 36 J: [Yes]
- 37 A: What's getting in your way.
- 38 J: Yes.
- 39 A: And is that (.) our focus?
- 40 J: (1.0) Yes. (1.0) It's and as you said the word 'our' and the voice inside me went it's \$my focus\$ it is up to me: cause I'm the only one who can (1.0) do something about that. And there's me jumping to action without exploring it uhuh .hhh right so (.) our focus is that question (.)
- 41 A: m::: m:::
- 42 J Yes.

Ailbhe again returns to what Judy said before making it the object of reference for the coachee's sense-making. The affective resonance on Julie's part contributes to their interaction in that both Judy and Ailbhe experience their interaction positively and build on this emotion. Her smiling on uttering specific phrases in lines 28, 34, and 40 (especially when saying 'my focus' in line 39) shows the ownership she feels of what they are both arriving at. At first glance, however, there is some relational and dialogical asymmetry that emerges here when the coach again begins to follow the client's line of thought. At a deeper level, however, their conversation is moving on towards a specific point, which makes it constructive. Each of the participants takes a different kind of responsibility here: the coachee for clarifying her goal for the session (and maybe for a longer time perspective) and the coach for maintaining the conversational flow by concentrating on and backtracking on the coachee's words. An example of such activity is in lines 29, 31, 33, 35, and 37. Here the coach draws on the coachee's words but accompanies them with her bodily work and intonation. Judy joins in and although only one of them is speaking both take part in this utterance by performing a synchronic gesture. In this way, they both resort to languaging to design the architecture of this conversation.







**Figure 6**  
Coach-coachee synchrony

In the last phase of this fragment, Ailbhe elicits explanations from Judy and hears an affirmation of her plan for the session. At the same time, she becomes again an active participant in the coachee's narrative and a prime designer of her self-scaffolding space. Judy is able to enter a sense-making process as a result of 'bouncing' from her own concepts and the expression presented to her by the coach.



- 43 J: But I'm also hearing very clearly it is **your** focus
- 44 A: (2.0) Yes::: (.) Yes.
- 45 J: °Ok° (.) .hhh So with that being our focus=
- 46 J: =Hm:=
- 47 A: =it is (.) that you're saying it about what's getting in the way.
- 48 J: .hhhhhhhhhhh yes yes.

Throughout the conversation, by semi-silent responses, Ailbhe makes room for Judy's languaging and affirms her narrative. This conversational strategy brings a result in line 48 where Julie's prolonged inbreath is a probable marker of her final acceptance of the goal they are going to realise together in the remaining part of the session.

## 5. Discussion

The events registered and described above find their reflection in Linell's words: "situated interactions belong to sociocultural, situation transcending traditions, that is, practices that take place on different and longer timescales" (Linell 2009: 412). From this vantage point we summarise the analysed fragment as follows:

- (1) Judy and Ailbhe's languaging prepares cognitive space for problem and goal determination;
- (2) Julie's vocalisation (a 'grunt') in line 10 is a case of situated interactional accomplishment and a cognitive pivot in her sense-making processes;

- (3) Ailbhe assumes the role of the conversation architect and Judy the role of a clarifier of her own sense-making experience;
- (4) by languaging about Julie's issue they mediate cognitively complex ideas;
- (5) the coach and coachee build conversational space through body synchrony and mutual attunement, presence and rapport while languaging; following Goleman (2007) Attunement is an Agendaless Presence;
- (6) the coachee builds her self-scaffolding space due to the coach's conversational prompts, e.g.: ok, yhm;
- (7) languaging makes the coachee's sense-making visible; when languaging, the coachee and the coach mediate cognitively complex ideas (e.g., Knouzi, Swain, Lapkin, Brooks, 2010; Swain, 2006; 2010; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, and Brooks, 2009);
- (8) wordings, vocalisations, sighs, pauses, and hesitations are cases of situated interactional accomplishment;
- (9) the vocalisation in line 10 proves it that is inseparably linked and integrated with the body;
- (10) the sense-making space is generated by the coach's regulatory work – first discreet conversational presence then more directive questioning (also confirmatory questions);
- (11) languaging mediates the coachee's ability to clarify her goal and encapsulate it in specific words;
- (12) the talk about the drop is a case of languaging about languaging;
- (13) there is body synchrony in the coach-coachee's languaging – they talk together and they move together; we qualify this phenomenon as a case of attunement while languaging;
- (14) languaging allows presencing – bringing past and future to the now (Julie's gestures bring the past and the future to the present).

Let us elaborate on the points above. In the coaching conversation analysed above, the coach and the coachee take on situa-

tion-specific roles and fulfil them and thus realise their contextual tasks. They do so by what Fusaroli calls “skilful intersubjective engagement” (Fusaroli et al. 2014). In the conversational flow of interactivity the coachee does not MAKE meanings, nor does she establish them. The coach establishes a dialogical space of problem-solving which allows the coachee to understand and capture the nature of the problem and, as a result, to come across with a solution. Both partners in interaction move along with a series of episodes of linguistic events by resorting to patterns of speech. More theoretically, unless the events are deemed “non-linguistic”, they show that human language cannot be reduced to the “use” of verbal patterns.

How is it possible that they both become linguistically interlocked in this cognitive sense-making process? Steffensen (2015: 108) explains “Symbolic structures, including second-order language, have irreversibly changed the human ecology and the human coordinative dynamics; above all, they allow our own and other people’s experiences to permeate our here and now activities.” Concepts and their meanings emerge through dynamic interaction between human agents, shaping and transforming each other in interconnected systems. The mediating role of language is crucial for “the concept is not possible without the word” (Vygotsky 1987: 131). The interaction between the coach and the coachee proves that language is non-local but distributed across space and time (participants move within different time-scales and go ‘beyond their brains’ when talking) embodied as opposed to abstractly procedural (players use their voice and bodily dynamics) embedded in the sociality of the conversation, enacted (participants ‘language’, or move towards solutions in and through action) and dialogical (participants orient towards each other). Although the coachee’s cognitive trajectory to a viable solution is “self-organized, unplanned, and on the edge of chaos” (Steffensen 2013: 195) it is rooted in interactivity, dialogicality, and languaging.

The dynamics of the interaction between coach and client paves the way to changes in the patterns of language, cognition, and emotion particularly on the part of the latter (e.g. Smith et

al. 2009). Here is a confirmation of Shotter's claim that "in certain forms of talk, of speaking, 'things' are not just said to us, they are done to us" (Shotter 2016). If, indeed, speaking is "an agent in the production of meaning" (Smagorinsky 2001: 240), not merely a conveyor of thought, "the process of rendering thinking into speech is not simply a matter of memory retrieval, but a process through which thinking reaches a new level of articulation" (Smagorinsky 1998: 172–73). Independently of the context in which people talk to each other (whether in coaching, psychotherapy, education, or any other conversational occurrences), language, cognition and emotion provide an arena for interpersonal coordination (Butler 2011, Louwerse et al. 2012).

## **6. Conclusions**

We conclude that as behaviour correlates with mental operations and emotive resonance in ways characteristic for each individual, various forms of interpersonal coordination become linked to different outcomes as, for example, in conversational dynamics (Abney et al. 2015, Fusaroli and Tylén 2016) or clinical psychology (Crowell et al. 2017, Ramseyer and Tschacher 2014). Coaching conversations provide a conducive communicative environment for the emergence of multiple patterns of coordination during particular sessions or as a result of a series of these. These coordinative alignments include such interactional modalities as vocalisations, bodily movements (and physiology, in general), or facial expressions. Similar to what Gelo and Salvatore (2016) observe in psychotherapy we find that to use their words, coaching brings results on many different levels due to the reciprocal interaction of the multiple factors mentioned above. Sense-making extends here as "events depend on interactivity or sense-saturated coordination that [...] grounds human cognition" (Cowley and Nash 2013: 187).

What happens in our case scenario confirms our preferred description of language. First of all, it is an activity or an experiential flow that is enacted, maintained, and changed by the real-time activity of participants (Love 2017: 3) and "the process

of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain 2006: 89). As they engage in talk both the coach and the coachee build a form of self-scaffolding (each her own) to control and internalise their mental processes and thought completion. Then as each of them brings cognitively complex ideas to the physical domain through verbalisations, again they co-construct incrementally a dialogue taking the coachee to a moment of insight. The fragments discussed here also illustrate the claim that “time-dependent biographical, historical, and developmental processes [...] are multidimensional and multidetermined” (Gelo and Salvatore 2016: 379) and work on multiple levels due to the different modalities (voice, gestures, gaze, posture, etc.) engaged in languageing.

Since language is a manner of flowing together in recurrent recursive interactions, as dialogue participants we change in our languageing because what we say, or what we hear, is not trivial. We say and we hear something and we are not the same afterwards. Our case study proves that people transform their thinking and behaviour according to their flow of languageing in a particular situation and under this situation. We see here how the coachee’s behaviour evolves according to her structure and her interactions with the coach. The space of conversation that opens is a self-scaffolding space in which participants interact in language with various results. To open a self-scaffolding space in a coaching conversation means that although the conversants act of intent, they do not control what happens. This is because in a self-scaffolding space built on languageing human autonomy appears. When languageing we create objects, and we can observe them by employing the procedures of reflection. It transpires then that languageing in dialogical self-scaffolding space promotes reflection as it allows a person to respond to the circumstances in which he/she finds an object and looks at it. This person can then make a choice as to the direction of his/her future actions, move this way or that, and can be responsible for his/her own behaviour.

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