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Liquid Metaphor in *Becoming Animal* by David Abram: A Transmodern Perspective Entangled with Phenomenological Insights

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Abstract

Becoming Animal *(2010) by David Abram represents a significant contribution to eco-phenomenological literature. The work describes how, by focusing on the aspect of becoming animal, i.e., tuning our senses to the pulse of the Earth, we can become fully human. The main point of the present paper is to explore the figurative language so abundantly used by the author to determine how it can play a part in opening our senses and helping us to engage with extra-linguistic reality. One recurring theme in the work is interbeing and the fluidity among all participants, a premise which influenced the selection of transmodern concepts as one of my analytical approaches. My examination of figuration is supported by conceptual metaphor theory enriched by the embodied phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his descriptions of how the body plays a crucial role in the creation of metaphorical expressions. The exploration of imagery reveals that metaphor exhibits not only transmodern movement across signs and extra-linguistic reality but is liquid in itself, featuring the potential for free, spirited reversibility, as well as oscillation between metaphorical analogy and literal meaning.*

Keywords

Abram, *Becoming Animal*, perception, metaphor, fluidity, embodiment

Encountering the Text: Recognition of (Figurative) Language as a Means of Transmodern Fluidity

David Abram is an American cultural ecologist and philosopher whose non-fiction works and numerous essays represent a substantial contribution to eco-phenomenological literature, offering a fresh look at what it means to become truly merged with nature. Abram emphasizes the need to develop sensitivity in our perceptions as he stresses the enormous potential of our bodies to become immersed more deeply into the terrain which we corporally inhabit. He also reminds us that the mind is not merely a human attribute but is a part of the earthly biosphere; according to Abrams, strictly speaking, the human mind is not autonomous but participates in a common awareness into which we are all embedded.[1]

Abram's pressing call to restore our animal sensibilities in an effort to re-forge the bonds between the human and more-than-human world strongly resonates with the current socio-cultural (philosophical, economic, political) trend of bringing to the fore a more integrated vision of reality.[2] This project relates to transmodernity, a concept set out by numerous literary critics and social scientists as the incorporation as well as transcendence of the limits of Modernity and

1 David Abram, "Waking Our Animal Senses," *Wild Earth 1997*; David Abram, "The Air Aware," *Orion Magazine* 2009.

2 Marc Luyckx Ghisi, *The Knowledge Society. A Breakthrough toward Genuine Sustainability* (Cochin: Stone Hill Foundation, 2008); Enrique Dussel, "World-System and Transmodernity," *Nepantla. Views from South* 3.2 (2002): 221–244; Rosa Maria Rodriguez Magda, "Transmodernity: A New Paradigm," 2017; Jeremy Rifkin, *The Emphatic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2009).

Postmodernity in the search for a new model that might explain certain systemic reorganizations being activated in our present.[3] First coined by the Spanish feminist and philosopher Rosa Maria Rodríguez Magda, the term transmodernity alludes to a number of general effects of globalization.[4] Transmodernism is associated with a global change in consciousness, worldviews, values, and paradigms. Along these lines, it has been further elaborated upon by, for example, the Belgian philosopher Marc Luyckx Ghisi, who advocates for a re-examination of Modernity by adopting a post-patriarchal, post-industrial, post-capitalist direction.[5] Ghisi recognizes the interdependency of humans, plants and animals within one system in a call for a re-imagination of our relationship with nature based on a greater responsibility for the Earth.

In response to the announcement of the death of Postmodernism, other scholars have also noticed the emergence of "a new dominant cultural logic"[6] which takes the form of, e.g., "the shift from a notion of a single expanding universe to that of multiple worlds inhabiting different dimensions in the time-space continuum."[7] The Spanish scholar Susana Onega continues by observing how the advancement of relativity and quantum mechanics at the beginning of the 21st century altered ways of perception, challenging established views of matter and time. The primary idea of quantum mechanics of the essential connectivity and interaction of all components within a given system is further elaborated on in terms of literature by the Spanish scholars Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Petrusa, who discuss a general paradigm shift towards the transmodern as a way to perceive the world as a unified, cohesive whole.[8]

It is not within the scope of this paper to address transmodernity in all its immense complexity, although a bit attention may be devoted to Capra's vision of man as merely one strand in the web of life, as well as to the emerging recognition of "a global relational consciousness"[9] as advocated by David Abram. As an invitation to become fully human through a process of inter-being with the Earth, *Becoming Animal* echoes Ghisi's transmodern view of the planet as an interdependent living community which may be positioned to overcome the destructive malaises of modernity and restore a more profound ecological awareness.[10]

3 Magda, "Transmodernity: A New Paradigm."

4 See Rosa Maria Rodriguez Magda, *La sonrisa de Saturno: hacia una teoría transmoderna* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1989).

5 Marc Luyckx Ghisi, "The Transmodern Hypothesis: Towards a Dialogue of Cultures," *FUTURES* 31, no. 9-10 (1999): 879–1016.

6 Alison Gibbons, "Postmodernism is Dead. What Comes Next?" *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 14, 2017.

7 Susana Onega, "Thinking English Literature and Criticism under the Transmodern Paradigm," *Counter Text* 3 (2018): 362–376.

8 "Introduction: Transmodern Perspectives on Literature," in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, ed. by Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1–18. See also Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A Synthesis of Mind and Matter*, Susana Onega, "The Notion of Paradigm Shift and the Roles of Science and Literature in the Interpretation of Reality," 2014; Rodriguez Magda, "Transmodernity: A New Paradigm."

9 Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream* (London: Tarcher/Penguin, 2004).

10 Ghisi is very much in line with Dussel, who calls attention to "the three malaises of modernity (individualism, the primacy of instrumental reason or technological capitalism, and the despotism of the system)" which cause the collapse of meaning and freedom in bureaucratized societies. Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity* (New Jersey: International Humanities Press, 1996), 142.

Abram's work has provoked considerable discussion and analysis in environmental fields of study, such as eco-phenomenology and literary eco-criticism, both of which complement transmodern concepts regarding the raising of ecological awareness. In a 2014 article, the British literary eco-critic Richard Kerridge argues that the main task of eco-criticism is to analyze all sorts of texts from the perspective of environmental concerns. Consequently, such analyses should aim to integrate environmental issues into a more general cultural debate, one attempting to effect re-evaluations in cultural values and personal behavior. Kerridge refers to numerous eco-critics, such as Lawrence Buell, Scott Slovic, and Nicole Seymour, noting their efforts to connect our knowledge to our feelings and behavior. Kerridge is arguing here in favor of the strong tendency in eco-criticism to abandon the Cartesian tradition of dualism, which results in the separation of humanity from non-human nature.[11] The British psychoanalyst Joseph Dodds goes even further, adding that a reassessment of our everyday behaviors, for example, the physical disconnection from nature in the consumption of processed food, contribute to our detachment from emotional engagement.[12] The aim of literature in this context therefore, should be to "attempt to change culture, and through culture change policy and behavior."[13]

Abram's text follows the New Materialists by introducing the reader to the realm of a "more than human world," a term he himself coined to propose the possibility of an interconnection between humans and the agentive world.[14] However, the question remains of how to cause people to feel the urge to connect, care, and change, as it might seem difficult to manipulate oneself intellectually into a caring relationship with, for example, a tree. It is vital to emphasize that in *Becoming Animal* the urge to restore the sense of oneness with nature begins at the linguistic level. In this paradigm, language is not merely a looping path from sign to sign within a Saussurean system which produces meanings through their relations to each other and remaining detached from reality. The language Abram uses does not separate the observer from the world – the embodied nature of the author's intensely experienced existence is profoundly interwoven into the fabric of his figurative speech, connecting his lived experience with the living Earth. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to draw attention to the linguistic aspects of *Becoming Animal* as the very first mode through which we can begin to notice and feel a consonant connection with the world. The intention is to view language not as a closed system producing meanings and value on its own but as a unifying tool elevated into "a beckoning play of melodic sounds continuous with the cries of ravens" by which we may encounter the world and live it through.[15] As will be demonstrated later in the analysis, the figurative language of *Becoming Animal* has the potential to "spill over" into the physical world, and the metaphor itself may oscillate freely between analogy and literality. Our examination of Abram's book then will not be in terms of environmental disciplines, but will instead apply conceptual metaphor theory

11 Richard Kerridge, "Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by G. Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 362, 363, 366.

12 Joseph Dodds, *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos: complexity theory, Deleuze/Guattari, and psychoanalysis for a climate in crisis* (London: Routledge, 2011).

13 Kerridge, "Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre," 363.

14 New Materialism is a cross-disciplinary area of study established at the start of the millennium which attempts to challenge the anthropocentric and constructivist direction of much of 20th-century theory by arguing that matter is as alive, active, creative and agentive as humans (Bennett 2010).

15 David Abram, *Becoming Animal* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 38-39.

intertwined with transmodern perspective and phenomenological assumptions. The intention is to present *Becoming Animal* as a post-postmodern, transmodern text which through its figurative language posits a return to the corporeality of the human body in an effort to restore the sense of affinity with the other. The paper seeks to highlight how it is metaphor itself which possesses the capacity to return language to its original owner, the animate Earth.[16]

Becoming Animal represents an intersection between fiction and non-fiction in first-person told by a homodiegetic narrator as the main protagonist and the only human in the story-world. The text abounds with descriptions of the inner state of the narrator/protagonist and his comments on the way in which the external surroundings act and manifest themselves. Performing in the joint position of narrator and protagonist, the main character repeatedly forges a connection with his readers, blurring generic boundaries by addressing his readers directly, instructing them, questioning them, and inviting them to self-observe and co-experience. As an internal element of the story himself, Abram operates as an internal focalizer, shaping reality and refining the world through his own perspective and perception. Only later does it become apparent that the anthropocentric position of the internal focalizer is ineffective, as the story-teller becomes aware that he is acting within a zone of reciprocity and alliance. His observations and interpretations are constantly being influenced and modified by – thus exchanged with – every single entity he encounters. Through these exchanges the all-encompassing power of the Earth itself is revealed through all its living, fully agentive entities. Abrams places himself within a world which is not merely a set of isolated, determinable objects over which he might exercise perceptual dominance, but within a space which serves as an extension of his own corporeality in which all participants are interconnected by the tensions and rhythms of a wider essence.

Metaphor, an instrument that is so pervasive in Abram's text, is able to exhibit this reciprocity by flowing back and forth between the physical and the abstract. Such figuration also has the capacity to scan the world in terms of self-other fluidity by dismantling clear-cut boundaries of unambiguous, non-metaphorical expressions. Echoing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspectives, Abram repeatedly accentuates his core principle that language and meaning emerge from the carnal dimension of the world; thus the aim of his text is to forge a language which could awaken "a new humility in relation to other earthborn beings" and "open our senses to the sensuous in all its multiform strangeness."[17] Our paper then seeks to show *Becoming Animal* as a work which seeks to raise the Earth from an inanimate, detached anthropocentric position by using figurative speech and its enormous potential to help us abandon "a phenomenology of absence."[18] The language of the text is not purely re-presentational, constructing and deconstructing, keeping the user inside it. The words do not merely *re-present* the world, but instead invite us to *be present* in the world, bringing the user into a unity with the other.

16 Abram consistently argues that language is not strictly the possession of the human, but is an attribute of the external world in which we participate.

17 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 3.

18 "A phenomenology of absence" is a term used by Rosa María Rodríguez Magda and Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen in "The Crossroads of Transmodernity," in *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, ed. Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa (New York: Routledge, 2019), 19–28. The authors express the view that structuralism, which emphasizes the play of signifiers with no reference to the material world, contributes to a sense of semantic idealism or hyperrealism, which in turn creates an era of empty signifiers and simulacra.

Discovering the importance of metaphor and exploring Abram's work from this perspective allows us to view language as not only an arbitrary system of representation, but as an open organism which reveals the reality that humans have always been rooted carnally in the environment which surrounds us, that the metaphorical language we use so frequently is a direct reflection of this pre-linguistic experience. The role which metaphor plays in *Becoming Animal* has been largely neglected by critics, who have typically described the work as a text whose aim is to connect the reader with the world.[19] Many commentators focus on the process of becoming as a means of unifying, but, as I want to manifest, they have not noticed that the metaphor so abundantly used by Abram is another important tool which unites, which connects the abstract with the physical, i.e., the mind and the sign with the flesh of the world. This paper then strives to fill that gap and to demonstrate how the very language that we use (especially figurative language in our case) is not merely intended to re-present the external reality, giving way, as Fredric Jameson notices, "to a yawning chasm between the generality of the words and the sensory particularity of the objects."[20] Instead, the aim here is to investigate why in Abram's work it is vital to emphasize and advocate for the importance of language as *embodied*. A preliminary rejoinder might be that the author induces the attentiveness to language itself by using it consciously, thereby enabling us to be both present and united within ourselves as we name reality through our words.

Methodology: CMT, Phenomenology, Transmodernism

The goal of creating a chiasmic, reciprocal interrelationship between readers and their surroundings pervades Abram's poetic imagery, as reflected in the rich use of metaphorical expressions. Here we will now move to conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) as one of our primary analytical tools. By explaining the abstract in terms of the physical rooted in pre-linguistic experience, metaphor has the capacity to break through the wall of linguistic signification. Let us outline the main concepts of CMT as introduced by cognitive researchers George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Zoltán Kövecses.

Metaphor is a fundamental principle in thinking and in our relationship to reality, structuring our knowledge and experiences in a highly specific manner. The importance of metaphor as a principle which shapes our cognition was noted by the German philosopher Hannah Arendt, who observed that the language of our thinking "is entirely metaphorical" and that this "conceptual framework depends entirely on the gift of the metaphor, which bridges the gulf between the visible and the invisible, the world of appearance and the thinking ego."[21] Arendt's descriptions have far more in common with the cognitive approach than with linguistic theories which consider metaphor to be merely linguistic ornamentation that replaces common designations with less typical ones.

Metaphors We Live By (1980) by the cognitive linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson is a key text in the field of cognitive linguistics which introduces a novel, experientialist (as opposed to objectivist) apprehension of metaphor. From this perspective, metaphor is no

19 See James Hartley, "[Review of] *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*," *Environmental Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2011): 189–193; Bonnie Bright, "[Review of] Becoming Animal: The Phenomenology of a Living Earth," *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 7, no. 1 (2013): 88–92.

20 Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 137.

21 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (San Diego New York: A Harvest Book, 1971), 23.

longer understood as merely a decorative accessory of language, but instead as a standard bearer of thought, a conceptual device for structuring and constituting reality which thereby enables the construction of a meaningful, coherent experience. This experiential or perceptual conceptual system is characterized by its embodied nature in which concepts are derived from image schemata which constitute pre-conceptual experience and interactional, sensorimotor activities.[22] A considerable number of conceptual metaphors originate from these image schemata, defined by Zoltán Kövecses as "abstract, pre-conceptual structures that emerge from our recurrent experiences of the world."[23] The recognition of these structures makes us aware of how the imaginative formations of comprehension originate within our own body in its interactions with an environment. Our understanding, as Johnson emphasizes, "involves many pre-conceptual and non-propositional structures of experience (such as image schemata) that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings."[24] All concepts are highly schematic and are determined in terms of prototypes which represent the most apposite examples of a given conceptual category in a given situation. As an extension of our body, these models possess the capacity to open up and connect a sign system or a text to the natural world.

The theory of conceptual metaphor has been greatly developed since Johnson and Lakoff's original studies, with the American psycholinguist Raymond W. Gibbs and the Hungarian cognitive linguist Zoltán Kövecses making significant contributions to the field. Conceptual metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Johnson as a structure that determines one domain of experience (typically more abstract, termed the target domain; e.g., "life") in terms of another (typically more physical, termed the source domain; e.g., "is a journey"). Kövecses complements this by describing "a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience": the target domain (more abstract, less tangible or accessible) and the source domain (physical, more tangible).[25] In order to create meaning in the world through metaphor, we conceptualize cognitively more complex domains with reference to simpler concrete domains. It is nonetheless important to emphasize that the process of mapping is not a random, fragmentary act, but highly organized mental work in which the source domain maps a coherent structuring of experience onto the target, which is then itself constituted as an organized domain.[26] The correspondences of the source domain constitute a specific conception of the target domain relative to the source. The pairing of a particular source domain with a target domain is grounded in similarity or a correlation in experience (for example, the sensorimotor experiences that form the basis for primary metaphors). The choice of source domain is determined by the human factor, which reflects "non-objective, non-literal, and pre-existing similarities between a source and a target domain."[27]

22 See Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

23 Zoltán Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9.

24 Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xvi.

25 Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 2, 4.

26 The term "mapping" is explained in CMT "as a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target" (Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

27 Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction,* 88.

The theory of conceptual metaphor (CMT) differentiates between conceptual metaphors which are considered to be conceptual patterns (for example, EMOTIONS ARE FORCES) and linguistic metaphors, specific metaphorical expressions based on more general conceptual metaphors (for example, *She swept me off my feet*). In CMT discourse, conceptual metaphors are written in upper case to indicate that "the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it."[28]

Recent developments in CMT accentuate not only the importance of embodiment and cultural specificities which affect the emergence of metaphors, but also a wide range of diverging contextual factors.[29] Studies by Kövecses have emphasized the importance of context, with the Hungarian theorist arguing that metaphorical concepts do not rely solely on the symbolic representational system existing in long-term memory but are in fact largely dependent on the situational and linguistic context.[30] Similarly, it is possible to suggest that the external context of the intimate relation with Nature as well as the property of reversibility in Abram's paradigm play crucial roles in shaping the author's metaphorical creativity.

As phenomenology is rooted in the background of CMT, our perspective will be framed and supported by the phenomenological view of objects and embodiment as fundamental in the creation of meaning. The metaphors David Abram uses in his text strongly articulate the participatory nature of perception along with the reciprocal embodied interplay between the observer and the world. This process of inter-being with the Earth reflects Merleau-Ponty's animate expressive world in which the observer is possessed by the perceived object, with the subject's vision formed in the centre of the visible to create an inseparable, intimate relationship.[31] The French phenomenologist has been chosen to incorporate his focus on the concept of embodiment in his assertion that phenomenology awakens our sensitivity to phenomena in processes which grant us the experience of the world coming into being at a pre-linguistic level.[32] Merleau-Ponty expands on this presupposition further in claiming that the creation of meaning is always a result of the way in which we relate to the world, of our individual styles of experience before it becomes thought. Within the works of Merleau-Ponty we may regularly find the contention that conceptual meanings arise as a deduction from gestural meaning, an integral element of the act of speech. This idea is developed by Merleau-Ponty's description of how he has begun "to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life."[33] Merleau-Ponty somewhat contradicts the structuralist principle that language is a fictional entity which by reason of its representational nature "must separate itself from the real thing, cut itself off from the really real," and if the sign system does not function in this way, it cannot

28 Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 4.

29 See Lynne Cameron, *Metaphor in Educational Discourse* (London & New York: Continuum, 2003); Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, Raymond W. Gibbs *Metaphor Wars: Conceptual Metaphors in Human Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

30 See Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*.

31 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1964/1968), 131.

32 Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (The Taylor and Francis e-Library, 1945/2005).

33 Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.

be considered a language.[34] For Merleau-Ponty, however, understanding is a process which first involves the body during which it is able to adjust to the object (which is "soaked" in the word), integrate it, and consequently comprehend it. Only after this has been accomplished can language display its capacity to mirror "the really real" and use the body as an instrument of its expression. The figurative language in *Becoming Animal* invites the reader to glimpse their own subjectivity and the situation, experiencing this at the level of primordial, pre-objective perceptual experience.

The ability to "become animal" coincides in Abram's world with his capacity of experiencing the state of being porous and permeable, an attribute which may aid individuals in entering into non-human forms of sentience. The boundary between the human and the more-than-human setting, as Abram frequently emphasizes, is not meant to fossilize into a barrier, but to dissolve into a passable membrane across which both sides mingle with and, finally, flow into each other, in nourishment and inspiration. Estonian scholar Julia Kuznetski expands the positions of trans-modernity by including the dimensions of the transcorporeal and transmodern fluidity, as figured in her analysis of the element of water.[35] Water perfectly illustrates the capacity of the body to be absorbed and liquefied by the powerful phenomenon of water in which it can meet itself, re-evaluate itself, and re-transfigure itself.

The quality of alliance and porousness which flows throughout Abram's text rules the choice of the transmodern perspective as advocated by Kuznetski as well as by, e.g. the American feminist scholar Donna Haraway, who accentuates the interwoven essence of subjects, objects, natures, and cultures, all of which are continuously involved in intertwining "string figure games."[36] Also the American physicist Karen Barad proceeds with similar observations, as can be seen in the introduction to one of her works:

> This book is about entanglements. To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled inter-relating.[37]

Additionally, the Austrian-born American physicist Fritjof Capra complements the above insights related to the alliance and permeability, adding that "the new concepts in physics have brought about a profound change in our worldview; from the mechanistic worldview of Descartes and Newton to a holistic, ecological view." Capra's holistic view entails seeing the world as a whole in which all parts are equally interdependent. A purely ecological view, on the other hand, entails the recognition of the manner an object is embedded in its common environment.[38]

34 Calvin Thomas, *Ten Lessons in Theory* (New York, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 49.

35 Julia Kuznetski, "Transcorporeality, Fluidity and Transanimality in Monique Roffey's Novel *Archipelago,*" in *Transcending the Postmodern: The Singular Response of Literature to the Transmodern Paradigm,* ed. by Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (New York: Routledge, 2020), 195–212.

36 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (Durhan and London: Duke UP, 2016), 13.

37 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2007), ix.

38 Capra, *The Web of Life*, 5-6.

Metaphor as a Tool Crossing Its Linguistic Boundary

The metaphors in *Becoming Animal* in this analysis were chosen with the goal of granting readers access to the feelings of reciprocity and permeability elicited in the work, then allowing participants to progress further towards a new, non-anthropocentric perspective. As displayed below, however, we should not be lulled into the feeling that it is us who enter into the presence of the object, since it is the object itself which steps forward into our presence. We may cautiously come to realize that we are loosening the reins of our habitual human-centered control as we sense how the environment itself "*envelops and gathers* a range of other bodies under its sway."[39]

Over time, the reader becomes accustomed to the potentially alarming idea that we are not the only active object in the realm of inanimate nature since the entities usually regarded as stationary and passive are also themselves possessed of a dynamic and mobile character. Furthermore, the reader comes to discover that they are not the only agents who colour the scenery by their mood or who can project their inner state of mind upon the outer world, but that "it is *the mountain that lends its gregarious power* to the multiple elements of this place."[40] There are numerous metaphors in Abram's text which express the experience of these new encounters with objects as agents that purposefully affect and arrange the space around us: we can sense that "a vast and brooding *presence* (of the breathing body of the mountain) […] is now slowly *walking toward you*.[41] During his long walks, Abram perceives the "*shadow touching me* […] at every point of my person," and "toward noon, I notice that my *shadow* seems to be *seeping into my flesh* […] absorbed through the pores of my skin."[42] Although he takes these walks alone, he is never completely unseen or unnoticed by the world, yet sometimes "no longer I am […] *under the scrutiny of the sun* [...] released from *the insistent gaze pouring down* from the sky."[43] As he discovers, the surrounding landscape is never still and unchanging, but remains in a constant state of metamorphosis and transformation – "a wooded hillside *is now extending a muscled shoulder in* my direction."[44] As the sun falls, he eagerly awaits "the *night fragments* as *they begin to leak out from* the tree."[45]

Having introduced relevant metaphors, we will now move on to analyze their structures and examine the motivations which lie behind them. Of course, the primary influence here is immediately apparent: Abram's metaphors abound in references to the Cosmos and Nature, with all features (for example, mountain, shadow, sun, and night) personified as bodies / containers / substances that move toward him, scrutinize him, reach out to him, touch him, seep into his flesh.[46] We are confronted with the fact that metaphor displays the incarnational character of linguistic meaning which is rooted in a physical dimension (body as container, substance) and from which

39 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 21 (emphasis mine).

40 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 21 (emphasis mine).

41 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 15.

42 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 17.

43 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 18.

44 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 83.

45 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 18.

46 Merleau-Ponty defines flesh as the element "in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire … a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being." See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1964/1968), 139.

it emerges.[47] In examining the motivation of the selected metaphors, we can draw upon our own experience with physical bodies (especially that with which we are most familiar, our own body) in a process which serves as a source material for ontological metaphors. The most evident ontological metaphor, as Lakoff suggests, is that in which the physical object is associated with the identity of a person.[48] Personification represents an extension of the ontological metaphor which allows us to comprehend worldly phenomena in terms of human qualities, motivations, activities. Obviously, the BODY metaphor interacts with another conceptual metaphor, which in our case is INANIMATE PHENOMENA ARE HUMAN AGENTS.[49] The examples listed above, however, clearly indicate that it is not only abstract concepts that can be personified (for example, time, death, or life), but also those which contain image-structures, i.e., concrete physical entities that already involve images generally understood as human.[50] In other words, we map the image of a person (or more specifically, certain aspects of the source domain such as the ability to move, perceive or influence) onto the image of, e.g., nature, a mountain or the night (as the target domain) in order to comprehend the object on our own terms as agents. Additionally, the concepts of shadow, night and gaze which are applied in our examples all have a physical basis, as they are understood in terms of an object or a substance and, as such, are capable of being quantified: it is the container/object or a container/substance as bounded by a surface, therefore it is possible to say "to step *into* the shadow of this mountain."[51]

Thus, spatial orientation (inside-outside, up-down), which reflects some of the many ways in which we can interact with the world is naturally included in our system of concepts. The personified "sun's *gaze*" and "night *fragments*" conceptualized as substances can acquire the properties of water or rain and can thus "*pour down from* the sky" or "*leak out from* the tree."[52] The Cosmos and all of its elements, commonly perceived as inanimate and passive, are ascribed an agency which is supported by another conceptual metaphor: ACTIVE IS ALIVE. The metaphor itself informs the reader that the world is *like* an active, willful agent *who*, as a bearer of specific (human) qualities, can move, watch, cause an event or effect a change. By mapping the aspects of a human being onto a formerly lifeless entity, we generate a new understanding of the rock or the shadow which can perhaps spur us on to step out of our perceptual oblivion, potentially lead us to the establishment of an alliance, bond, or solidarity with the surrounding world. Thus, these metaphors might open up the reader to a perceptual rebirth, moving them towards a biosphere politics which entails a transformation of sensitivity towards "transmodern planetary interconnectedness and mutuality."[53]

47 In the paper I apply Kövecses' analytical hierarchy model, commonly used in a process which starts by determining an image schema, the basis of all metaphors which provides primary meaningfulness and which is body motivated (e.g., BODY IS A CONTAINER), see Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*.

48 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 33.

49 Conceptual metaphors which serve as a pattern for specific metaphorical expressions are always capitalized in CMT analyses. Lakoff and his students created a list of conceptual metaphors, see George Lakoff, "Index of Conceptual Metaphors." <http://www.lang.osakau.ac.jp/~sugimoto/MasterMetaphorList/metaphors/index.html>.

50 George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 95.

51 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 21.

52 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 18.

53 Ateljevic, "Visions of Transmodernity: A New Renaissance of our Human History?" *Integral Review* 9, no. 2 (2013): 204.

This observation might be summarized by one more primary metaphor: INTERRELATEDNESS IS PHYSICAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS.

The previous section offers the reader the opportunity to step off the pedestal of self-centered individualism and recognize that they inhabit an articulate, eloquent landscape in which all things and beings have a vibrant communicative power and can convey something of themselves to others. The reader also learns that their body is an expressive medium which exists in a vivid interaction, engaging in an ongoing corporeal exchange with its external environment. The metaphorical expressions once again remind us that (abstract) signifiers are not locked within the carousel of a linguistic system, but are impregnated by the speaker's experience of the physical world.

The metaphors selected for this part of the present paper may be even more effective in dislodging the reader from their separation since the embrace, caress, and delicacy of the language works to soften, melt, and transcend the reader's anthropocentric position. We learn step by step that we are not necessarily "centrics" who handle and expropriate objects, but the objects themselves possess the capability to respond actively to our physical emergence.

All the entities of the natural environment provide support for our bodies, adapting their forms to our movement, reaching out their hands to nurture us, to protect us or to hurt us. Abram incessantly reminds us that while our bodies might be perceived as a border separating the internal from the external, they may also serve as a meeting and melting point for all of the "fleshes" involved, participating in a perpetual exchange by "*breathing.*[...] *offering ourselves to* the world at one moment and *drawing the world into* ourselves at the next."[54] Abram opens up the unbridled imagination of the reader, revealing a magical world of flesh being flesh in which "each *being radiates* into the world around it, and each *is affected (even infected) by the* others;"[55] "you are also *being touched by* the tree [...] *the leaf is gently exploring your fingers*, its pores, *sampling the chemistry* of your skin." During every communication "*the boundary* between the human and the-more-than-human world *stayed* […] *permeable* […] that boundary *never hardened into a barrier*, but *remained a porous membrane* across which nourishment flowed steadily in both directions."[56] In observing that "changes in the terrain begin to *release and mirror my own, internal changes*,"[57] Abram stresses that every part of the world around us can be perceived as a unique rhythm of mind in which everyone takes an active part, and which envelops and shapes us. The reader comes to see that their solipsistic ability "to see" or "to touch," which once left them with a sense of feeling detached, therefore powerful, secure, and invulnerable, is always accompanied by the dimension of "being seen" and "being touched," capable of breaking down feelings of anthropocentrism and separation. The very fact of being perceived can engender feelings of being exposed, endangered, and naked, but the experience might transform their former ignorance or arrogance into the quality of sharing and greater responsibility. The very experience of permeability as the perceiving subject and the surrounding environment co-emerging and co-inspiring each other has been termed "transcorporeality" by Julia Kuznetski. The Estonian literary scholar views transcorporeality as a crucial aspect of the Transmodern project through which attempts are made

54 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 61.

55 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 51.

56 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 236.

57 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 133.

to overcome the Cartesian dichotomy of "the natural that is still perceived as 'out there' and the intellectual as "in here.'"[58] The quality of Abram's "becoming animal" which mirrors Kuznetski's idea of discovering one's body through contact with another body (i.e. reciprocal co-becoming) exhibits not only transcorporeal (or transmodern) liquidity but, as the chapter below reveals, also translinguistic liquidity.

The above metaphors in Abram's work familiarize the reader with a personified reality in which all the world is given the space to move, watch, touch and transform its environment. Even the plants and stones behave as active agents with the ability to affect and shift the mode of the space around. The previous paragraphs have analyzed personification metaphors which display the relational arrangements of all organisms and objects in dynamic intertwined patterns through which all elements are organized. Such connections are articulated in two ways – firstly, in taking into account their semantic aspect, they introduce the reader to feelings of reciprocity and permeability. Secondly, they manifest the capacity to break out of the co-action of linguistic signs within a language system to touch the reality outside – they represent the author's reflection, which continually incorporates the primordial interchange between the body and the world, positing verbal thought and sensorial perception as two complementary "forces." Metaphor does not construct the meaning from the sequence of signs and sentences within a text, but draws from the direct experientiality of our own bodies. The interplay between the body and the concept is expressed in the way through which the abstract concepts in the target domain grow out of and are explained by physical experience in the source domain.

In this section, however, in our offering of one more example of metaphor, we will examine the larger issue of whether this metaphorical expression (as well as the previous ones) really speak of one thing as though it were another. In a metaphor such as "*the whole yard was listening*, *transformed* by the satin eloquence of the petals,"[59] we understand the target domain "yard" as a person who is perceptive and subject to diverse influences. In his examination of the potential literality of some metaphors, the American philosopher George E. Yoos raises a challenging point by claiming that "[t]here is no *necessary* awareness of analogy, likeness, or comparison when we conceive of one object, quality, or action through the form of another."[60] Linguists Gilles Fauconnier and Zoltán Kövecses also note that different constituents of the conceptual system (e.g., frames and their elements) are linked to each other not only metaphorically through an "as-if-connection," but by an "is-connection" which may be called an identity relation.[61] It is thus possible to suggest that the selected metaphorical expressions may be literal rather than metaphorical on the provision that we conceive of an object as something which *has* a certain quality, not *as if it could have* this quality. In our example, then, "yard" can be comprehended not as that which is *like* a person, but that which is *as* a person. As Yoos clarifies, "[w]hat is literally expressed are the two thoughts

58 Kuznetski, "Transcorporeality, Fluidity and Transanimality in Monique Roffey's Novel *Archipelago*," 197.

59 Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 172.

60 George Yoos, "A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 32, no. 1 (1971): 788–800.

61 Is-connection, i.e., an identification or identity relation, is defined as the connection during which a conceptualizer identifies a concept with another, or one entity or concept is categorized as another (Kövecses 2015: 44).

brought together in the constitution of one under the aspect of the other."[62] In our case, the target domain "yard" is constituted under the aspect of the source domain "a human being." On this basis, it is possible that Abram does not intend to persuade us to imagine Nature *like* a person but is instead suggesting that we consider Nature *as* a living, sensual, agentive entity, just as we would consider ourselves to be. At first glance, it would appear that the examples of personification used by Abram might be literal expressions which take the form of more definitive semantic structures. A deeper analysis, however, reveals that this in no way diminishes the function of metaphor as a semantically plural tool.

Australian phenomenologist Berndt Sellheim has examined the metaphors used by Merleau-Ponty to develop a terminology that could best describe a new non-dual space, namely the ontological intertwining of body and mind. Sellheim's results highlight the impossibility of formulating a precise linguistic framework when it comes to the experience of an embedded corporeal subjectivity in continual interchange with the environment. Both Merleau-Ponty and Abram resolve this conundrum by using language which could "remain, in some respects, open, i.e., negative."[63] An essential aspect of this form of indirect, negative language is the integration of silence as a strongly expressive primordial form "without which speech would say nothing."[64] Sellheim understands this silence as a quality which is determined by our body and our perceptual experience in a process of uniting corporeality, sense, and utterance.[65] Before we are able to say anything, we form "our mute contact with the things"; our subsequent words are not used in compliance with their pre-settled signification but in concordance with this pre-logical bond.[66] Expressed this way, we "plunge into the world instead of surveying it" in an experience reflected precisely in the indeterminate metaphor in which the body merges with language.[67] Merleau-Ponty's idea of metaphor as a tool of silence, which strips the meaning of its linguistic aspect, guides us directly to the thing itself outside the constraints of conceptual explicit statements. Sellheim complements the task of metaphor in a highly poetic manner in his assertion that it is its imaginative silence which reveals the mysterious depths of expression. [68] The puzzling negativity of metaphor lies in the fact that it possesses a vast capacity to multiply the shades and profoundness of meaning which would otherwise never flourish in the immobilization of the exact expression. When comparing the literal "he listens" with the metaphorical "*the yard listens and is transformed by* the satin *eloquence of the petals*," it is obvious that the metaphorical "listening," "transforming," and "eloquence" do not seek to reflect pre-established (culturally, linguistically) precise signification, but mirror an imaginative silence pregnant with the subtle tones of meaning that result from the intimate contact of the perceiver with the perceived. Sellheim fittingly remarks that polyvalent metaphors have the ability to echo the activity of life in a more "clinging" way than expressions more semantically resolvable. [69] The points

62 Yoos, "A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor," 788–800.

63 Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 41, no. 3 (2010): 265.

64 Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (USA: Northwestern University Press, 1960/1964), 46.

65 Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," 266.

66 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38.

67 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 39.

68 Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," 268.

69 Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," 270.

raised by Yoos and Sellheim are each valuable in their own manner. With Yoos we come to realize that our understanding of "yard," "petals," "Nature' through the concept of a person constitutes a new idea of the target domain, although not in terms of a distant object which can be compared to humans, but rather as a truly perceiving, agentive entity. While allowing us to experience the fusion of the source and the target domain, metaphors regarded as *statements of identity* can alter our apprehension of and attitude towards the described reality. As a result, this can eventually bring about the realization that humans are not in fact the ultimate arbiters of the world, thereby transforming our anthropocentric attitudes and behaviors accordingly. On the other hand, literal explicit language deprives us of the perfection of inexact forms, which possess a greater capacity to open us to the richness of life, a knowledge which cannot be conveyed through schematic representations. The interactive, relational dimension of reality which appears throughout Abram's work is most appropriately expressed by metaphorical images which allow two realities to display themselves simultaneously. Moreover, the allusive, murky quality of metaphorical expression is the most appropriate means of echoing the intangible levels of meaning, since "it is the lateral relation of one sign to another which makes each of them significant, so that meaning appears only at the intersection of and as it were at the interval between words."[70]

In summary, it is vital to read metaphors in a literal approach with both domains in "is-connection" in order to create new understandings of the target domain and to forge a hitherto unknown reality which can be viewed from a new light, possibly leading to a transformation in our actions. Figurative reading is also a key component of this approach, one which allows metaphors to preserve their conceptual "oceanic" openness, thus granting meaning the space to linger at the level of poetic silence.

I seek to show here that even (figurative) language itself represents a characteristic of transmodern thinking in its ability to participate in the process of "trans-stepping" towards the external reality, blurring clear-cut boundaries between a linguistic system and the world it describes. Moreover, metaphor itself exhibits a so-called trans-metaphorical fluidity in that it can turn from the mode of "as-if-connection" to the literal mode of "is-connection," leaving space for an alternative, playful creation of meanings. Analyzing the text with an emphasis on the extra-linguistic manner of understanding, i.e., embodied meaning mediated by metaphor, is the most effective way out of a enclosed system of definitive semantic structures to form a more immediate alliance with the external world.

Conclusion: Language Is Made of the World and Vice Versa

The recognition of the importance of (figurative) language in *Becoming Animal* emerges as the key point in this paper, i.e., metaphor has the capacity to grant the reader and the protagonist a sense of existing as a physical body carnally rooted in the pre-linguistic world. Through this ability, a manifestation of transmodern flow emerges across signs and extra-linguistic reality, with one growing out of and into the other. Moreover, metaphor is identified as fluid in itself as it displays a potential toward free, playful reversibility flowing in oscillation between metaphorical analogy

70 Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 42.

and literal meaning, thus echoing Merleau-Ponty's chiasmic way of perception in a sense "touching is being touched."[71] The quality of being entangled or liquid as displayed by metaphor gives us the opportunity to experience the world not as a distant object "out there," but as one body we are made of, allowing us to descend from the pedestal of self-centered individualism and transform our anthropocentric attitude.

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71 Chiasm is a concept proposed by Merleau-Ponty, who defines it as an intertwining, a crisscrossing or a bi-directional becoming or exchange between the body and things by which we might speak of the "flesh" of things, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes communication possible (Merleau-Ponty 1964/1968).

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