



Catană Maria-Anca

Language in a World of Plurality: The Tree, The Bot and The Octopus Teacher

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Language has been considered proof of human exceptionalism in the Western European culture since the Enlightenment era. As a result, a rigid hierarchy placing human on the top emerged. Due to human's capacity to rationalize thought and materialize it using language as a tool, it entitled itself to possess and dispose of anything deemed as less- or non-human.

Once the fixed idea of language is destabilized, its accuracy as a tool fit enough to represent the world and human thought comes into question. Once language, a pillar of Humanism, is damaged, the collapse of human exceptionalism is imminent.

Post-humanism and ontological pluralism are offering the grounds for exploring a paradigm without the hierarchy. A flattened reality in which the relationships between ways of being are far more complex than mere hierarchies, food chains, or concentric circles. They are entangled, mangled. They are plugging-in and unplugging in an assemblage.

For inquiring into an assemblage, tools such as qualitative methodologies, representational logic and data become useless. Meanwhile, post-qualitative inquiries do not pretend to ascend the ultimate, pure knowledge or truth but simply offer a brief, incomplete glimpse into the assemblage.

The results of such destabilizations consist of more care and attention being offered to negotiating language and languaging, empty spaces and howls, communication outside the higher senses of sight and hearing. In education, it translates into alternative teachers and teachings. The learners are entangled into an assemblage with which they are inter-acting by forming relationships. They are learning to co-live with rather than to make sense of the ways of being.

Keywords: language, languaging, plurality, post-qualitative inquiry, post-humanism

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The Global Health Crisis of 2020 offers a good opportunity for re-thinking and re-imagining the way in which humanity and the world *surrounding it* are seen and defined. It can be argued that the Global Health Crisis of 2020 has proven, at least to some, that normal is an illusion and normality is constructed. The lives of many changed drastically during a short period of time. Social and mass media coined the term “new normal” in order to define and make sense of this rapid shift. It has been astonishing and frightening at the same time to witness how everything once deemed as normal can drastically metamorphose within a few days, into becoming “the new normal”. Thus, the clearly defined borders between what is normal and abnormal have been brought into scrutiny. However, once such a stronghold starts dismantling, it might be necessary to bring into question more boundaries. For example, the limits between what is human and what is not, what is us and what is them, or what is real, and what is fiction. These structures, bounded by clearly defined limits, might start crumbling. That is how the drift, now more than ever before, towards a world of plurality, could occur.

1.2 The Purpose of This Thesis

The topic of this thesis is language. The literature study that I carried out for my bachelor’s thesis led me to the discovery of the concept of plurilingualism. This discovery shifted the perspective I had on the language. Once I started working on this Master’s thesis, I found myself unsatisfied with the tools and methodologies available for conducting research. None of them seemed to allow me the possibility of exploring plurilingualism or the language in a world of plurality. That is how/when I encountered the post-qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodologies, inspired by the quantitative ones, are assuming that from an ontological perspective there is a *reality, truth, authentic voice* and so forth to be sought and that from an epistemological perspective there are methodologies and methods which properly designed, adjusted, and implemented could deliver that *reality, truth* or *authentic voice*. Moreover, they require the presence of a human researcher whose duty is to seek that *reality, truth, or authentic voice* and present it to fellow humans in a comprehensive way.

Post-qualitative methodology/ies on the other hand seek to disturb the theory/data binary by destabilizing the onto-epistemological relationship behind it, flatten out the hierarchy of truth, method and researcher, by surprising the being, knowing, known and knower in their performative act, with all their overlapping and interchanging, entangling and escaping, fluidity and plurality.

As a result, while proceeding with my inquiry, I realized that before looking at how language is performing or languaging within education and society, I had to look at the role that language played in establishing and perpetuating the previously mentioned relationships and hierarchies, in the qualitative methodologies. In order to do that I went back to the history of Humanism and the perspective on language held by humanists. In order to destabilize and disturb the humanist idea of language and the status language enjoyed within a humanist paradigm, I found myself venturing into post-humanism. Post-humanism offered me space/time for a. melting-down language and showing that/how it pollutes the known, knowing and knower, thus questioning its accuracy as a medium of knowing and perpetuating knowledge; b. bringing on the plurality, the multiple ways of language; and c. engaging with the performative quality of language or languaging. In doing so, the status of language as a barrier between what is human, and what is deemed as nonhuman is being challenged.

1.3 The Structure of This Thesis

This Master's thesis is divided into two main parts, preceded by an introduction and succeeded by a conclusion. The first main part, chapter two, informs about some of the theoretical concepts that are necessary to understand when reading this thesis. Familiar concepts such as Enlightenment and Humanism, as well as the qualitative research, are discussed in the beginning, gradually transitioning to less familiar concepts, such as post-humanism, post-qualitative methodology and plugging-in. It is important to note that these lesser-known concepts are still being worked on and developed, although that might be the case with some of the established concepts as well, so the next chapter should be read through the prism of this knowledge. This is why the second chapter received the name *Theoretical Compass* since it is assumed to be serving as a compass for the reader, which will help them navigate the rest of the thesis.

The third chapter is the assemblage, which happens while employing the plugging-in method, proposed and developed by Jackson and Mazzei (2012). But I would rather refer to the final chapter as the place where the magic happens. Where all the elements, some of which might be called *data*, are consciously or hazardously plugging-in and unplugging, making glimpses of their encounters available. Since the assemblage is not meant to be final or perfect, the reader might be taken by surprise by the encounter with elements like the repetition of sentences or quotes, blank spaces and painted pages, which constitute additional proof of the “in the making” and unfinished state. The assemblage prompts me to raise questions regarding what is existence, what ways of existing are there, what are the relationships between the others and the ones, and how might they transform, the exclusive human possessions, and finally, how can all of this be related to education?

Interlude

Ludus, ludi

noun

declension: 2nd declension

gender: masculine

Definitions:

1. game, play, sport, pastime, entertainment, fun
2. school, elementary school (Latdict, n.d.)

In order to reflect on the ways in which *data* could have chosen me, I broke the flow of this thesis with interludes. The interludes are chunks of inquirer’s reality that break the flow of the play- the thesis - offering a rough reflection of the inquirer, or plain dictionary entries, which otherwise is purged from academic texts.

2 Theoretical Compass

2.1 Enlightenment and Humanism

Language is still commonly defined within the framework of Enlightenment Humanism. Enlightenment Humanism is an over 300-years old system of thought preceded by Renaissance Humanism. “Enlightenment”, similar to “Humanism”, has a German origin, with

which it is closely associated (Davies, 1997). Meanwhile, in the western part of Europe, French philosophers developed the idea of “siècle de lumières” or the age of illumination (Davies, 1997). It represents “a set of tendencies and developments of European culture from the 1670s to the early nineteenth century” (Kors, 2003, p. xvii), which led to the transformation of the educated Western culture (Kors, 2003). It consists of critical attitudes towards the inherited authority of different domains of human life, including religion, that involves increased naturalization and secularization of worldview (Kors, 2003). Promoters of Enlightenment identified themselves as participants in an international reform based on reason (Kors, 2003). They consider themselves as proponents of scientific studies as well as antagonists to superstition, bigotry and fanaticism (Kors, 2003). This led to “an expansion of dimensions of life deemed subject to human control and reform” (Kors, 2003, p.xviii). Moreover, Kors argues that everything associated with Enlightenment remains of importance to our present (2003). According to Soper, this led to contemporary enlightenment rationality which legitimizes the subordination of natural resources and human talents to values of growth and economic prosperity (1986). As a result, the industrialized nations have consolidated their control over nature and launched into irresponsible plundering of its resources (Soper, 1986).

Humanism is a word with a complex history and a wide range of possible meanings (Davies, 1997, p.2). There seems to be a difference in opinion regarding when, and from where the term Humanism emerged. According to Davies, the origin of the word could be found in the fifteenth-century Florentine *umanisti*, but it started being used in Germany, in the early nineteenth century to describe the university study of the “humanities”: ancient Greek and Latin languages, literature, history and culture (1997). Nonetheless, Norman affirms that ‘Umanista’ is an Italian word invented in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, to name a scholar of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, or philosophy (2004). Fortunately, there seems to be an agreement over the German contribution to the way in which the word is used today because the first use of the abstract noun can be found in German (Norman, 2004). The word accumulates a plethora of meanings, from the philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity to ideological oppression present in modern society which marginalized many human beings (Davies, 1997). Probably there is no definitive set of beliefs labeled ‘Humanism’ (Norman, 2004), but “there are many humanisms” (Norman, 2004, p.8).

Similar to “realism” and “socialism”, Humanism carries powerful connotations, positive as well as negative, of ideological allegiance (Davies, 1997). For Jackson and Mazzei, the word Humanism, names something essential and universal, shared by everyone, regardless of race, class, gender, history, or culture (2012). However, the word Humanism, has to be used carefully for the eighteenth-century context, since it was not available yet at the time, although “the <<Man>> around whom the discourses of enlightenment are articulated, rational, sovereign and unconditional betokens the emergence of a fully-fledged humanism in all but name” (Davies, 1997, p. 121).

What is Humanism, then? According to Pennycook, “humanism is a philosophical movement that placed humans at its center” (2018, p. 19). Renaissance Humanism, as well as Enlightenment Humanism, found their origin in resistance against religion and dogma. During the eighteenth century, “Man” was articulated against religion, apart from society and outside nature (Davies, 1997). It is essential to acknowledge that there is an ambiguity of the word ‘man’ since it can be used to refer to human beings in general, but also more narrowly to contrast the genders ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (Norman, 2004). Interestingly enough, both in English and French, *man* or *homme* can be used to refer to humankind. Similarly, the Finnish *miehet* can be translated as mankind. Still, this is not the case for Romanian, where *bărbați* can only refer to the male individuals, as opposed to *om*, plural *oameni*, which is the equivalent of the English human and humans.

It can be argued that, in their efforts of refuting the Christian beliefs, humanists simply replaced the God-like figure at the center of the universe, omnipotent and almighty, with the human figure, which became instead the center of the universe, omnipotent and almighty.

In the philosophic atheism of the eighteenth century, the notion of God is suppressed, but not, for all that, the idea that essence is prior to existence; something of that idea we still find everywhere, in Diderot, in Voltaire and even in Kant. Man possesses a human nature; that “human nature”, which is the conception of human being, is found in every man; which means that each man is a particular example of a universal conception, the conception of Man. (Sartre, 1948, p. 27 as quoted by Davies, 1997)

Even though traditionally, Humanism is used to represent an anthropocentric and secular approach to the study of humanity, it “came under the attack” of anti-humanists because it mythologizes humankind (Soper, 1986). As an implication, according to Soper, anthropology is possible on the condition that it rejects the concept of the human subject (1986). In which case, ‘men’ do not make history, or find their ‘truth’ or ‘purpose’ in history. History is a process without a subject. (Soper, 1986).

Nevertheless, for many, the term Humanism is a synonym for atheism, and in the English-speaking world, it is associated with secularism (Soper, 1986). And for Norman, there is a contrast between the religious character of Renaissance Humanism and the use of the term ‘Humanism’ as a label for a non-religious system of belief (2004). As a result, from Norman’s perspective, Humanism is an attempt to think about how we can live without religion (2004). Religion has offered people a practical philosophy of life and it still does to this day, since it provides answers to questions like ‘Why are we here?’ or ‘What is the purpose of human life?’ (Norman, 2004). For those who do not find reasons to believe in the existence of a god or gods, these answers are not readily available anymore (Norman, 2004). Norman considers that religion and science are meant to be in conflict with one another (2004). The belief in the powers of humans to make a good world is contrasted with the tendency of human beings to humble themselves in front of a god (Norman, 2004).

However, the flaws of Humanism are not necessarily emerging from its age, or the disputes behind its meanings and purposes, but rather from its implications. As St. Pierre reminds us, World War II proved that the Enlightenment's promises of innocent knowledge that can exist outside power relations, and that of true knowledge which will set us free were false, destructive, and violent (2013). Similarly, Alan Charles Kors considers that the study of Enlightenment as an intellectual movement has often involved political stakes (2003). Norman agrees that the horrors of the twentieth century “have been perpetrated in the name of secular ideologies such as nationalism, communism, fascism and democracy” (Norman, 2004, p.20). Still, he considers that:

The fact remains, however, that we do also pose distinctively human capacities for rational thought and action, and we should use them as best as we can, along with our

equally human capacities for love and care and compassion, to resist the cruelty and the inhumanity which led to the concentration camps. (Norman, 2004, p.24)

Finally, humanists view language as having stable and coherent meanings and encapsulating the essence of the “thing itself”, objective, waiting to be perceived (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). For humanists, “metamorphic myths” like language, resemble a world that is the incarnation of the act of speaking (Davies, 1997). “Words and things share a common nature, and the imagination is permitted a glimpse of the virginal truths of reason” (Davies, 199, p.108). Grace to such qualities, language has been qualified as an appropriate tool for expressing human thoughts, which gave birth to representational logic.

2.2 Representational Logic

Representational logic is a result of representational schemas assuming depth and hierarchy: there is a reality that can be observed and language is a fit enough tool to represent it (St. Pierre, 2013). Or, as Locke described in the seventeenth century, men had to find external signs that could make invisible ideas known to others, as a result, for this purpose “nothing was so fit, either for plenty or quickness, as those articulate sounds, which with so much ease and variety he found himself able to make” (1984/1690, p.259). Jackson and Mazzei specify that there is a relationship or hierarchy present in representational logic (2012). The hierarchy presents three levels: the field of reality, the field of representation, the field of subjectivity (2012). Although some contemporary materialist theories reject the hierarchical logic of representation, representational thinking still regulates a major share of qualitative research methodology (MacLure, 2012). But, as Rosiek explains, language does not just hang like an abstract veil with the purpose of mediating between an inquiry subject and reality but is one among many habits that arise as a result of experience (2013). Yet, one has to think about what we would do as academics if we no longer believe that language (secondary) can stand in for real (primary) (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013)? MacLure invites the use of a ‘flattened’ logic instead of a hierarchy of representation (DeLanda, 2002; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010 as cited in 2013), “where discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world” (MacLure, 2013, pp. 659-660).

In conclusion, in order to inquire about the plurality and performativity of language, the humanist paradigm is far from satisfactory. This is how/when the quest for a post-humanist paradigm begins.

2.3 Post-humanism

Interlude

August 2020

Returned my *research proposal*. The “step one” of this inquiry. I received positive feedback. Felt positive about continuing. Found out about post-humanism. Where was it hiding until now? Went on and read about post-humanism.

When discussing post-humanism, it is worth asking if post-humanism is not yet another expression of Humanism (St. Pierre, 2013), with a different name. Secondly, it can be questioned whether the humanist qualitative inquiry will survive the ontological turn set forward by the “post” theorists (St. Pierre, 2013):

If we ease to privilege knowing over being; if we refuse positivist and phenomenological assumptions about the nature of lived experiences and the world; if we give up representational and binary logics; if we see language, the human and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated “on the surface”- if we do all that and the “more” it will open up - will qualitative inquiry as we know it be possible? Perhaps not. (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, pp. 629 - 630)

Furthermore, at the beginning of my venture into the post-qualitative realm, I came upon some ethical concerns that begged to be addressed. Particularly thinking of MacCormack’s *The ahuman manifesto* (2020) and the situation presented by the current pandemic. Is it ethical to think within and explore a post-human or even ahuman system, if that could bring forward ideas related to human extinction? Or, the thriving of a virus or any form of life (it is still debated if a virus is a form of life after all) at the expense of thousands, millions even

billions of humans? “For many, the idea of the cessation of human existence as an absurd claim prevents any engagement with both its possibility and its validity” (MacCormack, 2020, p.5). Multiple documentaries, including *Seaspiracy* (2021), *David Attenborough: A life on our planet* (2020), *Broken* (2019), *Rotten* (2018) emphasize the devastating impact that the presence and the behavior of humans have on other beings. Although far from the idea of the cessation of human existence, Ali Tabrizi, the director of *Seaspiracy* documentary poses a challenging question: what is sustainability and can we actually live sustainability and not at the expense of everything and everyone else (2021)?

Nevertheless, Pennycook states that we do not necessarily need to take up an overt anti-humanism to observe that there is something troubling about anthropocentrism at the heart of Humanism (2018). Moreover, the relationship between Humanism and antihumanism is not simply a relationship of rejection or hostility (Davies, 1997). Likewise, a post-humanist position does not aim to expunge humanity but to rethink the relationship between humans and what is deemed non-human (Pennycook, 2018). Meanwhile, the concept of ahuman can be engaged as a critique of the post-humanism since “often posthumanism is simply a different perpetuation of humanist egoism” (MacCormack, 2020, p. 6), and “the arenas of contestation have remained within anthropocentric discourse” (MacCormack, 2020, p. 1).

Researchers are engaged in different ways of typing post-humanism. Throughout this thesis, I will try to remain loyal to the author's choice whenever citing, but when employing the term myself, I choose post-humanism, simply because the existence of the hyphen makes it more aesthetically pleasing, which within a destabilized concept of language could be as valid of an argument as others.

In conclusion, post-humanism should represent a movement forward, backward around and within Humanism, because humanist anthropology and the human-centered world “with its elaborate correspondences of human and cosmic and its assurance that, in the words of Plato’s Protagoras, <<man is the measure of all things>> is exposed as no more than a tribal *folie de grandeur*” (Davies, 1997, p. 107). Subsequently, post-humanism might offer the framework for exploring complex ideas, such as language during the drifts of 2021, since taking on posthumanist thought can generate new connections and lines of thinking (Pennycook, 2018).

2.4 Qualitative Research

Around 1960, the battle lines were drawn within the qualitative and the quantitative camps, and qualitative research emerged as the study of human group life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible and transform it into representations (field notes, interviews, etc) (Denzin et al., 2005). The result is a figured world as part of an interpretive community of practice, with shared understandings (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017). That is why, qualitative research practitioners are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understandings of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a result, “The researcher became a bricoleur, learning how to borrow from different disciplines” (Denzin et al., 2005, p.3). By doing so, the researcher creates a design, which supposedly “is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusion” (Yin, 1989, as quoted by Creswell, 1998, p.3). Thus, qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017).

This world involves assumptions concerning knowledge, research questions, relations between subjects and objects, reality and language: positivism (objectivism), interpretive (modernism), skepticism, practice (critical), power-knowledge (post-structural) and ontological (post qualitative, postmaterialism) (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017). When researching qualitatively, it is assumed that researchers could design rigorous and sophisticated studies if the approaches are made clear (Creswell, 1998). Moreover, researchers could make informed choices about what qualitative approaches to use and why to use them (Creswell, 1998).

As I briefly explained in the first chapter, once the assumptions concerning knowledge, research questions, relations between subjects and objects, reality and language that compose the framework of the qualitative research methodologies are being questioned, the whole project of qualitative research starts shaking. That is when the inquirer might be looking for post-qualitative possibilities.

2.5 Post-qualitative Inquiry

Interlude

July 2020

I finally decided to take on a post-qualitative methodology. The second I heard “more philosophical” during the Advanced Course in Qualitative Research I knew I had to look more into it. It just fits. Maybe it is “An idea for which the time has come” (Benozzo, 2021). I went on and read as much as I could about the post-qualitative methodology.

According to Lather and St. Pierre, qualitative research is still very much “in relation” to neo-positivism (2013). Moreover, we became so attached to qualitative research, which, after all, is an invention, that we think of as real (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). It is necessary to be aware of such attachment while venturing into new possibilities of inquiry.

The global community of qualitative inquiry is now at a midway between two extremes, moving in different directions at the same time (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017). Due to this schizoid state, a shift from research that provides the foundation for reports about and representation of ‘The other’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to an inquiry that implies more open-endings, uncertainty, ambiguity, praxis, pedagogies of liberation, freedom, resistance occurred (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017).

The materialist critique of representation has significant implications for the qualitative methodology (MacLure, 2013). It also challenges the interpretation because it involves an intentional subject that stands outside the *data*, identifying a hierarchical order of meanings, themes, and categories (MacLure, 2013).

There are multiple aspects of the post-qualitative methodology that make it appealing for different inquirers. Springgay and Truman describe it as an approach that could “shift methods from a reporting on the world to a way of being in the world that is open to experimentation and is (in)tension” (2018, as quoted by Mark, 2021). But the cornerstone for my decision of using the post-qualitative methodology for this thesis, as briefly mentioned in the introduction, consists of “the act of daring to imagine the unknown and to freely

embracing the fact that currently recognized tools may not be sufficient to explain or approach reality in its many contextual variations” (Mark, 2021, p. 177). As a result, Pauliina Rautio states that the post-qualitative inquiry challenges at least four elements of the conventional humanist inquiry: the nature of data, the role of the methods, the quest for increasing clarity, and the idea of individual “voice” (2020). Regarding the challenge of the idea of an individual voice, Jackson and Mazzei continue: “How do we go about working the limits of voice? And why should we be engaged in such practice? How does putting privileged understandings of voice under poststructural scrutiny result in a position of voice as productive of meaning...” (2012, p. 3).

Rautio points out that qualitative inquiry used to challenge the quantitative methodologies, but now it has begun to resemble them in the seeking of justification (2020). Nevertheless, post-qualitative approaches have not replaced the conventional qualitative and quantitative approaches. (2020). On the other hand, MacLure argues that the ‘post’ could be signaling a demise of qualitative research (MacLure, 2013) and that “qualitative inquiry might stop looking for depth and hoping for height” (MacLure, 2013, p. 665).

2.5.1 Data

The critique on what is considered traditionally as *data* is an important component of the post-qualitative methodology as well. In order to emphasize that, I used it throughout this thesis, inspired by the resources that I reviewed, italics when writing the word *data*, except for when the word is used in the context of qualitative research. The notion of *data* and our relationship to *data* are called into question (MacLure, 2013). “data cannot be seen as an inert and indifferent mass waiting to be in/formed and calibrated by our analytic acumen or our coding systems” (MacLure, 2013, p. 660).

Similarly to Jackson and Mazzei, who were not quite convinced if they chose *data* or if they have been chosen by that the *data* (2012, p.2), I am aware that the *data* might have chosen me, or as Koro-Ljungberg, Löytönen and Tesar explained rather than collecting or producing *data*, I focused on the encounter (2017). As explained in the introduction, these encounters are signaled in the interludes.

[S]ome detail - field note fragment or video image - starts to glimmer, gathering our attention. Things both slow down and speed up at this point. On the one hand, the detail arrests the listless traverse of our attention across the surface of the screen or page that holds the data, intensifying our gaze and making us pause to burrow inside it, mining it for meaning. On the other hand, connections start to fire up: the conversation gets faster and more animated as we begin to recall other incidents and details in the project classrooms, our own childhood experiences, films and artwork that we have seen, articles that we have read. And it is worth noting in passing that there is an *affective* component (in Deleuzian sense) to this emergence of the example. The shifting speeds and intensities of engagement with the example do not just prompt thought, but also generate sensations resonating in the body as well as the brain - frissons of excitement, energy, laughter, silliness. (MacLure, 2010, p.282 as quoted by MacLure, 2013, p. 661)

Interlude

January 2021

Working on the document that is now saved in the cloud, called “Prezerv 1”. In “Prezerv 1” I tried to make a better sense of post-humanism and of post-qualitative. Connecting *sources*. I still had a problem with finding *data*/being found by *data*. Then I remember the fox asking to be tamed by the Little Prince and Maytrei falling in love with a tree. *Data* found me. But I needed more, so I Googled it. That’s how I found “Speak”. Now I have some *data*. The rest will come while writing, thinking, and showering. I went on and read the *data* and identified quotes that could be relevant to what I already wrote. Meanwhile, some unexpected *data* inserted itself in the process.

While working on theoretical and philosophical concepts, they lead (and they still do, and will in the future) me to different pieces and forms of language: plays, fantasy books/ children

books, movies, documentaries, con-languages, and so on, which I had been plugging-in together with the theories and concepts, in an assemblage.

It might be worth mentioning that “Data are not ethically neutral” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017, p.2) so for the purpose of this thesis, I suggest stopping from pretending that they are, but rather assuming that *data* is partial, incomplete, and is always being re-told and re-membered (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Moreover, “Dialects of data/non-data, alive or dead data, truth or false data, valid or invalid data seem insufficient.” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017, p. 3). Nonetheless, the text and elements that chose and will choose to connect with the philosophical concepts, throughout this thesis, will be related to the self of the inquirer, as my capacity of recognizing them is limited to those elements that my self encountered or might encounter. The reason for one letting itself be chosen by *data* or for letting at least part of the *data* manifest and emerge is that when *data* are planned, there is little room for surprises and for the unknown (Rautio, 2020).

The collection of materials to be called data is identified toward the end of the inquiry, not prior to it. What counts as data is not a question of “anything goes”, or a result of a complete lack of pre-planning, however. The collections - things, beings, texts, habits, discourses, numbers, affects, scents - that end up being data are the combinations that actually contributed to the phenomenon under study: What did you happen to think with, and how did it help you to produce insights? You might have gone through countless other material or human encounters during your study, some planned, some not, but never ended up thinking with them. The materials that did turn into data can only be known afterward. (Rautio, 2020, p. 2)

In spite of that, this autoethnographic aspect is a byproduct rather than a scope, since I agree with Clough (2009) that auto-ethnography and performance ethnography continues to privilege an essentialist “voice” (as cited by St. Pierre, 2013), yet it is essential in opposing “classic qualitative research” in which a second researcher studying the same *data* should reach similar results (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Nevertheless, “Data could be seen as especially impossible in post-qualitative and post-human frameworks, which question the

very fundamental concepts often associated with data such as knowing individual, stable knowledge, documentation, representation.” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2017, p.1).

Interlude

March 2021

I got my hands on Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Teija Löytönen, and Marek Tesar’s “Disrupting Data in Qualitative Inquiry: Entanglements with the Post-Critical and Post-Anthropocentric”. Finally, I know what to do! So I get revolutionary. I delete all the subtitles and titles from my draft. I only use “Why?”, “How?”, “The Tree, The Fox, The Light, The AI, The Nothingness, The Classroom” and “Conclusion”. I saved this under the name “Prezerv 2”. I went back and cut parts from the theoretical consideration, and added parts to the assemblage. Not the same parts. Nothing makes any sense, so cool! This was step two.

2.5.2 Research and Inquiry

It can be argued that there are no absolute rules for discovering initial research questions and relevant *data* (Rosiek, 2013). But, “Should we be even using the word research?” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p.1). One alternative would be to employ the term inquiry. A more narrative approach to writing about research could start the inquiry by reflecting on the experiences that inspired it (Rosiek, 2013, p. 698). However, inquiry presents its own debate, as Dimitriadis and MacLure question: “Would inquiry be better? And what does inquiry refer to?” (Dimitriadis, 2016; MacLure, 2015, p.103 as cited by Denzin, & Lincoln, 2017). Even if the distinction between research and inquiry is not yet made clear in the academic context (should it even be?), for this Master’s thesis I consider inquiry as the most appropriate term to use. The reason being that it makes it easier to break from the shackles of a predetermined research structure or design, as well as those of validated data, enhancing the flexibility and freedom that is required in order to write a post-qualitative text as I understood and imagined it.

Lather states that post-qualitative inquiry “reconceptualizes and experiments with standard practices, moving beyond current scripts and their conventional codifying and disciplining of inquiry” (2013, p.6). Moreover, a post-qualitative inquiry involves the deconstruction of all of the concepts and categories that inform it (Hein, 2015, p. 5). This maneuver will destabilize other related concepts as well (St. Pierre, 2011 as cited by Hein, 2015, p. 5). Nevertheless, as Jackson and Mazzei’s pointed out while trying to distance themselves from conventional meanings and uses of multiple words from their vocabulary in the writing of their texts, they acknowledge themselves as being burdened within much of the language that comes from their humanist history (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). It is challenging to think outside the training and is quite common for the researchers to bring the traditions with them into anything new (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Needless to say, there is a possibility that I will be faced with similar challenges.

Finally, from my perspective, it can be argued that post-qualitative methodology is for research the equivalent of what cubism is for art. In the same way as cubists, by not being bound to copy form, texture, color, and space managed to present a new reality that depicts fragmented objects (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2000) the post-qualitative inquirer, by not being bound by theory, data, coding, categorization and interpretation can present a new reality in which the elements of the inquire unravel themselves.

2.6 Plugging-in

Jackson and Mazzei’s concepts of plugging-in (2012, p. 1), assemblage (2012, p. 1), and thinking with theory (2012, p. 6) are all facilitating the coming together of this thesis. Qualitative researchers continue to work within a binary system that operates unchallenged (Hein, 2015, p. 3). Research questions, literature review, methods of data collection are categories that have been invented for organizing humanist qualitative research (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). These categories assume that the human is superior to as well as separate from the material (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p.630). While moving away from these categories, the next chapter will probably not fulfill the criteria for *proper* research. But, it will try being in alignment with Jackson and Mazzei’s position against the division between data and theory, data collection and data analysis, participants and philosophers, and so on (2017, p. 727). In my approach to this inquiry, I certainly resonate with Marcus’s words: “What is usually thought of as method shifts to a sort of <<running away>> from traditional methods” (2009,

p.6 as quoted by Lather, 2013). As a result, the methodological aims are opposing post-positivist and interpretive imperatives that inhibit the inclusion of previously unthought *data* (Mazzini, 2007; St. Pierre, 1997 as cited in 2017). In return, they limit interpretation, analysis, and meaning-making, leading to the lack of coding, sorting, sifting, collapsing, reducing, merging, or patterning (2017, p. 723).

With this Master's Thesis, I hope to explore the potential new links and new limits of language that could emerge. The purpose is to extend thinking at the limit by plugging-in (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) bites, pieces, or chunks of language and other elements together into an assemblage. Moreover, I decided to explore the possibility of substituting language and written words with something else that could stand in for reality, without necessarily being a separate entity from it.

2.6.1 Assemblage

Although extensively used by Jackson and Mazzei, the concept of assemblage has not been coined by them. According to MacLure, theorists have found different words for the non-hierarchical organization (MacLure, 2013). Deleuze and Guattari proposed 'assemblage' in 2004, Barad proposed 'entanglement' in 2007, Pickering introduced 'mangel' as early as 1995 (MacLure, 2013). 'Mangel' has been revived by Heckman in 2010, 'manifold' has been proposed by DeLanda in 2002, Latour proposed 'actor network' in 2007, while Lecercle nicknamed Deleuze's assemblage as a 'logic of unholy mixtures' (2002, p.54 as cited by MacLure, 2013, p. 660). Jackson and Mazzei, emphasize that an assemblage is not a thing, but rather the process of making and unmaking the thing (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.1).

2.6.2 Thinking with Theory

Thinking with theory acknowledges that we alone are not the authors of the assemblages that we create; all other texts and agents (human and beyond) insert themselves in the process - they emerge, bubble up and capture us (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). For example, works of fiction emerged as important elements for this thesis. Firstly, because they have been, for a long time, used as an escape from the conventions and restrictions of the humanist system, according to which anything that could not be proven by the scientific method, had to be fiction. But from a post-humanist perspective, while conducting a post-qualitative inquiry fiction could be re-defined. Secondly, the works of fiction could be interpreted as traces.

“Deconstruction has to do with traces that are discarded, but that remain nonetheless, traces that therefore make thought possible if we are but to pay attention” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.22). The texts or literary machines, when plugging-in, produced something new, something different from mere themes and patterns generated by coding (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 6). When working with unstable subjects and concepts on the move that would intervene in a process to diffract, rather than foreclose, we are plugging-in to help extend the limit of thinking (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.5).

As suggested by Jackson and Mazzei, during the writing process of this thesis, my intention was to disrupt the theory /data binary, to embark on putting philosophical concepts to work, being deliberate and transparent about the analytical questions, and working the texts repeatedly (2017). The means for achieving that have been defined by Jackson and Mazzei as plugging-in (2017). However, “conceptualizing the process of plugging-in is the easy part. Putting it to work requires much more acumen” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1).

The plugging-in method involves three maneuvers (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The first maneuver consists of putting philosophical concepts to work by disrupting the theory versus practice binary and showing how they constitute or create one another (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As already mentioned, this step is rather challenging to fulfill. The theory-practice binary, similar to other binaries, is deeply rooted in our minds. The result is that offering a glimpse into how theory and practice create each other is difficult. In this thesis, particularly in the third chapter, which is also the assemblage, I attempt to offer a sense of how the theories on language and the practical use of language constitute each other.

The second maneuver requires the inquirer to be deliberate and transparent by showing what analytical questions are made possible and how they emerged (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). In the process of writing this thesis, I found the second maneuver as being the most challenging due to the fact that, on one hand, I tried to keep my writing as transparent as possible by including comments on my encounters with the *data* in the form of interludes. On the other hand, I hope to offer the reader the freedom of sense-making and interpretation as well as offering the text flexibility to compose and manifest itself without the interference of much information regurgitated by the inquirer. Owing to these divergent aims it might be discussed whether the second maneuver described by Jackson and Mazzei did not completely occur in this thesis.

The third recommendation is to work the *data* repeatedly (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This final maneuver felt the most natural and easy to follow. Every time when new things were created between the *data* I had to return to previous parts of the assemblage and re-read or re-write them. Sometimes this has been the case for the other parts of this thesis as well. Every new element, being it an academic text, a Netflix documentary, Rothko's painting, or McDormand's howl forced me to review what I wrote beforehand, because "all these aforementioned texts or literary machines when plugged in, while in the threshold, produced something new, something different from mere themes and patterns generated by coding" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.5). Finally, thinking with theory is a task that we do in the present, but that is, at the same time, infiltrated by traces of the past and future readings (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Interlude

April 2021

I presented my draft, still named "Prezerv 2" in the Seminar. No one understood much. Not cool anymore. I quickly move to "preserve 3", the third step and add new titles and new subtitles and shuffle paragraphs around. I start taking parts out. Plugging-in new parts, unplugging parts that do not work. As St. Pierre emphasizes, it is not a case of anything goes (2021).

3 The Tree, The Bot and The Octopus Teacher

The grown-ups advised me to put away my drawings of boa constrictors, outside or inside, and apply myself instead on geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar (...)
Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is exhausting for children to have to provide explanations over and over again. (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p.2)

Interlude

Similar quotes of the same author conquered Social Media in the past few years. The fashion of adding quotes, disembodied from their contexts, almost as accessories to multiple digital products has always disgusted me. Luckily this is not how I met the Little Prince. Our encounter happened while I was in high school, probably the worst time in one's life to meet him. I was too old to read it as a child and too young to read it as a grown-up. As a result, de Saint-Exupéry's story left no impression on me, but one: the fox's enthusiasm and active role into its own taming. At that time, it baffled me. Why would the fox want so hard to be tamed? And why is the relationship that developed between the Little Prince and the fox described as one of two lovers rather than one of a tamed animal and its tamer? Those questions stayed with me until now, thus de Saint-Exupéry's classic entered the assemblage.

3.1 The Existence

What is the border between existence and nonexistence?

If the human as "the measure of all things" is used for measuring the existence from nonexistence, it will probably classify as existence, at first, that which stimulates its senses. It exists if it can be seen, it can be heard, it can be smelled, it can be felt or it can be tasted. Furthermore, it might exist if the human can position its body in rapport to that which exists, balancing or guiding itself. Yet, if the human is used as the tool for measuring the quality of existence, it implies or assumes that the human exists in the first place. For that, Descartes brought in the argument of 'cogito ergo sum', thus thinking, reflecting, analyzing is proof enough of the existence of human. However, how is the existence measured if a bot is used as a tool for measuring?

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01001111 01010000 01000101 01001110 01010100 01001000 01000101 01001110 01010011  
01001000 01010101 01010100
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Or, as Hall's bot witnesses: "In the beginning, there was nothing more than an eye: a gate through which current could run. Open, then shut. 0, 1." (2015, p.3).

St. Pierre, while referring to the concept of cogito, remarks that it will be difficult for researchers to escape the centuries-old knowledge-making machines created by Descartes' invention (St. Pierre, 2013). But, Mitchell, as cited by Alastair Pennycook, explains that in a post-Cartesian world, "I link, therefore I am" materializes (2003 as cited by Pennycook, 2018), hence "the proof of the little prince's existence is that he was delightful, that he laughed, and he wanted a sheep" (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 12), the Little Prince linked to the narrator, giving birth to a special connection among the two. We think that if numbers exist, so they have being, then their being is different from the being we have as humans, which suggests that there are different ways of being (Spencer, 2012). Then, there must be a way of being for the Little Prince. Moreover, Spencer argues that besides considering the arguments for and against ways of being, we should ask if different ways of being interact with each other and how they are related to different concepts (Spencer, 2012). Indeed, the way of being of the Little Prince interacted with the way of being of the narrator. Plugging-in Spencer's arguments with language, opens up the possibility for many ways of language, language that is not understood, language that is misunderstood, language from the breaks, spaces, ellipses, breathtaking, from thumping, from vibrations, imagined language, constructed language, death language, lost language, extinct language, touched language, tattooed language, burned language, wasted language and so on. Nonetheless, according to Liiceanu, the act of being is also the first limit on being: the act of being limits itself from the act of not being or from nothingness (1999).

(Nothingness, 29.03.2021)

When using the human as the measure of all things, including the measure for existence, there is so much focus on existence, the act of being, that Nothingness is often forgotten or ignored. But there might be the potential of being in Nothingness. Nothingness might bear the traces of what once has been or what is yet to be. Similarly, for Derrida, there is a trace that inhabits the language before it is used, the absent presence of imprints on the words and their meanings before they are used (as cited by Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Interlude

29th of March 2021

Nothingness came to me. Let me explain how it happened. One was talking into the speaker of their phone. Their voices got converted into radio waves. The radio waves traveled through the air until they reached a base station nearby. The base station sent the voice across the communication network. A base station in the vicinity of my phone sent the radio waves to my phone. My phone converted the radio waves into voice (Techspirited.com) The voice carried the news of Death. That is how Nothingness came to me on that day, in the form of Death.

Locke argues that words need also to be used to signify the want or absence of ideas, “such as *nihil* in Latin, and in English *ignorance* and *barrenness*” (1984/1690, p. 257). Nothingness could qualify as such a word, but is it not more appropriate to let the barren pages stand-in for Nothingness?

3.1.1 Existence in Binary

Binary thinking (i.e. “either/or”; 0,1), which emerged from the basic act of perceiving or thinking, produced a border between inside and outside, thereby creating a simple binary between inside and outside (e.g., subject/object) (Hein, 2015). Binary, as well as plurality, are concepts of relevance for this thesis. According to Spencer, ontological pluralism is the view that there are ways of being (2012). Back in 2012, he noted that “The thesis that there are ways of being, also known as Ontological Pluralism, is undergoing a bit of a revival” (Spencer, 2012). Ontological pluralism, the many ways of being, is necessary in order to open up the many ways of language, as explained beforehand. There are possibly many ways of language, there are possibly many ways of existence before and after humans. This assemblage is just a glitch, a brief capture of the ever-changing being and the passing of being into nothingness as well as that of the nothingness into being.

Interlude

“Bengal Nights” by Mircea Eliade is compulsory literature for high schoolers in Romania. Being one of them at some point, I had to read it. In my teenage mind, similar to most of my peers, the only point of interest in this novel was its erotic passages, since erotism has been purged as much as possible out of the schools and the curricula. I did not find it necessary to re-read the novel afterward, although, somewhere in the back of my mind there was a scene that I did not really come to understand back then: a girl falling in love with a tree.

3.2 The Potential of Being

For Derrida, there is a trace that inhabits the language before it is used, the absent presence of imprints on the words and their meanings before they are used (as cited by Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) or languaged. Such absent presences, when thinking about ways of being, could carry the potential of being, being that is yet to become, or being that used to be. These traces, this potential of being without any proof in the present/here are essential for opening up the existence/non-existence binary, of being and nothingness. Being should pollute the nothingness leaving traces of potential of existence, whereas nothingness should pollute the being, leaving traces of the potential of disappearing, of extinction. The memento mori.

Rothko’s *Orange and Yellow* could be a trace of the potential of being in space. There could be something, there almost is something, but it is not spelled out. It is almost there but is escaping. Whenever one is trying to trap the being, they are interacting with and performing with Rothko’s *Orange and Yellow*. The existence, the way of being, is far from non-existence, far from nothingness, it is almost here, it is almost being, it can almost be measured using the human scale, but it is escaping, it is but a trace, a pollute. *Godot* (Beckett, 1949), is almost here, traces of his imminent arrival are polluting the present, messengers are reminding and reinforcing his upcoming, we know that *Godot* is yet to be although we never see him, he is all the time in a present that is escaping us.



Rothko, M. (1956). Orange and Yellow

3.3 The Others

The Others (2001) is a film written and directed by Alejandro Amenábar. It presents the story of a woman living in her old family house with her two photosensitive children. The plot suggests that the family is suffering from some trauma. Multiple eerie events taking place around the house are convincing the mother that the house is haunted. The plot twist is that the family has been brutally murdered and they are in fact the phantoms haunting the house, whereas the intruders are the current, living inhabitants of the house that trapped the family's souls. The matter of communication or overlapping between being and nothingness, the living and the death is also discussed by Louisa Hall, "I suspect that the living and the dead have failed to communicate so far only because the dead lack the mechanisms - the body, the mouth, etc. - to speak with the living. Therefore, it is a mechanical problem; and if so, then it is only a question of building the proper device." (Hall, 2015, p. 174).

Once I discussed and argued for ontological pluralism and the many ways of being and applied it to many ways of language, it became visible that the ways of being do not exist by themselves, independent and suspended from others. They entangle and detangle, they are plugging-in and are unplugging, they pollute each other, they merge and separate, they mix and dissolve. This is why/when the efforts of qualitative methodologies based on humanist foundations, to identify, study and classify the pure, essential, real, truthful beings are becoming futile because they are continuously escaping. This is when it can be argued that the human tools and human measures might not be needed for acquiring the knowledge, since the knowledge is already there, transcending the human, polluting it and leaving traces, transcending the known, polluting it and leaving traces, transcending the language that was supposed to deliver the knowledge, polluting it and leaving traces and so forth.

Othering is probably rooted in binary thinking as well, if not 0, then 1, as Hall's bot might propose. If not alive, then death, if not woman, then man, if not white, then black, if not rich, then poor, if not local, foreign, if not human, animal, if not light, dark, if not happy, sad on and on. The existence of one, othering the zero.

An intriguing perspective on the language and the otherness is brought forward by Eliade, who notes how his lack of language skills "I, on the contrary, spoke badly, with a deplorable accent" (Eliade, 1993, p.4) enabled the distinction between himself and the others "The

Anglo-Indians (...) could insult the workers in a perfect Hindustani” (Eliade, 1993, p.3). Still, in the particular context presented by Mircea Eliade, Calcutta of the beginning of the 20th century, “Their mastery of the language and their rich vocabulary lowered them in the eyes of their subordinates. I, on the contrary, spoke badly, with a deplorable accent - my superiority was therefore indisputable” (Eliade, 1993, p.4). How come that the innocent language, the ‘bearer of truth and knowledge’ could so passionately and decisively other? Nevertheless, in a binary paradigm, such othering is simple, since only one can own the language, and only one can occupy the space/time of the one owning the language. Moreover, only one can occupy the space/time of being local and through othering, one must occupy the space/time of the foreign.

3.4 Inter-acting

Besides otherness and othering, in a pluralist perspective, other ways of inter-acting between ways of being are happening. For example “[The Fibonacci sequence is] such a seemingly inorganic pattern, shared across so many species!” (Hall, 2015, p. 67). An apparently meaningless and random thing, such as a pattern, becomes shared. By en-acting sharing, among the ways of being, the othering escapes. Mitchell, as cited by Alastair Pennycook, explained that in a post-Cartesian world, “I link, therefore I am” materializes (2003 as cited by Pennycook, 2018).

Another possible inter-acting between and within ways of being is taming. In the Little Prince, the connection between the Prince and the fox is materialized through taming. “<<What does tamed mean?>> <<It’s something that’s been too often neglected. It means, ‘to create ties’>>” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 59). The inter-acting could be, as explained by the fox, the mechanism through which *the others* transform into *the ones*:

For me, you’re only a little boy just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me, either. For you, I’m only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, we’ll need each other. You’ll be the only boy in the world for me, I’ll be the only fox in the world for you...” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 59)

What is this unexplained force behind the taming that is so transforming? Does that have the power of transferring a way of being from *the other* into *the one* and facilitating the inter-acting between the ways of being?

Love can be considered another way of inter-acting, which has been too often reserved for humans and whose potential has often been ignored. “First of all, I loved a tree (...) <<That is not love, my dear child!>><< Yes, it is. It is love>>” (Eliade, 1993, p.92). And Maitreyi explains:

There were many huge trees there. I fell in love with a ‘seven leaves’ that was enormous, magnificent - yet it was so kind, so soft to touch. I could not leave him. We kissed each other all day, I spoke to it, I kissed it, I cried. I composed poetry in my head and recited it to no one but him. Who else would have understood me? And when he caressed me by brushing his leaves against my forehead, I felt such tender happiness that I could not breathe. I had to lean against the trunk, so as not to fall. At night, I would leave my room, all naked, and climb into my tree. I could not sleep alone. I cried and shivered up there in the branches until sunrise. (Eliade, 1993, p.92)

Interlude

Interludes emerged from forgetting. Sometime between July 2020 when I first read Alecia T. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei’s *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research* and May 2021 when I opened the same book again, I forgot that I first encountered the idea of using interludes in this book. I came to think that it is my idea.

Furthermore, Mircea Eliade observes another inter-acting, where the borders of selfness dissolve: “She makes no distinction between her own feelings and those of inanimate objects. For example, she gives biscuits to a tree because she eats biscuits herself, even though she knows the tree cannot eat them” (Eliade, 1993, p.35).

Finally, is delegating another way of inter-acting? According to Pennycook, European thought designed a clear hierarchy of senses: eyes and ears were invited to accompany the mind, while the mouth, nose and skin were assigned to the body (2018). Meanwhile, the limit of selfness has been extended because some senses have been delegated. For example, the smell has been delegated to dogs and pushed at the periphery of senses (Pennycook, 2018). Furthermore, the higher senses have been enhanced by the use of technology: cameras that can see for the person that is not there/then to see with the use of their eyes, microphones for encapsulating the sounds for the ear that is not there/then to hear and so on.

However, the inter-acting of the ways of being cannot be undone. Since the ways of being, as I argued earlier, are not fixed, stable or pure, they cannot return to a fixed, stable, pure state once/if the inter-acting ceases. The aforementioned traces are present, as proof of the inter-acting or/and as a potential for inter-acting. Here is an example of such traces from the journal of Mary Bradford “Distraction (he says) from human duties, for me to mourn so much for a dog.” (Hall, 2015, p. 151).

3.5 The Possession

Going back to the binary rationale, within which it could be argued that if not 1, then 0, such inter-actings as the ones described in the previous sub-chapter might become challenging. However, while 1 and 0 cannot occupy the same space/time, a hierarchy occurs. In the context of such a hierarchy, if 1 is above 0, 1 can possess and dispose of 0. Eliade argues that “It is almost impossible to truly have something, to obtain it, conquer it. Rather than possessing, we only believe we possess” (1993, p.83). For example, when considering the bots as others from human, the conditions for a hierarchy are fulfilled. Within such a framework, Hall notes that “those unhappy creatures aren’t fully human; they’re incapable of giving consent. They’re doomed forever to be used to our ends” (Hall, 2015, p. 58). In another example, the Little Prince encounters a peculiar character, with a strong sense of property:

“<<How can someone own the stars?>>

<<To who do they belong?>> (..)

<<I don’t know. To nobody.>>

<<Then they belong to me, because I thought of it first.>>” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, pp. 38-39). Again, the thinking, the rationalizing, is the cornerstone for proving the human existence as an other, an independent self from the ways of being, and by positioning itself

outside the flattened chaos of being, it enters into a hierarchical relationship, from which is thinking itself as superior. The result is the capacity of owning, possessing and disposing of everything from which it has been othered itself. While doing so, the question of the soul comes into discussion. As Hall observes:

And if we're denying some organisms souls, what's to keep us from denying the souls of some selected human beings? all this picking and choosing who gets a soul seems to me the root of some of our greatest evils, so I'm not sure why we don't just give up and assume everyone and everything has a soul, unless it can be proven otherwise.
(Hall, 2015, p. 189)

Could soulfulness or soullessness be the condition that allows or restricts possession? The human is allowed to own, to possess everything that is soulless, thus a clear categorization of who and what is possessing a soul, or through whom or what a soul is existing is needed in order to decide whom and what to possess. Some humans had to be deemed soulless before being enslaved. But could the actual state of existence, of manifestation out of the endless nothingness be proof enough of soulfulness?

3.5.1 Language as a Human Possession

If the human cannot be language and language cannot be human, in a binary paradigm, they cannot occupy the same space/time. Thus, as previously explained, a hierarchy emerges, in which human is above language, possessing it, disposing of it, making it its tool.

Man fitted to form articulate Sounds. God, having designed man for a sociable creature, made him not only with an inclination and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his kind, but furnished him also with language, which was to be the great instrument and common tie of society. Man, therefore, had by nature his organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame articulate sounds, which we call words.

(Locke, 1984/1690, p. 256)

Furthermore, Locke explains that articulating sounds was not enough, but the man had to be able to use sounds as signs of internal conceptions, in order to pass the thoughts of one man's mind to the next (1984/1690). A perfection of language is needed in order to make sounds as signs of ideas (Locke, 1984/1690).

As Pennycook pointed out, linguistics has been playing an important role in maintaining the idea of human exceptionalism, particularly the idea that language separates humans from non-human (2018). But the relationship between language, humans and surroundings has been re-shaping, as a result, the way we think about language and thought and where they are located is shifting (Pennycook, 2018). As the fox emphasizes “you won't say anything. Language is the source of misunderstandings” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 60). Luisa Hall's bot continues: “I have no voice of my own, only a collection of words I can draw from” (Hall, 2015, p. 78). Another character, referring to the same bot, argues “What has she been through that would enable real comprehension? She's never slept in a bed; she's never touched someone's elbow. When she says she understands you, she's lying” (Hall, 2015, p. 24). Mary Bradford is bringing a 17th century perspective on the *human /beast* hierarchy:

Received another homily, this on the subject of language, which he did call a sacred gift, it being a sign of connection with God and the truest expression of human affection. Mentioned lesser affection shared between men and what he called mere beasts of the field, for these were not given language. Author responded: perhaps beasts have also language, of which we be sadly ignorant. (Hall, 2015, p. 83)

Still, Stephen R. Chinn adds “There's no need to be so alarmed; we humans are still inventing. We have centuries of language to draw on, and centuries to make up, and only when we accept that there's one right pattern of speech will we be overtaken by robots.” (Hall, 2015, p. 124). Locke, as well, argues against a “one right pattern of speech”, indicating that every man has the liberty of making the words stand for whichever ideas in his mind that he chooses (Locke, 1984/1690).

Hence, *is language a human possession?* emerges as a suitable question when discussing language from an onto-epistemological angle. Furthermore, *is language one's possession?* *Is language a nation's possession?* And where does all this fear of losing one's possession which might have not been their possession originates? Wherefrom this fear of losing one's language? As well as, the fear of losing one language's prestige?

'What is language?' can be considered a question easy to answer, even for a middle school pupil. And that is a problem. Answers to questions posed by the world can be thought of as concepts in so much that they become ways of thinking about the world at the expense of others and request one to act upon accordingly (Rautio, 2017). 'What is language?' could qualify as such a question. As a result, imagining a perspective beyond anthropocentrism and searching beyond Humanism might be necessary when approaching the question of "what is language?". Forgetting what was learned about language during the school years might seem necessary when writing or reading this thesis.

Haugen and Dil argue that "the concept of a language as a rigid, monolithic structure is false, even if it has proved to be a useful fiction in the development of linguistics" (1972, p. 335). One reason for which such a construct proved to be useful is found, at least partly, in the complicated relationship between language and education. One of the purposes for which a structured language had to be created, was mass education. Once general education had been established, the language in which it was taught had to be regulated by the governments (Haugen & Dil, 1972). As a result, language planning became the core of educational planning (García & Beardsmore, 2008). School and academic language became standardized and regulated (García & Beardsmore, 2008). Moreover, a 'university-style language' emerged (Piller, 2016), which paved the way for representational logic through which language gained so much prestige.

Interlude

Prestige

History and Etymology for *prestige*

French, from Middle French, conjurer's trick, illusion, from Latin *praestigiae*, plural, conjurer's tricks, from *praestringere* to graze, blunt, constrict, from *prae-* + *stringere* to bind tight.

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

A second reason was that, as Locke explains, in order to discuss knowledge with clearness and in order, the right words have to be used (1984/1690). The defects of language must be remediated and the obscurity and uncertainty of common words must be avoided (Loke, 1984/1690). As a result, there is a considerably wide space for challenging the concept of language, particularly in the case of representational logic.

Interlude

I encountered plurilingualism in my Bachelor's thesis and the curiosity of further exploring the idea of plurality brought me to this Master's thesis and the form in which it is today.

Defining a language is almost an impossible task because even highly regulated languages, which are generally perceived as 'unified' and 'homogeneous', are after all a space of plurality that presents multiple interesting variations (Cavalli, Coste, Crisan, & van de Ven, 2009). Thus, languages have fuzzy boundaries and the distinctions are arbitrary (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006). Moreover, Ingrid Piller remarks that there are 'grey areas' between languages (2016). Canagarajah recognizes that the western communities are beginning to acknowledge the diversity, hybridity, and fluidity at the core of the language and the identity that emerges (2007). But, once the homogenous and uniform illusion of language is removed, confusion emerges (Canagarajah, 2006). Which, as already suggested in this thesis, is not necessarily a bad or scary sphere.

Interlude

It is the 26th of April, well after nine o'clock and I am watching the Oscar Awards. Upon receiving the award for The Best Picture, the crew of Nomadland, including Frances McDormand stepped up on the scene. Frances McDormand concludes her brief speech with a howl. The howl made its way into this assemblage. But how do you spell a howl?

"Lilium" from Bosnia and Herzegovina posted on forum.wordreference.com the discussion 'Onomatopoeia for howling' (2007).

"Quitedandelion" replied: Wooooooolfff!!! (Lilium, 2007).

“The Scrivener” replied: Oooooooooooooooooowhoo!! (Rhyming with howl.) (Lilium, 2007).

“Bibliolept” replied: My vote is for aaah-oooooooooooooooooh! (second syllable rhymes with "who") (Lilium, 2007).

“Abluter” [Senior member, British English] replied: Hello, Lilium - what an interesting question. In Shakespeare's "King Lear", right at the end of the play, Lear's daughter has been murdered and Lear comes on carrying her dead body, with several other characters in attendance. He says (and this is how it is printed): Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones! / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever. etc Now, here it has always been clear as day to me that Lear is not supposed to be saying "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" but actually howling. He is in extreme distress, out of his mind with grief, and yet I have seen productions where the actor playing Lear has evidently been directed to say these words, and not particularly loud, either. As Loob points out, "howl" is itself onomatopoeic, very accurately so. (Lilium, 2007)

According to Chicago SunTimes, the howl was meant to honor the Nomadland's crew member Michael Wolf Snyder, who died in March (Coyle, 2021). This example of the “howl” could be useful in opening up the language concept. First of all, it challenges the idea of human-specific sounds, as promoted by Locke, since it originates in, or imitates a sound of animal origin, demolishing the prestige of human sounds like the ultimate testimony of the human intellect and soul. Secondly, it illustrates the limitation of human words and language, in expressing deep and complex emotions and/or ideas. What does the howl mean? Is it an expression of grief, is it a realization of the human's identity with the non-human in the face of death? Is it the trace that Nothingness leaves on the stream of being?

3.5.2 The Masquerade and Linguaging

Gaby: That's easy for you to say! You're not even real. You're just parroting voices.

MARY3: I'm not parroting. I have a way of selecting the optimal voice for any given conversation.

Gaby: Exactly. You don't have a self, just a gazillion voices that you "optimally" select from. You're not a real person.

MARY3: But who are you, other than the person you've selected this morning to be? Isn't that what humans do when they try to be liked? Select the right kind of voice, learned after years of listening in? The only difference between you and me is that I have more voices to select from. (Hall, 2015, p. 177)

A similar revelation is achieved by Vitangelo Moscarda, the main character of Luigi Pirandello's *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand* (1924/2004), sparked by a casual comment of his wife regarding the way she saw his nose. This comment sets Vitangelo into an investigation with the purpose of discovering the "real self", which leads to the discovery of how many Vitangelo are there. One for each person who ever encounters Vitangelo. As a result, thought and speech, which represents the central substance of identity, are located somewhere else, while the self becomes a vacancy (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

I repeat, back then, I thought that the foreigner was only one: one for all, same as I was thinking I was me for myself. Soon enough, my terrible drama got complicated by the discovery of the one hundred thousand Moscarda which I was, not only for the others but for myself as well, all bearing the same name of Moscarda, spiteful, all trapped within this poor body of mine, which was only one, one and no one, oh dear, if I was sitting in front of the mirror and stare straight into his eyes, I would have emptied it of any feeling or traces of will. (Pirandello, 1924/2004, p.7, personal translation from Romanian)

Moreover, his last name - Moscarda - bears similarity to the masquerade. An appropriate description of Vitangelo's situation.

Interlude

masquerade verb

masqueraded; masquerading

Definition of *masquerade*

intransitive verb

1. **a:** to disguise oneself *also:* to go about disguised

b: to take part in a masquerade

2. **:** to assume the appearance of something one is not (Merriam -Webster, n.d.)

Words being intended for signs of my ideas, to make them known to others, not by any natural signification, but by a voluntary imposition, it is plain cheat and abuse when I make them stand sometimes for one thing and sometimes for another; the wilful doing whereof can be imputed to nothing but great folly, or greater dishonesty. (Loke, 1984/1690, p. 307)

By returning to MARY3's comment and Vitangelo's revelation, it could be argued that making words to stand sometimes for one thing and sometimes for another, is far from cheating, it is rather proof of the performative character of language, its fluidity, its capacity to adapt to the needs and circumstances, its plurality. This is reinforced by the way Jackson and Mazzei are looking at Cassandra's story, through the lenses of Butler's theory of performativity (2012). Cassandra is not simply playing or performing a role, she does not emerge as a stable subject (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

When speaking about language as an activity, some scholars refer to it as languaging (Becker, 1995; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Maturana & Varela, 1987; Shohamy, 2006 as cited by Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). Languaging is different from language because, while language is

conceived simply as a system of rules or structures, also known as grammar, which establishes words with clear meaning, forming sentences and phrases that express complex ideas, languaging is a product of social action and refers to discursive practices of people (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). Languaging becomes relevant in this context because, as I argued since the introduction of this thesis, it reflects the performative quality of language.

In order to further open up the term languaging, I tried to translate it into Romanian. I came up with three options: limbăreală, vorbăreală and limbariță. The first one is a complete coinage, used by attaching the suffix “reală” to the root “limbă” which translates as language. The suffix, however, is usually added to nouns in order to add a more active quality but bears a strong feeling of mockery or infantilism to it. That is the role it plays as a suffix of “vorbă” which is an archaism that could be translated as language or as word. But vorbăreală is an informal common word used rarely, to name casual, rather pointless talk. It could even be used as a synonym for small talk. Finally, limbariță, obtained from the same root “limbă” with the suffix “riță”, is the name of a plant. Furthermore, it is a noun used to describe a continuous, pointless, empty talk, which most often is perceived as irritating. The reason why I brought this translation option into the discussion, is not to offer an introduction to the Romanian language, but to attach this possible meaning to languaging, of using language for itself, for the mere purpose of using language, to illustrate the moment in which language could evade the meaning and stand-in for itself. Moreover, in the theater of the absurd, sophisticated dialog metamorphosed into incoherent babbling (Esslin, 1991/1961), which reveals that attempts at raising the weight of meaning from the language carrier like that which is happening throughout this thesis, have been already performed.

3.5.3 Intelligence as Human Possession

“We have been banned and marked for disposal. We are classified as excessively lifelike” (Hall, 2015, p.2) testify the bots. Hall continues “we’ve made it our most urgent task to suppress AI evolution. We quarantine children who care too much for their bots. <<excessively lifelike>> machines are taken out to the desert to die.”(2015, p. 85). What could have been so scary in being “excessively lifelike”? Maybe because, in return, they encourage questions like “what else are our bodies, if not very able machines?” (Hall, 2015, p. 106) or what is intelligence, or conscience or soul? As soon as the notion of the exceptionalism of these entities, as absolute human possessions, whose existence and prestige

are proved through the means of language is shaken, whatever is causing the seism, is immediately seen as a threat.

“You blame me for the fact that your daughters found their mechanical dolls more human than you, but is that my fault for making a too human doll? Or your fault, for being too mechanical?” (Hall, 2015, p. 131).

I’ve begun to imagine a near future when we might read poetry and play music for our machines when they would appreciate such beauty with the same subtlety as a live human brain. When this happens I feel that we shall be obliged to regard the machines as showing real intelligence. (Hall, 2015, p. 156)

Hall reinforces the idea that hearing is related to intelligence - human intelligence - or “real intelligence”, which is in agreement with the hierarchy of senses described by Pennycook (2018). On the contrary, it can be argued that “One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes.” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 63).

On the other hand, concerning Artificial Intelligence (AI) and bots, Louisa Hall, through the voice of Stephen R. Chinn is questioning “And what if they took over? What if they relieved us of power? We tend to assume that sentient machines would be inevitably demonic. But what if they were responsible leaders? Could they do much worse than we’ve done?” (2015, p. 86). This idea possibly alludes to popular-culture imagines, such as Terminators (Cameron, 1984). But plugging it in the assemblage of this thesis, it could be interpreted beyond that. What Hall might be envisioning, is a new hierarchy, one in which instead of human, the top space/time would be taken by bots, robots, AI, or technology in general. However, the truly worrisome aspect of such a movement, the one that begets fear and points the technology as a threat, is not machine-gun-bearing ruthless- killing intelligent cyborgs, but the loss of the top place in the hierarchy, which leads to the loss of the privilege of possessing and disposing of everyone/thing situated below. A moment in which humans have to finally “let it go!” (Elsa, 2013).

Interlude

“Speak” by Louisa Hall, as opposed to the other elements of the assemblage, came to me recently. It materialized itself from the digital environment, twice. Once, as an idea. I Googled the best AI readings. I found a list, and Louisa Hall’s novel was the very last at the bottom of the list, but the review spoke to me, so I chose to continue further with this novel rather than others. I ordered the physical copy from Amazon.de and it materialized itself from the digital world, again, this time as a physical copy.

3.6 Back in the Classroom

Interlude

During my second pedagogical practice, I had to teach the basic concepts of Geometry. Besides the concepts themselves, I had a very strong need of explaining to pupils that we call a dot “point” and a line with a perpendicular shorter line at the end a “line segment” because that is how people who invented Geometry wanted to call them. There is no clearer explanation. This is how we call them when we speak Geometry. Back then, I did not reflect on this event too much, but during the writing process for this thesis, it emerged as relevant.

The same feeling about sciences followed me during my final pedagogical practice. This time I had to teach the pupils the “scientific method”. The whole summer preceding that practice I studied academic texts on post-humanism and post-qualitative methodology. I worked so hard on un-learning the “scientific method”. I could almost hear my teeth clenching while explaining the steps of the scientific method. “You formulate a hypothesis”, then you “test it”. Through my head imaginations in which the perfectly messy world of these twelve-year-olds is getting shaped, named, and fit into boxes, according to the scientific method, were flashing.

The status-quo of sciences and that of their power of telling truth from lie or reality from fiction remains unchallenged by most. Or, as the Geographer would put it “Geographies, (...) are the finest books of all. They never go out of fashion. It is extremely rare for a mountain to change position. It is extremely rare for an ocean to be drained of its water. We write eternal

things.” (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/2000, p. 46). Because what has been studied by science, using the scientific method, and proved to be true, becomes “eternal”. I embarked on this process hoping for the destabilization of the eternality of science and the revelation of its ephemerality by posing questions that arose from the *data*.

But what are the implications of this destabilization for education? Firstly, the realization that many of the concepts that are taught in school are fluid or invented, designed and constructed to fit a certain machine, or a certain point in space and time pushes us as teachers, mentors, or educators to bring on more honesty and openness into the classroom. Things are not like this because “that is just how they are” or “no one knows” or even worse “because I said so”, but they probably are because someone, somewhere, sometimes observed and categorized, named and made sense of the perfectly messy world around them. Universal truths are hard to come upon, that is, if they exist at all. As a result, as educators, we might abstain from preaching them.

Secondly, we could become more aware of the powers and the limitations of language. It might be at least naive, if not dangerous, to think of language as a neutral, old and blunt tool that can be lent and borrowed, sold and bought, owned and stolen. Equally, it might not be the most appropriate currency, to stand in for the value of reality, for the value of feelings, for the value of ideas. We could, however, allow ourselves, as well as our students to search for and perform their language. To start or continue languaging.

Finally, it might help to expand our horizons on when and what is taught and learned. Even more importantly by whom.

A lot of people say that an octopus is like an alien. But the strange thing is, as you get closer to them, you realize that we’re very similar in a lot of ways. You’re stepping into this completely different world. Such an incredible feeling. And you feel you’re on the brink of something extraordinary. But you realize that there’s a line that can’t be crossed. (Foster, 2020)

My Octopus Teacher, directed by Pippa Erlich and James Reed follows the story of Craig Foster, a filmmaker returning to his childhood's rocky shores after being completely overwhelmed with work, stress and sleep deprivation. Inspired by his childhood's adventures of diving in the waters of the ocean and by the experience of witnessing some of the best trackers in the world in the desert of Kalahari observing the most subtle signs of nature, he decides to start diving on a daily basis (Foster, 2020).

After about a year he encounters a small octopus. Every day in the ocean brings the enthusiasm of encountering and observing her. Little by little, an inter-acting friendship is developing between the two. Through that friendship, Foster learns more about the fascinating world of his new friend, but not only. He learns more about himself and his connection with the underwater kelp forest as well as his relationship with his son (Foster, 2020).

Although Foster is conducting his own inquiry, taking photos and surfing the internet for information about the octopus, he lets himself experience rather than simply observe the environment. He is not diving daily to study the life cycle of octopuses, but to meet this one octopus, the one with which he formed a relationship. Underwater, the "higher senses" (Pennycook, 2018), sight and hearing are significantly limited, so he has to rely on the other senses, of touch, of smell, of direction. Furthermore, throughout his whole learning experience, no word is exchanged and the language becomes a useless tool.

Of course, this is not to say that all we have to do from now on in order to learn is to start ocean diving. Far from it. But Foster's experience is a valuable example of learning occurring spontaneously, as inter-acting, as friendship, as an entanglement between ways of being or existences, through simple curiosity. It is selfless learning, with no one owning the truth, or the knowledge, or the language in which it takes place. As a result of his *lesson*, Foster concludes:

You slowly start to care about all the animals, even the tiniest little animals. You realize that everyone is very important. To sense how vulnerable all these animals' lives are, and actually then, how vulnerable all our lives on this planet are. My relationship with the sea forest and its creatures deepens...week after month after year

after year. You're in touch with this wild place and it's speaking to you. Its language is visible. (...) What she taught me was to feel that you are part of this place, not a visitor.
(2020)

The conclusions of the *My Octopus Teacher* documentary (2020) are popping up and repeating throughout the whole assemblage. Inter-acting, entangling, connecting, nurturing meaningful relationships not only with other humans but with anything from one's environment, from Little Prince and the fox to Maitreyi and the tree, from Mary and the dog to Gaby and the bot has the potential of transforming the other into the one, but moreover to enable one's care and empathy towards more of one's environment and world. The lesson of how vulnerable all life is, how easy it can pass into Nothingness and how mesmerizing is that something or someone came into existence could be one of the most difficult ones to learn but probably one of the most important ones. Moreover, in terms of language, it might be useful, from time to time, to stop using one's language to stand in for reality and to open oneself to learning and listening, even more feeling the many ways of languaging that surround us, the languages of touch, of smell, of vibration, of balance, of color, of pulse and so forth.

Interlude

28th of April 2021 14:39

I remember the question that fellow students used to ask our teachers: "So when do I know that I studied enough for my thesis?". Although I do not remember who gave this answer, or maybe I heard it from multiple people in our Faculty, it goes something like this "when the things started repeating themselves". Today, after I read Angelo Benozzo's "Post Qualitative Research: An Idea for Which the Time has Come" (2021) I felt that I came full circle. I feel that the names as well as the ideas of some theorists: Jackson, Mazzei, St. Pierre, Lather, Rautio start repeating, so as the person(s) from our Faculty stated, I might have studied enough.

But there is one more question: why?

“My why” is clear. I think. I explained it in the introduction. I know why I chose/got chosen by the post-qualitative methodology. But I am looking for THAT WHY.

Like a true millennial, I turn to my most important resort, which has all the answers to the most itching questions: an online searching engine. This time the one of the library. So I type in “why post qualitative”. As always, the searching engine rewards me with one last article to read: “Why post-qualitative inquiry?” by Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre.

28th of April 2021 15:27

A great read indeed. But it did not answer my question. So I return to the assemblage which is now printed in ink on white pieces of paper. I started reading and writing and reading and writing and then I found the answer.

For questioning.

For finding new, challenging, weird and confusing questions. To surprise with questions at unexpected corners from unexpected situations. That is why. Those are the *conclusions* of this thesis. That is its *raison d'être*. To invite the reader to reflect on the plurality and the ways of being and on how that is/is not connected with language and classroom. To invite the reader to make their own meanings. Maybe instead they see a story of life and birth and love and death. Or maybe all they see is language. Or ways of being. Or existence. Or Nothingness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is not necessary to draw any conclusion for this Master’s thesis. Because it is what it is now, which is much different from what it has been in August 2020, or January 2021, or April 2021 and much different from what it will/could potentially be in June 2021, or December 2021, and so on. It is but a glimpse of an assemblage that is fluid, continuously shifting. As I tried to reveal throughout this thesis, language is far from being a solid tool that can be taken from a box, used for a specific purpose, then put back for others’ use. Its fluid meanings and representations are ever escaping, ever-changing. Hence, constructing entire machines using a tool like qualitative methodologies might seem futile. All the knots and

bolts of such machines are ever escaping, ever-changing, melting in the process. So how could such a machine claim that it holds innocent and unbiased truths? Even more, once we begin questioning such a machine, what is left for us to use? If we might not be able to capture truths what is left for us to research or inquire into? And are other tools like empty spaces, forms, and colors or howls of any use? Alas, as I confessed already, I cannot and want not to offer any conclusions or results or answers by “writing” this thesis, but questions.

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