

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY IN OLOMOUC  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of English and American Studies



**Leaving the Fictional Grounds of Language: An Attempt to Unify  
(Phenomenal) Reality and Representation through Sound and  
Metaphor in Works by Mark Z. Danielewski and David Abram**

Doctoral Dissertation

by  
Agata Walek

Supervised by  
doc. Mgr. Tomáš Jirsa, Ph.D.

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I, Agata Walek, declare that this dissertation and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that where I have consulted and quoted from the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed. I have acknowledged all sources of help in bibliography.

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## ABSTRAKT

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Cílem této práce je prozkoumat texty *Only Revolutions* (2006) Marka Z. Danielewského a *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (2010) Davida Abrama a zjistit, zda tato díla mohou nabídnout možnou alternativu k radikálnímu pluralismu postmoderní estetiky, poukázat na možnost, jak neutonout v moři „necentrovaneho“ myšlení a čtení, v labyrintu významů, interpretací, hodnot a kontextů, s nimiž jsme konfrontováni v rámci postmoderní situace. Jinou perspektivu může poskytnout interdisciplinární přístup, který má potenciál všimnout si aspektů běžně přehlížených a vyzdvihnout je do pozice zřídla nových významů. Interdisciplinárními oblastmi zvolenými pro tuto práci s ohledem na jazyková specifika zkoumaných děl (materialita slova, metafora) se staly fonosémantika, teorie konceptuální metafory a fenomenologie.

*Only Revolutions* je román, který popisuje cestu teenagerů Sam a Hailey napříč Amerikou a který uplatňuje techniku dvojího vyprávění, kdy jsou perspektivy obou protagonistů líčeny odděleně. Další text *Becoming Animal* vyzývá k probuzení našich zvířecích smyslů za účelem propojení se s inteligencí žijoucí země. *Only Revolutions*, běžně hodnocen kritiky jako román, který odráží postmoderní stav, je vnímám jako nekonečný pohyb mezi jazykovými znaky uvnitř jazykového systému (textu, který je možné donekonečna otáčet a číst zepředu či zezadu), jenž v Saussureově pojetí produkuje významy na základě vztahových relací mezi znaky nezávisle na skutečnosti. Čte se velmi nesehadno, jelikož postrádá syntakticky úplné větné celky, vyznačuje se však množstvím jedinečných shluků slov se specifickým rytmem a zvukem, které čtenáře vybízí k hledání nového interpretačního přístupu, jenž by využil zvukovou dimenzi slova. Lze tvrdit, že *Only Revolutions* je dílo smyslové v tom, jak dokáže aktivovat sluch i zrak a stimulovat hmatové vnímání skrze potřebu fyzicky obracet knihu. Tímto vede čtenáře k tělesnému prožitku i k materialitě slova, které svým zvukem i vzhledem má potenciál přispět k organizaci textu, a tedy k jeho lepšímu porozumění. V *Becoming Animal* je čtenář konfrontován s nespočtem metafor, které podněcují k nalezení souvislosti mezi jinak zcela odlišnými díly – právě objevení důležitosti zvukové stránky jazyka a metafory slouží jako bod propojující zkoumaná díla, jelikož oba jevy ukazují, že člověk byl vždy fyzicky ukotven ve vnějším prostředí a zvuk slova i metaforický jazyk přímo odrážejí naši před-jazykovou tělesnou zkušenost, která má potenciál vymanit nás z věčné cirkulace mezi arbitrárními znaky.

Nadto je záměrem práce zjistit, jestli novátorské interpretační nástroje aplikované v dizertaci poskytnou možnost nahlížet na protagonisty děl ne jako na rozptýlené

(post)postmoderní subjekty, ale jako na ontologicky pevnější, více ukotvené, centrované postavy navzdory heterogenitě a diverzitě, ve které žijí a kterou i vytvářejí. Cílem je identifikovat, zda je možné obnovit sjednocenější pocit sebe sama ve světle hutnosti každodenní fyzické zkušenosti.

Interpretační nástroje jsou zvolené s ohledem na jazykově důmyslnou povahu obou děl a využívají poznatky z oblasti fonosémantiky, teorie konceptuální metafory a fenomenologie. Součinnost všech tří přístupů má potenciál uvést a podpořit hlavní argument práce, který zní: postmoderní fragmentárnost a strukturalistickou jazykovou klauzuru lze překonat, jelikož zkoumaná díla skrze zvukovou a figurativní vrstvu jazyka poukazují na existenci skutečné fyzické zkušenosti světa, tělesně zakoušených struktur reality, které nejsou konstruovány výhradně jazykovými znaky. Specifický jazyk obou textů vybízí čtenáře k tomu, aby rozpoznali tělesnost protagonistů jako ozvěnu svých vlastních těl, která svým pohybem strukturují prostředí, spoluurčují způsob, jak se předměty jeví, a propůjčují jim význam a smysl.

V analýze *Only Revolutions* je použit přístup fonosémantiky s cílem poukázat na vazbu mezi fonémem a významem a nasměrovat čtenáře k před-symbolické konstituci předmětného (situačního) smyslu. *Becoming Animal* je zkoumáno z hlediska teorie konceptuální metafory, pomocí které je možné identifikovat (vytvářet) korespondence mezi fyzickou zdrojovou doménou a abstraktní cílovou doménou. Analýza metafory jasně ukazuje, že náš pojmový systém vychází z našeho fyzického ukotvení ve vnějším světě.

Zkoumání obou textů ve světle fenomenologické noesis, teorie metafory a zvukové stránky slova nám odhaluje, že bezprostředním nutkáním člověka není podlehnout absolutnímu pluralismu a fragmentárnosti, ale identifikovat a vytvářet analogie mezi rozličnými projevy objektu, hledat a nalézat podobnosti mezi zvukovým odstínem fonému a zvuky vnějšího prostředí, rozeznat a zformovat souvislost mezi dvěma konceptuálními doménami v rámci metafory. Paralely rozpoznané ve vybraných textech zřetelně manifestují, že přirozený svět a objekty v něm nejsou pouhou funkcí jazyka, jelikož jej oživují, dynamizují zvnějšku a poskytují výrazům, zvukům a metaforickým strukturám význam a hodnotu. Zvuk i metafora mají silný potenciál vyjmout čtenáře i protagonisty z arbitrárnosti jazykových znaků tím, že je nasměrují a vrátí fyzickému tělu, skrz které jsou schopni prožít a procítit vnější situaci.

Analýzou obou textů dospíváme k závěru, že způsobílost znovu prožít a tělesně okusit vnější skutečnost prostřednictvím pečlivé a soustředěné artikulace, či identifikovat (vytvářet) souvislosti mezi fyzickou zdrojovou doménou v metafoře a jejím abstraktním cílovým



protějškem otevírá čtenáři i protagonistům možnost rozpoznat sebe sama jako fyzické tělo, přisoudit své tělesnosti význam i důležitost a najít v něm kotvu, centrický orientační bod, od kterého je možné se bezpečněji odrazit do nejistých vod rozptýlených celků.

**Klíčová slova:** Mark Z. Danielewski, David Abram, noesis, metaforická struktura, korelace mezi zvukem a významem, tělesnost, jazyková klauzura

## ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis is to examine *Only Revolutions* (2006) by Mark Z. Danielewski and *Becoming Animal* (2010) by David Abram to determine whether these works can suggest a possible alternative to the radical pluralism of the postmodern aesthetics, if they can point out to the possibility of not drowning in the sea of non-centred thinking and reading, in the labyrinth of meanings, interpretations, values, and contexts with which the postmodern framework confronts us. A different perspective can be offered by interdisciplinary approach which has the potential to notice aspects commonly overlooked and elevate them to the position of the wellspring of new meanings. The interdisciplinary areas chosen for this thesis, taking into account the linguistic distinctness of the works under study (materiality of the word, metaphor), are phonosemantics, the conceptual metaphor theory, and phenomenology.

*Only Revolutions* is a road novel depicting a journey of 16-year old Sam and Hailey and employing a double-narrative approach in which the two perspectives of its teenage protagonists are presented separately. Another text, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* by the ecologist and philosopher David Abram calls for reviving our animal senses to experience the connection with the intelligence of the living land. *Only Revolutions* typically seen by critics as the novel which mirrors the postmodern condition is rather difficult to read since it lacks semantic continuity and is viewed as a looping path from sign to sign within a linguistic system which in Saussurean conception produces meanings through their relations to each other while being detached from reality. It features, however, an abundance of unique clusters of words with specific rhythms and sounds that encourage the reader to search for a novel approach, taking advantage of its auditory properties. It might be argued that *Only Revolutions* can be perceived as a remarkably sensual work in terms of its capacity to activate the reader's auditory and visual senses, and stimulate tactile or haptic perception through the need to manipulate the physical format of the book. The aim then is to concentrate on the materiality of the word and examine how sound helps to organize the text and facilitate its comprehension. In *Becoming Animal* the reader is confronted with a myriad of metaphors which inspire them to find a link between otherwise disparate texts – discovering the importance of the auditory dimension of language and metaphor serves as a powerful tool to demonstrate that humans have always been rooted carnally in the environment and that both the word-sound and the metaphorical language is a direct reflection of our pre-linguistic experience which could help us to escape an endless jockeying from sign to sign.

Moreover, our intention is to find out whether the novel interpretative tools applied in this thesis will provide the opportunity to view the protagonists of the works as ontologically more anchored, centred or unified in the reality of the (post)postmodern dispersion of the subject who exists in and produces an environment of heterogeneity and diversity. The aim is to identify whether different interpretative means can portrait or possibly restore a more unified framework of the self in the midst of multiplicity, taking advantage of the density of everyday physical experience.

The above assumptions ruled the selection of analytical tools, i.e. phonosemantics, the conceptual metaphor theory, and phenomenology which have the potential to introduce and support the main argument of this thesis, which is as follows: Postmodern fragmentation and Saussurean linguistic seclusion can be overcome, because the texts by means of the sonic and figurative layer of language posit the existence of real physical experiences with the world, physically experienced structures of reality which are not constructed exclusively by linguistic signs. The distinctive language of both texts encourages the reader to discern the carnality of the protagonists as echoed in their own body which, through its movement, structures the environment and co-determines the way in which objects are presented, granting them meaning and sense. These observations are based on phenomenological assumptions which will frame and support the main analytical tools selected for the study. All of these three perspectives will help us to view the texts as works which possess the capacity to overcome structuralist linguistic seclusion and manifest that meaning is not merely recovered from a linguistic structure but is achieved through the process of constitution based on our pre-linguistic physical interaction with an environment. The examination of both texts aims to demonstrate that they have the ability to gather and accumulate postmodern fragments and from them constitute a new and meaningful object.

In our analysis of *Only Revolutions* we apply the phonosemantic approach to restore the link between the phoneme and the meaning, directing the reader towards a pre-symbolic constitution of the meaning. *Becoming Animal* is explored from the perspective of the conceptual metaphor theory by which we can identify (create) correspondences between the physical source domain and the abstract target domain. The analysis of metaphor clearly reveals that our conceptual system stems from our physical anchorage in the outer world.

The examination of both works manifests that the use of phenomenological noesis, sound, and metaphor does not leave the reader among unrelated fragments but represents the human habitual urge to identify or create analogies among diverse manifestations of an object, to find similarities between the sound of a phoneme and the sounds from the external

environment, and also to discern correspondences between different conceptual domains. The analogies identified in the texts clearly demonstrate that the natural world and its objects are more than mere functions of language, as they actively dynamize it from the outside, charging words, sounds, and metaphorical structures with meaning and value. Sound and metaphor both possess the power to draw readers out of the realm of linguistic signs, emphasising the role of the body in allowing them to re-live and re-experience outer situations.

By analyzing the texts, we conclude that the capacity to re-live or re-experience external reality through the careful and focused articulation of certain expressions or the identification (creation) of correspondences between the physical source domain in metaphor and its abstract target counterpart, grants the opportunity for readers and protagonists to recognize themselves as physical bodies by placing their own corporeal self into prominence, thereby contributing to gradual recognition of themselves as a centric point of reference from which it is safer to face the uncertain waters of dispersed wholes.

**Key Words:** Mark Z. Danielewski, David Abram, noesis, metaphorical structuring, sound-meaning correlation, body, self-recognition, linguistic seclusion

## STRUCTURE

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In the introduction chapter the emphasis is placed on the selection of the examined texts, namely *Only Revolutions* (2006) by Mark Z. Danielewski and *Becoming Animal* (2010) by David Abram. The chapter provides a short description of both writings, explains the reason to leave prevalent literary interpretations, and suggests alternative analytical approaches and reading. The next section offers a theoretical background of critics who commonly analyze the works (specifically *Only Revolutions*) in the light of Saussure's theory of language and postmodern subjectivity. The following methodology subchapter introduces the main argument of the thesis and also novel analytical strategies, taking advantage of interdisciplinary perspective. Drawing on specific linguistic properties of both works, the analysis takes advantage of phonosemantics, the theory of conceptual metaphor, and phenomenology which are briefly outlined in the final section of this chapter.

The first explored text, *Only Revolutions*, is covered by chapter two which involves the description of phenomenological premises used in the analysis, including the ideas of Husserl, Ingarden, and Merleau-Ponty. In the following section the emphasis is put on the formal intricacies of the text, while incorporating views of different literary critics. The subsequent section uncovers the importance of the auditory and visual aspect of words, directing attention to pre-predicative experience as a means of possible escape from a linguistic seclusion. The subchapter explaining the main principles of phonosemantics used as a primary analytical method in *Only Revolutions* follows afterwards. The next part advocates sound as a navigating element, suggesting eight different thematic clusters organizing the text. They become the subject of a detailed phonosemantic analysis in the oncoming subchapters. The final sections deal with the issue of self-identification, taking into account phenomenological assumptions. The role sound plays in *Only Revolutions* is summarized in concluding remarks.

David Abram's *Becoming Animal* is examined in chapter three which is opened by the theoretical premises of the conceptual metaphor theory since it serves as a main analytical means applied in this text. In the next section the writing has been set in a broader context, finding similarities with Transcendentalists or New Materialists. Diverse contributions of other critics have been included in the subsequent part which is followed by the subchapter trying to find parallels between Abram's concept of "becoming animal" and that of Deleuze and Guattari's. As with sound in *Only Revolutions*, metaphors also have the capacity to arrange the reality of the text emphasized by the next subchapters which I named according to

the thematic areas the selected metaphors deal with. Each of the following sections is complemented by a thorough analysis of metaphors which again contributes to the idea that it is possible to evade the enclosed language system. The final subchapters attempt to question some cultural models (our five senses, active versus passive) and disclose the fact that metaphor might not always be understood as metaphor. Concluding remarks emphasize that the body (which might take the form of word-sound or physical source domain in metaphor) is the point to start with since it helps to arrange and correct the reality, thus finding the way out of fragments and chaos.

# 1 Introduction: Body as the Point to Which All Objects Turn Their Side

## 1.1 Presentation of the Analyzed Works: Texts Rooted in the World (and Not in Themselves)

In one of his *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning* (1976), the prominent Russian linguist Roman Jakobson directed his attention to *The Raven* (1845) by Edgar Allan Poe, more specifically to its gloomy refrain of “nevermore”, a declaration of definitive negation. While drawing our attention to the final /r/ consonant and its potential to cast the reader into either the future or eternity, noting also its association with the croaking of a raven, Jakobson points out that the expressive value of the word does not lie in its use of the approximant /r/ alone. He argues instead that the meaning of the word is strengthened through the unique variation of its phonic properties such as “modulation of tone, stress and cadence, the detailed articulation of the sounds and of the groups of sounds”, all of which contribute to the revelation of the word’s full emotive quality.<sup>1</sup> Jakobson also emphasizes that despite the relatively small occurrence of phonic elements, they still possess a remarkable capacity for conveying the richness of emotive, conceptual, and aesthetic content of the word. The modest category of phonic matter, sound texture with its ability to allow an idea to form and develop, were a constant source of fascination for Jakobson, who saw phonics as the mystery of the linguistic symbol, the mystery of the Logos.<sup>2</sup> The sound shape of language, which allows us to view language as not only the arbitrary system of representation but also as a means of manifesting the inherent relationship between sound and meaning, initiated the search for literary works which featured such qualities and which would open the reader to novel forms of reading, interpretation, and understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Mark Z. Danielewski’s 2006 novel *Only Revolutions* was chosen as the first text to be explored since it enormously encourages the reader to look for creative, innovative ways of approach and interpretation. It is a work which features an abundance of unique clusters of words with specific rhythms and sounds that grant the text an unprecedented degree of musicality, while simultaneously connecting itself with and magnifying the sounds of the external world. None of the other works in Danielewski’s oeuvre, whether *House of Leaves* (2000), *The Fifty Year Sword* (2005) or *The Familiar* (2015–2017), exhibit a level of sonic

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<sup>1</sup> Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jakobson, *Six Lectures on Sound and Meaning*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jakobson used the term as the title of his 1976 study, *The Sound Shape of Language*.

texture which is comparable to that found in *Only Revolutions*. The 2006 novel possesses an enormous capacity for triggering resonances on the part of the reader through their emotional and aesthetic responses, thereby opening them to the experience of yet another layer of meaning which connects “the arbitrary, the natural, and the necessary.”<sup>4</sup> *Only Revolutions* employs a double-narrative approach in which the two perspectives of its teenage protagonists Sam and Hailey are presented separately, and the work is typically seen by critics as a novel which mirrors the postmodern condition.<sup>5</sup>

The typological arrangement of the book, with the two separate narratives placed at opposite ends of the text, forces the reader to rotate the book in the process of reading and motivates them to employ both a conceptual and corporeal approach. They are encouraged to re-read the novel continuously which offers alternative combinations of the split narratives and also generates a seemingly limitless range of meanings and interpretations. The reader is caught up in a tumultuous jockeying from sign to sign, often left feeling adrift in the ocean of infinite variety. Literary critics usually have tended to emphasise the apparently chaotic nature of the book and focus on the aspects of the text which contribute to the overall impression of its infinite interpretative potential (for example, Berressem’s comments on geometry and topology (2012), Bray’s focus on circularity (2011), or the numerical and topological features listed by Portela (2012)). However, analyses of the novel to date have not paid particular attention to the presence of the sonic layer of the narrative. The Portuguese literary scholar Manuel Portela habitually overemphasizes “the hallucinatory effect of the digit of the letter, the calculation of language, and the geometry of the codex as a recursive dispersal and proliferation of meaning in the strange looping of signs” which leaves the reader trapped in the endless combinatorial possibilities of discourse and linguistic representation.<sup>6</sup> An examination of the phonic layer of the text can, however, provide a fresh scholarly perspective which has not been offered before. These tiny, insignificant phonemic elements often go unnoticed but exert a powerful influence, causing the reader to pause and articulate them carefully, thereby connecting the reader with the melody of the external world and offering them a possibility to escape from the carousel of signification, of “only revolutions”. Importantly, sound has the capacity to choreograph, shape, and structure the reality of the text, serving as an important organizer of meaning in the labyrinth of its fragmentary substance.

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<sup>4</sup> Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 437.

<sup>5</sup> The term “the postmodern condition” is taken from the title of the 1979 text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard which deals with the state of knowledge in the contemporary world and which brought the term “postmodernism” to the debates in Western philosophy.

<sup>6</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer: A Numerical and Topological Analysis of *Only Revolutions*,” 61.



The sound (or physical) texture of *Only Revolutions* is thus the first aspect which grants the reader (and the protagonists of the novel themselves) the sense of existing as a physical body carnally situated in the world, and the sonic layer of language offers the capacity to break free out of the grip of the “looping of signs”. Another text which complements and expands upon the potential of escaping the hallucinatory play of signification while remaining located in the world through language itself is *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (2010) by the ecologist and philosopher David Abram. While our analysis of *Only Revolutions* focuses on the use of auditory properties, the examination of Abram’s work investigates the usage of metaphorical expressions. The thematic focus of his earlier work *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (1997) did not provide Abram the opportunity to use metaphors extensively, but the later work titled *Becoming Animal* aims instead to discuss the inner condition of the author and therefore offers greater scope for the application of metaphor; it is for this reason that the work has been chosen for analysis in this thesis.

Abrams’s novel represents an example of environmental non-fiction (specifically, the intersection between fiction and non-fiction) literature which offers the possibility of restoring our animal sensibility in an effort to re-forge the bonds between the human and a more-than-human world. There is a general critical consensus (Kimmerer 2011; Hartley 2011; Bright 2013) that the phenomenon of erotic attraction as a power which allows an individual to develop intimately in the agentive world forms a key aspect of the work. In this study, however, the possibility of developing in the animate world will be examined through an analysis of metaphor in order to demonstrate that humans have always been rooted carnally in the environment which surrounds us and that the metaphorical language that we use so frequently is a direct reflection of this pre-linguistic experience. As with the use of the phonemes in *Only Revolutions*, the role which metaphor plays in *Becoming Animal* has been largely neglected by the critics who have typically described the work as a text whose aim is to connect the reader with the world. They focused on the process of becoming as a means of unifying but did not notice that 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 thesis then strives to fill that gap and demonstrates that the very language that we use (in terms of both sounds and metaphors) is not intended to merely 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.”<sup>7</sup> Instead, the aim here is to investigate why in both Danielewski’s and Abram’s works it is vital to emphasize and advocate for the importance of language as embodied. A preliminary answer might be that they induce the attentiveness to language itself while using it consciously, thereby enabling us to be both present and united with ourselves as well as with the reality we name through words.

The physical aspect of the language present in both texts opens up a series of other questions which this thesis also intends to address. The protagonists of *Only Revolutions*, Sam and Hailey, fly through their lives in a succession of ephemeral, episodic moments which they experience as an accumulation-oriented hyper presence. As the literary critic Jameson noted, “the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience”, existing among a vast collection of isolated and disconnected fragments.<sup>8</sup> The question remains of whether the sound of words can work in counteraction to this “disintegrated narrative fabric” and to the velocity of the protagonists, slowing them down and allowing them to experience a focus-oriented “profound” presence.<sup>9</sup> The thesis will examine whether this is possible and move on to identify how expressions grouped in terms of alliteration, rhyme, or rhythm and their careful articulation can contribute to Sam and Hailey’s self-recognition, restoring a more coherent sense of their identities. The thesis will also address how our physicality through language, either in terms of phonemes or metaphors, can shift the emphasis from a subject which is “dependent for its construction and is menaced, undermined, problematized, or fragmented by other social arrangements” to a subject which is capable of escaping from the trap of acting as a function of language or a social construction.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, I want to argue that *Only Revolutions* and *Becoming Animal* can be viewed not only as purely aesthetic or artistic objects but also as works which have the potential to provoke debate, or to introduce fresh concepts by calling into question contemporary cultural patterns. These revolutionary texts grant their readers the opportunity to explore and perceive the world and themselves not as a fixed, ready-made sign or role but as a source of potency, the initial prerequisite for an individual’s novel insights, perceptions, and queries. In order to make my argument clearer, let us outline the fields which serve as a theoretical background or

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<sup>7</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 137.

cultural setting for critics who have examined *Only Revolutions* in particular, the areas which, in the light of alternative approaches and different analytical tools, form a space for polemics or challenges and inspire us to move beyond their frame of conceptualization and seek out complementary, novel, and stimulating perspectives. The chapter below will also incorporate preliminary suggestions for alternative methods which will be applied in the subsequent analyses.

## 1.2 The World Is Made to Mean but Not Only by Language <sup>11</sup>

The language of both texts is the first aspect which draws the reader's attention, and it is immediately apparent that the texts do not intend to hold their readers in the habitual realm of the sign structure but instead aim to guide them beyond its structural confines. It is precisely this system of representation which invites the reader to embrace an original, *extra-structural* experience of the world which, although not always visible, is stored and preserved within the language itself.

In his seminal work *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein* (1988) the British linguist Roy Harris points out that "knowledge in the Western tradition has always revolved round the relationship between words and the world, between language and reality."<sup>12</sup> Efforts to discern parallels between the sign and the object have been a crucial undertaking not only in linguistics but also in philosophical traditions dating back to ancient Greece. In his famous dialogue *Cratylus* (390 BC),<sup>13</sup> Plato explains that in order to understand language we must understand how a name relates to the holder of that name, arguing that language has a divine origin and that the assignment of names to objects is by no means a random or thoughtless activity. In *Cratylus*, Plato advocates a position which Harris has termed as "natural nomenclaturism", an approach that contrasts sharply with the opinion articulated by Hermogenes that words are empty labels which are made to suit human convenience.<sup>14</sup>

Taking up the baton of "natural nomenclaturism", the British religious studies scholar Neil Douglas-Klotz noted that Aramaic also lacks a clear delineation between the inner quality of the language and an outer action. Unlike Greek, Aramaic presents a fluid and holistic view of the cosmos which is capable of expressing multiple layers of meaning. As

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<sup>11</sup> "The world is made to mean" is a paraphrase of Stuart Hall's sentence "the world has to be made to mean" published in *The Rediscovery of Ideology* which suggests that an individual is always brought into existence by language (1982/1998: 1050).

<sup>12</sup> Harris, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> "There is a serious doubt over the date of *Cratylus*. Most scholars date it not later than 390. Warburg has argued for the view that it was written sometime between 380 and 370" (Ross 1995: 187).

<sup>14</sup> Harris, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to play games with words*, 9.

Douglas-Klotz stresses, Aramaic is rich in sound-meaning: “one can feel direction, colour, movement, and other sensations as certain sacred words resonate in the body. This body resonance was another layer of meaning.”<sup>15</sup> The phonosemantic approach that we will apply in our analysis of *Only Revolutions* attempts to restore the link between the phoneme and the meaning, directing the reader towards a pre-symbolic constitution of the meaning.

### ***1.2.1 Significance Is Not Real***

The father of modern linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure runs entirely counter to the theories outlined above and his structuralist view of language rather dramatically transformed the study of the humanities. Saussure’s theoretical claim that language is an entity of combinatorial and contrastive properties existing in a mutual relationship within a network laid the ground for subsequent structuralist theories of semiotics and has had a highly significant impact on “the social sciences generally, semiology and structuralism, Modernist thought, and our conception of man”, as the American literary theorist Jonathan Culler summarizes in his work *Saussure*.<sup>16</sup>

In his most influential work, *Cours de Linguistique Générale (Course in General Linguistics)*, published posthumously by his students in 1916, Saussure argues that language is a system of arbitrary signs without any direct relation to the objects to which they refer. He also argues that the forms which signs adopt are intended to generate differences between them: “in language there are only differences. Even more important: difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*.”<sup>17</sup> The principle of difference and the relationships with other terms within the system give rise to the value and meaning of words. As Saussure claims, a linguistic sign is the combination of a form or a sound pattern (the signifier) and a mental image (the signified). The signified does not exist as an object in the world but as a concept, the product of reasoning. Furthermore, Saussure also argues that language constitutes the framework within which our thought materializes itself. This essentially means that it is not we who are in deep alliance with the world created by and creating reality, but rather that it is this autonomous system of arbitrary forms itself (rather than the substance) which translates the world for us.

Saussure’s concept of language as a purely relational system in which all elements produce meaning entirely through their relations with each other was a major influence on,

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Culler, *Saussure*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 120.

among others, the anthropological phase of French structuralism initiated in the 1940s by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French social anthropologist and a leading exponent of structuralism. While studying “primitive” cultures, he developed Saussure’s assertion that meaning is a product of difference and applied this approach to the study of discrete cultural phenomena. Lévi-Strauss concluded that all cultural manifestations, such as customs, taboos or initiation and hunting rites, do not possess any intrinsic meaning but that, as with the sign, their meanings are determined by convention and defined by the position in a system in which they function. In his further investigations he observes that the structure of the “primitive” apprehension of reality is based on binary oppositions (for example, presence versus absence, above versus below, centre versus periphery), a notion which would prove crucial to the development of post-structuralism from the 1970s onwards. Lévi-Strauss’s torch is carried by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes who also considers opposing pairs to be organizers of cultural formation. In his early work *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes examines the ways in which bourgeois society promotes its values through specific cultural elements, and argues that mythical speech including language, painting, posters, rituals, objects “are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth.”<sup>18</sup> All of these cultural components are unified by the fact they exist as little more than a language, a chain of signs. It should be added here, however, that although Barthes considered structuralism to be an effective instrument and he himself made significant contributions to its development, he shifted from its position in the late 1960s in the light of more progressive movements in literary criticism.

The post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida remained in thrall to structuralist semiotic seclusion despite his development of the theory of deconstruction as an anti-structuralist practice (of reading) to contest “the authority of linguistics, language, and logocentrism” (Derrida in his last interview, *Le Monde* August 19, 2004).<sup>19</sup> Derrida also argued that language-as-writing immerses the writer in the play of signifiers which can never be fully mastered. The signifier can be seen as “an instituted trace” which only precedes that of which it is a trace.<sup>20</sup> It is unmotivated which means that it has “no natural attachment to the signified within reality.”<sup>21</sup> Rather than perceiving the sign as a mediator between two presences, Derrida’s concept of “différance” destabilizes the relationship between the signifier and the signified through its insistence that the presence of the object itself can never be

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<sup>18</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, “*I am at war with myself.*”

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 46.

realized.<sup>22</sup> The meaning will never achieve such a state of stability, since every “present” element is constantly being completed by its relation to past elements as well as to those of the future. As the part of the play of differences, meaning is in constant flux, indefinitely delayed, incapable of being settled.<sup>23</sup> Although Derrida manages to eliminate the representational function of the sign, he was still unable to break through the trap of semiotic isolation. Furthermore, his famous assertion that “[t]here is nothing outside of the text” in fact develops a new isolation, a textual isolation which fails to establish any connection with the non-discursive, tangible world beyond the semiotic confines.<sup>24</sup> With Derrida, then, we see the first indications that meaning is ultimately incapable of being grasped or expressed, and it becomes clear to us that the extra-textual world has been postponed while language still holds the winning hand in this high stakes game of poker.

Returning once again to structuralism, it is apparent that its crucial interpretations have been hugely influential, exerting a decisive impact on the way in which we think about cultures and how they work. It is therefore unsurprising that every product or even the way in which a subject exists in the world is comprehended as a fluid sign, a signifier or a social role (for example, the prohibition of incest should not be understood in isolation but in terms of its role within a system); it lacks any inherent meaning and is determined by our relationship with other roles or signs within a certain context (or structure). Interestingly, when elucidating the meaning of a particular literary work, literary structuralism relies on a process of collaboration between the reader and the textual structure. The (actual, physical) reader, however, is an outsider here, since they are not a part of the structure; nonetheless, they are still regarded as an essential aspect of the creation of meaning. On this basis, it may be valid to question the general structuralist view which is based on the assumption that signs are defined by their position in a system without any external foundation. Indeed, it is not only the reader who comes into play when interpreting this very structure, but also historical situatedness and, ultimately, the physical environment; these are also very important aspects which saturate the structure with the external environment. If we were in fact prisoners trapped within a structure, we could easily become puppets of any ideology or social role (as

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<sup>22</sup> Derrida explains his concept of *différance* in the following manner: “The sign [...] is deferred presence. Whether we are concerned with the verbal or the written sign, with the momentary sign, or with electoral delegation and political representation, the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence. What I am describing here in order to define it is the classically determined structure of the sign in all the banality of its characteristics—signification as the difference of temporization (Derrida 1982: 9).

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

constructed by socio-cultural or discursive practices) without any hope of escaping the shackles of their setting. A structure or a sign becomes ideological or authoritarian every time they are viewed as the only valid perspective through which we are expected to view the world, and we could easily find ourselves caught within the web of binary oppositions (acceptable/unacceptable, nature/culture, high/low) that structuralism tends to work with. The Saussurean strict separation (binarization) of *langue* and *parole* along with the view that values and meaning emanate from the system and that concepts are solely differential provoked a lively scholarly response.

Phenomenologists, whose concepts and assumptions will be applied in this study, took a different approach when 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 a thought. Maurice Merleau-Ponty often stated that conceptual meanings arise as a deduction from the gestural meaning which is an integral element of the act of speech. He develops this idea by asserting that he begins “to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life.”<sup>25</sup> The external reality constantly pushes through the word itself, using vowels and phonemes as a means of ‘singing’ the world into existence, since “their function is to represent things [...] because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence.”<sup>26</sup> He somewhat contradicts the structuralists’ perspective in their belief 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”; if it does not act thus, it cannot be considered a language.<sup>27</sup> 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.

In agreement with Merleau-Ponty, the Czech phenomenologist Ivan Blecha has also noticed that the importance of the object is apparent in the fact that it cannot be excluded from the process of defining the sign, as it gradually involves itself in the act. Blecha stresses that reality is not purely the reflection of a linguistic system or a text, and he maintains that a sign does not derive its meaning and value solely from its relationship to other signs. Echoing the ideas which Husserl outlined in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), he calls for an

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<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.

<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 217.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Ten Lessons in Theory*, 49.

immersion in pre-symbolic experience in which the sign system plays no role, the realm where bodily movement and gestures structure and shape our environment, co-determine the way in which the objects reveal themselves to us, and articulate the conditions for the ‘meant’ to have a future meaning. Blecha further emphasizes that the bearer of original meaning is the entirety of the situation in which we move, select our options or correct (adapt) temporary conditions, and this totality can never be replaced by a linguistic system of any type.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, a number of cognitive scientists, such as Mark Johnson, have drawn attention to an embodied and imaginative understanding and reasoning based on “a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience.”<sup>29</sup> This observation also features in the works of George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1980, 1989), while Saussurean linguistic detachment is discussed and summarized by the American literary critic Jeffrey Barnouw who argues that Saussure neglected “the indispensable role of experiential context as a determinant of meaning.”<sup>30</sup> Drawing from his empirical studies of the ways in which children learn to speak, he further explains that experience and mutual interactions between people are fundamental not only to the application of language, but also to the constitution of its meaning.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on these arguments, this thesis intends to use its analysis of the two literary texts to demonstrate that meaning is not merely recovered from a linguistic structure but that it is achieved through the act of constitution based on our non-propositional structures of experience which we, as imaginative bodily organisms, attain while operating in interaction with an environment.

*Only Revolutions* and *Becoming Animal* have been selected in order to present a potential means of escaping the power of the sign, the structure, the text, and discourse, while reflecting on the fact that the articulation of reality is comprehensible, logical, and meaningful prior to its substitution or representation by language as a system. The linguistic nature of both texts allows the reader not only to “think” of the meaning but transfers the reader to their body, allowing them to move towards the object commonly signified by a sentence, and ultimately experience it, feel it. The point is not to construct the meaning from the sequence of signs and sentences within a text but rather to focus on the direct experientiality which our bodies undergo when uttering a word or even a letter or a sound. As a result, the emphasis is placed on the direct access to the somatic self via a close analysis of our metaphorical /embodied perception of the world. We aim to propose and demonstrate that both works have

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<sup>28</sup> Blecha, *Fenomenologie a kultura slepé skvrny*, 8–18.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *the Body in the Mind*, xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Barnouw, “Signification and Meaning,” 263.

<sup>31</sup> Barnouw, “Signification and Meaning,” 264.



the capacity to transpose the reader into the extra-textual world of objects, escaping the trap of signification. It will also be argued that these texts might even possess the potential to re-live the situations which we once experienced in the real world in a physical sense, granting us access to our ongoing “I”. By installing the self into the action of attentive pronouncing letters or decoding metaphors, the reader places their own corporeal self into prominence, thereby restoring their embodied consciousness and establishing a more unified, “ontologically secure” sense of the self.<sup>32</sup>

### ***1.2.2 The Postmodern Subject: Lack of Unity, Lack of Depth, Lack of Emotions***

Given the intricate web of social roles and inter-relations which unfold in our technology-dependent world, it would appear to be a somewhat Herculean task to explore the theoretical standpoints dealing with the issue of the subject, identity, or agency, a topic which has been the focus of intense discussion over the course of the last fifty years. What can be considered obvious, however, is the fact that we face recurrent motifs of subjectivity which have adopted remarkably unified formulations such as “the ‘death of man’, the ‘death of the author’, the ‘deconstruction of the subject’, the ‘displacement of the ego’, the ‘dissolution of self-identity’”, referring specifically in this context to the ideas and concepts of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida.<sup>33</sup> The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan expanded this list by adding the complementary qualities of fragmentation and powerlessness. In his influential concept of the mirror stage, Lacan explores the perceived tension between unity and disconnection which the subject experiences, stating that:

“the *mirror stage* is based on the relation between [...] a certain level of tendencies which are experienced [...] at a certain point in life – as disconnected, discordant, in pieces – and that is always something of that that remains [...] a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that the subject for the first time knows himself as a unity, but as an alienated, virtual unity.”<sup>34</sup>

While reminding us of the unsettling recurrences of fragmentation in dreams which take the form of “castration, mutilation, dismemberment”,<sup>35</sup> Lacan not only destroys the illusion of our wholeness but also casts doubt on the agency which we exert over our selfhood, when adding “[t]hat is what I insist upon in my theory of the mirror stage – the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is

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<sup>32</sup> “Ontological security” is a term which was coined by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991).

<sup>33</sup> Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of J. Lacan, Book II*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 9.

premature in relation to a real mastery.<sup>36</sup> This decomposed, deconstructed, even exterminated subject has taken on yet another form, one which was memorably portrayed in the character of Hal who flies through the pages of David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* (1996). It is a protagonist who is defined by a lack of substance, depth, and intense emotions. This type of subject uses cynicism to mask his fear of being a human or humane, naive or sentimental, rolling his eyes in disdain to express his inner shame over sincere feelings. In addition to this, the postmodern subject has to face a lurking chaos which is "not just disorganisation, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of the things and of other persons."<sup>37</sup> The British sociologist Anthony Giddens examines the ontological security of an individual, observing that "to answer even the simplest everyday query [...] demands the bracketing of a potentially almost infinite range of possibilities open to the individual"; Giddens continues by claiming that the response only becomes acceptable or appropriate if it is shared, but that the concept of being "shared" appears to be an "unproven and unprovable framework of reality."<sup>38</sup> The unlimited potential liberates the subject from their previously fixed position but also leaves them existentially troubled, indecisive or paralysed; the endless possibilities of Giddens' concept of "as if reality" dismantle their external world, leaving them trapped in a double chaos – the chaos of the exterior and the chaos of the interior.

This thesis will consider the "dismantling" approach of the above-mentioned theories in its examination of both texts in an effort to identify whether different interpretative tools can portrait or possibly restore a more unified framework of the self in the midst of diversity, taking advantage of the density of everyday physical experience. Particular attention will be paid to the ways in which watchful speaking, attentive pronunciation and embodied metaphorical expressions as creative acts in interaction with the world might contribute to self-discovery as self-presence, self-immediacy, or the idea of the subject in progress, as becoming.

The search for the physical motivation of metaphorical expressions (in *Becoming Animal*) or the urge to read out loud alliterated, rhythmical or otherwise expressive words (in *Only Revolutions*) leads the reader to a process of self-observation, allowing them to track their feelings and their behaviour. In turn, this approach forces them to notice what the text does not only to their mind but also to their body in order to close the gap between themselves in reality and their mere "representation". The bodily experience of the text, the absorption

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<sup>36</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of J. Lacan, Book I*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 36.

into its letters and words, also leads the reader to examine their agentive self-presentation, forcing them to ask just who exactly is reading and pronouncing the words. The feeling of being inserted into the experience of a creative act of speaking might provide the reader with a clearer sense of self, helping them to re-discover and re-construct the subject in its current existence.

The American phenomenologist David Cerbone explains that “the notion of the subject plays a prominent role in phenomenology, both as one of the “unifiers” of experience and as a “phenomenon.””<sup>39</sup> Developing an awareness of one’s sensing bodily existence is the first step towards phenomenology as the study of phenomena, and, as Cerbone points out, the notion of a phenomenon coincides with the notion of experience. Phenomenology then exchanges the fact of *having* a body for *being* a body, but this does not exist as an additional distant object of perception, nor as a category; instead, it is the sense that “I am”, with the subject being conscious of and filled or saturated by oneself and the world. As Cerbone notes, “you experience yourself as actively engaged with world, and, with suitable reflection, you experience yourself as having experience.”<sup>40</sup> Given their active perception, the reader can use their body as a core which is capable of unifying the performance of the articulated words, the articulated reality (of the texts and the extra-textual reality), and themselves. They are engaged in the ways in which sounds (reflecting situations or objects) and metaphors are presented to us and can observe the structure of their manifestation.

The examination of the texts presented in this thesis will demonstrate the extent to which the structure of manifestation is or is not arbitrary or idiosyncratic, investigating whether it is part of a chaotic play of signs and images or if it follows an essential structure which is stable and predictable. Finally, the thesis will also touch on the ability to constitute the meaning of objects and their formal structure as a creative act which mirrors the dynamics of the self and which could potentially serve as a source of individuation. Danielewski and Abram’s writings attempt to demonstrate that self-understanding is not initiated by and encompassed solely in the structure of language but through the body of the self as it moves and explores the increasingly visible external world, with the carnal self providing this world with value and meaning through the process of interaction.

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<sup>39</sup> Cerbone, *Understanding Phenomenology*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Cerbone, *Understanding Phenomenology*, 9.

### 1.3 Methodology and Theoretical Framework: Interdisciplinary Approach

The linguistic qualities of both studied texts set the course for their interpretation and active (performative) reading, inviting the reader to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. The novel *Only Revolutions* is written in free verse, and the expressions used within it are often arranged without any sense of semantic continuity. Although it is initially rather difficult to discern any degree of sense or coherence in the work, the words are in fact arranged and clustered according to their rhythm, sound, alliteration, and meaning which serve as a significant aid in identifying the main thematic groups.

The powerful sonic quality of the work motivated us to adopt the phonosemantic approach as the first analytical tool in our examination of the text. A phonosemantic analysis increases the physical involvement of the reader in the text, connecting their physical self and object perception with the physical perception of the text (in the materiality of words). The phonosemantic approach was therefore chosen in order to explore the ways in which both the reader and the protagonists of the work can participate in reality through the verbal realm or even through the medium of a single phoneme and “project ourselves in a co-creative attitude in the realm of the objects.”<sup>41</sup> The process of performative reading by pronouncing or producing sounds which echo (at the onomatopoeic or iconic level) real events, such as a clap of thunder, enables the protagonist and the reader to re-experience the situation in which they exist both physically and pre-linguistically. This investigation intends to demonstrate that the mere fact of a sound and its potential to echo the external situation enriches the status of a word as the means which allegedly only “points us away from itself and prods us to “go on” to the next word in the chain of signifiers.”<sup>42</sup> The American critical theorist Calvin Thomas declares that the actual function of any meaningful word is to disconnect us from the undifferentiated darkness of immediate being.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, he neglects to acknowledge that a word is also manifested through its sound; its meaning is saturated with and animated by the sound produced by the user, and this sound is not necessarily just a pointer but may also act as a slingshot which can fire us off the chain of signifiers and project us into the embrace of a real situation, into the darkness of being.

*Becoming Animal* by David Abram is filled with unique metaphors which reflect the author’s distinctive form of sensual perception. Abram repeatedly calls for us to return to our animal senses (i.e., to our bodies), and the exploration of metaphor was thus selected as a

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<sup>41</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas, *Ten Lessons in Theory*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Ten Lessons in Theory*, 53.

suitable means of assisting and supporting Abram's vision of carnal reawakening. The question arises of how metaphor, a linguistic tool and a subject of thought, can connect us with our flesh, the reality of the text, and the external world, and, as the thesis will manifest, this can be accomplished in two ways. Firstly, as with the sound of a word, Abram's rich metaphorical imagery can encourage the reader to avoid merely going through the text in a passive, receptive manner when reflecting intellectually on the meaning. It instructs the reader not to focus on interpreting the meaning but to "make the meanings into objects", experiencing a kind of intercourse with the (fictional) objects and situations, if we are to adapt a vivid suggestion made by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden.<sup>44</sup> Metaphor thus operates in a similar way to sound, encouraging the reader to execute a novel cognitive operation which initiates "the intentional constitution of the objectivities", with the reader proceeding from the reading of the sign to the event or the perception of the tangible object.<sup>45</sup> As a result, it becomes possible to jump off the carousel of sentential signification into the realm of the immediate access to the object itself. This aspect is essential for the main argument of this thesis which will be specified below, and since metaphor has been largely unexplored by critics, it has been chosen as the focal point from which the examination of the work will proceed.

Secondly, metaphor possesses the capacity to explain the abstract with the physical, allowing the reader to encounter the pre-articulated world in which they are physically situated. As with sound, metaphor directs us from the linguistic sign to the body, allowing us to re-live and re-experience situations in which we exist as a movement and gesture. The mere process of understanding one conceptual domain (often referred to as the target domain, typically considered to be more abstract) in terms of another (termed the source domain, usually more physical in nature) requires active participation on the part of the reader, both through their mental creativity and also their bodily sensation.<sup>46</sup> Here, too, the reader should not remain in the role of a passive recipient of the text but is expected to consciously reconstruct a set of correspondences between the source and the target, a process which is by no means a mechanical reception. They should attempt to constitute the meaning synthetically, transposing their body onto the target, enabling, as Ingarden maintains, "an intercourse" with both domains. In order to examine the above-mentioned properties of

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<sup>44</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*.

<sup>46</sup> According to the specialist in the field of cognitive linguistics, the target domain is located in the higher cortical areas of the brain and is less physical in nature. The source domain is located in the sensorimotor system of the brain and is typically more concrete and physical (Kövecses 2010: 86–88).

metaphor, another analytical tool will be employed: the conceptual metaphor theory developed by the cognitive linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson.

The choice of the phonosemantic approach to Danielewski's novel and the metaphorical analytical strategy in the case of Abram's work aims to explore how each aspect shapes and informs the understanding of the (non)fictional worlds along with their protagonists. Both analytical tools intend to manifest how to change the interpretation of their condition viewed by the aesthetics of the postmodern, understood within this context as the "decentering of that formerly centered subject or psyche."<sup>47</sup> These analytical perspectives in the texts and through the texts open up the possibility of interpreting them in a way which differs from the conclusions of the critics mentioned above, who largely adopt the postmodern position of analysing subjectivity as something which "has been rendered various, fractured, and indefinite [...] because of a new recognition of the complexity of our social roles and the multiplicity of our interactions."<sup>48</sup> Examining *Only Revolutions* in the light of the Saussurean conception of language as "a recursive path from sign to sign", as Portela has offered, initiates a space for further discussion and encourages the reader to suggest alternative approaches to the analysis of the text.<sup>49</sup>

### ***1.3.1 The Argument of the Thesis***

Both the sound of the word in *Only Revolutions* and metaphor in *Becoming Animal* which I identified as one of the most distinct elements in these writings emerge as the key aspects having the capacity to grant the reader and the protagonists the sense of existing as a physical body carnally rooted in the pre-linguistic world. This assumption ruled the selection of analytical tools, i.e., phonosemantics and the conceptual metaphor theory, which have the potential to introduce and support the main argument of this thesis, which is as follows: Postmodern fragmentation and Saussurean linguistic seclusion can be overcome, because the texts through the sonic and figurative layer of language posit the existence of real physical experiences with the world, physically experienced structures of reality which are not constructed exclusively by linguistic signs. The distinctive language of both texts (more specifically the extensive use of rhythm, alliteration, and metaphor) encourages the reader to discern the carnality of the protagonists as echoed in their own body which, through its movement, structures the environment and co-determines the way in which objects are presented, granting them meaning and sense. These observations are based on

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<sup>47</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Hall, *Subjectivity*, 118.

<sup>49</sup> Portela, "The Book as Computer," 36.

phenomenological assumptions which will frame and support the main analytical tools selected for the study. All of these three perspectives will help us to view the texts as works which possess the capacity to overcome structuralist linguistic seclusion and manifest that meaning is not merely recovered from a linguistic structure but is achieved through the process of constitution based on our pre-linguistic physical interaction with an environment. The examination of both novels aims to demonstrate that they have the ability to gather and accumulate postmodern fragments and from them constitute a new and meaningful object.

In cognitive linguistics (drawing as it does from phenomenology), objects themselves and the fact of embodiment play a fundamental role in the creation of meaning since it materializes abstract concepts by bodily specific ways. Although cognitive linguists are in agreement with postmodern thinkers concerning the social-constructionist and relativistic assertions that the meaning is culturally, historically, and ideologically conditioned, they still insist that human thought and meaning emerge from bodily experiences. Since humans conceptualize abstract concepts in body-specific ways, the very fact of bodily involvement presents “a challenge both to the possibility of unlimited alternativity in conceptualization and, consequently, to that of the unlimited social construction of meaning.”<sup>50</sup> This observation undisputedly weakens the unlimited scope for world-making which is offered by postmodern approaches.

### ***1.3.2 Phonosemantics and Phenomenology in Only Revolutions by Mark Z. Danielewski***

#### ***Phonosemantics***

Phonosemantics (or sound symbolism) is a field which has been explored and examined by many linguists and is grounded in the belief that regular correlations can be identified between the sound of a word and its meaning. Although linguistics has been dominated by the presumption of the arbitrary nature of the sign since the publication of Saussure’s *Cours de Linguistique Générale (Course in General Linguistics, 1916)*, the years prior to the First World War also saw works by a series of significant linguists who were exploring and developing the idea of phonosemantics. For example, the American philologist Maurice Bloomfield investigated the analogical associations of particular phonemes and clusters with specific meanings (1895). Similarly, the linguists Otto Jespersen (1933) and Edward Sapir (1911, 1927) developed the Frequency Code, an approach which was further elaborated by American linguists such as John Ohala (1984) or Morris Swadesh (1970). The frequency code identified parallels between high tones, vowels with high second formants, high-frequency

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<sup>50</sup> Kövecses, *Where Metaphors Come From*, 78.

consonants and rapid movement, levels of sharpness and small sizes. It also drew connections between low tones, vowels with low second formants, low-frequency consonants, and heavy, slow movements, large sizes and levels of softness.<sup>51</sup>

The analysis of Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* presented in this thesis adopts the approach which was developed by the linguist Margaret Magnus to explore the association of specific phoneme classes with specific semantic fields. As Magnus points out, some aspects of a word's meaning are arbitrary while others are not; while reference is essentially arbitrary, individual phonemes and phonetic features are meaning-bearing. As a result, each word which contains a given phoneme carries an element of meaning which is not present in words which lack this phoneme. Magnus's theory is comprehensive and argues that sound-meaning actually underlies the entirety of word semantics. Nonetheless, this is not the only approach which will be employed in this analysis, and the work of other linguists will also be integrated into the study. This includes thinkers whose research sought to identify evidence of the extensive existence of iconicity and systematicity in spoken language, such as Edward Sapir (1929), John Ohala (1994), or Johanna Nichols (1994). It is vital to mention also other linguists such as Padraic Monaghan (2019) and Matthew Fletcher (2019) who explored how phonemes and phoneme features can induce iconicity effects. A particularly revealing study by Sam Maglio and Cristina Rabaglia (2016) which addresses with the relationship between vowels and spatial distance will also be applied in this thesis.

Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* is written in free verse, and when encountered for the first time, it can appear to be little more than a sequence of incomprehensible and disorganized fragments. Words and short sentences are arranged seemingly at random, without any significant causal continuity. Once the reader has overcome this initial incomprehension, they are struck by the fact that the words, although not necessarily grouped to form meaningful sentences, are clustered according to their rhythm and alliteration, an arrangement which strengthens the material (i.e., sonic) layer of the language. While it is no easy task to seek out the meaning of the narrative, the sonic quality of the language itself might serve as a strong navigating element throughout the text. One of the aspects of this analysis then will be to identify clusters of words which are connected by alliteration and divide them into groups indicating the main topics with which the author is preoccupied. The phonosemantic approach will allow the reader to gauge the degree of direct connection between sound and meaning, with such connections serving to reveal the emotional or physical state of the protagonists while, for example, using expressive interjections

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<sup>51</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 10.



(“weeeeeee”)<sup>52</sup> or visually emphasized letters.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, phonosemantics will also make the reader aware of the way in which our articulators function and how they can imitate the movement of the external object. When performing a detailed phonetic observation of the articulators, it becomes apparent that there is a surprising number of curious parallels and similarities between their physical movement and the movements of the objects which they signify (for example, “circle”).<sup>54</sup> These types of descriptions enable us to slow down and experience the full depth of the sound through careful and unhurried enunciation, paying full attention to the way that every single vowel or consonant is articulated. As a result, we can begin to notice the individual words and the effect which they can have upon us, allowing us perceive the mutual relationship which exists between a word, ourselves, the possible inner condition of the protagonist, and the external world. When viewed through the perspective of phonosemantics, this perspective has the capacity to break down the barriers of linguistic representation and connect the individual with the world itself.

### ***Phenomenology***

The phonosemantic viewpoint will be framed and supported by the concepts of phenomenology as represented by the writings of Edmund Husserl, Roman Ingarden, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ideas which represent an attempt to find the alternative to a postmodern version of a subject discussed above. The key aspect of phenomenological thinking which will be applied in the analysis is the concept of *intentionality*, an approach which was crucial to the thinking of Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. As was outlined in works such as *Logical Investigations* (1900), *Ding und Raum* (1907), the essay titled *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* (1911), and *Ideas* (1952), Husserl argued that every experience is always the experience *of* or *about* something directed towards the other. The self does not remain suspended in a state of egocentric predicament but is instead attached to the external world. Another observation which is salient in terms of our analysis is that every object manifests itself in different profiles and aspects and that it is the inner structure of the object which directs the perceiver towards a gradual constitution of its meaning.

The phenomenological approach of Ingarden also contributes to this research through the argument that a work of art can be viewed as a phenomenological object whose parts also constitute a meaningful, solid whole. In writings such as *The Literary Work of Art* (1931) and

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<sup>52</sup> Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> The usage of certain intonation patterns or expressive interjections manifests the internal condition of the speaker and is considered to be corporeal sound symbolism, directly displaying the linkage between sound and meaning. (Hinton, Nichols, Ohala 1994: 2)

<sup>54</sup> Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, 165.

*The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1937), Ingarden outlined the four heterogeneous layers which he believed comprise each work of art; the foundational sound stratum is most relevant for the purposes of our study, since it focuses on the “flesh”, the phonic material through which meaning can be conveyed.

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty completes the trio of phenomenologists whose concepts are of relevance to this inquiry mainly because of his focus on the concept of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty frequently emphasizes that phenomenology awakens our sensitivity to phenomena which will grant us the experience of the world coming into being at a pre-linguistic level.<sup>55</sup> The sonic and visual aspects of the words used in *Only Revolutions* invites both the reader and the protagonists to glimpse their own subjectivity (through careful articulation) and the situation (the object), experiencing this at the level of primordial, pre-objective perceptual experience.

The “phonemic-bodily” experience could represent a means of moving closer to reality and of shaking off the shackles of language. It signals the possibility of an escape from language through language itself on every occasion that we accept it as a means of experiencing a sound or a letter and seek out similarities with extra-linguistic reality without attempting to conceptualise or create a narrative. It is crucial that we manifest a direct pre-language experience and persist in the simplicity of the pure sound, letter or movement of our articulators without falling prey to symbolic interpretation, since it is this which erects the wall between the self and the reality. The phenomenological return to phenomena, to the unity of consciousness, embodiment, and the world, is reflected in the examination of Danielewski’s text as the unity of the reader, their bodies (via the articulators and the voice), the text, and the world.

### ***1.3.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Phenomenology in *Becoming Animal* by David Abram***

#### ***Conceptual Metaphor Theory***

Abram’s poetic imagery is deeply pervaded by the chiasmic, reciprocal interrelationship with one’s surroundings, as reflected in the rich use of metaphorical expressions which have influenced the decision to employ the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) as a primary analytical tool. By explaining the abstract in terms of the physical rooted in pre-linguistic experience, metaphor also has the capacity to break through the wall of linguistic signification and offer a significant contribution to the main argument of the thesis.

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<sup>55</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

In their key work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), the cognitive linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson provide an outline of CMT by emphasizing that the essence of metaphor lies in the understanding and experiencing of one concept (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”). The most important argument they put forward is that human thought processes themselves are largely metaphorical. When we connect the two sentences together, the resulting claim is that regardless of how abstract the resulting concept may be, our conceptual system draws on our sensuous, bodily experience. In a similar vein, the Hungarian linguist Zoltán Kövecses observes that metaphors are not only based on cultural considerations and different cognitive processes but on bodily experience too.<sup>56</sup>

Just as sound is used in *Only Revolutions* to choreograph the text in a meaningful manner, metaphors are applied in Abram’s text to arrange its reality, thereby providing a degree of intertextual clarity. They can be grouped in such a way as to gradually develop the process from an autonomous, solipsistic self-progress towards a sensuous, grounded entity. The role of metaphor in Abram’s work is then to re-awake the author’s vision of a new sensibility, allowing a more grounded, non-solipsist man to emerge in a more-than-human-world.

A crucial aspect which can be discerned in *Becoming Animal* is the manner in which the world is perceived, since the perception modalities tend to step out of their usual role of their division into the five basic senses or of being linguistically dichotomized into the active or the passive. Abram’s method of perception is reciprocal, interactional and is reflected by the usage of metaphors. The analysis will move on to determine whether the sense modalities function in their regular position of physical source domains or if they act also as abstract targets. When used in the position of targets, sense modalities allow the author to redefine perception in a new way, revealing its diverse aspects and layers. One example illustrating this might be the act of “perception” itself which is conceptualized metaphorically by Abram as “interaction”, “inhaling-exhaling”, “intercourse”, “a sexual act” or “dancing”. Further examination will reveal whether this network of perceptual multiplicities or *adumbrations* (in the term coined by Husserl) contributes to the overall horizon of the experience or merely manifests a sequence of disconnected fragments.<sup>57</sup> An examination of this issue will allow us

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<sup>56</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Edmund Husserl claims in his work that every sensuous quality, every spatial shape manifests itself by continuous multiplicities (which he calls *adumbrations*), which the observer reveals gradually and which contribute to the overall horizon of the experience (1913/1983: 9, 74, 87).

to apply phenomenological assumptions to identify the extent to which Abram's method of perception follows in the footsteps of postmodern fragmentariness or whether he creates an alternative in the form of constituting analogies, similarities, and coherent wholes. The thesis will therefore examine how a specific metaphorical expression was created and identify which metaphorical patterns stored in the long-term memory were used in order to track Abram's conceptual process. Kövecses' analytical hierarchy model will be applied, a process which commonly starts by determining an image schema, the basis of all metaphors which provides a primary meaningfulness and which is body motivated (e.g., BODY IS A CONTAINER).<sup>58</sup> The next step will be to specify a domain/frame which defines the meaning more specifically. Finally, the mental space will be defined, an aspect which, unlike the first two levels, is not part of long-term memory but belongs instead to a working memory found at the individual level which draws upon the individual experience of the author. This can be used to explain the final form of the metaphorical expression which is much more specific when compared to the image schema and which is primarily motivated by the immediate context – e.g., the metaphorical expression “*ears are tuned to the howling of wolves*” represents a more specific version in comparison to the image schema BODY IS A CONTAINER, an expression which can be further defined as A PERSON (BODY) IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT (CONTAINER).<sup>59</sup> The purpose of this form of analysis is to illustrate the way in which Abram's metaphorical thought comes to constitute reality and the extent to which this reality might be perceived as coherent and interconnected.

Another challenging aspect posed by Abram's work is the question of whether the prototypical frame for sense modalities follows the cultural dichotomy model (i.e., the active versus the passive) and whether it is in fact constituted by the passive version. Perception verbs are typically classified into three groups according to the semantic role of their subjects – passive, active, and those which send a stimulus (I can *see*, I *watch*, it *looks*). Kövecses (2019) examines the conceptual structure of smell and initially proposed two conceptual frames, passive and active, but after further analysis, he came to a conclusion that “the conceptual structures of the various sense modalities do not have an elaborate control aspect” and therefore proposed that the prototypical frame for smell (and perhaps the other senses) is more commonly constituted by the passive version.<sup>60</sup> This conclusion essentially means that we are largely passive recipients of reality rather than active participants. In this thesis,

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<sup>58</sup> Conceptual metaphors which serve as a pattern for specific metaphorical expressions are always capitalised in CMT analyses.

<sup>59</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 334.

however, we aim to contradict this observation by referring to Abram's text in which the state of being "active" does not necessarily mean "to be in control". The crucial element, if we are to be non-passive performers of perception, is the ability to become present-focused and vigilant, during which dichotomies such as the active versus the passive lose their relevance. The perception verbs used by David Abram lack this sharp semantic distinction and it no longer seems appropriate or valid to group them into strict categories of active and passive ones or to attribute them only a passive role. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's observations, it can be argued that every perception process involves an interactive participation between "me" and "it" and we can simply never truly know if I am the one who wants to watch or if I am being made to watch by an object. We can never actually know if we are the ones who touch or are touched by an object since we are all interconnected by a vague temptation.<sup>61</sup> The metaphorical analysis will therefore have to take into consideration the perception of the world and the self as a subject/object in a constant state of activity/passivity. A detailed analysis of this issue should allow us to determine whether and how the fact of fluidity or permeability in Abram's text as exemplified in a metaphorical manner could contribute to a shift beyond the limits of the secluded, uprooted subject and to view it instead as existing in reciprocal communion with the world.

It should be noted here, however, that the classic perception verbs paradigm and traditional conceptual metaphor theory fail to take into account the chiasmic way of perception, and it is therefore necessary to propose a supplemental solution to this quandary.<sup>62</sup> Conceptual metaphor is linear and unidirectional (i.e., the target is conceptualized by the source), but the experience of mutual reciprocity is reversible, instantaneous, and active/passive. This thesis suggests that mutual reciprocity (including the state of activity/passivity) might be expressed by *a circular conceptual metaphor* which would blur the boundaries of this dichotomy and offer the impression of a more immediate experience. The schematic circular conceptual metaphor would take the form of TO PERCEIVE IS BEING PERCEIVED IS TO PERCEIVE, stated not in a linear form but as a circle.

### ***The embodied Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty***

The metaphors which David Abram uses in his text strongly articulate the participatory nature of perception and its reciprocal embodied interplay between the observer and the world. It

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<sup>61</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

<sup>62</sup> Chiasm is a concept proposed by Merleau-Ponty, who defined it as an intertwining, a crisscrossing or a bi-directional becoming or exchange between the body and things that justifies speaking of the "flesh" of things, a kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible (Merleau Ponty 1964/1968).

would therefore be logical to ground the analysis of these metaphors not only on the basis of CMT but also on phenomenology, in particular the embodied phenomenology espoused by Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

*Becoming Animal* can be perceived as an invitation to become fully human through a process of inter-being with the Earth, an approach which reflects Merleau-Ponty's animate expressive world in which the observer is possessed by the perceived object, with their vision being formed in the centre of the visible and creating an inseparable, intimate relationship.<sup>63</sup> Drawing on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, this thesis will investigate whether Abram's imagery creates a random reality or a reality of harmony between the observer and visible objects, and discuss whether Abram is instead staring at chaos. It may also be the case that Abram sees all things as existing in a complementary kinship with the observer and constituting a structural order. The aim then is to determine to what extent and in what manner phenomenology can help us to perceive the world as being coherent and interconnected, as "a shared external frame of reference", thereby creating an alternative to the unrestrained proliferation of cognitive spaces offered by postmodern approaches. Finally, the goal is to investigate how the fact of reciprocity can enable individuals to experience themselves as a more unified "internal frame of reference."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 131.

<sup>64</sup> The terms "external/internal frame of reference" were introduced by Noline Timmer in reference to the external world and the inner self (2010).

## 2 Encircled in Circles? *Only Revolutions* as a Means of Liberating Ourselves from Language, Text, and Fragments.

### 2.1 Introduction of the text: Encircled in Circles

The artist brings back from the chaos varieties  
that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ  
but set up a being of a sensory [...] on an anorganic plane of composition  
that is able to restore the infinite.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, 1991)

As is illustrated in the chapter below, numerous scholars have emphasised that *Only Revolutions* by Mark Z. Danielewski echoes the postmodern condition, reflecting a continual process of rereading that generates endless interpretations and produces meanings as a looping path from sign to sign, often leaving the reader disorientated and lost in the chaos of the seemingly infinite variety. The novel's protagonists themselves are trapped in the abstractness of sign and culture and experience their lives as a random sequence of ephemeral moments and occurrences.

The years since the turn of the millennium have seen the emergence of a general trend which sees postmodernism as having been exhausted, with many new cultural trends, such as metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, 2018), hypermodernism (Lipovetsky, Charles 2005), digimodernism (Kirby 2009), or altermodernism (Bourriaud 2009), being suggested as a way of understanding the contemporary situation.<sup>65</sup> However, the main aim of this analysis is not to explore whether Danielewski's novel absorbs and reflects any of these new cultural paradigms but rather to apply novel analytical tools in an effort to demonstrate that even such a quintessentially postmodern work as *Only Revolutions* might offer an alternative to the aesthetics of the postmodern.

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<sup>65</sup> The term "metamodernism" appeared in Van Den Akker, Robin, and Timotheus Vermeulen. "Notes on Metamodernism." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010): 1–14, and in Van Den Akker, Robin. In *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, edited by Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen. London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. The term "hypermodernism" was used in Lipovetsky, Gilles, and Sebastien Charles. *Hypermodern Times*. Wiley, 2005. The term "digimodernism" appeared in Kirby, Alan. *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009, and "altermodernism" was introduced in Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Altermodern*. Tate Publishing, 2009.

The approaches which will be applied in this study are phonosemantics and phenomenology, two methodologies which can offer a fresh perspective as a possible means of moving away from the fragmentation, relativism, and solipsism of postmodernism. The phonosemantic perspective will reveal that the text does not have to be understood primarily as an interaction of chained words without any extra-linguistic connection, but that it should be also understood as an interplay between phonemes, each of which have the capacity to fuse with the signified in the process of speaking. In this manner the phonemes (the sounds) can escape a semiotic independence, an enclosed sign system, since they offer us a direct experience of real situations (for example, of a storm or an intimate situation) through the interchange of signification, through the *Only Revolutions* of the text itself.

The phenomenological standpoint, on the other hand, is applied to display the capacity to alter the way in which humans are examined in the novel. This approach will attempt to reconfigure some key facets of postmodern subjectivity, more specifically the qualities of solipsism, decentralization, elusiveness, and fragmentation. While it offers the possibility of a more physical, experiential access to the self and the world, phenomenology also remains aware of the subject's potential for a greater degree of authentic expression. As will become apparent, a phenomenological understanding might offer an alternative approach to the protagonists Sam and Hailey and their way of thinking about themselves and their identity, guiding them (and the reader) towards a deeper level of integrity and a more stable sense of self.

### ***2.1.1 Phenomenological Premises Used in the Analysis***

Since phenomenology is a broad field, we should perhaps start with a general outline of some key assumptions which are employed in this analysis and which might help to overcome the bricolage of postmodernism. The crucial feature upon which phenomenology is founded is the role of the subject and the way in which it experiences the world and the way in which it attends to this experience; in essence, the approach places a focus on the subject's ability to experience the way in which objects appear to them. This directs the observer to explore the correlation between intentional objects and the way in which they manifest themselves to consciousness, thereby revealing an exclusive facet of experience, namely *intentionality*.

Intentionality is a salient point which Edmund Husserl, one of the principal founders of phenomenology, brought to the fore in works such as *Logical Investigations* (1900), *Ding und Raum* (1907), the essay titled "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" (1911), and *Ideas* (1952). Husserl argued that experience is always the experience *of* or *about* something



directed towards the other, an assertion that appears to contradict the Lockean and Cartesian view that we are caught in an egocentric predicament, trapped in our isolated subjectivity, and cut off from the body and the world. Phenomenology does not, therefore, maintain the self in a state of solipsism but instead tries to liberate it from this isolation and make it public, while restoring the external world for the self. The subject does not fragment and divide itself but rather unites itself with the other. Husserl stressed that a perceived object reveals itself to the perceiver in an essentially temporary manner, adopting many different profiles and aspects, but its inner structure directs the subject towards a gradual constitution of its meaning. The guiding principle in Husserl's thought is that the structure of an object's manifestation is neither arbitrary nor idiosyncratic, and that conscious experience allows the observer to gradually reveal its inner essential structure independent of the empirical specifics that they may encounter. However, as Husserl asserts, the experience of an object is never apodictic; it cannot be clearly established in a fixed form. The following analysis adheres to this assumption and attempts to demonstrate that all these diverse profiles and aspects are not in fact an accumulation of unrelated fragments, but instead belong to one object, to a unified whole, which manifests itself continually through a variety of layers. In contrast to the postmodern understanding, phenomenology sees parts as constituting the background of an appropriate whole, allowing the perceiver to discern a more profound continuity among the various fragments and objects. The impossibility of capturing an object unambiguously and in its entirety creates a space for endless curiosity and playful exploration.

Having addressed the fact that a subject's experience is not merely a chaotic play of images, Husserl introduces another vital concept which is applicable to our analysis, namely *successiveness*. The structure of experience, Husserl argues, is naturally *retentional*; it is perceived as something which is happening concurrently in different "nows" and which can be actively remembered. Experience also has a *protentional* dimension, as we are often able to predict what is about to happen next<sup>66</sup> Although Danielewski's text is somewhat lacking syntactically complete sentences which reflect the retentional and protentional (or temporal) structure of experience, isolated expressions also possess the potential to manifest the process of deliberate succession.

Just as a sentence or a text is incapable of being understood all at once, the object is also disclosed through a process which Husserl termed *adumbration*.<sup>67</sup> This means that every sensuous quality, every spatial shape manifests itself through a continuous sequence of

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<sup>66</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, 25–26.

<sup>67</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, 9, 74, 87.

multiplicities (87) which the observer uncovers gradually and which contribute to the overall horizon of the experience. Once again, it must be emphasized here that in contrast to the postmodern fragmentariness (which serves as a means of liberating oneself from ordering and totalising concepts), adumbrations are wholly unrelated to the disconnected elements of experience. By synthesizing the diverse layers of the object through a process which Husserl termed *noesis*, the observer is able to unify the various moments of their experience and constitute the object as a meaningful whole, the form of which will be discussed in more detail later in the analysis.<sup>68</sup>

In Husserl's conception, the primary structural aspects of experience are not only *noesis* and *noema* (the content experienced, synthetic unities, the meanings of the stretches of experience) but also the person who perceives – the ego acting as a constitutive factor of experience.<sup>69</sup> This is a crucial observation, since it is through a synthesising approach to the world that the perceiver gains the unique opportunity to build up their own identity, a process which accumulates with the passage of time. Our analysis also explores this assumption and shows that the specific way in which the perceiver uncovers and connects the various aspects of objects with the aid of language can allow them to reveal their own identity as a responsible agent of intentionality.

Another philosopher whose thinking is applied in the analysis is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French phenomenologist whose work focuses primarily on the issue of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty expanded on Husserl's claim about the essential role of bodily self-experience in encountering and locating a spatiotemporal object which itself determines the way it will be perceived. The "flesh" of the word (its auditory and visual dimension) along with the articulatory capabilities of the novel's protagonists and the reader play an indispensable role in the analysis when constituting the experience of an object or a situation or in the development of self-experience or self-identification. Merleau-Ponty repeatedly emphasises that phenomenology can awaken our sensitivity to phenomena which can offer us the experience of the world coming into being, the world which precedes knowledge.<sup>70</sup> On this basis, the analysis will focus mainly on the sonic/visual aspect of words, since the use of careful and focused articulation can enable the reader and the protagonists to encounter their own subjectivity and the situation (the object) at the primordial and pre-objective level of perceptual experience.

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<sup>68</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 70, 142.

<sup>69</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, ix.

One assumption which is repeatedly discussed in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach (and which might be considered as an alternative tendency to the postmodern aesthetics of disintegration) is the idea that the object never appears in isolation but is always encountered as a part of a wider background.<sup>71</sup> When perceiving a particular object or shape, we do not experience unrelated features via unrelated sensations; instead, all of the individual components continually inform and impregnate each other, seeking out a connection to the whole which they gradually come to constitute.<sup>72</sup> Applying the findings of Gestalt psychology, Merleau-Ponty insists that internal connections can be identified between different perceptual modalities which, during a perceptual experience, constantly intertwine with one another, thereby resulting in the formation of a meaningful unit.<sup>73</sup> This integrity of perception is again illustrated in the analysis when examining how certain features, such as the phonetic properties of words echoing the situation at an onomatopoeic or iconic level or as a synonymic series, are grouped together, to form a meaningful, unified situation.

The Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden, the founding father of phenomenological aesthetics, completes the circle of phenomenologists whose concepts are applied in the thesis. In his texts *The Literary Work of Art* (1931) and *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (1937) Ingarden observes that even a work of art can be considered a phenomenological object: a phenomenon which manifests itself in a myriad of aspects and which invites the reader to assemble its parts to constitute a meaningful, solid whole. He argues that every work of art is a stratified formation formed by four heterogeneous layers. These layers are 1) the stratum of sound formations (word sounds, phonetic formations of a higher order); 2) the stratum of meaning units (words, phrases, sentences); 3) the stratum of represented objects/objectivities (the building blocks of the represented world, such as people, events, things or the atmosphere of the world); 4) the stratum of schematized aspects (imagery of the text).<sup>74</sup> Although all of these layers are deeply interconnected and mutually contribute to the constitution of the final meaning to a significant degree, Ingarden considers the stratum of meaning units to be of the utmost importance, since it "provides the structural framework for the whole work."<sup>75</sup>

The stratum of sound formations forms the foundation of all of the layers and represents the most important level for this thesis, since it focuses on the afore-mentioned

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<sup>71</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 21–22.

<sup>73</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 52.

<sup>74</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*.

<sup>75</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 29.

“flesh” of the word, the phonic material through which meaning can be conveyed. Ingarden emphasizes that “the meaning is essentially bound to the word sounds” and that the *phonetic stratum* participates in the constitution of the other strata and enriches the artwork “by a particularly formed material and by particularly aesthetic value qualities.”<sup>76</sup> He goes on to suggest that meaning needs an external shell to find its “expression”, without which it would not be able to exist. The aim of this work, however, is to demonstrate that the sound layer plays a far more expansive role than that of an external shell and deserves considerably more attention. Not only does it “enrich” the other strata by modifying their polyphony but it is just as indispensable as the stratum of meaning units.

### ***2.1.2 “Revolutions” as the Creator of Endless Interpretations***

When encountering *Only Revolutions* for the first time, the reader may be surprised by the ability of this undoubtedly complicated text to draw them into its world, to devour them completely. The novel possesses an uncanny power to interweave the reader into the text through repeated re-readings which allow them to generate endless interpretations of the same events. Immediately upon opening the book, the reader is captivated by the seductive power of symbols, numbers, pictograms, idiosyncratic expressions, typographic complexities, and unique page layouts, all of which are strengthened and intensified by the temptation to rotate and invert the book in their hands. The text represents a compelling *eidetic invariant*, and if we approach the work from a phenomenological standpoint, we will not feel overwhelmed by the seemingly endless variations but rather fascinated by the sheer variety of manifestations by which the narrative discloses itself.<sup>77</sup>

When trying to depict what lies at the heart of the story, we might use the viewpoint of Danielewski himself who describes it in an interview with Kiki Benzon:

“At the heart of it are these two kids. They were two kids that I came across. They were impertinent, they were courageous, they were penniless, and most important, they were parentless. They were without anybody. They were sitting on a corner begging for change. And they loved each other. They held onto each other, they looked after each other, they lusted after each other they protected each other. They were each other’s world. And the fact that they were without anything was so inspiring. Because they were bold. Maybe they were Homeric gods in disguise. Maybe they truly were

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<sup>76</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 59, 56.

<sup>77</sup> Eidetic variation is the technique of varying the properties of an object in imagination or phantasy, with the aim of judging which properties are essential to an object of that type, an object with its eidós or essence. (D.W. Smith, *Husserl*. 2007: 431).

Mendicants. But there was something magical about them for me – that absolute attachment to each other. And I looked at them as kind of American Romeo and Juliet.”<sup>78</sup>

The love story of Sam and Hailey is a source of endless fascination for Danielewski, since, as he says, it attempts to explore the opposing poles of human experience: freedom and love. The author sees freedom as a way of life unbound by any limits imposed by circumstances, society or even by our own bodies. Love, however, represents attachment; it is something which actively binds us to the other, curbing our way of being, yet it also allows us to transcend some aspects of life. Danielewski scrutinizes Plato’s concept of metaxy, the idea that the characteristic human condition is one of in-betweenness, suspended on a web of polarities and seeking a way in which to reconcile both aspects.

Danielewski has suggested that the text has a centrifugal structure, and it could then be seen as an allegorical text which symbolizes the movement away from an over-controlled, inflexible centre of non-freedom towards a more relaxed, unbound mode of reading and experiencing. The core of the text has a dense appearance, with the text compressed or even suffocated by rigid formal and linguistic limitations which distract the reader with the additional burden of historical columns placed in the inner margin of each page (see Fig. 1).

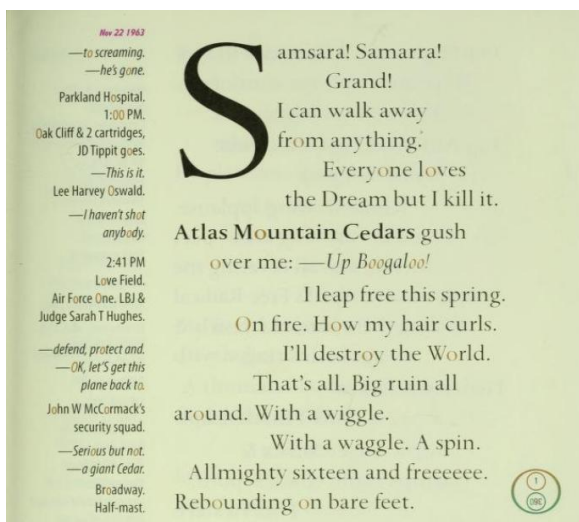


Fig. 1 – History bar (margin) placed in the inner margin of every page

The text consists of 360 pages which are separated into two halves enabling two directions of reading – one half of the page is read from top to bottom, but the book can be inverted to allow the second half to be read. Each page is divided into four sections – there is an inner margin which contains references to historical events (largely dominated by acts of

<sup>78</sup> Benzon, “*Revolution 2*,” 2–3.

political violence, accidents, and natural disasters) which is also divided into two halves of 90 words each. An outer column is divided into an upper quadrant (either Sam's or Hailey's) and the lower upside-down quadrant (either Hailey's or Sam's) which relate the interior monologues of each character. Each character's interior monologue is placed atop the other on the opposite side of the page, creating an effect not dissimilar to a Möbius strip.<sup>79</sup> Each page contains 90 words each of Sam or Hailey's narratives, thereby forming 180 narrative words per page (see Fig. 2).

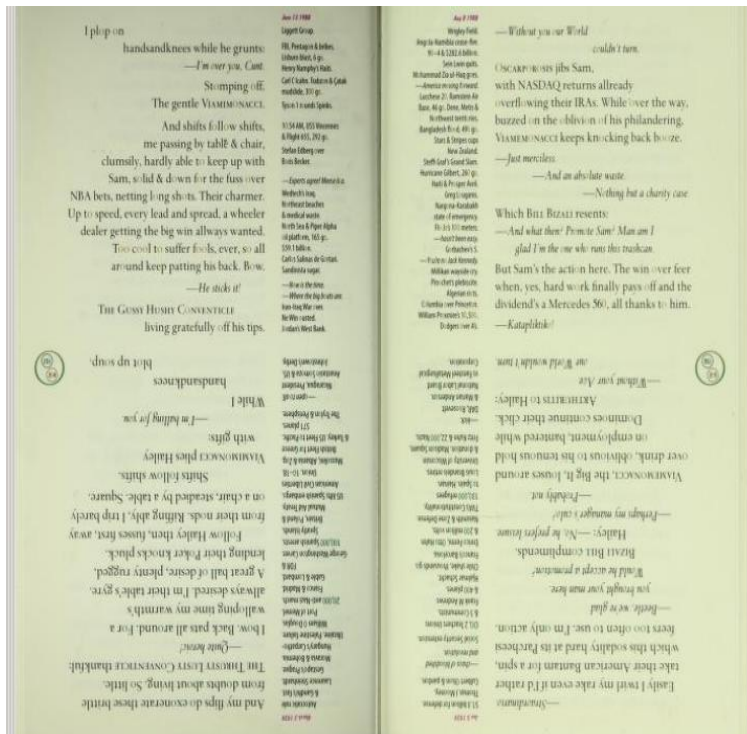


Fig. 2 – The layout of the pages

The book can be read either from front to back or from back to front; we see the narrative from Sam's perspective when the book is read from one side of it, but if we turn the book over and start from the other end, we see the story through Hailey's perspective (see Fig. 3)

<sup>79</sup> Möbius strip, a one-sided surface that can be constructed by affixing the ends of a rectangular strip after first having given one of the ends a one-half twist. This space exhibits interesting properties, such as having only one side and remaining in one piece when split down the middle. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

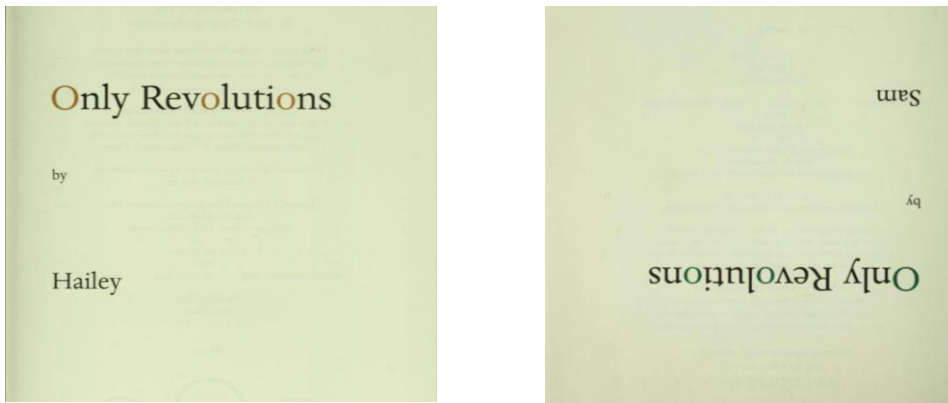


Fig. 3 – Hailey’s perspective (on one side of the book) and Sam’s perspective (on the opposite side of the book)

Both narratives intersect in the middle, and the reader can manually rotate the book as they read in order to unfold additional meanings. In her essay “Mapping Time, Charting Data,” the American postmodern critic Katherine Hayles demonstrates the temporal logic of *Only Revolutions* as follows:

“Sam’s moves from 22 November 1863 (in the middle of the Civil War), whereas Hailey’s starts on 22 November 1963 with John F. Kennedy’s assassination [...]. Each moves through about a century, so that Sam’s ends where Hailey’s began, while Hailey’s ends in our future of 19 January 2063, with the last chronological interval for which events are recorded starting with 25 May 2005.”<sup>80</sup>

The reader is thus physically, even performatively, engaged with and involved in the book from the very moment they open it – their eyes circle around the page while their hands rotate the book in symmetrical cooperation. The text does not simply re-present a stable narrative reality which the reader can absorb passively; instead, it requires physical manipulation which provokes the reader into the performative creation or invention of the story, granting the text a sense of infinite fluidity and changeability. By offering different reading trajectories with each reading of the work, the novel rejects the idea that narrative reality is a fixed and absolute entity, suggesting that it is something which can be endlessly re-constituted. The circular form of the text creates a circle of everlasting becoming, with the centre located in all positions at once. This eternal reconstitution of reality reflects the Husserlian observation that the experience of a situation is never apodictic, meaning that it cannot be established definitively. It should be emphasized, however, that although performative reading offers alternative potential ways of organizing the reality of the text, this never results in an accumulation of

<sup>80</sup> Hayles, “Mapping Time, charting data,” 165.

unrelated sections and fragments. As the analysis below will demonstrate, the variety of textual layers or adumbrations serves as a background for the arrangement and constitution of a meaningful whole through the process of synthesizing noesis.

As a Portuguese literary scholar Manuel Portela has claimed, Danielewski has managed to establish an intricate relationship between the graphical/material form of the book, the linguistic space, and the narrative space.<sup>81</sup> The main organizing principle is the circular structure enriched by the Möbius strip arrangement; the circularity, and symmetry simultaneously influence the structure of the text, the language, and the narrative in an ongoing process. Once the reader reaches the end of either Sam's or Hailey's story and yields to the temptation to begin a new cycle, they find themselves again entangled and drawn into the formal, linguistic and thematic complexities of the work. Only after having read through the work does the reader see the full intricacies of the novel's structure and can perceive the extent to which the text skilfully manipulates him/her into taking different reading trajectories, chasing down the endless variations of meaning. *Only Revolutions* can be compared to a symphony alternating between fast allegro movements and slower meditative stretches, leaving the reader spinning around in a wild circle of words, passed like a ball from one side to the other, with ideas multiplying and echoing themselves endlessly. Portela's interpretation indicates that it is not only the text which captures the reader within its semiotic circle of words, but that the recursive circularity of the chapters, pages, and the physical rotation of the book also play a role in tipping them over into the abyss of infinite possibilities.

At the beginning of this reading experience, one feels entangled in the fixed form of the text. Endless constraints of the circular form draw the reader deeper into the guts of the text where s/he meets two teenage lovers, Sam and Hailey, who appear to be equally enmeshed into the fixed structure of the work. In an interview with Kiki Benzon, Danielewski explained that he wanted to portray his protagonists as constrained by their egos, by their all-encompassing love attachment, by history, society, work, nature, road networks and time itself, with the two characters constantly attempting to overcome these restrictions and reach a state of full liberation. Katherine Hayles echoes this view in a slightly different way by stating that while we live in an age of apparently unstoppable deluge of information, "*Only Revolutions* puts information excess into tension with an elaborate set of constraints."<sup>82</sup> She

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<sup>81</sup> Portela, "The Book as Computer," 23, 24, 31.

<sup>82</sup> Hayles, "Mapping time, charting data," 161.



believes that the power of information multiplicity could be successfully reduced through an interplay with constraints as experienced in the text.

Manuel Portela, however, emphasises the almost hypnotic and unceasing potential of language to construct, re-construct, and de-construct our reality when claiming that “the text shows the abstractness of signs and culture, specifically, the combinatorial nature of discourse and representation. Those features enable us to investigate the connectivity and the physicality of the form’s language and writing as producers of meaning.”<sup>83</sup> Portela develops the idea further by suggesting that words “direct the reader’s attention to the dictionary and the grammar of language, but also to cultural patterns and abstract concepts as human constructs for making sense. Their circular and elliptical shape is an echo of the reading motions that are required for the production of meaning as a recursive path from sign to sign.”<sup>84</sup> The physical act of rotation itself then locks the reader inside the language and the narrative of the book, leaving them caught in an infinite orbit around the un-embodied (in the sense that they are not experienced physically) linguistic and graphic signifiers and enhancing the permutations of their meanings. The world-forming intention of the text is rejuvenated, and it is only afterwards that the reader sees it as something which is here to be actively co-created, re-invented, transformed. Portela repeatedly draws attention to “the probabilistic, even hallucinatory or chaotic nature of permutations of signifiers”, and describes the meaning as “an emergent and probabilistic phenomenon.”<sup>85</sup> He also points to the maddening power of a word when noting that:

“Signs do not suffer me to merge with them. They just allow me to move in the turbulent field of meanings with which their particular constellation seduces my desire for interpretation. I go round and round, one more time I go round and round, and in that spiral vertigo I experience the madness that there is in language. I go round and round, one more time I go round and round, and, caught in the infinitely recursive loop of reading, I am aware of the desire to read as one of the many forms of love. First an S, then an H; first an H, then an S; and in that SSSSSSSHHHHHHHH HHHHHHHSSSSSSSS I feel the chaos of the world reconstituting itself through the hallucinatory effect of the digit of the letter, the calculation of language, and the geometry of the codex as a recursive dispersal and proliferation of meaning in the strange looping of signs.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 22.

<sup>84</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 36.

<sup>85</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 59.

<sup>86</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 61.

My analysis expands upon this argument and aims to demonstrate that the object in the world does not function as a mere plaything *of* and *for* the reader which they construct randomly in creating a hallucinatory reading experience; in fact, the very opposite is the case. By applying the phenomenological approach, I will argue that it is the object which presents itself within and throughout a particular contour given by its structure and which purposefully guides the reader toward a fuller understanding of itself as intended.<sup>87</sup> The analysis will reveal the possibility of escaping the centrifugal pull of this movement and joining the path of Sam and Hailey, thereby sending them and the reader on a trajectory out of the circle, out of the endless sequence of *Revolutions*.

## **2.2 *Only Revolutions* as an Infinite Collage: “Allone” as Many in One and One in Many**

As with Danielewski's other works *House of Leaves* (2000) or *The Fifty Year Sword* (2005), *Only Revolutions* certainly avoids gravitating towards a realist mode of depiction, with the author instead adopting a highly experimental approach in terms both of materiality and content. This authorial choice opens the gate to endless interpretations and creates fertile ground for critics who are spellbound by the novel's narrative; undergoing constant reconfigurations enabled by typographical and visual facets. The multi-layered nature of the text also allows them to explore and be entertained by the literary and cultural potential of the digital age. By magnifying different individual aspects of the text, critics can construct a world which is not a mere enclosed container but rather an open-ended yet unified network of multiple perspectives, perfectly summarised by the expression “alone”, an expression which has no connection to “alone” but means instead “all” in “one” and which appears frequently in the novel.

*Only Revolutions* has been subject to a wide range of critical approaches, each of which has taken their own unique perspective on combining the novel's spots of indeterminacy. The German literary scholar Sascha Pöhlmann takes advantage of the novel's subtitle *The Democracy of Two*, trying to draw a parallel between the political potential of the narrative and Whitman's politics of radical democracy and individualism. He declares that *Only Revolutions* is a democratic text “since it espouses a multiplicity of voices, viewpoints,

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<sup>87</sup> The intentionality of consciousness or directedness towards objects is explained by Husserl as follows: “[w]herever we meet with animals and men and cultural objects (implements, works of art, or whatever), we no longer have mere nature but the expression of mental being-sense. Then we are carried beyond the domain of what is given in simple sensuous perception. Perception, as pure sensuous perception, is *directed toward pure corporeality*, simply and straightforwardly (Husserl 1939/1973: 55).

and identities on the levels of content, form, typography, layout, visuality, and materiality”, arguing that the novel is political in its ability to take the reader out of their individual perspective and immerse them into a world which demands to be engaged with in its full complexity.<sup>88</sup>

The aim of this chapter then is to summarise the interpretations of a series of critics whose reactions to Danielewski’s fiction have enriched his body of work through their diversity of insights and viewpoints. Some critics have categorised Danielewski’s work as electronic literature, a newly emerging genre which requires novel critical modes of reading. For example, in his essay “Writing in the Electronic Age”, the German cultural historian Hans-Peter Söder states that this new interpretation does not “resemble the poetics of the past, focusing less on notions of *docere et probare* than *delectare*.”<sup>89</sup> The British literary scholar Alison Gibbons sees the novel as an ambiguous, multifold system, exhibiting a polychromic topography of time and space in which “the spatio-temporal planes in the novel appear to congregate and fragment, fuse and digress, to reveal the reader at the heart of this play.”<sup>90</sup> The German scholar Hanjo Berressem focuses on Danielewski’s haptic and gestural dynamics which he sees as the main organizers of the space of reading; as he notes, “reading is always embodied reading, in the same way that cognition is always embodied cognition, material objects are always also “figures of thought” and vice versa.”<sup>91</sup> Berressem’s interpretation identifies a deep resonance between actual space, conceptual space, and writing space in the novel. Another stimulating observation is made by the Belgian academic Dirk Van Hulle, who notes that the text makes us deeply aware of the dominance which humans exert over nature and explains that “Danielewski’s book is an important Darwinian statement in that it questions the human species’ self-importance and suggests that in a broader perspective all anthropocentric “revolutions” are only revolutions.”<sup>92</sup> Anthropocentrism is closely related to the prominence attributed to culture, language, and representation, and this stance is challenged not only by *Only Revolutions* but also (and to a greater extent) by *Becoming Animal*, the text which will be explored in the following chapter.

Let us return once again to Pöhlmann and his assertion that “*Only Revolutions*, in form and content, espouses, adapts, and expands a Whitmanian politics of radical democracy and individualism.”<sup>93</sup> Pöhlmann notes that Whitman’s entire body of work is marked by the

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<sup>88</sup> Pöhlmann, “The Democracy of Two,” 29.

<sup>89</sup> Söder, “Writing in the Electronic Age,” 2.

<sup>90</sup> Gibbons, “You Were There,” 4.

<sup>91</sup> Berressem, “The Surface of Sense,” 203.

<sup>92</sup> Hulle, “Only Evolutions,” 138.

<sup>93</sup> Pöhlmann, “The Democracy of Two,” 5.

attempt to merge the concept of democracy and individualism, a reflection of the American poet's belief that the individual and the universal are closely intertwined. Pöhlmann perceives *Only Revolutions* as a fascinating variation on Whitman's aesthetics and political dialects of democracy and individual. Sam and Hailey are not depicted as solipsistic individuals, but they have always been entangled in and informed by a democratic community, *The Democracy of Two*. Crucial for the two characters is the realisation that however contradictory or distant the individual and another individual or the universal might be, one grows *out of* the other and *into* the other. I would like to expand upon this view by analysing this concept from a phenomenological approach. One of the basic premises of phenomenology is that every act of consciousness we perform is essentially intentional which means that every experience is always an experience of something. Our consciousness is then always directed at another object, a supposition which is somewhat contradictory to the Cartesian understanding of consciousness as an egocentric, enclosed cabinet.<sup>94</sup> From a phenomenological perspective, we are never simply enclosed within the limits of our subjectivity and our connection with the world is not a mere projection of our solipsistic minds. Phenomenology reminds us that the mind is in fact a public object through its correlation with the world, and that the world and the other person are not only psychological but deeply ontological.

*Only Revolutions* is a genuine road novel – it is a movement, a velocity, a roundabout which impels us from the secluded cabinet of our psyche, slowly leaving behind Sam and Hailey's separated "I"s and guiding us towards not an imagined world, but a perceived and lived one, the tangible world inhabited by "Us", the democracy of two; in Pöhlmann's words, by "a mutual recognition and acceptance of dependency." It should be noted, however, that although each gap between the two is intended to initiate the movement towards each other, we will never leave the state of metaxis. We will never escape our human condition of in-betweenness, since the state of being too close to each other will always lead us to seek freedom and escape.

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<sup>94</sup> "In the Cartesian, Hobbesian, and Lockean traditions (as opposed to phenomenology), which dominate our culture, we are told that when we are conscious, we are primarily aware of ourselves or our own ideas. Consciousness is taken to be like a bubble or an enclosed cabinet; the mind comes in a box. Impressions and concepts occur in this enclosed space, in this circle of ideas and experiences, and our awareness is directed toward them, not directly toward the things "outside"" (Sokolowski 2000: 9).

### 2.3 Pre-predicative, Physical Experience of Words

To put it briefly, in human speech,  
different sounds have different meanings.  
To study this co-ordination of certain sounds  
with certain meanings, is to study language.

(Leonard Bloomfield, *Language*, 1933)

As we have seen, Danielewski's text is not a linear narrative but rather an extensive collection of diverse ideas, observations, feelings, and comments which arise spontaneously from the consciousness of the protagonists. Each page can even be considered as an autonomous unit which is more or less independent from the narrative sequence, as the novel can be interpreted as a highly decentred text. *Only Revolutions* appears to be constructed from a vast collection of floating fragments, and this sense of detachment is reinforced further by the circular pattern of reading which makes the pages whirl and swirl like dust caught in the wind. The syntax of the text is never sufficiently developed and there is a highly loose, almost non-semantic continuity to the work, with words often acting as isolated islands of meaning. The use of individual words or obscure expressions in many segments of the text serves a positive purpose, since it inspires the reader to plunge into the lacunose, sparse space, forcing them to pause, sharpen their focus, scrutinize the word, exploit the situation. Since the meaning and value of words in the text are not always complemented by the chain of preceding or succeeding expressions, the reader can perceive individual terms as an entity in themselves and develop their own sound-meaning potential. There is a distinct absence of full sentences in the text, and this too opens a space for identifying ways of escaping from the circularity of language, as will be demonstrated later in the analysis.

It is unrealistic to imagine that we could unravel all of the layers and facets of this wildly diverse and inventive text, but the aim here is to argue that *Only Revolutions* is a remarkably sensual work in terms of its capacity to activate the reader's auditory and visual senses and stimulate tactile or haptic perception through the need to manipulate the physical format of the book. The intention then is to concentrate on the materiality of the word (i.e., its sound and the graphical representation of words in the text) and examine how sound – a prominent point of orientation in the text – supports other sensory modalities, primarily the tactual and visual strata, and helps to organize the text and facilitate its comprehension.

This analysis does not adhere to the presumption that “we can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast, it takes the path of phenomenology, a philosophy of possibilities, which asserts that the key element in disclosing the nature of a thing is not language but the very object itself; as the object establishes itself gradually in infinite spatial profiles, guiding the observer through its inner structure towards the constitution of its meaning. The insights offered by Ingarden seem to be the most appropriate for this work because “no author writing before or after Ingarden has ever approached the depth and rigour that we find in his analyses of the ontology of the work of art.”<sup>96</sup> Ingarden explored the adaptation of cognition to the relevant object in art works which force the reader to abandon the automatic act of *thinking the meanings* of the sentences and which encourage them to progress to the objects themselves. By drawing the reader out of the receptive manner of reading, such works open up the possibility of relocating ourselves into the world of objects when actively and attentively performing signitive acts.<sup>97</sup> As a result, constitutive activities are triggered during which the reader is able to avoid the process of thinking, instead experiencing the situations in which they have participated.

In *The Literary Work of Art* (1931), Ingarden observes that each work of art is also a phenomenological object; a phenomenon which manifests itself in myriads of aspects and which invites the reader to synthesize its parts to constitute a meaningful, solid whole. He argues that every work of art is a stratified formation formed by four heterogeneous layers.<sup>98</sup> Although each of these layers are deeply interconnected and form substantial contributions to the constitution of the final meaning, the stratum of meaning units is, he argues, of the utmost importance, since it “provides the structural framework for the whole work.”<sup>99</sup> The stratum of sound formations forms the foundation of the layers and meaning can be carried out through its “flesh”, i.e., its phonic material. Ingarden emphasizes that “the meaning is essentially bound to the word sounds” and that the *phonetic stratum* participates in the constitution of the other strata and enriches the artwork “by a particularly formed material and by particularly

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<sup>95</sup> Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Mitscherling, “Concretization,” 137.

Ingarden has inspired many academics across different disciplines but they usually focus their research on issues which are not applicable to this analysis. The Canadian philosopher Jeff Mitscherling, for example, deals with the issue of word sound and claims that meaning cannot exist without sound, arguing that the subject intends the objectivity which is consistent with the word meaning determined by the sound. Peer F. Bundgaard, a Danish semiotician, focuses on spots of indeterminacy in artwork and challenges the degree to which the reader fills in the blanks as a quasi-perceptual act.

<sup>97</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 36–40.

<sup>98</sup> 1) the stratum of sound formations (word sounds, phonetic formations of a higher order; 2) the stratum of meaning units (words, phrases, sentences); 3) the stratum of represented objects/objectivities (the building blocks of the represented world, e.g., people, events, things, atmosphere of the world; 4) the stratum of schematized aspects (imagery of the text) (Ingarden 1937/1973).

<sup>99</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 29.

aesthetic value qualities.”<sup>100</sup> He develops this thought by stating that the meaning needs an external shell to find its “expression”, without which it would not exist. The aim of this work, however, is to demonstrate that the sound layer serves as much more than an external shell and deserves a far greater degree of attention. Not only does it “enrich” the other strata by modifying their polyphony, it might also play an equally vital role as a stratum of meaning units. The main functions of sound during the analysis will be introduced and discussed in the following chapter.

When considering the process of circling inside language, it should be noted that the salient point in the phenomenological approach is the object which always precludes any cognitive act. As Husserl, observes, “before every movement of cognition the object of cognition is already present as a *dynamis* which is to turn into an *entelecheia*.”<sup>101</sup> It is, therefore, the object which awakens and activates our cognition which is always leaning against the external world, always requiring the background of the world for its own existence. At first, we approach the object directly and physically during our pre-predicative experience without the mediating presence of a word. Husserl stresses that

“[t]he theory of pre-predicative experience, of precisely that which gives in advance the most original substrates in objective self-evidence, is the proper first element of the phenomenological theory of judgment. The investigation must begin with the pre-predicative consciousness of experience and, going on from there, pursue the development of self-evidences of higher levels.”<sup>102</sup>

In other words, predicative judgments stem from a primary, physical experience of the world.

Words in *Only Revolutions* are not tightly bound by syntax; they do not form developed syntactical units and they are thus freed from semantic rotation, existing largely as branched nominal phrases, simple sentences or exclamations. The expressions are arranged to form self-sufficient, abbreviated wholes which are graphically and phonetically provocative, forcing the reader to stop, refocus their attention, and directly experience their sound and rhythm. The reader can even be unexpectedly denied the option to glide from left to right automatically and are instead given space to absorb individual expressions thoroughly. Many of the expressions used in the text are slang, deformed or newly coined, and this can make it more challenging for non-native English speakers to grasp the meaning. In many cases, the only recourse left open to the reader is the phonic material of a word, its sound as the simplest

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<sup>100</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 59, 56.

<sup>101</sup> Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 29.

<sup>102</sup> Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 27.

linguistic formation, and the way in which it mingles with and mirrors the phonic material of other neighbouring words. A word usually forms part of a wider language system and seldom occurs in isolation. The various elements of a sentence cooperate to create higher syntactical units and this is also reflected within individual words; the phonetic elements are not a random accumulation of unrelated sounds but instead influence each other, accentuating their neighbouring sound or suppressing it, granting the word its own unique melody and timbre. The acoustic aura of the word foregrounds the deeper nuances of the meaning. At that point, the reader is invited to focus on the succession of individual word sounds – the way they inform and influence each other, the qualities that they contain, which the reader can pick up upon and develop. This creates an ideal situation for this particular exploration, since it is possible to approach a word in a different, novel way. In the first place, the expression is offered to the reader not as a referring sign but as an element which has the potential to draw attention to its physical properties. Through the process of articulation, the reader can achieve a sense of their own physicality, leading them to the pre-predicative experience of the situation or the object. The phonosemantic approach focuses on the perception of the materiality of the word allows us to discern the resonance with the external object, thereby finding the gap through which it is possible to escape from a circular, conceptual nature of a sign and the rotations of the text. The physical nature of the signifier then protects the reader from drowning in the overflow of information, releasing them from the carousel of the linguistic system and the text itself.

#### **2.4 Escaping from Revolutions through Physical, Lived Experience**

The argument which we propose here is that *Only Revolutions* wants neither the reader nor the protagonists to be permanently trapped by the mesmerism of revolutions and the “paranomastic association of multiple lexemes” but, instead, aims to offer a loophole, an escape route from the madness of circularity through the possibility of lived experience – for example, when reading certain words out loud.<sup>103</sup>

The physical manipulation and rotation of the book which the reader is required to perform in the process of reading the work palpably involves them in an act of somatic self-awareness. This physical involvement, if not neglected, directs the reader to charge the act with a degree of significance, thereby fulfilling the main task of phenomenology – to make explicit the phenomenon of the world. The reader becomes increasingly aware of the various

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<sup>103</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer?” 52.



possible physical aspects of the book (its graphical design, the layout of its pages, and chapters, the variances in the appearance of words and letters) and realizes that this single volume is not suspended in a void but in fact emerges from the background. It has been placed into a specific physical environment, it has been written by a postmodern author, it implies particular analytical routes. This adumbration, however, is not intended to leave the subject lost among the pile of unrelated fragments of perception, but, as Husserl explains, the purpose is to allow the object's diverse contours and profiles to manifest themselves.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, regardless of the sheer diversity of manifestations which Danielewski's book (or any other object) possesses, the process of noesis (synthetizing) directs the reader to constitute the object as a book, as a homogenous element, as something with a coherent structure. As Husserl emphasizes, however, it is not only the object but also the subject who plays an important role when unifying these manifold profiles. The process of noesis allows the "I" as a dative of the experience to unify an object's different manifestations and also to reach a state of somatic self-awareness when holding and rotating the physical book. The physical manipulation which the act of reading *Only Revolutions* entails, allows the reader to recognize themselves not as merely one more automatic object of perception but rather as an agentive, constituting, personal "I" who can gain the experience of becoming actively engaged with the surrounding reality.

*Only Revolutions* also features a narrative which avoids the gradual build-up of full syntactic wholes, with individual words conveying not only their meaning but also their flesh – the appearance of their letters and the clustering of sounds. By adopting an imaginative approach to reading these words, such as the use of particular intonations, rhythms, and volume levels, the reader and the protagonists are invited to manifest not merely their physical presence but also their own musicality, playfulness, sensuality, and theatricality. In order to demonstrate that the reader can be physically and actively involved with the text and develop the sonic potential of words (because the external carrier of a word is not only a random shell but can also be linked with the meaning at the level of phonemes, syllables or tones), it would be useful to extend this analysis by examining phonosemantic perspectives, an approach that will be outlined in the following chapter.

The concepts of phonosemantics, as developed by Eastern European linguists such as Vladimir Zhuravlev, Stanislav Vasilevic Voronin, and Iván Fónagy, or sound symbolism, the term more commonly used in the American and West European linguistics by thinkers such as William Empson, Margaret Magnus, John Ohala, and Johanna Nichols, provides a useful

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<sup>104</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.

approach through its effort to identify the parallels between meaning and phonemes, the links between the seemingly isolated language system and the reality it refers to, thereby allowing readers to perceive novel, hitherto unseen dimensions when experiencing a text.<sup>105</sup> The approach also grants us the possibility of fusing the fictional and the real, since the focus on the articulation of phonemes transfers us into the realm which phenomenology terms as the actual world, the realm of actual objects. This creates a parallel fusion – the union of word meaning with the corresponding object – thereby loosening the grip of the text and the language.<sup>106</sup> This approach also gives us the chance to free ourselves from the limitations of the private, enclosed cabinet of our consciousness and move towards a public inter-subjectivity.

The fusion of the fictional and the real works in much the same way when using the personal pronoun “you” in the phrase “You were there”. “You” can be used to refer to both of *Only Revolutions*’ protagonists, Sam and Hailey. But during the process of writing the book, Danielewski communicated with his readers, asking them for certain details which he later incorporated into the text. As Gibbons notices, he has thus added “another dimension to the second-person pronoun of “You were there”” by integrating the personal contact with his readers.<sup>107</sup> This aspect might be understood as something which has the potential to break the enclosed self-absorption of the protagonists who often seem to be disconnected from the demands of the world by rejecting the past and the future, wishing to be “only ever contemporary.” Although they are unwilling to live through the sequence of time, a fact which might indicate their inability to recognize the consequences of (their) past actions and take an active part in a meaningful social gesture, this approach does contain the potential to project them beyond their introversion and reconnect with the call of the outside world, represented here by the intrusions of sound and the term “you”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hans Marchand, a German linguist, notes that the idea of sound symbolism is based on the imitation instinct of man who imitates by speech sound things perceived through senses or uses speech sounds to express emotions (Marchand 1959: 146). There is a close connection then between semantic level of a word and the somatic expression of an individual.

<sup>106</sup> Ingarden stresses that the meaning of a word “is always constituted through the intellectual cooperation of several subjects of consciousness [...] and direct cognitive contact with the corresponding objects” (1937/1971: 29). He goes on to note that we are not isolated solipsists locked in our consciousness, fabricating the meaning of words without any influence of the outer world. The outer reality always infiltrates into the text and the language.

<sup>107</sup> Gibbons, “You Were There.” 171.

<sup>108</sup> The Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka gave the pronoun “you” another interesting perspective when used as a means of escaping from semantic rotation. She argues that “you” is one of the semantic primitives (primes), i.e., not a common word participating in the definition of other words and is therefore not locked into circularity when translating unknowns into unknowns. “You” as being part of the outside reality is freed from this semantic rotation “The elements which can be used to define the meaning of words (or any other meanings) cannot be defined themselves; rather, they must be accepted as “indefinibilia”, that is, as semantic primes, in terms of which all complex meanings can be coherently represented” (Wierzbicka 1996: 10).

## 2.5 Phonosemantics, or Locking the Meaning in Sound

In just the same way here I take a sound, as a gesture,  
on the surface of the life of consciousness, –  
it is a gesture of a lost content;  
and when I assert, that “Ss” is –  
something luminous; I know that the gesture  
in general is – a faithful one,  
and my figurative improvisations are models  
for the expression of a mimicry of sounds that we have lost.

(Andrey Bely, *Glossolalia: A Poem about Sound*, 1922)

Phonosemantics or sound symbolism is a branch of linguistics which explores the resemblance between sound and meaning, and this approach provides an alternative analytical tool which has the capacity to highlight aspects that literary theories could neglect. Phonosemantics tries to demonstrate that sound has the potential to bring order to the apparent disorder of a highly complex text and that meaning is locked in sound in the same way as sound is locked in meaning.

Sound symbolism is often seen as a somewhat controversial approach since the assumption of the arbitrariness of the sign has been the consensus opinion in linguistics since the 1960s. As the Norwegian phonosemantic researcher Margaret Magnus admits, much of the controversy stems from a general confusion over the precise definition of the terms “arbitrary” and “word semantics”, with not all word semantics being limited to the role of reference markers.<sup>109</sup> Roman Jakobson explains that the controversy primarily originates in “an insufficient care for the methods of psychological and/or linguistic enquiry”, suggesting that the issue has suffered from a “lack of attention to the phonological aspects of speech sounds or by inevitably vain operations with complex phonemic units instead of with their ultimate components.”<sup>110</sup> Janis B. Nuckolls, an American anthropological linguist, offers a different perspective by noting that “the problematic nature of sound symbolism arises from its conflict with the structural linguistic axiom that sounds do their work through contrastive relations with other sounds rather than through their intrinsic sound qualities.”<sup>111</sup> Over the recent decades, however, a growing number of linguists and other researchers have carried out interdisciplinary experiments in the fields of phonetics, phonology, semiotics, and semantics in an effort to reinterpret the key Saussurean hypothesis regarding the arbitrariness of

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<sup>109</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 2–3.

<sup>110</sup> Jakobson, “Closing Statement,” 372, 373.

<sup>111</sup> Nuckolls, “The Case for Sound Symbolism,” 226.

linguistic signs. Contemporary scholars such as Victoria Bobicev (2008), Tatiana Zidrasco (2008), Olga Fischer (1997), John Ohala (1983, 1997, 2006), Margaret Magnus (2001), and Marcus Perlman (2010), to name just a few, have made significant contributions to the field of study by demonstrating that the connection between the signifier and the signified can be considered as natural in terms of their imitative or iconic character. The Ukrainian linguist Zoriana Nasikan observes that the principles of the arbitrary and natural “harmoniously intermingle and work well in any language.”<sup>112</sup> Margaret Magnus strongly supports this view, arguing that the meaning of every word is partly inherent in its form. She also sees reference as essentially arbitrary but considers individual phonemes and phonetic features as meaning-bearing (2001). A phonosemantic analysis of some selected expressions made by Sam and Hailey in *Only Revolutions* will attempt to demonstrate that not only single phonemes are capable of conveying meaning but also syllables and rhythm.

### ***2.5.1 The Beginnings of Phonosemantics as the Search for the Origin of Language***

While it is not within the scope of this work to trace the origins and history of phonosemantics, a scholarly approach which stretches back to mystical and religious literature, it would nonetheless be useful to offer a brief overview of the development of this crucial discipline. Over the course of many centuries, phonosemantics has captured the interest of numerous scholars and artists who have probed the origins of language, and the approach has offered vivid support to the possibility of sound-meaning correlation. Some of the leading intellectuals of Western philosophy and art have touched on phonosemantics including Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Alexander Pope, Emanuel Swedenborg, Novalis, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Arthur Rimbaud, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Marcel Proust, and Andrey Bely in the Russian context.

There has been considerable academic debate over whether some languages exhibit stronger sound-meaning correlations than others. For example, Indian scholars consider Sanskrit to possess such a quality, the Kabbalists strongly favour Hebrew, and Plato preferred Greek. Wilhelm von Humboldt and Maurice Bloomfield, two prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century philologists, offered an intuitive insight into the fundamental concepts of phonosemantics but, as Magnus suggests, they were unable to establish credible empirical grounds for proving or disproving the existence of a connection between the articulation of a phoneme and its semantics.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Nasikan, “Phonosemantics,” 2.

<sup>113</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?* 18.

Despite considerable effort, no empirical basis was identified prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but progress was made on this issue in the early part of the century by, among others, the French linguist Maurice Grammont who saw the correlation between sound and meaning as the essence of poetry (1901). Leonard Bloomfield, an American structural linguist, was the first to quantify the correlation and his findings opened the floodgates to subsequent scientific discussions (1909–1910). Another renowned scholar in the fields of linguistics and anthropology, Edward Sapir, carried out a series of phonosemantic studies and declared: “[w]e may legitimately ask if there are, in the speech of a considerable percentage of normal individuals, certain preferential tendencies to expressive symbolism not only in the field of speech dynamics (stress, pitch, and varying quantities), but also in the field of phonetic material as ordinarily understood.”<sup>114</sup> The Danish linguist Otto Jespersen is considered by Magnus to be “the most adamant phonosemantisist” of the years before the Second World War and viewed sound symbolism as something which exerted a productive influence on language evolution and use (1922). Bringing our list of (pre)war scientists to a close, it is also worth mentioning the contributions of Richard Pager, a British researcher into the origins of speech, and John Rupert Firth, an English linguist who coined the term “phonestheme” but who nonetheless believed that meaning was a matter of the attunement of the nervous system rather than an inherent feature of speech sounds (1935).

The study of phonosemantics intensified in the post-war years, with numerous notable works by Eastern European scholars such as Stanislav Voronin (1990, 2004, 2005) or Alexander Zhuravlev (1974) who examined the symbolic meaning of sounds in Russian language. In the USA the primary advocate of sound symbolism was the linguist Dwight Bolinger (1949, 1950) who explored the status of the morpheme and reached the conclusion that it was not the smallest meaning bearer, since there are situations in which even smaller units, known as phonestemes, convey the meaning. Another scholar who deserves consideration is the Hungarian linguist Iván Fónagy who established the relationship between phonemes and metaphors. Interestingly, Gérard Genette, the French literary theorist who is mainly known for his pioneering work on structuralism and his contributions to the theory of narrative, was also attracted by the seductive idea of language as an “echoer” of reality rather than a shared system of signification. In 1976 he published the only full-length history of the study of phonosemantics, *Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie*, where he offered a detailed examination of the influence of the Platonic concept of mimologism on the most notable representatives of western philosophy. He concluded his study by declaring that scholars of

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<sup>114</sup> Sapir, “A study in phonetic symbolism,” 226.

modern poetics and contemporary theory and criticism should focus their attention on the search for the natural motivation (in terms of an analogical relationship) between the signifier and the signified.

One of the most celebrated linguists of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century was the Russian-American pioneer of structural linguistics, Roman Jakobson, whose sense for the wholeness of language was largely consistent with that articulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Humboldt or Bloomfield. His most prominent work on the topic was *The Sound Shape of Language* (1979). In the later period of his career he subjected the sound of poetry to deep analysis in an effort to identify what gives a poem such a powerful emotional charge. Some of his findings reveal that the emotive stratum in language differs from referential language by its sound pattern and its syntactic role.<sup>115</sup> When exploring Edgar Allan Poe's work *The Raven*, he applied his concept of similarity as being superimposed on contiguity and demonstrated that two similar phonemic sequences in close proximity assume a paronomastic function; words with a similar sound are associated more closely through meaning, thereby intensifying the effect.<sup>116</sup> In our following analysis of the speech of Sam and Hailey, we identify the same aspect – the accumulation of certain phonemes, either similar or contrastive, creates an undertone of the meaning, magnifying the expressive power of the word. One of the poets whom Jakobson frequently discusses and cites for reasons that relate to his research into sound symbolism investigations is Velemir Khlebnikov, a distinguished figure of the Russian Futurist movement whose work will also be examined in this study.

### ***2.5.2 Four Kinds of Correlations***

The study of sound symbolism distinguishes between four kinds of relationships between signs and their referents. Sound-meaning correlations occur at the level of onomatopoeia, icon, index, and symbol, although in practice there is considerable overlap between these categories and it is rare to find clear-cut examples of each type.

Onomatopoeia is the least prevalent type and is described by Magnus as a phenomenon restricted to a precise function and a relatively small semantic area, primarily to words which phonetically imitate or resemble external sounds.<sup>117</sup> When following the definition given by Nuckolls, an icon might be described as a unit, more specifically a phoneme, which “seems highly motivated or natural with respect to some articulatory or acoustic criteria, and refers, denotes, or communicates by its resemblance to a sensation,

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<sup>115</sup> Jakobson, “Closing Statement,” 354.

<sup>116</sup> Jakobson, “Closing Statement,” 371–372.

<sup>117</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 7.

feeling, or idea.”<sup>118</sup> A sign and its referent can be also connected at the level of the index, being conveyed through symptomatic signalling or physical contingency.<sup>119</sup> In such a case, the sign always signifies something else; for example, “smoke” is an index for “fire”. The third possible relationship is termed as symbol and can be described as “a conventional link between a sound and an idea, without any apparent motivation”, representing arbitrariness in the Saussurian sense.<sup>120</sup>

The phonemes explored in *Only Revolutions* occur mainly at the level of the onomatopoeic and iconic sound-meaning correlation, thereby manifesting that the connotation of a word is strongly influenced by its phonological form. Identical or similar phonemes arrange the expressions into clusters, reinforcing their semantic level which, as Magnus points, is “indirect evidence for true iconism.”<sup>121</sup> She regards iconic meaning as the fundamental level of word semantics, a foundation stratum upon which the other layers of meaning are constructed.<sup>122</sup> Since the sound of phonemes, the phonological structure of the word, is the primary object of the analysis of Sam and Hailey’s speech, making the words’ semantics sensitive to a phoneme, a focus on the iconic and onomatopoeic level of the sound-meaning correlations seems to be the most adequate approach for our study.

### ***2.5.3 The Way Phonosemantics is Used: Methodology***

The application of sound symbolism in this analysis is based on Margaret Magnus’s work (2001) in which she outlined a classification scheme for all words containing a given phonological feature. Magnus’ system demonstrates that words involving a certain phoneme possess a specific element of meaning which does not appear in words without this phoneme. The principle that a given phoneme is associated with a specific semantic domain, as developed by Magnus, has been applied in the analysis of the selected expressions in Danielewski’s text.

The study also takes advantage of phonesthemes when grouping words into larger semantic clusters, taking into account the commonalities in their phonological form.<sup>123</sup> Magnus performed a series of fourteen experiments in her work which revealed that “word meanings are decomposable into various components, some of which are arbitrary and some

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<sup>118</sup> Nuckolls, “The Case for Sound Symbolism,” 228.

<sup>119</sup> Nuckolls, “The Case for Sound Symbolism,” 229.

<sup>120</sup> Nuckolls, “The Case for Sound Symbolism,” 229.

<sup>121</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 59.

<sup>122</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 72.

<sup>123</sup> Phonestheme, a term coined by a British linguist J.R. Firth in 1930, is a basic unit of sound(s) paired with a certain meaning, creating a group of words which take on common semantic features, e.g., the /gl/ phonestheme (glare, glimmer, glister, glitter) which refers to reflected or indirect light.

not.”<sup>124</sup> In our analysis we focus on non-arbitrary sounds in line with her classification and attempt to corroborate Magnus’ assertion that “the referent determines what the word **is**. The sound does not directly affect what a word **denotes**, but what it **connotes**, not what it **is**, but what it is **like**.”<sup>125</sup> Our analysis also integrates the findings of other linguists such as Monaghan and Fletcher, who explored the iconicity of individual phonemes in an experiment with almost one hundred participants (2019). In their study they make frequent reference to the concept of phonosemantic synaesthesia in which sound is connected with vision, and sound with specific tactile properties. Also applicable to our research was an interesting research project conducted by Maglio et al. which examined the relationship between vowels and spatial distance (2016). The work of other contemporary linguists such as John Ohala and Iván Fónagy (1994) were of relevance to our study, primarily in terms of their research into the attribution of specific meanings to sounds on the basis of either their own experiments or earlier linguistic research by different scholars.

## **2.6 Escaping the Labyrinth of Information Multiplicity: Sound as a Navigating Element in the Analysis**

The French literary scholar Brigitte Félix notes that in *Only Revolutions* “there is little novelistic plot in the conventional sense, but rather a journeying in and through extravagant language, turning the so-called novel into narrative verse through repetitions, wordplay, and a dense, poetic web of images, leitmotifs and recurrent sound pattern.”<sup>126</sup> Assessments like this can often have a double effect on potential readers of the novel; either giving them a clear and comprehensible account of what to expect when reading this remarkable novel, or discouraging them from embarking on the literary journey through the maze of never-ending multiple meanings, forcing them to look for a simple and understandable way of comprehending.

This analysis aims to provide a more unambiguous introduction to the novel which could help new readers to orient themselves more easily in the intricacy of the text. On an internet discussion board on the work of Mark Z. Danielewski, one contributor posted Danielewski’s own definition of a signiconic concept as a fusion of a sign and an icon (2015). Danielewski adds that “rather than engage those textual faculties of the mind remediating the pictorial or those visual faculties remediating language, the signiconic simultaneously engages

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<sup>124</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 3.

<sup>126</sup> Félix, “Three Hundred and Sixty,” 192.



both in order to lessen the significance of both, and therefore achieve a third perception no longer dependent on sign and image for remediating a world in which the mind plays no part.”<sup>127</sup> The contributor identified parallels with Marshall McLuhan’s work *The Medium is the Massage* in which the sense of hearing is described as being undoubtedly more in tune with the external world than the sense of seeing, as it enables a person to perceive the situation enveloped in acoustic space, thereby recreating “the multi-dimensional space orientation of the “primitive.””<sup>128</sup> The contributor ends with the thought-provoking conclusion that “different types of languages, narrative, and page formats/structures are the signiconic’s means of constructing a world that inherently calls into question mere representation in itself, which causes the reader to remediate their own sensory experience of the text.”

Sound then is the property to which we will turn our attention, since it may serve as a tool by which to mediate a primordial, unbiased perception of an object by the reader and “remediate their experience”. In developing his philosophy of language, Merleau-Ponty argues that signs do not appear to be arbitrary when we consider the emotional content of the word. He explains that “the words, vowels, and phonemes are so many ways of “singing” the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naive onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence”.<sup>129</sup> When uttering the expression “**Boooooooooomblastandruin**”, the reader can reconcile its emotional essence (as expressed by either Sam or Hailey) with their own and with the destructive charge of the actual situation.<sup>130</sup> The emotion (or the destructive charge) contained in this word is manifested not only in individual words, vowels, and phonemes, but also by the way in which they are articulated, prolonged or accentuated, mirroring the speed, rush, and noise of the road.

The first aspect which immediately attracts the reader’s attention upon opening Danielewski’s text is the arrangement of words which appear to have been selected on the basis of their phonetic and suprasegmental form – rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration (assonance and consonance) – rather than any sense of syntactic cohesion. The reader therefore becomes attuned to the sound of the text, noting the phonetic similarity of words which are semantically related. Since it is possible to trace a certain thematic regularity with a particular group of words, it would seem wholly natural to select the expressions which are in close proximity and linked by their similar sound properties and meaning. In this section of the

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<sup>127</sup> Source: <https://thefamiliar.wordpress.com/2015/01/29/what-tf-is-this-signiconic/>

<sup>128</sup> McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, 45, 115.

<sup>129</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 217.

<sup>130</sup> Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, 78, 79.

analysis, a series of semantically related words used in *Only Revolutions* will be grouped into clusters and categorised into eight different thematic wholes in order to identify an initial rough meaning of the text and gain some idea of what the text might be addressing, a hypothesis which will subsequently be elaborated and deepened with the help of tactile and visual support. As the American philosopher Don Ihde remarks, “the foreign tongue is first a kind of music before it becomes a language; it is first pregnant with meaning before the meaning is delivered to me.”<sup>131</sup> On such a basis, the interpretation of the text can be seen as a gradual resurrection of meaning from sound, from physical – sonic and aural – experience, which might possibly evoke the sensations of gravity, passion, and vigour which are hidden in letters and words and intensified by their graphical representation and the repetition of phonemes.

The analysis will then explain that each thematic cluster is not a random collection of unrelated sounds, but that the opposite is the case; when the clusters are subjected to a phenomenological interpretation, we can see that they are carefully interwoven, directing the reader toward a unified perception and understanding of an object or a situation which displays their contours and profiles in a seemingly endless sequence of permutations. The final step will be to categorise the created thematic clusters into more specific narrative sequences, in an approach suggested by Portela, thereby integrating them into the overall narrative, forming a more complete, specific meaning. The thematic areas I suggest and examine are introduced below. Since all of these situations (or themes) appear frequently throughout the text, they create effective points of orientation in the narrative. These include:

- a) *rumbling noise*
- b) *fierce violence*
- c) *screaking stabbiness*
- d) *splashing water*
- e) *jerky sex*
- f) *soft intimacy*
- g) *bulging beginning*
- h) *swirling circularity*

Sound is not the only element which informs each cluster. As the Austro-Hungarian dance theorist Rudolf von Laban noted, each individual phenomenon is permeated with

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<sup>131</sup> Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, 157.

constant motion, and we can see that it is *rhythm* which lies beneath and disciplines the scattered impressions of Sam and Hailey which are found throughout *Only Revolutions*, arranging them into eloquent units.<sup>132</sup> The areas suggested above allow us to discern the rhythmic correlations among the categories, permitting the groups to be categorised into four larger units. The first unit is composed of the first three thematic clusters, i. e. rumbling noise, fierce violence, and screaming stabiness, and gives the situations an intense, disturbing, even somewhat hostile quality; this category can be termed **the rhythm of fervent emotions**.<sup>133</sup> The quality of feverish rhythm, which appears most prominently in the first half of the book and which vividly under-colours the protagonist's inflated, rowdy egos, repeatedly transforms itself throughout the text into a second unit named **the rhythm of splashing water** (involving thematic cluster "d"). This category creates a terrain of excessive fluidity, featuring a dramatic release of a huge volumes of water experienced every time Sam and Hailey indulge in heavy drinking sessions. Not infrequently this is accompanied by the condition of nausea, echoed with the rhythm and sounds of watery, hissing expressions. Throughout the narrative the reader experiences the fundamental patterns of ebb and flow, a rhythmic alternation of stress and release, of jerky sex and soft intimacy. The contrast between the progressive rhythm of excited passion and the flowing pulsation of intimate, gentle familiarity forms another unit called **the rhythm of tension and relaxation** (consisting of thematic clusters "e" and "f"). The final, biological cluster of bulging beginning borne by the rhythm of circularity and the everlasting rhythm of bud, blossom, fruit, and decay, is the central motif of the text. The fourth unit linking the bulging beginning with the swirling circularity is called **the rhythm of circular return**.

The analysis employs phonetic, phonological, and phonosemantic approaches, all of which are essential, since they are mutually complementary – the phonetic explanation describes how individual vowels and consonants are produced by articulators, which in turn helps us to understand and justify why they are labelled as "high" ("front", "dark", "high-pitched" in the phonological accounts. This also helps to highlight the fact that the production of certain sounds requires a particular level of effort, prolongation, softness, and dynamics. It heightens our awareness of where sounds are produced in our mouth, the way in which our articulators move, and the effort our bodies make during the act of pronunciation. All of these aspects demonstrate why phonosemantic linguists attribute a certain quality or tone to specific

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<sup>132</sup> Rudolf von Laban declares in his work that both living and non-living things are pervaded by natural rhythm; they are in constant motion, generating structures and qualities of regularity and harmony (1921/2014: 75–78).

<sup>133</sup> The thematic clusters are written in bold so that they do not blend into the text.

sounds and classify them into the groups such as “small”, “big”, “harsh”, “brutal”, “stingy”, or “distant”. Phonetic analyses emphasise that sounds and phonemes do not exist in isolation but instead cooperate with each other and modify the quality of their neighbouring sounds, participating in a coherent “symphony”. Once the reader becomes aware of all these sound-creation subtleties, their self-observation can be heightened during articulation and they might potentially be motivated to invest their own energy or mental resources into pronouncing even a single phoneme, thereby boosting their sense of identity and self-awareness.

Each thematic area deals with a different situation or object and constitutes some of its profiles including strong emotions, destructive energy, intimate behaviour or harsh behaviour. By the mere act of articulation, the reader is offered a rich space in which to synchronize their own emotions and passions with the energy of the situation described by particular words, an opportunity which enhances their activity and performance. Furthermore, the phonic material used to create certain emotional qualities in words can be modified by the performance of the reader, with the changes reflecting their inner state. An understanding of the quality of sounds and the way in which they are produced can help the reader to identify the parallels between their own physical involvement and the movement and behaviour of actual objects. By experiencing a word on a sensual level, the reader can more closely approach the possible experience of the protagonists (as indicated by the graphical representation of words and the repetition of certain sounds within single words) and enjoy a feeling of sharing, of being public. It is through these experiences that the reader can become an active reader; no longer absorbed by thinking about the meaning of the sentences but progressing “from the sentences read to the objects appropriate to them and projected by them”.<sup>134</sup> Ingarden describes this self-projection into the world of the objects in a very colourful way, stating that the thing which transforms a receptive-passive reader into an active reader is the ability to experience the “intercourse with fictional objects”.<sup>135</sup> An active reader is not expected to remain detached from the object but rather to adjust to it and merge with it in a creative manner, otherwise they will find themselves locked inside the language, unable to progress beyond the level of understanding the sentences on a linguistic basis.

As Ingarden claims, it is the word sound which prepares a sensory basis leading to the apprehension of meaning. When the reader remains focused on the level of a phoneme or a

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<sup>134</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 38.

<sup>135</sup> The concept of “intercourse with fictional objects” is explained by Ingarden as the act of synthesizing objectification during which the reader becomes a witness and “cognizes these objects anew as is they were simply there in front of him, and he is then under their “impression”; he apprehends them in an aesthetic attitude and reacts to their aesthetically relevant features with appropriate emotions” (1937/1971: 48).

word and avoids the temptation to submit to the flow of thinking on one sentence after another, drowning in conceptual circulation, they can experience the space outside of the language and beyond the revolutions. When discussing sentence-generation operation, Ingarden explains that “[t]he meaning of the sentence completes itself and adapts itself to the meaning of the sentences preceding it, but not only to those preceding it. The meaning of sentences which are yet to come can also share in determining the meaning of the sentences we have just read, can supplement it or modify it”.<sup>136</sup> What he is suggesting here is that the sentences are only able to acquire their full meaning as parts of a web of sentences. However, we should remain aware of the risk that this might move us away from the things themselves and trap us once again in the play of signifiers and syntax when searching for nuances of meaning.

### 2.6.1 *Sound and Meaning Getting Together*

Gibberish may be heard as the instantiation of the particular pleasures of having words in the mouth, and all the excitations of self-sounding: to feel the passing of breath as it rises up from within to fill the throat and mouth, conditioned and contoured by the larynx, the muscular force of the tongue moving back and forth, to the final drop into the lips, as sudden energy flows over to reverberate behind the ears, along the skin, and within the environment around. All such movements underscore the voice as an assemblage of signification *and* the corporeal, reminding [us] of the material poetics of language .

(Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 2014)

When discussing the possible arbitrariness of meaning, Ingarden’s conclusions are very much in line with the findings of phonosemantics research when he claims that “some words appear to be particularly qualified to carry a specific meaning and, as a consequence, not only seem to be “more understandable”, but contain, hidden within them, various special possibilities of application.”<sup>137</sup> His observation is based, among others, on the work of the German philosopher and psychologist Maximilian Dessoir, who asserts in his work *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* (1906) that the original linguistic sound has its origin in a phonic gesture which externalizes the property of an object. Ingarden also incorporates the findings outlined by Julius Stenzel, a German philologist and mathematician, in his *Philosophie der Sprache* (1934) that it is possible to assume a relationship between

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<sup>136</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 34.

<sup>137</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 42.

meaning and sign which explains the higher possibilities of expression realized in poetic language or other spheres of aesthetic expression. Similarly, in his work *Language in Literature* (1987) Roman Jakobson asserts that “[p]oetry is not the only area where sound symbolism makes itself felt, but it is a province where the internal nexus between sound and meaning changes from latent into patent and manifests itself most palpably and intensely.”<sup>138</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s observation is also in the same vein as the previous views when stating that

“[i]f we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meaning of words, it is true that the verbal form—with the exception of endings—appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its “gestural” sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that the words, vowels, and phonemes are so many ways of “singing” the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naive onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence”.<sup>139</sup>

The Canadian philosopher Jeff Mitscherling was greatly influenced by the work of Ingarden and offers a slightly different perspective, noting that it is precisely the word-sound which guides “the initial concretization of the object in its determination of the word meaning, and this concretization will proceed further during the course of the sentence-forming operation.”<sup>140</sup> While largely agreeing with the preceding previous comments, the exploration outlined below will attempt to prove that word meaning and ultimately the meaning of a whole sentence is significantly determined by the power of sound reflecting the nature of an object or a situation.

Our examination of the seemingly infinite quantity of phonemes does not aim to be yet another accumulation of facts, a tiresome informative analysis of sounds. Instead, we intend to demonstrate that each of the sounds has something important to tell us; every single sound rewards the effort to articulate it consciously since this shows the way in which the protagonists (and possibly the reader) grasp the seductive energy of the world / the object and vocalize it in their own unique manner. Sound functions here as a means of exciting the feelings of wonder and curiosity, suggesting the myriad of ways in which the objects can appear to us. It reminds us that things are fascinating to explore, leaving us forever puzzled and captivated by their inexhaustible aspects and profiles.

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<sup>138</sup> Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, 88.

<sup>139</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 217.

<sup>140</sup> Mitscherling, *Roman Ingarden’s Ontology and Aesthetics*, 95.

The sound-meaning correlation can be identified in the work of other writers, featuring prominently in *Ulysses* (1922) or *Finnegans Wake* (1939) by James Joyce or in the work of the Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov, two authors whose writings will be referred to in the phonosemantic analysis of Sam and Hailey's speech. Similarly, Andrey Bely, a leading theorist and poet of Russian Symbolism, inquired into the connection between sound and meaning in his sound poem *Glossolalia* (1922). Inspired by mystical and religious texts, Bely discovered that certain combination of sounds – functioning as gestures of the tongue – hold meanings which we have lost the capacity to recognise. When describing the process of articulation, he identified parallels between the cosmos and the cavity of our mouth, comparing the work of the articulators to the movements of a dancer whose movements mimic the rhythm of the world. Some of his observations regarding the parallels between sound and meaning are used in the footnotes of our analysis to demonstrate that his intuition and his reliance on mystical and religious sources are surprisingly very much in line with accepted linguistic descriptions. The American literary scholar Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. argued that “*Glossolalia* was a poetic experiment to find *sense* in the non-*sense* of language. Bely's aim throughout his artistic career was to revitalize language, to create the “living word”” (1995: 13). One of the aims of our analysis is to identify meaning in sound, while bearing in mind that the creation of the world could have been performed in the cosmic milieu, i.e., within our own mouths.<sup>141</sup>

### 2.6.2 *Speaking and Spoken Word*

Before proceeding to the phonosemantic analysis of the text, it is important to clarify the distinction between a spoken word and a speaking word (which Ingarden refers to as a living word, as an understanding of this difference might help to enrich the interpretation of words and their sounds.<sup>142</sup>

Merleau-Ponty argues that speech is an institution and that humans, as language users, are typically little more than reproducers of commonplace utterances for which

“[w]e possess within ourselves ready-made meanings. They arouse in us only second order thoughts; these in turn are translated into other words which demand from us no real effort of expression and will demand from our hearers no effort of comprehension. Thus, language and the understanding of

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<sup>141</sup> Bely, *Glossolalia*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 44.

language apparently raise no problems. The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself.”<sup>143</sup>

Merleau-Ponty believed that the way in which we use language in everyday life relegates us to the role of mechanical recyclers. We are no longer able to step beyond the white noise of common words into silence, a realm in which we can truly experience the word or use it as if we were doing so for the first time, as if the word were a clap of thunder ringing out violently across empty space. For Merleau-Ponty, a speaking word is not a stock reply word but a gesture which “does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself.”<sup>144</sup>

The concept of the mediated gesture which goes beyond the sign has been explored by numerous theoretical approaches encompassing the fields of the visual arts, literature, film, and dance. One particularly influential contribution was made by Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian film theorist and director, who coined the term *mise in geste* in 1948. In a collection of his articles from 1939–1941 which was published under the title *Nonindifferent Nature*, Eisenstein emphasizes that corporeal movement is a crucial force which tries to find a precise reflection of the subtext of a narrative situation and give structure to a work of art, thereby influencing the perception of the audience. He claims that “a gesture becomes the shot, and the intonation of a word – sound and music”.<sup>145</sup> Another significant figure in this field is the Bulgarian theorist Julia Kristeva. Kristeva attempted to break the association of the gesture with the sign and examine the gesture as a bodily process, an activity, maintaining that gesturality does not signify but is primarily indicative or demonstrative in character (1978). While the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in his essay *Kommerell, or On Gesture* (1991) agreed that the gesture was a non-linguistic phenomenon, he believed that it was interwoven into the functioning of language.

The Canadian philosopher Hayden Kee grants a different dimension to the concept in his criticism of Merleau-Ponty’s tendency to prioritise the act of speaking over spoken speech, believing that there is an interdependence between both aspects. Kee reduces Merleau-Ponty’s gestural approach to speech to a bodily manifestation of emotion during which “the meaning is given immediately, manifestly, and expressly, in the gesture itself”.<sup>146</sup> Speech, in Kee’s view, is a continuation and refinement of bodily expression. Merleau-

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<sup>143</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 213–214.

<sup>144</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 214.

In his explanation of an authentic expression, Merleau-Ponty stated that “beneath the conceptual meaning of the words” we can find “an existential meaning which is not only rendered by them, but which inhabits them, and is inseparable from them.” The successful process of expression is “to bring the meaning into existence” (1945/2005: 212).

<sup>145</sup> Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, 286.

<sup>146</sup> Kee, “Phenomenology and Ontology of Language and Expression,” 418.



Ponty's approach, however, is far more subtle and developed than that of Kee's, and stands in opposition to the perspectives of Kristeva and Agamben since he sees the gesture as rooted in the sign and replicating the external reality. Merleau-Ponty explains that gestural meaning is immanent in speech; it is not only contained in words but also in phonemes and vowels which are predisposed to extract and express the emotional essence of things.<sup>147</sup> Speaking speech, which he refers to as "authentic speech", or "transcendental speech" and which has its basis in gestural meaning, is an earth-shattering, thrilling experience, since it is like giving shape or birth to a new, hitherto unexpressed meaning. The reconstituting power of these words is totally incomparable with "instituted speech", representing speech about speech used as a circulating currency, and it is therefore unsurprising that Merleau-Ponty draws a strict distinction between the two.<sup>148</sup> This is not, however, to suggest that he antagonizes both concepts and excludes the possibility of their interconnection, denying the importance of spoken speech as the background from which speaking speech might blossom.

Kee questions "for whom is the meaning thereby constituted" or how many times a person must use a speaking word before it falls into the sedimented form, casting doubt on the universality of being "new" or "formative" and suggesting that "the speaking speech is "speaking" only with respect to personal idiolects, and with respect to the shared, intersubjective domain of meaning".<sup>149</sup> He also adds that even spoken speech always involves a certain degree of creativity or expressiveness and the potential to reshape a previously fixed reality. Similarly, certain words might be insignificant for one person but deeply transformative for another or may only disclose their riches many years later. Kee's style of formulating his arguments demonstrates the extent to which he remains in thrall to the Cartesian tradition of the disconnection from the object. He is distanced from the object (whether a word or the world itself) which he wants to make transparent by measuring, quantifying, and qualifying. The speaking word, however, is not a matter of "universality" or "degree" or answering the question "how many". It is neither a bare carnal gesture nor a mere creativity or expressiveness. The speaking word is a matter of a deep subject-object union and resonance between the word, the speaker, and the world. It is a matter of a particular rare situation which casts out of the acquired habit of speaking and deepens the way in which we experience the world, how we live through the object and speech. This is certainly not

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<sup>147</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 217.

<sup>148</sup> "There is, of course, every reason to distinguish between an authentic speech, which formulates for the first time, and second-order expression, speech about speech, which makes up the general run of empirical language" (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2005: 207).

<sup>149</sup> Kee, "Phenomenology and Ontology of Language and Expression," 422.

something which can be measured and objectified – the speaking word is not here to be acknowledged by others and evaluated, but exists entirely because of the mere process of uttering it, living through it, the process of its emergence. As Merleau-Ponty explains, “[t]hus experience of one’s own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality”.<sup>150</sup> Hayden Kee seems to be thinking about the body and might claim to understand the body, but he may not live in the subject-object alliance and experience the dramatic charge of the “transcendental speech”. He is therefore *speaking only* about speech alone.

### 2.6.3 *Speaking Words in Danielewski’s Text*

An awareness of the dual nature of the word might help to direct the reader towards perceiving the expressions in Danielewski’s text either as distant, ready-made signs or as speaking words which burst into full blossom out of the signs, reconnecting the inner state of the reader with the inner state of the protagonists and with the object or situation. Nevertheless, certain expressions which are used by Sam and Hailey have a greater potential to be interpreted as speaking words since their striking visual or auditory features are more likely to encourage the reader to tune their cognition to an object. These types of expressions possess the following qualities:

- are made distinct and expressive through the use of different font colours, typographic styles, and elongated forms (ThuuUuuuuuuuuunder, screeeeaaaaaams, GRIZZLED BEAT and RALLY FRO)
- are used with exclamation marks (*Liberty!*, Kisses it! Amorously!)
- possess a prominent rhythmicity, thereby activating the reader’s connective and performative, trance-like potential through an intense and dynamic time structure (swarming from gulch, gully and gorge; freaking ecstatic, hops acrobatic, so clumsy I stop)<sup>151</sup>
- are rhymed, thereby enhancing the rhythm and its capacity (Sam allready squirting the floor, though back again, panting for more, and I’m gripping his hard, grindings galore. So soft I’m hardest of all.)<sup>152</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 231.

<sup>151</sup> Eilon Morris claims in his work that “another role often attributed to rhythm is that it provides a direct link between the performer/performance and the audience” (Morris 2017: 15).

<sup>152</sup> This is the spelling used in the text.

- feature alliterative clusters which deepen the pleasure of experience them physically when delving into their sound (Beer kegs spraying the pond. All swim, splash, sputter muddy.)

Some other nuances will be discussed in the phonosemantic analysis. All of the analyzed expressions grouped into thematic clusters are written in bold.

#### ***2.6.4 Phonetic, Phonological and Phonosemantic Analysis with Phenomenological Insights***

I retreated into my mouth  
to examine the universe of speech.

(Andrey Bely, *Glossolalia: A poem about Sound*, 1922)

##### **I. The Rhythm of Fervent Emotions**

The first cluster called **the rhythm of fervent emotions** finds the protagonists and the reader located within a realm of ***rumbling noise***, ***fierce violence***, and ***screaking stabbinness***. The rhythm and the sound with its energetic, emotional quality have a powerful potential not only to reinforce but to give birth to the meaning, generating the authentic sense of an atmosphere of rage, barbarity, and fear. It is the sinister rhythm of a storm, of a violent environment which captures the pulse of the rebellious protagonists and makes them seem synchronized, enabling them to experience the hypnotic power of sharing.<sup>153</sup> The ominous terrain of thunder (rumble, bumble), the pinching quality of freezing and icicles all talk to Sam and Hailey's bodies, sensitizing and attuning them to these earthly rhythms. The Earth reveals their own anger and fear to them, and they can find their own echoes in the rumble of heavens and the grip of the frozen land.

##### **a) *Rumbling Noise***

(expressing physical intensity, smashing emotions)

Hailey:

(8)

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<sup>153</sup> The fact that the inner sense of rhythm is not separated from the outside world but is closely linked to and influenced by the immediate situation was emphasized by Konstantin Stanislavski, a Russian theatre practitioner, or E. Morris. (Morris 2017).

## **ThuuUuuuuuuUUUUunder**

[...] Enjoying her **snarl**.

The utterance of the expression **ThuuUuuuuuuUUUUunder** abruptly rends the silence, an effect which is magnified by the varying font size. Thunder erupts violently from emptiness, bringing something new and authentic which is indicated in a graphical sense by the large uppercase letters; the visuality of the textual characters influences the intensity of pronunciation. The letters gradually diminish in size as the peal of thunder dies down, closely mirroring the experience of a storm. A specific visual representation of the sign is thus the first thing we experience, affecting our perception and interpretation. The irregular appearance of the text due to the varying font sizes immediately draws the attention of the reader, forcing them to pause and focus on the visual aspect. Simultaneously, however, they also become aware of the auditory aspect of the word, naturally assuming that the physical/graphical representation of the word reflects the actual mental state of Hailey, who absorbs the grandiosity of the storm and utters the word with a roaring energy. The storm is genuinely present in this word as long as Hailey's body and that of the reader becomes attuned to its power. As Ingarden explains, "[t]he phonetic and visual forms of the word seem almost to be merely two aspects of the same "verbal body"". <sup>154</sup> Both the visual and the auditory comprehension prevent the reader from hurrying through the word, and they are instead given the opportunity to experience it richly and actively in all its individuality. Both sense modalities which are imprinted in the word disclose the manner in which the storm manifests itself to us, revealing its inner structure. The materiality of the word initially envelops us in a pre-linguistic dimension, allowing us to experience a physically and temporarily individuated manifestation of the situation. Its power is seen and heard in the expression itself. By focusing on the phonic materiality of the word, the reader is granted the possibility of escaping from "the-word-as-a-concept" and enjoying the dimension of the "word-as-pre-predicative" experience. The violent aspect of the thunder resonates with the hot temper of the protagonists and potentially echoes similarly emotive capacities in the reader. Through the lived experience of the word sound the reader can connect their own sensation with the possible emotional state of consciousness of the protagonists, a mood which is inspired and heightened by the experience of the actual storm.

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<sup>154</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 21.

Let us move on to compare the way in which the sound of thunder develops with the activity of our articulators. A more detailed phonetic analysis might invite the reader to adapt themselves to new perceptions and reveal that phonemes are neither isolated from each other nor a random sum of sounds, but that they in fact mutually influence or give rise to each other. It is even possible to suggest that they possess the capacity to create their own story within a word, “the story of thunder, or the melody of thunder”.<sup>155</sup>

The first letter of the expression **ThuuUuuuuuuuuuunder** is the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ which sets the backdrop for the action; when constricting the air flow through a narrow channel at the site of the upper teeth and the tongue, we accumulate an energy which is not released immediately (as in the case of, for example, in /f/) but gradually, creating turbulence. Since it is voiceless, greater force is required to push the air out directly from the lungs, and it is followed by a low (open) central vowel /ʌ/, which is pronounced in a slightly longer way before voiced consonants, transferring its power towards the following homorganic /n/ and /d/.<sup>156</sup> When pronouncing the voiced alveolar nasal, we redirect the blocked airflow through the nose, giving the sound a resonant and somewhat sinister tone which is intensified further by the voiced alveolar stop /d/ which, when tapping the alveolar ridge, produces a rumbling noise saturated by the nasal. The final voiced approximant /r/, more specifically its rhotic variant, concludes the story, producing a rough, violent, destructive energy;<sup>157</sup> the sound is dynamic and active, providing the whole word with its driving force.<sup>158</sup> The articulators that form the lower part of the vocal tract – the lower lip and the tongue, are highly mobile, thereby providing the necessary sense of dynamism. The letter /U/ has a curious feature which is apt in its use here; when pronounced, the sound is a low central vowel but in the written form it forms a high back vowel which has been described by Jakobson as evoking the qualities of thick, distant, hollow, dark, deep, and strong.<sup>159</sup> The acoustic quality is determined by the low resonating frequency F1 (at the outspread pharynx) and also by the low F2 (at the outspread oral cavity), which could explain Jakobson’s intuition about the dark nature of the vowel. The letter is strengthened by its physical size and its repetition, which co-determines the powerful, violent tone of the word. Furthermore, the different adumbrations which the expression **ThuuUuuuuuuuuuunder** offers, such as the sound of real thunder, the sound of

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<sup>155</sup> Eilon Morris observes that the Greek philosopher Aristoxenus was preoccupied with the dynamic relationship between sounds, the ways they are linked to each other and inform each other. When creating a rhythm, they contribute to the composition as an organic whole. (Morris 2017)

<sup>156</sup> Two sounds have the same place of articulation.

<sup>157</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 79.

The rhotic varieties of English include the dialects of Scotland, Ireland and most of the United States and Canada.

<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, A. Bely in his *Glossolalia* compares the phonemes /ar/, /ra/ to the “explosions of gleams from the heat”, something which “bursts out from the darknesses of the warmth” (1922/2003: 32).

<sup>159</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 191.

phonemes, the visual manifestation of the letters or the clusters of surrounding words of a similar rhyming sound (e.g., blunder, scumble; 324) are by no means fragmentary units of the experience. Through the process of noesis (synthesis) the subject is able to connect all of the diverse moments of their experience and, as an active agent of the situation, constitute it into a coherent and meaningful whole. Similarly, the situation is constituted both by the reader and the protagonists, and their identity is constituted in the same way though their roles as subjects of the experience. As Husserl emphasizes, the feeling of identity is not a result of a single moment, but it continuously accumulates over time.<sup>160</sup> The precise location of a subject in time and space, grounded in their body while possessing the potential to constitute, enables them to identify a sense of their personal integrity.

The next expression which Hailey utters immediately after the long enunciation of “thunder” is **snarl**. *OED* defines the word **snarl** as a display of the teeth accompanied by an angry sound.<sup>161</sup> It is no coincidence that the author places this word directly after thunder, as the two words share the same rough energy. The initial hissing sibilant /s/ of **snarl** adds force to the word through its characteristically intense sound directed with the tip of the tongue towards the teeth. Its high pitch is produced at the back of the tongue which forms a narrow channel to focus the stream of air more vigorously. The voiced liquid /r/ enriches the word with a wild, powerful spirit, and this kind of energy is also apparent in its rhotic, R-coloured version, which is an alveolar vibrant during which a large portion of air must be vigorously pushed out of the lungs, making the tongue vibrate and creating a harsh sound. The word is then finalized by the voiced lateral /l/ felt as a prolongation or continuation, which might be the result of the airstream proceeding freely along the sides of the tongue. Since there is no physical obstruction of the airflow as with stops or fricatives, we are given the impression that the sound is being slowly poured out.

(16)

THE NEW HOPE **throws a tantrum**  
**temper pounding** manure

(28)

Quite a **rumble**  
**Roaring** my way.

[...]

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<sup>160</sup> Husserl, *Meditations*.

<sup>161</sup> “Snarl” defined by <https://www.oed.com>.

Even when, with these  
**surrrounding** legions,

(125)

Gobble. Eats my pie. So I have it too.

- UuuuuuuUuu, he **mums**.

- UuuuuuuUuu, **I rumble**.

-uUUUUUUuu, we **bumble**.

When reading the verses out loud, the reader may be overwhelmed by the cavalcade of sinister, rumbling emotions. The act of reading the lines vocally does not immediately impart the meaning of the word, but it is instead the physical, phonic vibrations of plosives, fricatives, and labials which seize our initial impression, energizing the word with a dark and violent power. As the analysis illustrates, these two qualities vividly cooperate and inform each other.

The first sequence of verses (16) is dominated by the voiceless plosives /p/ and /t/ and the voiceless fricatives /θ/ and /f/, sounds which can be used to echo very strong emotions. In the word **throws**, the voiceless dental fricative puts forward the necessary strength for the action (see the previous paragraph) supported by the violent energy of /r/. This effect is further directed and modified by the voiced labialized velar /w/, the role of which is to imitate “the sound and action of rapid movement through air”.<sup>162</sup> The sound is produced by rounding the lips to constrict the airflow, thereby increasing its speed and turbulence. The final sibilant /s/ closes the scenario with an additional level of striking force. The word **tantrum** is formed by two /t/ stops. The action at the start is abrupt and hard and determines the overall tone of the word. The voiceless plosive /t/ is made by pressing against alveolar ridge and blocking the passage of air, creating pressure which can be released in the form of a fierce burst. The voiced alveolar nasal /n/ greatly amplifies the voiceless plosive /t/ followed by the approximant /r/, whose rumbling energy intensifies the effect of its previous companion. The final bilabial nasal /m/ increases the volume further. The sound is formed by redirecting the blocked airflow through the nose with both lips, granting a resonating value which can be prolonged endlessly; in this context, the sound suggests the possibility that the **tantrum** can go on and on indefinitely. The words **temper** and **pounding** both feature the plosives /p/ and /t/, again indicating harshness and abruptness, an effect intensified further by the final

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<sup>162</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 299.

approximant /r/. The voiceless stop /p/ involves the element of precision or even of perfection;<sup>163</sup> it can also be considered less violent and indicates a greater degree of precision in terms of placement, a more accurate means of applying a large burst of energy. The sound is not dispersed; it is in fact carefully directed and focused, with the position of the lips held together tightly suggesting an image of stiff precision. The pre-final nasal in **pound** and the final voiced stop /d/ terminate the action in a resonating manner.

Verses (28) and (125) manifest the qualities that can charge a word with either a dramatic driving force or a faint, indistinct puff. The text is overwhelmed by the approximant /r/ and the cluster of labials<sup>164</sup> /mb/ and a coronal<sup>165</sup> /l/, with the words given a dense, strong driving force by the wild /r/ sounds. The verb **roar** not only starts with /r/, suffusing the word with a harsh energy, but also ends with the same letter, reverberating the energy and amplifying the sound. The dark and savage power of the expressions is multiplied and echoed further by the effect of consonance (**rumbling roaring, surrrrounding**).<sup>166</sup> The diphthong /oa/ switches from the mid-back position to the central position, enveloping the word with a deep and dark spirit<sup>167</sup> The expression **surrounding** itself surrounds the situation in an intense (the hissing /s/), powerful (the forceful /r/), and dark (the enigmatic /ou/) manner. The bilabial /m/ frequently appears in words referring to shapelessness or vagueness.<sup>168</sup> The verb **to mum** is defined as uttering a faint, indistinct sound, and this is reflected in its phonetic description, with the sonorant or resonant /m/ being produced with a continuous, non-turbulent airflow which is rather formless, since it resembles a pure tone rather than a specific letter. This could explain why /m/ frequently appears in indistinct expressions or in surroundings where it can echo the neighbouring consonants such as the /mbl/ cluster; in this case, the voiced bilabial /b/ is often depicted as big, brutal, bulging, something which precedes an explosion.<sup>169</sup> When comparing it with its voiceless, rather “desiccated” counterpart /p/, /b/ is greatly inflated by the obstructed airflow and vocal cords vibration. As was noted above, the liquid /l/ keeps the situation flowing, and thus the whole triad portrays a low, continuous, lumbering act. The definition of **bumble** as movement in an awkward, clumsy manner or as sexual intercourse is

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<sup>163</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 179.

<sup>164</sup> Speech gestures using the lips are called labial articulations.

<sup>165</sup> Speech gestures using the tip or blade of the tongue are called coronal articulations.

<sup>166</sup> Consonance is a form of alliteration and occurs when a consonant sound is repeated throughout a sentence without putting the sound only at the front of a word.

<sup>167</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 197.

<sup>168</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 287.

When explaining the meaning of the bilabial /m/, A. Bely states that it is “mystical, bloody, fleshy, but a liquidy sound of life in the moisture: in it is the mystery of animality” (1922/2003: 52).

<sup>169</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 59, 87.



also reflected in the phonetic properties of the word. **Rumble** and **bumble** mirror and reinforce each other through a perfect rhyme created by consonance.<sup>170</sup>

(133)

A fourknee boogie before Sam.  
Swiggle and thrum. **Slumping**,  
To limbo for more **hump**.  
[...]  
my funk and **plump**.

The sequence in this verse is overtly sexual and illustrates which specific phonemes can be used effectively within such a context. The first thing to observe is the cluster /ump/. All three expressions featuring this cluster are connected to the concept of solid masses and heavy collisions or falls. **Hump** refers to sexual intercourse or specifically to a woman who makes herself available for sex.<sup>171</sup> As Magnus points out the homorganic /mp/ bilabials imply a heavy landing; she goes on to explain that the nasal /m/ is associated with collisions with solid masses, and creates a low, dull sound.<sup>172</sup> The plosive /p/ draws the situation to a close with a hard and precise drop. The phonemes used in the passage imitates strong, dull noises accompanying the sexual act, and their effect is magnified by their perfect rhyme – the meaning is colourfully complemented by the sound.

(27)

Over the hills the strangest **crash**  
**Boooooooooomblastandruin**

It is immediately apparent that the arrangement of phonemes in the word **crash** amplifies its meaning through the abrupt start and gradual receding of the situation. When pronouncing the voiceless velar stop /k/ in the word **crash**, we block the airflow with the back of the tongue and the soft palate, producing a sharp, hard sound.<sup>173</sup> The word is thus governed by this sudden, stabbing interruption of the flow, backed by the destructive /r/, and closed by

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<sup>170</sup> Perfect rhyme occurs when two words conform to these conditions:

- a) The stressed vowel sound in both words must be identical, as well as any subsequent sounds.
- b) The articulation that precedes the vowel in the words must differ.

<sup>171</sup> “Hump” defined by <https://www.oed.com>.

<sup>172</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 99, 7.

<sup>173</sup> The stop /k/ is described by Bely as something which causes “strangulation, death, congealing, cold, the impermeability of mass, inertness [...] unconsciousness, the use of force to interrupt the airflow” (1922/2003: 66).

the extended decay of the sound represented by the prolonged alveolar fricative /ʃ/. The combination produces a hushing sound, imposing a final silence over the whole event.

The word **crash** is accompanied by a term which expresses the predicted uproar, a conglomerate of the words **Boooooooooomb, blast, and ruin**. Once again, the phonic material of the word imitates the potential destructive force of an explosion as reinforced by the initial bilabials. The prominent voiced bilabial /b/ appears three times in the sequence and is described as slow, large, and loud.<sup>174</sup> As was mentioned above, the sound is typically associated with interference, explosions or brutality. It is inflated by the air accumulated in the vocal tract and seems ready to burst any time. The following mid back rounded vowel /o/ has a lower second formant frequency, and therefore it might be considered as slower and darker when compared with the high-pitched, fast /ee/. Furthermore, it is a back vowel, symbolizing spatial distance, since the sound feels like it emerges from the furthest recess of the mouth.<sup>175</sup> It is perfectly replenished by the energy of the previous letter and is lengthened by its reoccurrence. The /mb/ cluster terminates the situation with a slow, deafening explosion which will resonate long afterwards due to the preceding nasal. In the next word **blast**, the cluster /bl/ is designated as a loud, air-induced sound, full of pressure caused by the impacts of both the bilabial plosive and the liquid /l/, the latter of which has the energy to make the /b/ bulge.<sup>176</sup> The pre-final hissing sibilant /s/ draws out the eruption, reinforcing it with its ominous energy. The final voiceless stop /t/, which possesses the sense of movement towards a goal, hits the alveolar ridge, blocks the airflow and immobilizes the act. All that remains is the echo of the destructive event carried by the nasal /n/ in the final word.<sup>177</sup>

Sam:

(88)

to this mob's **danger, rankles**

my **anger**

The selection of phonemes in this verse evokes a strong feeling of displeasure and hostility, and the sounds are marshalled here in order to exploit the potential of expressing the creeping sense of danger and the aggressive energy of anger swelling out of control. Two of the three expressions marked in bold possess the same middle cluster /ang/, with the third

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<sup>174</sup> Monaghan, "Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?," 249.

<sup>175</sup> Rabaglia, "The Sound of Distance," 147.

<sup>176</sup> Magnus, *Whati is in a Word?*, 178.

<sup>177</sup> Magnus, *Whati is in a Word?*, 168.

word featuring /ank/. This sequence unites the pronunciation of all words whose meanings are also interrelated. **Danger** opens with the voiced alveolar stop /d/ in which the tip of the tongue touches the alveolar ridge giving the sound somewhat dark and resounding timbre. Since it is often described as slow, the word unlocked by /d/ might be suggestive of a creeping, dark nature.<sup>178</sup> It is followed by /ang/ cluster which, although pronounced as /dʒ/, retains the visual image of /g/. The voiced velar stop /g/ is articulated with the back of the tongue touching the soft palate, a location quite deep in the throat, even deeper than the site at which the voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ is formed, giving it the impression of something hidden, unexpected, or even scary.<sup>179</sup> The consonant has been analysed as energetic or harsh,<sup>180</sup> or as large, hard, and masculine.<sup>181</sup> When connected with the nasal /n/, it evokes the feeling of something compressed which suddenly expands and slowly diminishes.<sup>182</sup> The word culminates with the approximant /r/ driving it heavily towards something possibly violent or rough, implying a lack of control over the situation. The word **anger** also contains the cluster /ang/ coloured by the final /r/, therefore the meaning might be developed in a similar manner to that of **danger**, with the exception that it does not start with the plosive /d/ and thus lacks the initial dark aspect.

### *Word Sounds Which Lead the Reader to the Sensual Experience of Rumbling Noise*

Both Ingarden and Merleau-Ponty draw a strict distinction between lifeless, mindlessly repeated words which the speaker strips of their ability to evoke a certain property of a referred object, and living, powerful words which closely reflect the way an object manifests itself.

Ingarden points out that the sound of living words “can fulfil the function of the directly understandable “expression” – both in the sense of “manifestation” and in the sense of expressing the intended meaning”.<sup>183</sup> One important aspect to be noted here, however, is that the living word is not living only by reflecting the nature of an object, but also by involving the speaker’s experience and the current mode of their being and feeling: “The experiences of the psychic states of the speaker are “exhibited””.<sup>184</sup> The central figure in the process is thus the speaker or the reader as the dative agent of the object’s disclosure; these

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<sup>178</sup> Monaghan, “Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?,” 250.

<sup>179</sup> The voiced velar nasal occurs as an allophone of /n/ before velar consonants.

<sup>180</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 204.

<sup>181</sup> Monaghan, “Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?,” 252.

<sup>182</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 303.

<sup>183</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 44.

<sup>184</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 44.

subjects unify this interpretation with their own inner state and allow it to flourish through sound. In this process the inner state of the protagonist intermixes perfectly with the graphic representation of a word, the rumbling nature of the storm and the quality of the phonemes which imitate a roaring sound. This experience is felt by the reader who, when reading the text aloud and noticing parallels with their own state of mind, can find themselves being swept away by the energy of the words which convey the energy of the storm, the phonemes, and all participants in the final effect of the verse. An active reader is able to synthesise all of these elements and experience the power of storm in full through the vibration of a living word which reflects their own inner state. They are also capable of experiencing the myriad of aspects in which the situation manifests by using relevant phonic and suprasegmental materials, such as tone, melody or rhythm, and chains of synonyms. Ingarden summarizes that when the reader or the speaker are able to “see” the object and actively grant it a degree of fullness, “it is the special character of the word sound and not the corresponding meaning itself which plays the essential role.”<sup>185</sup> The result is that the active reader possesses the potential to connect the mode of the situation with the mode of their inner state and the possible inner states of Sam and Hailey.

*b) Fierce Violence*

Hailey:

(31)

By this **furious flurry**

What just won't desist,

a pang –

Sam.

(55)

THE BAGMAN shakes his **fist**

**Furiously**

[...]

(16)

DYING HOPE returns

**following this furor**

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<sup>185</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 44.

This phonetic gesticulation suggests once again that the words used by Sam and Hailey are not merely concepts which make us think about or understand violence or anger, they are in fact penetrated through and through by the atmosphere of violence; the words themselves are a manifestation of violence which invite the reader not to understand the meaning, but rather to adjust to it and embrace it, to feel it. This interpretation is supported by Merleau-Ponty's point that "[i]t is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive "things". The meaning of a gesture thus "understood" is not behind it, it is intermingled with the structure of the world outlined by the gesture".<sup>186</sup> Violent behaviour is then the source from which the meaning stems, and the word carries its innate biological, natural imprint.

Almost all of the words connected by alliteration express an accumulation of overpowering anger which seeks urgent release or "discharge". The letter /f/ is a voiceless labiodentals fricative which does not obstruct the airflow and which provides a pause in which the tension can be released. It is a pulmonic egressive sound which means that the airstream created by the lungs, ribs and diaphragm is forced out through the mouth or nose. The articulation of this sound requires a large volume of air and considerable strength directed outwards, an act which mimics the process of emotional release. In order to successfully release the accumulated emotion, we need a degree of bodily resistance, an effect which is provided here by the voiceless nature of the sound. In the case of the /f/ sound, the vocal cords do not vibrate, and the labiodental nature of the consonant obstructs the airflow rather than completely blocking it. It is possible to perform a test to find out whether we can release our anger by replacing /f/ with other sounds. For example, if we use the voiced variant /v/ in the word **fury** (or in the more emotionally charged **fuck**), the effect is greatly weakened by the voicing since the articulation is made with the vibrating vocal cords and does not require a great deal of body strength. If we apply the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/, the sound will be diffused into space and will not be so strongly single-pointed. Moreover, this penetrating sound is used more for drawing attention rather than seeking release. If we add a plosive (e.g., /p/, /t/, /k/) to the word, the emotion will be blocked right at the beginning and the effect of release will be weakened.

The use of the word **fist** demonstrates an appropriate selection of phonemes which closely mirror an acute, sudden, and fast-moving situation which might be associated with the behaviour of a clenched hand. The fricative /f/ is followed by the vowel /i/ which, according to the phonological description, is a high front close sound: the front of the tongue is raised to

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<sup>186</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 216.

a height slightly below and behind the front close position, the lips are spread, and the tongue is tense.<sup>187</sup> It is a sonorant which means that the sound is produced with a continuous, non-obstructed air flow in the vocal tract. The acoustic quality of the sound is determined by the resonating frequencies of the vocal tract: the formant F1 is the resonating frequency of the pharynx, while F2 is the resonating frequency of the mouth. The vowel /i/ has a very low F1 (spread pharynx) and a high F2 (narrowed oral cavity), the highest of all vowels, and this grants the vowel sound an acute and sharp, sting-like character. The graphical representation also mirrors its nature; it is thin and pointed upwards, swinging out towards the top. The sibilant /s/ penetrates the word with a shrill sound, and the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ hits the alveolar and stops the airflow. As with the fricative /f/, /t/ is a pulmonic egressive sound in which the air stream is pushed out from the lungs. **Fist** is a monosyllabic word with a closed syllable.<sup>188</sup> The phonological description shows that there is a striking similarity between the behaviour of articulators, the created sound, and the typical behaviour of a fist. The fist is a closed palm; /f/ charges the word with heated emotion, /i/ drives the word sharply forward and upwards, /s/ energizes the word with a piercing sound, and the final /t/ delivers the killing blow, a resounding punch which rounds off the scenario of the whole word (an effect which is also reflected in the graphical representation of the capital letter T). The Danish linguist Otto Jespersen noted that the vowel /i/ is an appropriate means of expressing something small (such as, for example, a fist) and that the short /i/ expresses the brevity of an act (such as a rapid blow).<sup>189</sup> He also explains that short words (such as the monosyllabic **fist**) are used for acute situations. Jakobson points that the postvocalic labial stops at the end of the monosyllable can be interpreted as an abrupt blow and that /i/ suggests a closer focus upon the action.<sup>190</sup>

The sounds which comprise the word **furor** convey a sense of fiery, passionate energy. The expression opens with the voiceless fricative /f/, and the approximant /r/ appears twice; firstly in the middle, where it casts its destructive energy back towards /f/, and secondly at the end, where it confirms and places a seal on the savage tone of the word. Danielewski frequently uses alliteration in his work to intensify the meaning and the mode of the surrounding words.

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<sup>187</sup> Cruttenden, *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*, 105.

<sup>188</sup> A closed syllable is a syllable with a short vowel sound and one or more consonants at the end.

<sup>189</sup> Jespersen, *Language*, 402.

<sup>190</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 201.

c) *Screaking Stabbiness*

Hailey:

(19)

– *Oh no, Sam reeks*

[...]

- *Not a chance, screeaaaaams*

[...]

Sam already

**Wheeling with feer**

(22)

Hair at **thistle** of **icicles** reaching

[...]

Even her **knees** join the surrounding **freeze**

Unhailed, stuck, **needlessly seized**

[...]

the **easiest** trip by which I'll break

a timid **breeze**.

(33)

[...] my racing **breeze**:

– *Weeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*

(39)

– *Ypeeeeeeeeeee!*

**Defeasibly** not.

I dive, palms a **squeeeeeeeal** wide.

(50)

**Briiiiiiiiiips** bursting out.

– *Stop! Please!*

Sam:

(20)

where HE

**Screaks.**

Off to her ring. After which

She **irksomely stings**:

All of the expressions in this passage display how the quality of screaming stabbiness can be evoked. Each line is suffused with the assonance<sup>191</sup> of the most striking of English vowels, the vowel /ee/.<sup>192</sup> As was discussed above, the vowel acquires its extremely high-pitched sound through the high second formant frequency. The wavelengths in the oral cavity are therefore short, giving the sound a highly intense, bright, and more directional aspect. In the word **screeaaaams** the vowel is strengthened not only by its repetition but also by the initial sibilant, with its acute diffusion impacting the whole word.<sup>193</sup> The airflow escapes through a very narrow groove in the centre of the tongue and causes friction between the tongue and the alveolar ridge.<sup>194</sup> The restricted passage through which the air is expelled gives the sound a razor-sharp edge. The driving force of the sibilant is abruptly blocked for a moment by the velar plosive /k/, but it is brought back into play immediately by the infernal energy of the /r/ sound. The word concludes with the shapeless vibration of the nasal /m/ indicating the likelihood that the act too will slowly fade away. Similarly, when analysing the word **squeeeeeeeal** we can note a similar arrangement, but it lacks the fiery /r/ effect and terminates with the approximant /l/, which makes the action appear more prolonged.<sup>195</sup> The very last synonym in the group is **scream** ending with the voiceless stop /k/. When pronouncing the letter, the air is sharply compressed behind the closure made between the back of the tongue and the soft palate. Judging by the physical behaviour of the articulators, the action in the word is terminated abruptly.

The word **feer** is written with a spelling mistake which has likely been made intentionally. In any event, the spiky, high-pitched quality of /ee/ remains unchanged, and the sound stabs us with an air of danger. The labiodental voiceless fricative /f/ is pronounced with considerable muscular energy and a strong blast of breath, forming a strong foundation on which to introduce a power with the potential to demolish things. The final alveolar

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<sup>191</sup> Assonance is a form of alliteration. It is the repetition of vowels in two or more words immediately succeeding each other, in a line or at the end of a line.

<sup>192</sup> In *Glossolalia*, Bely describes the meaning of the vowel /ee/ as “cyan, a height, pointedness, ecstasies, the rapture of a mystic, Luciferism” (1922/2003: 67).

<sup>193</sup> Bely describes the sibilant /s/ as “wings of the whistle of light, fires” which “rips apart the barriers of teeth, and a ray penetrates into our mouth” (1922/2003: 32).

<sup>194</sup> Cruttenden, *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*, 187.

<sup>195</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 119.



approximant /r/ is voiced in its post-vocalic position, which intensifies and projects its raw energy outwards.

The expressions **thistle**, **icicles**, and **sting** possess a somewhat prickly character, an effect which is intensified by the high front vowel and the sibilant. The lateral approximant /l/ in the first two words contains the element of being little, light, linear,<sup>196</sup> while the velar nasal /ŋ/ in the second word indicates an extended process of decay.<sup>197</sup> This interpretation fits perfectly when we take into account the way in which the velar is formed – the soft palate is lowered and adds the resonance of the nasal cavity to the pharynx, which then slowly recedes. This thematic cluster is a perfect example of how words in *Only Revolutions* can form an interconnected web of meaning-related expressions united by the intense high-pitched sound /ee/, unfolding the seemingly limitless aspects and perspectives of an object or a situation and its quality in a creative, even joyful, manner. The object or the situation excites our interest, luring and tempting us closer with its manifold manifestations, all of which, however, direct us to a single, solitary target which is, in this case, the quality of being piercing, stabbing or intense. Although it might appear that Danielewski is merely scattering his words on the page haphazardly, he is in fact employing strong points of orientation (phonetic properties) which enable the reader to find order in the verbal chaos by structuring the fragmented reality in a meaningful and accessible way. The author does so less with the help of the semantic layer of language, and more through the receptive experience which occurs prior to the act of signification. While the text may appear to be obscured and chaotic, subject to countless meanings and interpretations, it is perhaps the case that the adoption of an explicitly physical approach to *Only Revolutions* can offer the reader a means of nestling inside the book and of finding its primordial melody – more fundamental and structuring than appears at first glance.

**Freeze** and **breeze** are also punctured by the stabbing vowel /ee/ and seem quite similar except for the differing initial consonants of /f/ and /b/. **Freeze** is associated with extreme conditions, and this is echoed in the voiceless fricative /f/ which is the sound of strength, friction or abrasion. We noted earlier the more violent and brutal nature of the voiced plosive /b/, especially when located in the environment of relevant sounds, but it can also show another far weaker aspect, since the degree of breath and muscular effort necessary for its articulation is significantly less than that of its voiceless counterparts; it is described as large (because of the voicing) and slow.<sup>198</sup> The final voiced alveolar fricative /z/ is formed by

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<sup>196</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 92.

<sup>197</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 285.

<sup>198</sup> Monaghan, “Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?,” 250.

the blade of the tongue approaching the alveolar ridge. The air is released through this tiny groove, giving the sound a series of characteristics described as smooth, effortless, slippery, fast, somewhat hard, and long-lasting.<sup>199</sup> The word **freeze** obviously takes advantage of the qualities of being hard, slippery, and long-lasting, while **breeze** evinces those of being smooth and effortless.

## II. The Rhythm of Splashing Water

The group called **The Rhythm of Fervent Emotions** is not the only category which releases its energy and allows it to disperse throughout the text. Sam and Hailey are teenagers who are still in the process of developing more accurate and eloquent ways of thinking and expressing themselves; in the novel, they are still adrift within the vast, deserted space between sign and signification, a mute, more sensual space which has not yet been overwhelmed with elaborate concepts and subtleties of thought when approaching the object. This is a raw space which remains uncultivated by bright formulations, but which is instead vitalized by the carnal rhythm of the situation, of that from which they form their relationships.

The savage rhythm of the sudden gush of water, the pulse and sound of splashing and the sputtering spring captures the inner rhythm of the protagonists, connects with their internal condition and inspires them to echo its beat.<sup>200</sup> Sam and Hailey's heavy drinking sessions and their nauseated hangovers are not a straightforward mimicry of the splashing rhythm but emerge from it, adopting its style and its expressive principle. Faithful to their individual rhythm and the way in which they articulate or extend the pronunciation of words, Sam and Hailey adhere closely to the metre, the rhythmic framework given by the water, while simultaneously maintaining a mutual dialogue with their own spontaneity and the stability of the watery beat.

### d) *Splashing Water*

Hailey:

(35)

From the freezelloss and **slowwash**

**Slushgushing** out of basins

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<sup>199</sup> Monaghan, "Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?"

<sup>200</sup> The idea of the profound relationship between the object and the subject in which the world inhabits the subject through its flesh, through its outer vibration, and inspires the interior response of the subject was elaborated by Merleau-Ponty in his essay *Eye and Mind* (1964).

(91)

Beer kegs **spraying** the pond  
All **swim, splash, sputter** muddy. *alliteration*

(95)

My guts turning, **splashes & sweats,**

Sam:

(125)

snizzle, horizontal **sloshes galoshing,**

One fascinating feature of this passage is the sequence of words which are united not only semantically (in the succession of synonyms), but also (or possibly primarily) by sound, in this case, the sibilants /s/ and /ʃ/. Similar word sounds reflect the infinite ways or adumbrations in which a situation or an object can reveal itself, with each manifestation allowing a slightly different aspect to come to the fore. We can observe a certain correlation here with the work of James Joyce who made similar use of sound in *Finnegans Wake* or *Ulysses* (a work of “voicing”), most notably in the chapter titled “Sirens” where “the governing rules here are acoustic, not linguistic.”<sup>201</sup> Another example is Velimir Khlebnikov, a uniquely innovative Russian poet.<sup>202</sup> He was preoccupied with the creation of new words which were “painted with sound”<sup>203</sup> and “directed toward the thing they name.”<sup>204</sup> As Weststeijn notes, Khlebnikov always aimed to identify a motivated relation between the referent and the word either at an onomatopoeic level or “as a relation created by the poet within a wider system.”<sup>205</sup> This approach is aptly illustrated by his poem *Incantation by Laughter*, in which he creates different variations of the word “smech” (“laughter”) to mimic the sound of uncontrollable laughter. Another of Khlebnikov’s striking innovations was his belief that the consonant was the most important letter in the word since it controls the meaning. He observed that “words that begin with an identical consonant share some identical meaning; it is as if they were drawn from various directions to a single point in the mind”.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Elliott, *The Sound of Nonsense*, 33.

<sup>202</sup> Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) was a Russian poet an active member of the Russian Futurist Movement. He devoted some of his linguistic work to the search for correlations between Russian phonemes and meaning, a project which is clearly reflected in his poetry and has been examined by Roman Jakobson. Khlebnikov experimented with supra-conscious poetry (*zaumnaja poezija*) based on invented words. The purpose of *zaum* was to escape the limits of the rational and intelligible.

<sup>203</sup> Weststeijn, “Another Language, Another World,” 31.

<sup>204</sup> Khlebnikov, *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, 382.

<sup>205</sup> Weststeijn, “Another Language, Another World,” 33.

<sup>206</sup> Khlebnikov, *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov*, 384.

This observation largely corroborates Margaret Magnus's phonosemantic research in which she argues that individual phonemes possess unique semantics and that every word which contains a given phoneme carries a meaning which is not present in words without this phoneme.<sup>207</sup> The clustering of words with identical phonemes and similar meanings in Danielewski's text certainly provides ample evidence to support both of these opinions.

In his translation of Khlebnikov's work into Czech, Jiří Taufer (1975) touches on another aspect and points out that the words selected are by no means random, fixed, or lifeless, but instead follow a linguistic and visual order.<sup>208</sup> They create a root system which serves as a base from which word forms grow and branch like a tree. Danielewski employs words in the same manner – they grow out of the object, out of the sibilant root, which allows them to flourish and blossom into endless colours and shapes.

Since the sound of falling water is very much associated with intense hushing or hissing sounds, it is the onomatopoeic sibilants /s/ and /ʃ/ which feature most prominently in these sequences. The sibilants are very often accompanied by the liquid /l/, since it relates to the sense of something humid, clear or lightweight.<sup>209</sup> The sounds are also followed by the plosive /p/ or the voiced velar glide /w/ depending on how the meaning of the word is developed and where the stress should be placed. These expressions can be divided into three distinct groups – the first one containing **slush** and **slosh**, the second one with **spray**, **sputter**, and **splash**, and the third one involving **swim**.

In the first group with **slush** and **slosh**, the sibilant is immediately followed by the lateral /l/ without the plosive or any approximants. The cluster /sl/ is associated with something shapeless, messy, or slippery,<sup>210</sup> most likely because /l/ is strongly connected with the idea of formless liquid. As we can see, the meaning of both expressions is very much alike – the OED dictionary defines both as the watery substance resulting from the partial melting of snow or ice.<sup>211</sup>

The second group of expressions contain /sp/, /spr/, and /spl/ clusters with the initial energy of the sibilant abruptly terminated by a precise point between the lips – the voiceless stop /p/. This effect can be either intensified by the raw /r/ or made more fluid by the liquid /l/. Physically, the expressions resemble a waterfall suddenly hitting a specific spot in the wall, the result of which is the scattering of drops. **Sputter** features the alveolar stop /t/ in the middle which grants the word an aspect of directionality. In the final word **splash**, the watery

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<sup>207</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word*, 1.

<sup>208</sup> Chlebnikov, Velemir. *Zakletí smíchem*. Translated by Jiří Taufer. Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1975.

<sup>209</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 191.

<sup>210</sup> Hinton, *Sound Symbolism*, 287.

<sup>211</sup> OED: <https://www.oed.com>

lateral /l/ adds a more liquid quality to the whole process. It would be useful here to focus on the difference between /s/ and /ʃ/ because they are both essential elements of almost all of these expressions. As Cruttenden explains, they both possess a relatively high level of intensity, and the duration of fricative noise is longer than in their voiced partners. When articulating /s/, the airflow escapes through a narrow groove, but for /ʃ/ the escape of air is more diffuse, since the friction occurs across a more extensive area of the tongue and the roof of the mouth. In the case of /ʃ/, more parts of the tongue are involved, and the grooving occurs further back than in the pronunciation of /s/. Another important detail is that the articulation of /ʃ/ is laxer than that of /s/. When we take all of this information into consideration, we can start to understand why all the expressions start with /s/ rather than /ʃ/. The /s/ sound is more focused and tense, resembling a single water course, but when it encounters an obstacle, such as the plosive /p/, its flow is dispersed in all directions, losing its strength, and terminating with the anti-climax of the /ʃ/.

The third group features the word **swim**. This word starts with the /s/ sound, immediately immersing us in an intense, likely aquatic experience. The velar voiced glide /w/, however, exerts a considerable influence on its preceding companion, since the /s/ is articulated in the same way as the /w/ with rounded lips. However, almost immediately the /w/ sound starts to fall under the influence of the following sound, transitioning away to a /l/ position and stretching the lips. /w/ is described as a glide or semivowel which means that its sound is phonetically similar to that of vowels, and it is categorised among the class of sonorants whose sound is produced with a continuous, non-turbulent airflow in the vocal tract. Physically, the work of the articulators closely resembles the act of swimming – an intense, yet smooth movement which encounters no obstacles, stretching out our body and possessing a lengthy, languorous close.

The sound of water in its variations can disclose many subtleties of meaning, as the sound itself has the potential to echo the mental life of a protagonist, an aspect which is difficult to express conceptually. Sam and Hailey make allusions to their true feelings, sometimes referring to external objects, but almost never openly reveal what they are feeling or thinking. The accumulation of water sounds in the text points to the heavy drinking of the protagonists and the intensity of their physical reactions (91, 95). In this way, the sound greatly supports the stratum of the represented objectivities.

### III. The Rhythm of Tension and Relaxation

The alternation of jerky sex and soft intimacy, of tension and relaxation, is yet another contour through which the space of the text organizes itself; it serves once again as a skeleton for the manifestation of rhythmic expression, providing a stable, non-fragmented structure within which Sam and Hailey can express their potential, latent rhythms, their personalities, their specific means of expression, their essential vitality. Their unique rhythms disclose their identities, and regardless of how untamed and impulsive they might be, they beat within the framework of tension and relaxation.<sup>212</sup> This rhythmical structure, the repetition of silence and articulation, might be compared to the phenomenological concept of the object as the blend of the present and the absent, of filled and empty intentions.<sup>213</sup> Like Schrödinger's cat, the object and its aspects are simultaneously both absent and present. The sense of its structure or identity is constituted in the same way as the structure of rhythm – through the bond between presence and absence.

#### e) *Jerky Sex*

Hailey:

(47)

**Kisses** then, wet if thin

[...]

**Jouncing, jerky** him. Tight  
stickening his nakedness. **Bounces**  
slickening the rise. Firming my  
cheeks and jiggling his thighs.

(92)

umpteen bodies detaching  
with touch, **rubadub dub**, Ollfing  
the clutch, Nmmmmmmmming,  
turntaking fondles so casually offered

[...]

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<sup>212</sup> The Russian theatre director and producer Vsevolod Meyerhold was an inspirational figure in international modern theatre who drew a strict differentiation between metre and rhythm. Meter is a regular beat or unit of time; it is a blueprint, a map. Rhythm, on the other hand, represents a land, the individual form of expression which is free and variable. The meter provides the context for the rhythm (Meyerhold 1991).

<sup>213</sup> Sokolowski explains that empty intentions “target something [...] not present to the one who intends. A filled intention is one that targets something that is there, in its bodily presence” (Sokolowski 2000: 17).

Public **thrusts** for public orifices.

And **lusts**.

Sam:

(43)

She greedily  
swallows every **squirty**

**ecstasy** I bring her.

**Sunnysurrrounded**

I **kiss** her back then.

She faints. So profound my taste.

She rises. So profound my taste.

(47)

I release with a **jerk torrents**

Of me [...]

(90)

I'm

Ready **Set Hot** to highfive **dingdang**

With my **thingthang** for the coochity

In contrast to the previous cluster groups, the expressions here are short (mostly monosyllabic or disyllabic), abrupt, sudden, rhythmic, forcible, sharp, hard, and quick. Sex is perceived in the text as an act with little or no delicacy, an impression intensified further by the appearance of a masculine rhyme (thrusts lusts, dingdang thingthang).<sup>214</sup> The reader is immediately struck not only by the acoustic quality of the expressions, but also by the highly expressive prosodic elements of rhythm and tempo which accompany the sex-related words. The rhythm of alternating accented, and unaccented sounds has an almost onomatopoeic effect as it closely mimics the physicality of the external situation, serving, in this respect, as a basis upon which the meaning is built. The short sentences (and words) used in the text accelerate the tempo – words with specific phonetic properties are chosen to conform to the situation. Rhythm, as the British composer and actor Eilon Morris points out, is extremely

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<sup>214</sup> Masculine rhyme matches only one syllable, usually at the end of respective lines. The final syllable is stressed.

physical; it is the form of a vital, energetic movement;<sup>215</sup> the British movement practitioner Janet Goodridge enriches Morris's standpoint by defining rhythm as "a patterned energy-flow of action marked in the body by varied stress and directional change".<sup>216</sup> Applying phenomenological observations, it might be suggested that these are not words which have been selected randomly, circling the concept of sex in endless explanations, but that it is the act of sex itself and its bodily manifestation which has influenced the selection of shorter words exhibiting specific phonetic qualities. Ingarden summarizes this by claiming that "there is a strong correlation between the structure and qualitative constitution of the object of cognition, on the one hand, and the kind of cognition on the other".<sup>217</sup> In line with Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, he adds that there is even "an adaptation of cognition to the object".<sup>218</sup> Rhythm and tempo are the exact elements which do not participate in the conceptual definition of other words, and therefore they are not locked into an everlasting loop of circularity when translating unknowns into knowns. They are freed from semantic rotation and freed from the system of language. Although they can utilise language in order to materialize themselves, they use it to reach beyond language, to step out of the conceptual trap.

The sex-related words can also be divided into unifying groups – the first involves the words expressing movement, the second one the words related to rhythm, and the last one contains the expressions demonstrating the jet of liquid.

The expressions which can be categorised into the group of movement are **bounce**, **jounce**, **jerk(y)**, and **thrust**. All of the words are monosyllabic and therefore essentially fast, and most of the vowels are back vowels which are heavy and bulky,<sup>219</sup> with Jakobson noting that /o/ and /a/ are big while /u/ is thick, blunt, bitter, and strong.<sup>220</sup> Since the vowels are typically in a mid-verb position, they have an agentive effect of putting a subject into motion, guiding the preceding consonant towards a solid, dense, bulky situation. The initial voiced plosive /b/ relates to something big, inflated, and violent, an impact which can perhaps be explained by the excessive vocal fold vibration during the compression stage,<sup>221</sup> and the fact

<sup>215</sup> Morris, *Rhythm in Acting and Performance*, 11–12.

<sup>216</sup> Goodridge, *Rhythm and Timing of Movement in Performance*, 43.

<sup>217</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 9.

<sup>218</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, 8.

<sup>219</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 185.

<sup>220</sup> Jakobson, *The Sound Shape of Language*, 188, 191.

Bely complements this description by claiming that the sound /u/ expresses "warmth, angularity, narrowness, depths, corridors of the larynx, a fall into murkiness, fires of purpleness, will, forced efforts and the torments of birth", and that the vowel /a/ is white and reveals "a fullness of the soul, reverence, worship, wonder [...] it is the sound of apprehension [...] exhaling outbursts to freedom", and an orange vowel /o/ "is a sensation, sensitivity, of the cavity of the body and the mouth: of pleasures and pain" (1922/2003: 66–67).

<sup>221</sup> During the compression stage, the lung action compresses the air behind the closure formed by a plosive.



that the sealed speech tract is left overfilled with compressed air which is ready to burst out at any time during the release stage.<sup>222</sup> The voiced affricate /dʒ/ is slower in pronunciation than its voiceless opposite, and its affricate nature means that a considerable degree of friction builds up at the point where the plosive stop /d/ is made. In the word **jounce** the affricate is followed by the diphthong /ou/ which strongly evokes an up and down movement which is terminated by the cluster /ns/ expressing finesse or ease.<sup>223</sup> The word **jerk** on the other hand, is considerably harsher because of the liquid /r/, guiding its raw energy towards the edgy velar /k/ which abruptly interrupts the act. The word **thrust** focuses on different aspects. At first, the expression gradually accumulates strength through the fricative /θ/, before carefully releasing the pent-up energy, generating friction. In the phonetic description, the air escapes gently through the narrow opening between the tip of the tongue and the upper teeth. Subsequently, the /r/ sound initiates a forward motion towards a soft, carefully directed silent fall softened by /s/ and brought to a close by the voiceless stop /t/.

The second group expressing rhythm contains the expressions **rubadub dub**, **dingdang** and **thingthang**. The rhythm here is dictated by the repetition of sounds and words. The word **rubadub dub** might be considered partly onomatopoeic, mimicking the regular beat of a drum, an effect which is partly iconic since it uses the tough, near-by quality of the roaring /r/. Moreover, the dark, low-pitched nature of the back vowels results in a blunt, rumbling sound. We can also discern the impact of the noisy and bumpy plosive /b/, which is sensed as a blow at the end of a syllable, and finally the alveolar stop /d/ contributing with its resounding, booming quality. The last two expressions **dingdang** and **thingthang** alternate the front high-pitched vowel /i/ and the low back vowel /a/, an effect which gives the impression of change in spatial distance – in a spatial sense, /i/ is considered as being closer and higher and /a/ as more distant and lower. The voiced alveolar /d/ initiates the noisier onset of the action, while the voiceless /θ/ starts more slowly in a hushed manner. Both expressions, however, conclude in the same way using the unhurried, diminishing nature of the voiced velar nasal /ŋ/. Phonetically, these patterns mimic the movement of articulators whose work is gently shifted to the very back of the mouth using the back of the tongue and the velum. The movement of articulation towards the most distant position along with the resonance of the nasal cavity creates a slowly fading tone.

The third group of expressions, **squirt(y)** and **torrent**, manifest a jet of liquid and reveals the striking similarity between the somatic energy which the speaker imparts into the

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<sup>222</sup> During the release stage, the organs form the obstruction part rapidly, allowing the compressed air to escape abruptly.

<sup>223</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 44.

pronunciation of the phonemes and the energy of the external situation. In the first expression, the sibilant /s/ provides the subsequent velar stop /k/ with its strength and allows it to gather the necessary energy to be sprayed wildly towards the central vowel /ə/. Since the vowel is reduced and unstressed, it is somewhat short and is thus incapable of delaying the release of energy, transferring it immediately to the further roaring /r/ which saturates it further before reaching an abrupt termination in the stop /t/. As the schwa vowel is not a full vowel which would dilute the energy of the neighbouring consonants, the word then accumulates a number of powerful sounds, making itself truly explosive. In the word **torrent** the energies are more evenly distributed and carefully directed between the opening and closing stop /t/. The voiceless plosive /t/ sets the background for the action, casting the compressed air towards the weighty back /o/, providing more space but also colouring it with a darker tone. The double /r/ revives the stream through a double shot and directs it further towards the end, softened by the resonating nasal /n/ and finally terminated by the stop.

Yet another interesting aspect of the selection of words in Danielewski's text is his gleeful enthusiasm for creating nests of expressions which are interrelated by their shared sounds, thereby permitting them to multiply and echo their neighbours in a playful, creative manner, e.g., "she **swallows** every **squirty ecstasy** I bring her [...] **Sunnysurrounded** I **kiss**." He lets us know that erotic pleasure can be partly reflected in the physical dimension of word-sounds which, when read out loud and developed to their full potential, can offer us the sensation of sheer joy.

#### *f) Soft Intimacy*

Sam:

(82)

I press my thumb then on her **soft** mouth,

**touch** her playful bangs, [...]

**patience** claiming me.

[...]

Strength needs me, **touching** my face

Repeatedly, cooing with her fingers supplely

[...]

**pleasing** me, **slowly**, whiling me with **care**.

(90)

With my thingthang for the **coochity**  
**Coochcooch** de l'Orange.

(113)

[...] then a hop  
over to her bed for **cuddles**,  
**muzzles** and a **caress**.  
How **gently** now  
she holds onto me. Her **soft** breath  
**warmly** on my ear.

(161)

Rubbing Hailey  
With my **palm** to **calm** me.

Hailey:

(82)

And Sam with his thumb **caresses** my lips  
**touches** my scrubby elbows, his  
**patience** finally **calming** me.  
[...]  
I **console** too. **Touching** his face  
over and over, my hand **subtly**  
**pattering** over him, around his dare, tenderly

As is apparent from the above discussion, Danielewski's work features a series of sounds which appear with a high degree of frequency. In this section, however, the sounds are enveloped and modified by a slightly different environment which allows them to reveal new and unexpected facets.

When examining the highlighted words, one aspect appears to unify almost all of them, namely the quality of being slow. There are at least four reasons why the pronunciation of certain fragments is made longer and thus slower – the sounds often contain resonants and sibilants whose pronunciation is longer;<sup>224</sup> the vowels appear in environments which lengthens their pronunciation (e.g., **palm**, **calm**, **warm**); the words invariably feature back

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<sup>224</sup> A sonorant or resonant is a speech sound that is produced with continuous, non-turbulent airflow in the vocal tract; they are most often voiced.

vowels which are slower and more radiant due to their longer wavelengths and more diffuse routes; and, lastly, they feature diphthongs which are formed by the movement from one vowel to another, yet another lengthening process.<sup>225</sup>

The most striking sounds here are the affricate /tʃ/ and the voiceless fricatives /s/, /ʃ/ (**console, slow, soft, subtly, patience, coochity, touch, gently, thumb**). The sibilant /s/ is frequently described as slow, soft, small or feminine, thereby granting the phonemes a soothing, slow, fondling articulatory and acoustic quality.<sup>226</sup> These sounds are often accompanied by back vowels which allow the pronunciation to flow in a somewhat subtle manner. Since they are darker than front vowels and spatially more distant, they give an impression of being more intimate and homely. This delicate, caressing mode is further heightened by the usage of sibilance,<sup>227</sup> while the lateral /l/ adds to /s/ its fluid, gentle, soft property.<sup>228</sup> In comparison to the /r/ sound, which lends a dynamism to its environment, /l/ tends to conform to the surrounding sounds, giving the impression of passivity or idleness.

The fricative /ʃ/ is commonly used to quieten someone down. As was explained earlier, the airflow of /ʃ/ is dispersed, since the articulation covers a more extensive area than is the case for /s/, so the stream of sound is less focused and the pronunciation becomes more relaxed and soothing.

The affricate /dʒ/ (**gently**) is another sound which helps the reader to sense the peaceful and pleasant mode of an intimate situation. It is voiced, so unlike its voiceless counterpart /tʃ/, the pronunciation is longer. /Tʃ/ is identified as a sound in which pressure is applied against something soft and fragile but which offers some resistance.<sup>229</sup> Magnus' description is again grounded in the phonetic account of how the articulators work. Since the sound is a combination of /t/ and //ʃ/, it has both a stop (during which it touches the upper ridge) and a fricative stage. The closure made between the tip, blade, and rims of the tongue and the alveolar ridge is released slowly, and the air escapes in a diffuse manner. One important point made by Cruttenden is that affricates differ from plosives in the fact that they never lose their fricative release stage, meaning that there is always an air "cushion" present in the articulation, which could explain Magnus' intuition about "touching something soft".

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<sup>225</sup> Rabaglia, "The Sound of Distance," 148.

<sup>226</sup> Monaghan, "Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?," 249, 251.

<sup>227</sup> Sibilance is a form of alliteration. Is the repetition of sibilants (s, z, sh, zh, ch, j) in two or more words immediately succeeding each other.

<sup>228</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 92, 119.

<sup>229</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 107.

Other sounds which are commonly used to capture the sense of intimacy are the voiceless plosives /t/ and /p/. These sounds are always associated with contact, touch, /p/ for precision, /t/ for directness, and they feature the added quality of being small, possibly a result of the relatively small part of the contact area formed by the lips in /p/ or the tip of the tongue and the alveolar ridge in /t/.<sup>230</sup> I would also mention one more element which enriches the sounds with softness, and that is aspiration, the simple puff of air accompanying the release of voiceless obstruents every time they are in the initial position or at the beginning of a stressed syllable. This additional breath lends a more affectionate or even cuddly aspect to the articulation.

Some expressions conclude with the nasal /m/ (**calm, palm**), a sound which both possesses the resonating quality echoing the act but also resembles something shapeless, soft, continuing.<sup>231</sup> She also adds, as mentioned before, that the nasal is associated with collision with solid masses and creates a low, dull sound. This is usually true for the environment with /p/, but here it is preceded by /l/, which gives the nasal a more soothing tone.

The soothing, slow, fondling articulatory and acoustic quality of the phonemes very closely mimics Sam and Hailey's behaviour patterns in an intimate situation, depicting the fact that they are overwhelmed and united by the tender, relaxed attuning of their two bodies. Relevant in this context is the observation made by Merleau-Ponty: "the body converts a certain motor essence into vocal form, spreads out the articulatory style into audible phenomena".<sup>232</sup> The acoustic flesh of the word intertwined with the external context is perfectly sufficient to reveal the subtleties of the intimate situation, since this does not attempt to conceptualize it but instead makes it present or affective. The word suggests that the reader should touch and caress it rather than read it. Interestingly, the quality of auditory phonemes experienced as "soft" forms a tactile layer embedded in the auditory layer, enabling us feel the overlap of two sensory perceptions. Merleau-Ponty extends the tactile experience to the domain of vision when he notes that "vision is a palpation with the look", moving on to state that:

"[s]ince the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes — even more, every displacement of my body— has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible

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<sup>230</sup> Monaghan, "Do sound symbolism effects for written words relate to individual phoneme or the phoneme features?," 249.

<sup>231</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 7.

<sup>232</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 211.

in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one.”<sup>233</sup>

*Synaesthesia* then is yet another way of disclosing some of the many profiles of the object, or in our case of the intimate situation, allowing us perceive the tactual materiality of the sound. The American musician and philosopher Jessica Wiskus notes, however, that synaesthesia is not a bare sum of two different sensations but is instead a matter of experiencing resonance and synchronization between one aspect and another which has the potential to open the witness to an ecstatic, transformative experience.<sup>234</sup> When the external rhythm of sound (**touch, gently, calm, palm**) is able to find a point of contact with the internal rhythm of the reader – their inner being, their inner pattern of intimate behaviour, letting the visible soak through the invisible, there is the potential that they will experience rare moments of euphoric joy.

The clusters of synonyms and the unifying quality of the selected phonemes (for example, sibilants) along with the use of synaesthesia in the text represent an ongoing manifestation of the inner essential structure of the intimate situation, offering richer and more diverse perspectives. The auditory experience informed by the tactile sensation discourages the reader from conceptualizing the intimate situation and thereby making it instrumental; instead, they are guided towards an authentic and affective perception, towards becoming a lived-body, a localized “field of sensation”.<sup>235</sup> It is important to stress once again that not all of these phonemes and synonyms are accidental and unrelated fragments. While taking into account Gestalt psychology and its emphasis on the holistic structure of experience in which the whole precedes and arches over the parts, we as readers can discern a continuity among these expressions, revealing the different layers of an object by various means. The expressions serve as the background of a single object, a single situation which, by its inner structure, guides the perceiver to uncover its meaning.

#### **IV. The Rhythm of Circular Return**

*Only Revolutions* revolves in a **rhythm of circular return**, a spiralling mythical sense of time. The two identified clusters which reflect this most strongly are those of ***Bulging Beginning*** and ***Swirling Circularity***.

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<sup>233</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134.

<sup>234</sup> Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought*, 115.

<sup>235</sup> Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, 88.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of *Only Revolutions* is the fact that once we reach the end of the narrative, we are encouraged to start the book again from the other perspective, thereby blurring the points at which the book begins and ends. The work is a circular narrative in which every single page emerges from the history margin and coils forward to the middle, to the heart of the book. The present meaning is nested in the past and weighted by the unfolding future. The reader can aim to reach the end of the narrative at the centre of the book, but it unfolds further through re-reading, constantly escaping their grasp as they try to comprehend the full complexity of the narrative.

The rhythm of circular return resembles the rhythm of a musical work which, as Jessica Wiskus observes, “does not proceed through absolute beginnings or endings, but, as an expression of mythical time, creates itself through the fold of multiple layers.”<sup>236</sup> The love story of Sam and Hailey is a never-ending revolution of death and resurrection, the rhythm which binds the past and the present, but with no sense of return to what has happened before. They are forever set free from the order of time, remaining sixteen for all of eternity.

### **g) *Bulging Beginning***

Hailey:

(35)

stones, by **bud**, **bulb** & **blossom**

**bursting** from muck.

All the expressions marked in bold in the above passage relate to a new beginning, a process of growth and change. The most prominent letter clustering the words of similar meaning in terms of consonance is the voiced plosive /b/ which has been already discussed above.<sup>237</sup> Magnus develops yet another element of the letter by suggesting that it denotes the pressure built up behind an obstacle and its subsequent release.<sup>238</sup> This description closely reflects the way the sound is produced by the articulators. She also adds that if the liquid /l/ follows the plosive, like in the word **blossom**, it has enough energy to make the /b/ sound

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<sup>236</sup> Wiskus, *The Rhythm of Thought*, 55.

<sup>237</sup> The pronunciation of the plosive /b/ is viewed by Bely as something which “provides us with a picture of an enormous hollow sphere inside of which are – we, and from the surface of which essences act, forming earthly covers (both water and earth)” (1922/2003: 68).

<sup>238</sup> Magnus, *What is in a Word?*, 182.

bulge into a ball shape.<sup>239</sup> In such an interpretation, this can grant words featuring the /bl/ cluster the quality of repletion, or of being overfull. The expression **burst** seems to be the most action-like of all; it is influenced by the neighbouring approximant /r/ to generate offering a significant portion of dynamism. The brisk tap against the alveolar ridge made by the final voiceless stop /t/ brings the situation to a sharp end, adding a sense of direction.

As the analysis shows, all of the expressions expand on different aspects of the phoneme /b/ and the external contexts which it might reflect. The phoneme serves as the initial contour of an object (later finalized by the entire word), remaining at a pre-linguistic level. If we agree with Ingarden's observation that the intentional object is a target towards which words project (rather than the other way round),<sup>240</sup> this may well occur at the level of sounds which respond to the object and trace its "silhouette".<sup>241</sup> Since the phenomenological view states that intentionality is connected with human thought in much the same way as a sign and an object, there is no apparent possibility of complete linguistic seclusion or mental solipsism, as language will be always form a part of the stimulus-response chain.<sup>242</sup> As Merleau-Ponty emphasized when discussing the idea of inter-subjectivity, meaning is not a private matter.<sup>243</sup> When dealing with the phenomenon of speech and the specific act of meaning, he explains that a word itself "is not the bearer of its own meaning, has no inner power" and is "bereft of any effectiveness of its own".<sup>244</sup> He continues that without reflection of the thoughts of others through the act of speech, a word remains an empty container, adding that the conceptual meaning does not exist in isolation, or in a vacuum, but must grow out of the gestural meaning immanent in speech.<sup>245</sup> It is, then, no coincidence that even single phonemes (like those which represent a bulging beginning or others) are shaped by and echo the surrounding situation, allowing the recipient "to understand the meaning of words through their place in a context of action, and by taking part in a communal life".<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Liquid is a consonant sound in which the tongue produces a partial closure in the mouth, resulting in a resonant, vowel-like consonant, such as the English sounds /l/ and /r/ (Britannica).

<sup>240</sup> Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*.

<sup>241</sup> Ingarden claims that sound in the form of rhythm, pacing, etc. does indeed have intentional objects. However, by claiming that a phoneme is meaning-bearing, phonosemantics extends the potential of a sound significantly.

<sup>242</sup> "Ingarden's use of the term "intentional" appears to follow Husserl's usage, which was derived in turn from Franz Brentano's theory of intentionality" (Hanks 1996/2018: 123).

<sup>243</sup> "Thought is not an "internal" thing and does not exist independently of the world and of words" (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2005: 213).

<sup>244</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 205.

<sup>245</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.

<sup>246</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 208.



## *h) Swirling Circularity*

Hailey:

(39)

Their petals **twirling** my hair.

[...]

**Swirling** the **World** and lifting the sky [...]

**Around** and **around**.

(143)

fullout busy to stick

my **swirling** blur, wring me still

(152)

–*Hey he's* VIAPPOPOLIS **squirms**.

Sam:

(165)

**curl** a fist, dare to not give up,

[...]

Wants a **circle** of his own.

One curious feature about the expressions in the above passage (and one which is not immediately apparent to the reader) is the fact that they all contain the cluster /ir/ or /ur/ and that when we pronounce them, our articulators circumscribe a circle (or a semi-circle in the case of **curl**). **Twirl**, **swirl**, **squirm**, and **circle** all start with alveolars /t/ or /s/ which means that the articulators involved are the same and in the same position – the tip of the tongue touching or nearly touching the alveolar ridge. In **twirl** and **swirl** the articulation of /t/ and /s/ is accompanied by the velar /w/ which forces us to round the lips almost immediately upon touching the ridge. At this point, we are at the stage of describing a semi-circle and continue this act with the alveolars /r/ and /l/, which draws us back to the starting point of the articulation, the alveolar ridge. The forward route from the ridge to the lips and back again forms a neat circle which is accentuated by our rounded lips. In the word **circle** our articulators work the other way round. Starting from the alveolar ridge (/s/) we move slightly backwards with /r/ to the post-alveolar position, with /k/ drawing us deeper down towards the

soft palate, before /l/ finally returns us to the initial alveolar position. The meaning of the word and the work of articulators are in perfect symbiosis. Moreover, the presence of /r/ lends all of the expressions a dynamic and rhotic quality. The word **around** follows the same circling path when starting from mid central position, going backwards with the back vowel /o/, turning forwards with /u/ and ending once again in the mid central position.

This phonetic and phonosemantic analysis demonstrates that it is not only the sounds which help the reader to “see” or imagine an object or situation and creatively fill in the spots of indeterminacy; this is also performed through the motoric or tactile activity which allows them to experience the object in a literal sense through the work of articulators. When pronouncing the word, the sound and the movement of the articulators reflect the behaviour of the external object and mirror the way in which it unfolds itself, helping to outline the first and basic meaning of the word. A language concept, however distorted it might be, can be corrected by a direct motor (auditory/tactile) experience of our bodies. Provided that we are able to conceptualize a perfect geometrical shape, we also possess the capacity to feel the way our articulators work and then go on to touch the real circle, even if the result is the realisation that it is far from perfection. Every single movement of our body can help us to break through the barriers of the language game.

## 2.7 Integrating Sound-Thematic Clusters into Narrative Sequences

In his study of *Only Revolutions*, Portela proposed a framework of fifteen narrative sequences in Danielewski’s text including the range of pages which these sequences might cover.<sup>247</sup> When comparing the pages on which the thematic clusters discussed above appear with the pages which Portela proposes for his narrative sequences, we can identify a number of connecting points between the two, suggesting that the clusters may be closely integrated in the narrative sequences, a possibility that allows the meaning to unfold in a more precise way.

The thematic clusters of *strong noise*, *violence*, and *stabbing* appear in the narrative sequences dealing with Sam and Hailey’s first meeting, their reunion, and their car journeys. These are the earliest sequences in the book, and they include the section in which the main monologue of one of the protagonists is printed in a larger font than that of the other character

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<sup>247</sup> The narrative sequences are as follows: 1. Sam and Hailey first meet (1–24), 2. Sam and Hailey are reunited (25–48), 3. First car journey (49–72), 4. Club party in New Orleans (73–96), 5. Hailey in the hospital (97–120), 6. Second car journey (121–144), 7. Stay at St. Louis and work at the bar(145–168), 8. St. Louis, bike rides to work, Sam and Hailey in bed (169–192), 9. Last days working at bar in St. Louis (193–216), 10. Third car journey, Sam and Hailey try to get married (217–240), 11. Fourth car journey and marriage (241–264), 12. Fifth car journey and fight against The Creep (265–288), 13. Car accident (289–312), 14. Death of Hailey/Sam (313–336), 15. Sam/Hailey’s lament for Hailey/Sam (337–360) (Portela 2012: 32).

placed upside down on the same page. As the story proceeds, this typographical difference slowly diminishes and the font size of the two sides of the page gradually become more similar. The graphical difference extremely obvious in the early pages of the text indicates the gulf which still exists between Sam and Hailey, separated as they are by their overblown, self-centred egos. The two characters are both sixteen, overwhelmed by arrogance, ignorance, and destructive instincts (S1: “I can walk away / from anything [...] / Everyone loves / the Dream but I kill it [...] I’ll devastate the World. / No big deal”). They are full of rebellion and toxic feelings towards the world, and the graphical layout simply externalises their own internal feelings about themselves. All of these cynical and gloom-ridden feelings are enveloped and supported by the violence, power, and stabbiness of words they utter, a sinister sound which echoes the rumbling noise of thunder, full of destructive, staggering energy. The text here is replete with explosive sounds which reveal the brutality and unpredictability of their emotions, but it is also the sound of darkness, filled with the creeping nature of danger and fear. Sam and Hailey are overcharged with anger, acute, sharp, and stingy, and this dark energy seeks a release by finding its voice in proper sounds which would divert this fiery, passionate energy harmlessly into the flesh of the word.

The *water-themed* cluster appears most frequently in the sequence of car journeys, with the sound of the text intensifying the experience of Sam and Hailey’s route from East to West following the course of the Mississippi River. The hushing and hissing sounds are deeply ingrained in the text, demonstrating in a swashing manner how geographical reality can be mirrored and echoed by the reality of language. The protagonists are keen drinkers, spending much of their time in bars, and since they are never direct when it comes to expressing their experience, the vigorous sounds of water are also used metaphorically and serve as a vivid accompaniment to their joyride through the heat of firewater.

The cluster of terms relating to *soft intimacy* and *sex* features in the narrative sequence detailing the protagonists’ first car journey during which the couple make love for the first time. The two teenage lovers can by no means be considered intellectuals discussing the world and scrutinize their feelings. They are passionate, animalistic, sensual, and sexual. These clusters then are not limited to a few random pages, but suffuse the entire text, appearing essentially omnipresent throughout almost all its narrative sequences, typographical subtleties, and even appearing in the rhythm and sound of language, intermixing and interacting with each other. As was noted above, intimate situations are never expressed explicitly but take the form of accumulated sounds which extend into a tactile layer when they are perceived as “soft” and also to a visual layer when described as “slow”, “small” or

“feminine”. The expression of sex while using strong rhythms, short and sharp sounds, goes far beyond the limits of conceptual words, and allows the reader to experience the synchronization of their bodies with the hypnotic tempo of the words in the text. The regular pattern activates a feeling of spontaneity, leaving the protagonists and the reader feeling vital, excited and fully involved in the present moment.

The sound cluster of *bulging beginning* features most prominently in the sequence in which Sam and Hailey are reunited, colouring this experience with the sounds of accumulated pressure which smashes through barriers, allowing the released energy to bulge into a new shape. Since the reader and the protagonists are held captive by the repeated rotation of the book, “this reading practice catapults them into the beginning of a new cycle in yet another “revolution” [...]. With this final turn, the book turns over to begin again, a renewal forecast in the burst of greenery”.<sup>248</sup>

The *circular movement* cluster covers Sam and Hailey’s reunion, their car journeys, and their period working at a bar, alleviating the repetitiveness of these situations by the actual physical feeling of circularity in the mouth and experiencing the dynamism of movement. Circularity, however, remains the central motif and its verbal expressions appear throughout the text, circularly connecting the first chapter (H34: “Because allways all around me / the World rebegins”) with the last one (S241: “What goes around, comes around”).

## **2.8 Visual / Auditory Perception as a Means of Pre-predicative Experience Before Proceeding to Linguistic Reasoning**

*Only Revolutions* gives the reader the opportunity to move beyond the circularity of the text and the circularity of language through its focus on sensual perception, with the highly musical narrative of the text freeing its auditory potential. This effect is heightened further through the work’s typographic symmetry and other graphical subtleties which also activate the processes of visual perception.

The physical possibilities of the book are not the only means by which *Only Revolutions* can dazzle us, since the text attempts to break out of its corporeal boundaries and invites us to step in or out of its world at any time. We can observe the narrative, participate in it and co-create it; we can also examine how our own bodies work when we read the text aloud. The sounds direct us towards our own articulators, the little organs which we usually neglect completely. We can pay attention to the way in which they move to modulate the

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<sup>248</sup> Hayles, “Mapping time, charting data,” 174, 176.

sounds they produce, gaining a direct tactile experience of the word along with the thing itself; for example, when the physical articulation of an expression imitates the behaviour of the object to which it refers, such as a circle. It is important to emphasize that the graphical layout of the text, the visual aspect of the expressions, and their sound are the first elements which the reader encounters before they proceed to the stratum of meaning units, represented objectivities, and the imagery of the text, inviting the reader to the pre-predicative experience before all else. Only after this initial experience can attention be devoted to the more complex layers which combine to create a multi-layered, harmoniously arranged organism. An examination of some aspects of the visual layer of the text which facilitate the pre-linguistic level of experience will allow us to develop the meaning in a more accurate and subtle way.

### ***2.8.1 The History Margin and the Search for Identity***

The purpose of this chapter is to explore whether and how the text offers an opportunity to rediscover the self and answers the question of the extent to which a subject can be said to experience agency (understood here as the potential to act freely with intent and awareness) over oneself. We turn again to phenomenological assumptions and take advantage of the visual layers of Danielewski's text which invite the reader to a pre-linguistic perception first.

The history margin is one of the many visual idiosyncrasies found in the text and is always placed in the innermost side of the page, creating a historic context. It is somewhat insignificant in its appearance, presented in a font size which is a lot smaller than the actual Sam or Hailey's monologues, thus granting the main text a sense of contemporaneity. Since it looks so negligible, visually distant, and not particularly enticing, it is easily overlooked by the reader. However, it is precisely this inconspicuousness which is very informative, as it might be perceived as having little impact on the thoughts of the protagonists themselves; the diminutive size of the margin text possibly reflects Sam and Hailey's inattention and disregard towards the past.

Nonetheless, the margin appears on every single page and is full of facts taken from world history; the sheer ubiquity of the text eventually encourages the reader to dive into its waters and explore what it has to offer. The more we examine the margin which encircles Sam and Hailey's monologues like an ocean from which they emerge, the more deeply it soaks through the text, allowing the reader to perceive the historical echoes which resonate in the protagonists' inner monologues. It is the reader who allows the collective dimension of the history margin to intertwine with the explicitly personal dimension of Sam and Hailey's memories, perceptions, and experiences. One example of this would be the frequent mention

of violence and death in the margin, a possible hint towards the death of the protagonists, contextualising the event and making it more accessible.

Our willingness (or otherwise) to pay sufficient attention to the history margin can alter our perception of the text; if we are sufficiently attentive and make the effort to scrutinize the chronomosaics, history can perhaps be understood as something which is deeply imprinted in the protagonists' personal lives, an aspect which affects their present experience and might shape their future deeds. But if we ignore the history margin, history becomes something which is barely noticed, thereby leaving the protagonists oblivious to the passage of time. The reader can choose to ignore the margin, thereby neglecting the past, or to entangle history with the narrative, loosening the grip on time. As Sam notes, “[f]uture breezes implore / me to stay / But I’m no future. I’m no past. / Only ever contemporary of this path” (358). Regardless of how oblivious the protagonists or the reader may be to the history margin, it does play a crucial role, since our present lives lived as future histories are inevitably intertwined with the past, an irrevocable link which imbues our acts with meaning. Danielewski himself invited his fans to send him suggestions for important historical events. Since his fanbase was mostly born after the Kennedy assassination, the starting point of Hailey’s narrative, Danielewski made them an active part of the text, manifesting their life-stories which resonate and echo with the life of the protagonists through their shared history. As Mark Hansen, an American literary scholar, explained, the Kennedy assassination can be perceived as “a privileged moment of collective-personal self-reference” which makes us aware of “living connection to the past – a sense that the past is not simply past, but remains part of our present.”<sup>249</sup> This observation is very phenomenological in fact, since no single moment of experience is ever truly isolated but is instead enveloped by the horizon of something which we have already experienced and something which is yet to come.<sup>250</sup>

Regardless of how hard the reader strives to preserve the porosity of time, both Hailey and Sam repeatedly and resistantly strive to keep themselves centred within the fractioned, intensified present. The following passage illustrates this situation very expressively: “[f]uture winds imploring / me to stay. / But I am no tomorrow. I am no yesterday, / Only ever contemporary of this way” (Hailey 358). The language they use is very frequently fragmented and reminiscent of Lacan’s perception of schizophrenia as a linguistic disorder in which the lack of a signifying chain of meaning renders the construction of sentences impossible. An individual who lacks the ability to link words together in order to form a coherent whole is

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<sup>249</sup> Hansen, “Print Interface to Time,” 185.

<sup>250</sup> Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of the Internal Time (1893–1917)*.

unable to unify the past, present, and future of their biographical experience and will be condemned to living out their life as a series of unrelated, albeit expressive present moments.<sup>251</sup> In his text *The Lost Dimension* (1991), the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio describes this experience of life as “computer time”, a constantly accelerating temporality which is continually constructing a permanent, intense, and vivid present. Similarly, Mark Davis, the British sociologist, observes that “[a]s consumers of new communications technology we now live a curiously “hurried life” in which the perception of time has become so acutely accelerated that we live in a series of fleeting, episodic moments” and our lived experience is “characterized by a series of seemingly disconnected intensities.”<sup>252</sup> Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this work to explore these insights more deeply, but if we accept the validity of these interpretations, we might note that the protagonists do not appear to have the experience of temporal continuity, since their lives are stripped of the past and lack any sense of a future. This state of affairs can result in the loss of personal identity, since, as Frederic Jameson observes, “our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the “I” and the “me” over time.”<sup>253</sup> Jameson strongly believes that we construct our personality on the basis of the perception of our own life history and that this is facilitated through our sense of the historical past.

Sam and Hailey then seem to follow the path of some postmodern protagonists whose hyperactive life is broken up into brief moments of intensity, flitting from one activity after another in an attempt to kill the fear of emptiness and boredom.<sup>254</sup> The two protagonists reveal an obsession with speed; they drive fast cars, constantly swapping vehicles, transforming the countryside in an accelerated mode, living in the present and ignoring the past. As Hailey laconically summarizes, there is “[n]o dillydallying for me. But / silly boy so impressed still gallops / after me [...] no one keeps up. / I’m that fast, man” (9). A few pages later she adds, “[p]edaltothePasPasMetal, gassing it, / hitting it hard [...] Accelerating more until I’m / hardly touching the tar” (49). The act of living in such an intensified present

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<sup>251</sup> As David Harvey explains, “the reduction of experience to “a series of pure and unrelated presents” further implies that the “experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid, and material”(1990: 54).

<sup>252</sup> Davis, “Hurried Lives,” 8–9.

<sup>253</sup> Postmodern theorists such as Frederic Jameson often observe that the perpetual, intensified present weakens the ability to maintain a connection between cause and effect. A person who is unable to arrange the past and the future in a coherent narrative may suffer from the loss of a stable sense of identity and also to the weakening of historical awareness. “our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the “I” and the “me” over time” (Jameson 1988: 8).

<sup>254</sup> In her article “Hyper and Deep Attention” the American postmodernist critic Katherine Hayles describes the generational shift from a deep attention style towards a hyper attention mode as a result of the increase in the variety of available media. She explains that deep attention “is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods, ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times. Hyper attention is characterized by switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom” (Hayles 2007: 187).

eliminates the possibility of a continuous narrative and subverts the ability to make sense of experiences. The protagonists fly through their lives in this accumulation-oriented hyper-present manner, with the reader too becoming driven by the same overwhelming feeling.

It is also possible to suggest, however, that the text invites the reader to escape the trap of the wild circularity of chasing various fragmentary perceptions through the text, and switch from an accumulation-oriented hyper presence to a focus-oriented (phenomenological) deep presence. In our search for a way out, we may turn to the British analytic philosopher Galen Strawson who contradicts Jameson's view and calls into question the widespread opinion that "human beings are naturally narrative and [...] that narrativity is crucial to a good life"<sup>255</sup> by juxtaposing the impression of diachronic continuity with episodic self-experience, suggesting that episodic individuals do not perceive their lives in narrative terms.<sup>256</sup> While he admits that episodic life might differ from diachronic life in its emotional or ethical form, he stresses that it is by no means less humane or vibrant. He also contradicts the opinion that the episodic person is "less informed by or responsible to the past" and argues that the past is active in the present without necessarily being active *as* the past.<sup>257</sup> In his opinion, the episodic person has absolutely no sense of their life as a narrative with or without form, nor are they particularly interested in their own past. The past is manifested by shaping the mode of exposure in the present, but "I have no significant sense that I [...] was there in the further past."<sup>258</sup> Strawson emphasises this once again by stating that what truly matters is how our present state has been formed by our past. "Self-understanding does not have to take a narrative form" because narration based on memories is nothing more than a construction or even a fabrication-based process supported by our "coherence-seeking, unity-seeking, pattern-seeking [...] form-finding tendency"; "if one is narrative, one will also have a tendency to engage in invention [...], falsification [...], revisionism" since our memory "deletes, abridges, edits".<sup>259</sup> This assertion clearly suggests that we cannot trust the way we reformulate our identity from the

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<sup>255</sup> Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 429.

<sup>256</sup> "One does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (2004: 430).

<sup>257</sup> Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 432.

<sup>258</sup> Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 433.

"For the memories themselves are not important. Only when they have changed into our very blood, into glance and gesture, and are nameless, no longer to be distinguished from ourselves" (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose*, 1995).

<sup>259</sup> Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 448, 441, 443.



depths of our past.<sup>260</sup> He concludes by saying that “[d]iachronicity is not a necessary condition of a properly moral existence, nor of a proper sense of responsibility.”<sup>261</sup>

Strawson’s views are certainly thought-provoking and smash the frequently held view that self-identity is inherently narrative and that we need a coherent life history to make sense of our lives. Nonetheless, he is unable to offer any suggestions for non-narrative episodic individuals who no longer feel actively involved in the past and who are not particularly absorbed by this bygone time either. One way or another, Sam and Hailey become enveloped by the seemingly insignificant historical margin; while it carries an imprint in their lives, they barely notice for it as they whizz through their lives, fast, free, and easy. Nonetheless, they themselves are episodic heroes who refuse to trudge aimlessly through the disconnected fragments of their adventures, because they have passion, they have the potential to exploit and be fascinated by the current moment and to use it to the full. As we shall see, their passion for the objects or the situation, this intense agentic physical awareness, can serve as the key to their own self-discovery.

When trying to find an answer to the question of how to relocate our lost sense of identity, it might be useful to turn again to phenomenology and its key notion of intentionality.<sup>262</sup> Intentionality directs us towards the possibilities which can only be carried into effect through the interaction of a person with an object or any outer situation or event. The American phenomenologist Robert Sokolowski develops Husserl’s findings and suggests that “identity and intelligibility are available in things, and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given.”<sup>263</sup> He continues by saying that it is we ourselves who possess the potential to disclose these qualities and by doing so we are finally able to identify or recognize ourselves. As he notes, “[p]henomenology is precisely this sort of understanding: *phenomenology is reason’s self-discovery in the presence of intelligible objects*”.<sup>264</sup> We do not have to take on the role of storyteller and relate the story of our lives in order to find ourselves; in fact, this ability lies in an individual’s capacity to make things emerge from the uncertain fog of probabilities while being able to capture the typical aspects that the object offers in their own unique manner. An individual gains a sense of their own identity every time they manage to articulate what they have perceived and remembered.

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<sup>260</sup> “The narrative tendency to look for story or narrative coherence in one’s life is [...] a gross hindrance to self-understanding” when “we risk moving away from accurate self-understanding, from the truth of your being” (2004: 447).

<sup>261</sup> Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” 450.

<sup>262</sup> “The directedness of consciousness toward an object; an act of consciousness is a consciousness *of* something, and in that sense it is intentional” (David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl*, London & New York: Routledge, 2007, 435).

<sup>263</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 4.

Sokolowski does not neglect the fact that it is our felt corporeality (and mobility) which enables an individual to identify themselves as being “present” and to perform all of the intentionalities directed towards the world.<sup>265</sup> Provided that this self-identification is brought about by physical awareness, it is the very sounds that we create, the way in which we move, touch and arrange the objects around us which make us feel “I exist this way”, if performed attentively.

As a summary of the above observations, we might wish to suggest that the situations in the narrative and the language of *Only Revolutions* have the capacity to accelerate the protagonists, leaving them lost among fleeting, disconnected moments. However, there is another interpretation which would view the text as something which works counter to the velocity of the protagonists’ lives, attempting to slow them down. While the high-speed adventures are narrated in language which is highly elliptical and syntactically paratactical, reflecting the absence of single focus, this mental chaos is constantly balanced by the simplicity and stability of the flesh – by the fullness of the physical presence of words through their appearance, size, rhythm, consonance, and assonance. Sam and Hailey are great language enthusiasts, endlessly enthralled by the way they use and articulate words. There is a palpable sense of pleasure in how they stretch out expressive interjections to their breaking point and cry them out, as both of them frequently do (weeeeeee, whoooooeeeee, screeaaaaams, booooooombblastandruin; 19, 27, 33, 35, 78, 79). They are mesmerized by the power of rhythm when strengthened by alliteration and rhyme (“throws a tantrum temper pounding manure”; 16)) during which they might feel a wonderful thrill in the loss of control. There is something fascinating about unashamedly disclosing inner emotions through words which resemble a roaring energy of thunder, or when using expressions of soothing sounds to show softness, delicacy, and care. Sound here is not only used to echo mental states or objects but also serves as a graphical representation of words, drawing forth the contours of emotion ready for actualization. Danielewski uses different typographic styles and the words are often capitalized, highlighted, italicized and written in different sizes and colours.

Sam and Hailey use somatic energy through auditory, visual, and tactual representation to disclose the endless range of facets whereby an emotion or a situation can be revealed. Through an abundance of synonyms and neologisms, varied graphical inventions, they try playfully yet insistently to capture the most typical aspects of their feelings or objects

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<sup>265</sup>Sokolowski makes an interesting point when stating that “the self that comes to light in all these differences and activities is not a punctual thing, not an always completed identity, but one that is there only within a rich manifold of appearances and conduct. There is an identity of the self, but it is achieved precisely through decentering” (2000: 128).

which, by being partially hidden and evasive, will always keep them engaged. Every single word, in essence the speaking word, is the key to their recognition and self-identification, suggesting the possibility of freeing the shackles of the accumulation-oriented, fragmented present at any time they wish. The present does not have to be negated or contradicted, but simply changed into the other mode, into focus-oriented perception, and lived in all its fullness through the sound layer of language. The freedom to oscillate between one mode and the other, and fully experience both manners, remains forever open to us. Sam and Hailey (and the reader) are free to carry on down their road along which they can gather the scattered fragments of their personalities through their passion, enthusiasm, and joy. This is intrinsically linked with their sheer physicality, the nature of which is to turn to and attune to the world, thereby allowing them to re-discover and re-constitute their own sense of identity.

### ***2.8.2 Sexuality Directing the Protagonists towards the Centre as Union***

“In kissing, do you render or receive?”

(Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 1602)

Sexuality is prevalent throughout *Only Revolutions* not only at the semantic level in terms of metaphors referring to flora and fauna, but also in a physical sense in the form of significant sounds. Sex is also depicted typographically as a circle around two vertical lines and as a circle containing two smaller circles with page numbers inside, printed on every page, with these structures symbolizing the union of the two protagonists. The female and male genitals are visually represented by specific arrangements of words (for example, S 177 and H 184). Sexuality then is a strong element in the text which connects both protagonists and culminates at the very centre of the book where all of the differences are harmonized and fused into one – the font sizes of the two monologues become equal and the content of the two monologues mirror each other.

The centre of the book (180–181) is the physical representation of the union between the two protagonists who set out on their circular journey as two “I”s separated by their arrogance, rebellion, and hatred towards the world. Visually, the initial separation is illustrated by the font size, with the monologue of one of the protagonists appearing in a larger font than the monologue of the other on the opposite side of the page. As the narrative approaches the middle of the book, the two font sizes gradually become more equal in size. At the middle of the book, the two monologues even share the same length; Sam and Hailey’s

monologues both contain 180 words per page, a number which represents half of the circle, and the history margin also features 180 words, with the two sections combining to form a symbolic full circle. This feature indicates that the sense of re-union reaches far beyond the individual level of Sam and Hailey (and perhaps the reader too), encompassing a far wider societal or global dimension.

The re-union starts, however, in our own individual body, when our look “envelopes, palpates, espouses the visible things”.<sup>266</sup> As Merleau-Ponty continues, “these two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange”.<sup>267</sup> This would indicate that there is no room for solitude, scattered fragments or solipsism once we start living consciously through our corporeality; our inherent physicality naturally reaches out for and resonates with the other. At the beginning of the re-unification process, Sam and Hailey exist as two separated egos who are experiencing the split of perception into “seeing” and “being seen”, the one who touches and the other who is touched. Both still remain distant from each other (a gap which is highlighted by the different font size and the varying narratives of the same story), since they are separated “by the thickness of the look and of the body”.<sup>268</sup> Despite their initial disconnection, neither Sam nor Hailey is ever foreign to the other; Sam perceives Hailey and through his own existence he participates in Hailey’s perception of Sam.

It is through the process of maturation and, more obviously, through their deeply intimate sexual connection that “the thickness of the look and of the body” ceases to act as a barrier which divides; corporality “is not an obstacle between them”, and it slowly becomes “their means of communication”.<sup>269</sup> During this maturing procedure, it is crucial that the individual fully recognizes, accepts, and absorbs the landscape of another person. Merleau-Ponty discusses this issue in a metaphorical approach, querying whether his left hand can touch the right while being touched at the same time; “why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own?”<sup>270</sup> Once we become aware of the possibility of reversion, of giving back, we will never again be locked in our private world surrounded by other separated little worlds but will instead feel enveloped by them, entangled in them, and safer with them.<sup>271</sup> Danielewski

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<sup>266</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

<sup>267</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

<sup>268</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

<sup>269</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

<sup>270</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 141.

<sup>271</sup> Merleau-Ponty complements his explanation of chiasm by adding that “this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close bound system that I count on” (1964/1968: 146).

depicts the magical pact between Sam and Hailey's landscapes in the form of their eyes, each of which carries the imprint of the other. As Pöhlmann summarizes,

“[b]oth Sam and Hailey already carry traces of each other within them, as their respective eye colour indicate – “Gold eyes with flecks of Green” (S 7) and “Green eyes with flecks of Gold” (H 7) – and their individuality is always already informed by the other individual; both selves are always connected to their respective others. The individual in *Only Revolutions* is always already multiple and universal in true Whitmanian fashion.”<sup>272</sup>

The text reminds us, nevertheless, that however much this reversibility or union underlies the maturation process, it will never be fully accomplished and “the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization.”<sup>273</sup> This hiatus is emphasized by Alison Gibbons who notes that “Sam is continuously with Hailey, Hailey continuously with Sam, and yet they are somehow always separated. This separation takes the form of the impossibility of merging their historical timelines. Furthermore, they are also physically divided through the space of the book.”<sup>274</sup> Portela also supports this view, seeing the odyssey of the two protagonists as “a journey of everlasting, ageless wanderers reflecting the destiny of each of us since the beginning of time with the (im)possibility of union, and the possibility and impossibility of identity between signifier and signified.”<sup>275</sup> Merleau-Ponty offers an apt conclusion to these reflections when describing the (im)possibility of chiasm: “this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching [...] is not an ontological void, a non-being; it is spanned by to the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another.”<sup>276</sup> As we can never fully experience the complete overlap of our touching and touched hand, the landscapes of Sam and Hailey slip away from each other's grasp at the precise moment when they are about to connect.

In the beginning there is Sam and Hailey; the two protagonists appear suddenly and unexpectedly from the book as a capital S and a capital H, with each monopolising their respective front pages. “Haloes” is the first word of Sam's narrative, the circle of light which surrounds the heads of Christ and the Saints, while Hailey's narrative opens with the word “Samsara”, a term from Indian philosophy which means “the endless cycle of death and

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<sup>272</sup> Pöhlmann, “The Democracy of Two,” 13.

<sup>273</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147.

<sup>274</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 173.

<sup>275</sup> Portela, “The Book as Computer,” 34.

<sup>276</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 148.

rebirth to which life in the material world is bound.”<sup>277</sup> Duly encircled by the holy light of haloes, the innocence of undifferentiated feeling, the two protagonists invade life as overblown, noisy individuals and begin their cycle towards the kindness of communion. Their circular path is not their individual experience and individual time, but is clearly derived from the collective experience of all humankind, a dual “mixture of sense and non-sense, good and evil, freedom and repression, the days of life and death” which is physically inscribed in the materiality of the text’s landscape and of the text itself.<sup>278</sup>

The last chapter of the narrative is transformed into the first and the cycle starts over again, keeping us spinning in *Only Revolutions*. There is something, however, which time and again drives us to force a way through “only” revolutions, always something which gives us pause for thought. This might occur through “this primordial meeting of brute being and wild-flowering mind”, since they are “equally the source of that thought in act which sometimes lets us break the rhythmic monotony of our “mortal circle” and move forward into truth.”<sup>279</sup> As our analysis has revealed, this “magical” moment can be manifested primarily through the power of sound.

## **2.9 Concluding Remarks: Singing Out the World: The Role of Sound in *Only Revolutions***

The philosopher, concerned with comprehensiveness, must eventually call for attention to the *word as soundful*. On the other side, the sciences that attend to the soundful, from phonetics to acoustics, do so as if the sound were bare and empty of significance in a physics of the soundful. And the philosopher, concerned with the roots of reflection in human experience, must eventually also listen to the *sounds as meaningful*.

(Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 1976)

When addressing the issue of active co-creation between author and reader, Ingarden explains that each object, person, or event in a work of art is schematized, inevitably containing spots of indeterminacy since it can never be presented in a fully determinate manner (in contrast to

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<sup>277</sup>This definition is provided by OED: <https://www.oed.com>.

<sup>278</sup> This is a quote by Richard McLeary, which he used in his Introduction in Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. USA: Northwestern University Press, 1960/1964.

<sup>279</sup> This is a quote by Richard McLeary, which he used in his Introduction in Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Signs*. USA: Northwestern University Press, 1960/1964.

the case of real objects which can be determined in their full extent). It is thus up to the reader to add an extra meaning to a work of art by applying their own creativity and imagination. This act of complementing the spots of indeterminacy is called concretization.<sup>280</sup> Although Ingarden argues that the stratum of represented objectivities is the most suitable stratum for concretization, the sound stratum appears to be a more logical object of study in the case of Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*, a more effective means of emphasizing its importance and exploring its potential.

The aim of this analysis then was to demonstrate that the sound stratum is no less important than the other strata and that it plays a significant role in enhancing and amplifying their effect. The American philosopher Robert Luzecky examined Ingarden's analyses of the sound-synchronized filmic work of art and reached a similar conclusion:

"Ingarden is too quick with his suggestion that the phonetic elements of sound-synchronized films only enjoy a diminished status in relation to the presentation of visible aspects. I claim that—in concretized sound-synchronized filmic works—the phonetic elements should be granted a status that is on par that associated with the presentation of objects by visual (i.e., photographic) means."<sup>281</sup>

Luzecky supports his claim by suggesting that the phonetic content or sound has a "magical capacity to transfix us – allowing us to participate with the *habitus* of its world."<sup>282</sup> While he calls for a revision of Ingarden's assertion that the phonetic stratum does not have ontological primacy in cinema, it is regrettable that he does not go on to explore the role which sound plays in cinematic works of art. In the case of the novel *Only Revolutions*, the phonetic (phonosemantic) analysis carried out in this thesis has outlined the major role which functions of sound play in this remarkable text, and it is even possible to justify assigning a far higher level of importance to the auditory level in comparison with the other strata.

To recapitulate the findings of the previous exploration it might be proposed that sound plays a crucial role in *Only Revolutions* in a number of ways.

a) It structures and groups the reality of the text into patterns, thereby serving as a remarkable organizer of meaning in the labyrinth of fragments. It takes control of the fragmentary text and thoughts, giving them a framework of boundaries and shape; it guides

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<sup>280</sup> "In concretization the peculiar co-creative activity of the reader comes into play. On his own initiative and with his own imagination he "fills out" various places of indeterminacy with elements chosen from among many possible or permissible elements" (Ingarden 1937/1971: 53).

<sup>281</sup> Luzecky, "Roman Ingarden's concept of the filmic work of art," 686.

<sup>282</sup> Luzecky, "Roman Ingarden's concept of the filmic work of art," 687.

the reader towards a more understandable apprehension of the text and facilitates the concretization of objects and situations.<sup>283</sup>

b) Moreover, it is a powerful tool for concretizing spots of indeterminacy, encouraging the reader to think not only about the objects but to experience the represented world fully, vividly, carnally.<sup>284</sup> The inexhaustible multiplicities (or adumbrations) of situations and objects coloured by the sensuous quality of the protagonists and readers are mirrored by the prosodic elements of words and their synonyms (rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance) and the composition and arrangement of phonemes. They expand the inner structure of the intended object, every time in a slightly different manner; the sound helps to create a network of aspects which define the intended object, thereby contributing to the emergence of a concise and meaningful whole.

c) The auditory properties of expressions also have the potential to correct and complement a linguistic concept through audible and tactile experience.

d) Additionally, sound opens the reader to the experience of deep attention and self-awareness, allowing them to focus on and live through every single word and its phonemes. Since the represented objects and situations in Danielewski's text show a high degree of indeterminacy, this increases the focus of the reader and their engagement in concretizing them; the more self-engaged the reader is, the more they can merge with the represented objectivities, closing the gap between the interior and exterior worlds.

e) Since it emerges from physical activity, sound gives a sense of agency or action; it directs the reader toward specific aspects of a situation, enabling them to experience the event or even the expression itself lively and intensely through the physical act of pronunciation (or articulation) by which they can come into contact with a living word. The living word, as Ingarden and also Merleau-Ponty claim, has the potential to unify the object with the reader who invests their inner state, somatic energy or motor activity into the words themselves.

f) In addition to the corresponding phonosemantic conclusions, phenomenological (Ingarden, Merleau-Ponty) insights are very much in agreement with the view that sound has the potential to bear meaning. Although Ingarden emphasizes that the creation of meaning is a polyphony of diverse elements, he also admits that "[e]very word meaning, taken in isolation, is a self-enclosed unit of meaning."<sup>285</sup> If a single expression has the potential to carry the

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<sup>283</sup> The idea of sound as an element which makes sense of the world is examined by Elliott who states that it helps the reader to "make sense of nonsense writers" (R. Elliott 2018: 13).

<sup>284</sup> Spots or places of indeterminacy are the terms used by Ingarden in *The Literary Work of Art* to define the under-specification of represented objects as opposed to the over-determinacy of reality. The task of the reader is to reconstruct or concretize the gaps in the represented world in a creative manner.

<sup>285</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, 101.



entire weight of the meaning, the phonic material, essentially the coat in which the word is dressed, will be able to express emotional or other qualities of the speaker at a micro-level and reflect the inner structure of the external object in a simple manner. Phenomenology works with the concept of the intentionality of human consciousness which is always directed towards and nourished by the external world. Meaning cannot then be considered as the product of an isolated chattering mind but rather the product of the interconnection between the intentional act of consciousness and the intentional object. Equally, language itself, whether a word or even a single phoneme, is an intrinsic part of inter-subjective reality.

g) Merleau-Ponty believed that a speaking word is a genuine gesture which “brings the meaning into being or makes it effective, and does not merely translate it”, and it is therefore possible to argue that sound has the potential to convert a spoken word into a speaking word, possessing the capacity to project out from the concept and grasp us tightly, to tear us out of our mechanical, automatic existence.<sup>286</sup> The acoustic quality of the word can be a remarkable source of joy and pleasure which leaves the reader captivated by the sheer pleasure of its musicality and trance-like capacity.

h) Sound possesses immense potential as a means of connection and communication; when we read the words out loud, we can free ourselves from the distanced position as a mere reader and by using our bodies as a mediator, we can be united in a performative manner with the protagonists of the text and the described objects. This is aptly expressed in the observation made by the British sound, visual, and performance poet Bob Cobbing:

“[c]ommunication is primarily a muscular activity. It is potentially stronger than everyday speech, richer than those monotonous seeming printed words on the page [...]. Say “soma haoma” [...]. Dull. Say it dwelling on the quality of the sounds. Better. Let it say itself through you. Let it sing itself through you. The vowels have their pitch, the phrase has potential rhythms. You do it with the whole of you, muscular movement, voice, lungs, limbs. Poetry is a physical thing. The body is liberated. Bodies join in song and movement. A ritual ensues.”<sup>287</sup>

The automatic reception of the text can thus be elevated into a highly captivating, intensifying experience on every occasion that the reader can sense the enormous, thrilling quality of the phonemes, when they are willing to devote all the strength of their body to experience the pronunciation to its fullest extent.

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<sup>286</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 213.

<sup>287</sup> Cobbing, “Some Statements on Sound Poetry,” 40.

i) Finally, the very sound of a word can transport its user into the pre-conceptual realm in which signification plays no role, granting the reader the chance to re-experience the acts and associated feelings that they had once undergone while physically present in the world. Sound then overcomes the dichotomy between language and the extra-linguistic world to which language refers, since it represents the physical core in which the language is lodged and by which it can touch and be touched by external reality; language thus becomes a part of stimulus-response chain.<sup>288</sup>

The analysis of the *Only Revolutions* provided above has aimed to demonstrate that the text, when approached from the perspective of phonosemantics and phenomenology, can be viewed and interpreted not in the traditional understanding of being elusive, decentred, locked in its own system of signs and symbols, but rather as a work of art with the potential to offer a route towards a more stable level of subjectivity and out of the purely semantic grip of language. It offers an alternative to the postmodern *dis-ease*, while simultaneously granting us a feeling of ease and pleasure in the world perceived directly with our bodies. It leads the reader out of fragments into the object and the manifold ways in which it can manifest itself, disclosing in a fascinating manner its different aspects and modes, and revealing itself as a meaningful whole. The perspective of phenomenology and its focus on direct bodily experientiality clearly show that the human in the text and the reader possess the means of discovering their potential as agentic, communal personalities. While being (self)attentive and absorbed by the moment, while finding the passion and the joyful ability to constitute a meaningful whole out of any possible fragments, we are freed from the need to follow the imposed subjectivity determined by socio-cultural constraints and offered the unique opportunity to rediscover a more authentic, spontaneous, and sincere dimension of the self.

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<sup>288</sup> Julia Kristeva is in agreement with numerous anthropologists when she claims that “[w]hile the practice of language really presupposes for primitive man a distance with respect to things, language is not conceived of as a mental elsewhere, or as an abstract thought process. It participates as a cosmic element of the body and nature, and is joined with the motor force of the body and nature” (Kristeva 1969/1989: 50). Similarly, Janis B. Nuckolls, an American anthropological linguist, observes that some native American tribes such as the Navajo view linguistic sound as something which reflects the forces of life, connecting speech, breath and movement. In the language of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea there is a connection between sound words and place, for example, water. (Nuckolls 1999: 227)

### 3 *Becoming Animal* (2010) by David Abram: Nature as Becoming is Different from Nature as an Object

One image against another  
can create something more subtle than thought.

(Ian Finlay, *Letters to Ernst Jandl*, 1994)

Although this thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach in its detailed analysis of two literary works, it is not intended to be a typical comparative study. Instead, the analysis is intended to demonstrate how the two texts complement each other in their efforts to portray the human condition in the post-postmodern era. The selected modes of interpretation shift the focus from the aesthetics of the postmodern to the realm of physicality, to the concept of our bodies as “the fabric into which all objects are woven”, an essential tool of our expression, comprehension, and integrity.<sup>289</sup> While the exploration of Danielewski’s text focuses on the aspect of sound in language, the main point of interest in *Becoming Animal* is metaphor. Both approaches play the same role of uniting the abstract with the physical – connecting language with the world and the mind with the body.

Before proceeding in our analysis to explore the use of metaphor in Abram’s text, it is necessary to outline the key aspects of the conceptual metaphor theory.

#### 3.1 Metaphor as a Gift to Language: Theoretical Background

Metaphor is a fundamental principle of our way of thinking and of our relationship to reality, structuring our knowledge and experience 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 its “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.”<sup>290</sup> Arendt’s view had far more in common with the cognitive approach than with the linguistic theories which consider metaphor to be merely a means of replacing regular designations with less typical ones, a concept to which we will return later. The use of metaphor to express imaginative thinking is a pervasive phenomenon which is widely applied across a number of

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<sup>289</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 273.

<sup>290</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 123.

literary and other artistic genres to evoke aesthetic effect but which can also be found in all forms of language across various discourses. The exploration of metaphor in *Becoming Animal* by David Abram serves as an essential interpretational tool which has been chosen in order to offer an alternative approach to the issue of semiotic and textual seclusion. In contrast to the petrifying nature of the sign which is only capable of covering a narrow section of the signified, metaphor softens its barriers by allowing us to enter the realm of a much broader pre-articulated experience and live it before we solidify its aspects by verbal means.

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

The theory of conceptual metaphor has been greatly developed since Johnson and Lakoff's original studies, with the American psycholinguist Raymond W. Gibbs (2008) or the Hungarian cognitive linguist Zoltán Kövecses (2002/2010) making significant contributions to the field among others. The conceptual metaphor is defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a structure which determines one domain of experience (typically abstract) by means of another (typically physical, concrete). Kövecses complements this by stating that it is "a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience": the target domain (more abstract, less tangible or accessible) and the source domain (physical, more tangible).

<sup>291</sup> In order to make the world meaningful through metaphor, we conceptualize cognitively more difficult domains with reference to easier concrete domains. In contrast, our analysis will demonstrate that physical entities adopting the position of target domain concepts can be metaphorically conceptualized in order to bring about a novel understanding of their aspects. It is nonetheless important to emphasize that the process of mapping is not a random, fragmentary act but a highly organized mental work in which the source domain maps a coherent structuring of experience onto the target which is then constituted equally as an

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<sup>291</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 2, 4.

organized domain.<sup>292</sup> The correspondences of the source domain constitute a specific conception of the target domain relative to the source. The pairing of a particular source domain with a target domain is grounded in similarity or a correlation in experience (for example, the sensorimotor experiences which form the basis for primary metaphors). The choice of source domain is determined by the human factor which reflects “non-objective, non-literal, and pre-existing similarities between a source and a target domain”. In other words, a source is usually more physical, for example, “motion”, while a target is more abstract, for example, “time”; the resulting conceptual metaphor is TIME IS MOTION in which “time” represents the target domain and “motion” serves as the source domain.<sup>293</sup> A considerable number of conceptual metaphors derive from “image schemata” which are “abstract, pre-conceptual structures that emerge from our recurrent experiences of the world.”<sup>294</sup> These structures make us aware of the fact that the imaginative structures of comprehension originate in our body and its interaction with an environment. Our understanding, as Johnson emphasises, “involves many pre-conceptual and non-propositional structures of experience (such as image schemata) that can be metaphorically projected and propositionally elaborated to constitute our network of meanings.”<sup>295</sup> Embodied metaphorical projections, therefore, serve as a significant antidote to postmodern pluralistic inter-mind realities and the relativization of knowledge and understanding. Moreover, as an extension of our body, they also possess the capacity to open up and connect a sign system or a text to the natural world.

The theory of conceptual metaphor (CMT) differentiates between conceptual metaphors which are considered to be conceptual patterns (for example, EMOTIONS ARE FORCES) and linguistic metaphors, specific metaphorical expressions based on more general conceptual metaphors (for example, *She swept me off my feet*). In CMT discourse, conceptual metaphors are written in upper case to indicate that “the particular wording does not occur in language as such, but it underlies conceptually all the metaphorical expressions listed underneath it.”<sup>296</sup>

Recent developments in CMT (Cameron 2003; Gibbs and Cameron 2008; Kövecses 2010) accentuate not only the importance of embodiment and cultural specificities which

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<sup>292</sup> The term “mapping” is explained in CMT “as a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target” (Kövecses 2010: 7).

<sup>293</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 88.

<sup>294</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 9.

<sup>295</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xvi.

<sup>296</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 4.

affect the emergence of metaphors but also a wide range of diverging contextual factors. Studies by Kövecses (2015, 2020) have emphasised the importance of context, with the Hungarian theorist arguing that metaphorical concepts do not rely solely on the symbolic representational system existing in long-term memory but are in fact largely dependent on the situational and linguistic context. In the same manner also phenomenology supports this claim by stressing the fact that the creation of the conceptual meaning is always a result of the way in which we harmonize with the world, taking into account gestural meaning and the carnal dimension of the outside world. Similarly, it is possible to suggest that the external context of the intimate relation with Nature and the aspect of reversibility in Abram's text play a crucial role in shaping his metaphorical creativity.

### ***Lakoff and Turner on Literal Meaning Theory***

In this subchapter we will provide an outline of the traditional understandings of metaphor discussed and ultimately challenged by Lakoff and the cognitive linguist Mark Turner (1989).

Lakoff and Turner describe five misconceptions of traditional approaches to metaphor, but since most of these lie outside the scope of this work, we will address only the most serious fallacy, the concept of literal meaning. Literal Meaning Theory is based on semantic autonomy, the idea that an expression (or concept) is meaningful in and of itself and that it does not originate from any conceptual relationships being outside logic (for example, conversational principles, metaphor or metonymy). In other words, the approach posits that all conventional language is essentially semantically autonomous or literal, serving as tools for constructing a basis for metaphor which is, nevertheless, located outside of it.<sup>297</sup> The idea of non-conceptual autonomy develops this further by arguing that the meaning of expressions depends entirely on the direct relation between a word and the world, a relationship which exists without the involvement of human cognition. The major misconception of the objectivist claim concerns its perceived inability to recognize that “truth and falsity are relative to conceptual frameworks” as products of the human mind.<sup>298</sup> Among the most prominent proponents of literal meaning theory are the American linguist Jerrold Saddock (1979/1993), whose article “Figurative Speech and Linguistics” advocated all the key ideas of the theory as explained above, and the American psychologist David Rumelhart who maintains that metaphor is a malformation of the literal (1979/1993). A more pragmatic

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<sup>297</sup> The term “literal” is frequently mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson, but it has a different meaning than the understanding found in Literal Meaning Theory. It is instead used as a source domain of a metaphor or to contrast the expressions “exaggerated”, “ironic”, or “understated” (1989: 119).

<sup>298</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 118.

approach to the theory was offered by the British philosopher of language Paul Grice (*Logic and Conversation*, 1967) who argued that language semantics could be navigated by formal logic if it also integrated a theory of conversational principles. As metaphor is not part of formal logic, it should be involved in conversational principles working with literal meanings. Donald Davidson, the American analytical philosopher, made an important contribution to the theory through his assertion that “metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.”<sup>299</sup>

Adhering to their initial hypothesis, however, Lakoff and Turner observed that semantically autonomous concepts are not independent from the workings of our mind; they cannot be considered to reflect mind-free objective reality since they are “grounded in the habitual and routine bodily and social patterns we experience, and in what we learn of the experience of others.”<sup>300</sup> Moreover, both authors suggested that literal meaning theory is focused exclusively on language rather than concepts, while metaphor (as an essential part of our conceptual frameworks) is always conceptual, based on mappings from one (physical) domain to another (abstract) domain. They develop their argument by stating that some features of a concept (for example, that of a dog) are comprehended by means of metaphor (for example, a dog’s loyalty), but some other features of this concept are obviously comprehended without reference to a diverse conceptual domain (say, for example, dog’s ears). This may lead to the conclusion that a concept with a complex internal structure can be understood both literally *and also* figuratively while remaining grounded in non-metaphorical comprehension. In other words, the (physical) source domain can be characterized by non-objective concepts which are semantically autonomous. In broader terms, they argue that only certain concepts are semantically autonomous and that conventional language, including our conceptual system, is essentially metaphoric. When applying the theory of conceptual metaphor, we can identify a conceptual unity among a number of linguistic expressions which belong to one conceptual metaphor; however, according to a literal reading they would be seen as being disparate, lacking any internal relation.

The postulates of the literal meaning theory have significant consequences, particularly the claim that a statement is meaningful only if it expresses true or false propositions reflecting mind-free reality. This implies that metaphor can only be meaningful if it is paraphrased into literal language. The use of literal paraphrase, however, flattens the

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<sup>299</sup> Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” 32.

<sup>300</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 113.

semantic depth of metaphor to a significant degree, since it strips the metaphor of its conceptualizing and inferential ability. Literal expression has the capacity to voice the “visible” alone, wholly neglecting the metaphoric dimension of the “invisible”. Another relatively serious misunderstanding of the potential of conceptual metaphor is the assertion that it simply directs our attention to pre-existing similarities between two non-metaphoric concepts. As we know, however, conceptual metaphor has the capacity to *constitute* the similarity and introduce structures and features which are not ingrained in the target domain. Literal meaning theory also tends to differentiate between reason and imagination, excluding metaphor from the realm of reason on the basis that it can be considered irrational and fanciful. Lakoff and Turner commented on this disparagement by saying that “if we view metaphor as part of the faculty of the imagination, then reason is mostly if not entirely imaginative in character.”<sup>301</sup> They support this observation by stating that the imaginative capacity of human thought, which is also embodied, can take the mind beyond the realm of what we are able to feel or see. Additional criticisms of literal meaning theory address the assertion that metaphor is not a “proper” means of expression, since it lacks a conceptual role and is therefore incapable of being used in reasoning and understanding; since it deviates from regular conventional usage, it is entirely deviant. Metaphor serves as emergency, because we automatically seek out the literal meaning of the sentence first.

Lakoff and Turner also critique literal meaning theory by referring to their extensive empirical study of both common and poetic language, demonstrating that metaphor is, in any event, a form of conceptual mapping which underlies natural, day-to-day language in much the same way as poetic language does. Lakoff and Turner are attempting here to reveal all of the conceptual work which lies beneath the language by means of metaphor.

### ***Criticisms of CMT***

Although a more extensive examination of the critical approach to CMT lies beyond the scope of this thesis, it would nonetheless be useful to offer a brief outline of the main issues which have been raised in a challenge to some aspects of the theory and responses to these offered by proponents of the idea that metaphor reflects our way of comprehending the world not as fragments or disconnected cognitive spaces but as an interconnected whole. Over the past thirty years, conceptual metaphor theory has faced a wide range of criticism, including, for example, the assertion that the concept of domains is not particularly well-defined. This is a somewhat challenging point, but cognitive linguists, such as Kövecses, have attempted to

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<sup>301</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 124.



elaborate further, working with other conceptions which are based on the idea of a coherent arrangement of our experience, such as image schema, frame, domain, and mental space.<sup>302</sup> By far the strongest criticism relates to the methodology of CMT, namely the process for identifying metaphors in discourse or the need to include real, natural contexts, since these factors can exert a considerable influence on the understanding and creation of metaphors (Leezenberg 2001; Deignan 2005, 2010; Pragglejaz Group 2007). In his response to this point, Kövecses rejects the opinion that CMT should be used only “to collect metaphorical expressions, lay out the mappings that constitute those conceptual metaphors, and see how the particular conceptual metaphors form larger systematic groups.”<sup>303</sup> In his view, the greater task is to examine the discursive, social, pragmatic and syntactic “behaviour and function of the metaphors in real data.”<sup>304</sup> In his latest work (2005, 2015, 2020), he follows precisely this approach, using different kinds of socio-cultural contexts and examining how they affect metaphor creation and comprehension, and this line has also been adopted by other scholars in the field (Geeraerts and Grondelaers 1995; Goatly 1997; Low 2010).

### **3.2 Abram in a More-Than-Human-World: A Broader Context**

David Abram is an American cultural ecologist and philosopher whose work brings an element of ecological thinking to phenomenology. His thinking echoes that of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson whose essay *The Over-Soul* introduces the concept of mankind possessing within ourselves “the soul of the whole; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.”<sup>305</sup> By unifying the act of seeing and the object seen, viewing the subject and object as one, Emerson’s thinking here is reminiscent of that of Merleau-Ponty, but the parallels found in the writings of Abram are particularly apparent in the perception of Nature as resembling a womb which embraces and nourishes us. Emerson terms this concept as the Over-Soul “within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other.”<sup>306</sup> Similarly, Abram refers to all-embracing Nature as the Mind in which we are immersed and of which we are made.

Abram’s personal life story of a lonely wanderer in the wild immediately brings to mind Emerson’s fellow Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who developed his own sense of spiritual independence during his spartan years in the famous cabin at Walden Pond,

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<sup>302</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 17.

<sup>303</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 18.

<sup>304</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 18.

<sup>305</sup> Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” 262.

<sup>306</sup> Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” 262.

reducing life to its most essential needs. The similarities between Abram and Thoreau are not restricted only to their shared experience of the lonely wanderer but also extends to the broader concept of matter, a phenomenon which deserves our attention since it never exists as inactive, inanimate or dull solidity but as a vibrant, agentive, and sensitive organism. In his text *Walden* (1854), Thoreau draws attention to natural unprocessed food as a source of force and vitality which has the capacity to energize his flesh, thereby “feeding his genius.”<sup>307</sup> As with Abram, Thoreau urges us to cultivate our means of perception through “being forever on the alert” and adds that no philosophy, history or poetry can provide us with the knowledge comparable to “looking always at what is to be seen.”<sup>308</sup>

Material agency or the vital energy of material formation have been vigorously championed by the American political theorist Jane Bennett who echoes Abram’s call to leave behind the image of instrumentalized, inanimate matter, while abandoning “the onto-theological binaries of life/matter, human/animal [...] organic/inorganic.”<sup>309</sup> She emphasizes that by returning our attention and respect to what she calls the “vibrant matter”, a process of creating alliances with other bodies, we can promote more ecological and sustainable methods of production and consumption, strengthening our survival prospects and our sense of happiness.

As a strong advocate of the need to encounter with the brute, primitive wildness of things, Abram moves from “the Transcendental East” of America and hearkens to the “call of the wild” of the West, represented, among others, by the novelist Jack London, the environmental philosopher John Muir, and the poet and essayist Gary Snyder. Abram is clearly greatly inspired by Snyder in particular, especially his calls for a return to oral culture as a way of re-establishing the ancient affinity between man, language and the land (1996). While resurrecting our animal senses and the sensuous of oral cultures, we can experience a sense of carnal reciprocity and erotic draw, refining our awareness, care, and concern. Snyder’s epic poem “Mountains and Rivers without End” (1996) resonates significantly with Abram’s animistic understanding of the world in which pine trees and even pieces of furniture can voice the struggles which they face in their lives. As a journey poem, “Mountains and Rivers” awakens Abram’s desire to walk the land as a meditation or ritual in the timeless time of the Dreamtime, singing the world into existence. Mountains, rivers, and woods are fluid entities which constantly intermingle with each other and transform themselves, a process

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<sup>307</sup> Thoreau, “Walden,” 145.

<sup>308</sup> Thoreau, “Walden,” 75.

<sup>309</sup> Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, x.

similar to the concept of “becoming animal” in Abram’s story-world.<sup>310</sup> Snyder’s emphasis on the connection of place with its story, a hallmark of indigenous thinking, can also be discerned in Abram’s text. He considers a *story* to be a *storage* of the knowledge amassed by non-writing cultures, the task of which is to activate the memory of the situations occurring there, thereby bringing the land to life (Abram 1996, 2015). Abram shares Snyder’s conviction that establishing a relationship with the land and perceiving it as a living and breathing entity is the key to mitigating the ecological crisis and open up the idea of ethics not in terms of a mere set of mental directives, but as something “urgently felt in our muscles and bones”.

Abram’s non-fiction works and his numerous essays represent a substantial contribution to eco-phenomenological literature by offering a fresh look at what it means to become truly merged with nature. He frequently emphasises the need to develop the sensitivity of our perception, stressing the enormous potential of our bodies to weave us into the terrain which we corporally inhabit. He also reminds us that the mind is not a human possession but belongs instead to the earthly biosphere; strictly speaking, we do not enjoy an autonomous mind but participate in the common awareness into which we are embedded (*Waking Our Animal Senses* 1997, *The Air Aware* 2009). As we shall see, his work has provoked considerable discussion and analysis in environmental fields of study such as eco-phenomenology or literary eco-criticism.

In a 2014 article, the British literary eco-critic Richard Kerridge argues that the main task of eco-criticism in light of the global ecological crisis is to analyse texts from the perspective of environmental concerns. Consequently, such analyses should aim to integrate environmental issues into a more general cultural debate, attempting to effect re-evaluations in cultural values and personal behaviour. He refers to numerous eco-critics (L. Buell 2005; S. Slovic 2008; N. Seymour 2012) and notes the high degree of urgency in their work and their efforts to persuade us to care, to connect our knowledge to our feelings and behaviour. Kerridge is arguing here that there is a strong tendency in eco-criticism to abandon the Cartesian tradition of dualism which results in the separation of humanity from non-human nature.<sup>311</sup> The British psychoanalyst Joseph Dodds goes even further by adding that intellectualization and a reassessment of our everyday behaviours, for example, a physical disconnection from processed food, contribute to our detachment from emotional engagement

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<sup>310</sup> The concept of “becoming animal” first appeared in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987) and will be explored in more detail in the following sub-chapter.

<sup>311</sup> Kerridge, “Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre,” 362, 363, 366.

(2011). The aim of literature in this context is therefore to “attempt to change culture, and through culture change policy and behaviour.”<sup>312</sup>

The question remains, however, of how to make people feel the urge to care, to change, because it often seems difficult to manipulate oneself intellectually into a caring relationship with, for example, a tree. Abram’s text follows the line of the New Materialists by introducing the reader to the realm of a “more than human world”, a term he himself coined, and offers the possibility of interconnection between humans and the agentic world.<sup>313</sup> The development of such an interconnection, however, cannot happen overnight, and the aim is therefore to analyse the text in such a way that it can gradually restore the connection of the self with one’s sensitivity at first; only after such a change has been made can the self become open to the other and to the possibility of change. As a result, our examination of *Becoming Animal* will not be conducted from the viewpoint of environmental disciplines, but will instead apply the ideas of conceptual metaphor theory and phenomenological assumptions. The intention is to present *Becoming Animal* as a post-postmodern text which posits a return to the corporeality of the human body in an effort to restore the sense of integrity as opposed to the postmodern condition of insecurity induced by the seemingly infinite range of multiplicities and oppression at the hands of power structures. It attempts to rehabilitate the quality of honesty or sincerity (as opposed to postmodern irony, simulacra, and obscurantism) defined by the American literary critic Lionel Trilling as “the congruence between feeling and avowal” or “the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one’s own self.”<sup>314</sup> The body in Abram’s world is thus presented as an instrument which is capable of erasing the boundary between within and without described by Trilling as sincerity or honesty. Finally, the text emphasises that it is metaphor itself which (along with the sound and rhythm of words in Danielewski) possesses the capacity to return language to its original owner, the animate Earth.<sup>315</sup>

*Becoming Animal* represents the intersection between fiction and non-fiction, and it is a first-person narration told by a homodiegetic narrator who is also the main and the only (human) protagonist in the story-world. The text abounds with descriptions of the inner state of the narrator/protagonist and his comments on the way in which the external surroundings

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<sup>312</sup> Kerridge, “Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre,” 363.

<sup>313</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> century theory by arguing that matter is as alive, active, creative and agentic as humans (Bennett 2010).

<sup>314</sup> Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 4, 5.

<sup>315</sup> Abram repeatedly argues that language is not the possession of a human being but is an attribute of the external world in which we participate (2005, 2010).

act and manifest themselves. Acting in the joint position of narrator and protagonist, the main character repeatedly forges a connection with his readers, blurring the boundaries by addressing them, instructing them, questioning them, socializing with them, inviting them to self-observe and co-experience. Abram, as an internal element of the story, seemingly operates as an internal focalizer, complementing reality with his own perspective, refining the world through his own perception. Only later, however, does it become apparent that the anthropocentric position of the internal focalizer is ineffective as he becomes aware that he is acting within the zone of reciprocity and alliance. His perception and perspectives are constantly influenced by, modified by, and exchanged with every single object and the all-encompassing power of the Earth itself as living, fully agentic entities. He places himself in the world which is not a set of isolated, determinable objects over which he might exercise a perceptual dominance but one which serves as an extension of his own corporeality where all participants are interconnected by the tensions and rhythms of a wider life.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the sound contained in words has the potential to speak a world into existence and manifest its expressive power; similarly, metaphor, an instrument which is so pervasive in Abram's text, is able to exhibit this reciprocity by journeying from the physical to the abstract. Echoing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective, Abram repeatedly emphasizes his belief that language and its meaning emerge from the carnal dimension of the world (2005), and the aim of his text is thus to introduce 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."<sup>316</sup> *Becoming Animal* aims to raise the Earth from its inanimate, detached position by means of articulating personal erotic tension which releases our flesh into the flesh of the soil. 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, singing the user into a unity with the other.

### 3.3 Contributions of Other Critics: The Liquid Mind in Abram's World

Many critics and academics have observed that *Becoming Animal* relates to the process of a human becoming intimately engrossed in the living, animate world through a process of mutual attraction, through the power of Eros (Wall Kimmerer 2011; Hartley 2011; Bright 2013). Using the capacity of our sharpened and focused perception, we are disposed to "excite

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<sup>316</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 3.

and nourish our spiritual and sensual engagement with the world”, as the American environmental scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer states in her article.<sup>317</sup> Animal senses are then some of the most precious possessions with which humans are endowed, as they can bridge the apparent gulf between one flesh and another, thereby guiding us from indifference towards a greater sense of care.

The behavioural ecologist Stephan Harding has noted that Abram’s text offers a return to the animistic sensibility, a primordial mode of perception, in which man is not merely a detached observer of the Earth but is within it, caught by its gaze (2011). The need for a deeper immersion in the physical world was repeatedly stressed by Merleau-Ponty (1945) who saw perception as a reciprocal process in which the perceiver constantly responds and tunes to the enveloping terrain which responds and adjusts itself accordingly. A thought-provoking comparison has been made by the eco-semiotician and eco-psychologist Jorge Conesa-Sevilla (2011) who notices the parallels between Abram’s idea that “our” mind is as much the Earth’s as it is ours and Gregory Bateson’s supreme cybernetic system referred to as the Mind (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972). Abram’s concept of Earth complements Bateson’s idea of the liquid Mind in that it shows the capacity of human to overstep the limits of the self through experiencing the dissolution of the mind in the mind of another animal, plant, stone or, ultimately, the Earth itself.

James Hartley (2011), an American Professor of Environmental Studies, develops this line of reasoning and warns that Abram is at risk of marginalisation due to the stringency of his “capacity to engage in a particular mode of phenomenological reflection” which “requires the cultivation of practices so strenuous, focused, and perilous (both mentally and physically) that few persons would likely to assent to them.”<sup>318</sup> Indeed, Abram himself points in his work to his “porous” nature, the permeable nature of his senses that leave him susceptible to the influence of other people.<sup>319</sup> This capacity might not be available to other perceivers; however, as Hartley notices, Abram makes a genuine effort to bring his readers as near to this experience as possible without violating their truths to an excessive degree. Abram’s text then “asks its reader to consider the possibility of entering into another relationship with one’s thought”, but only if they are prepared to abandon their habitual approach and read themselves intellectually into Abram’s sensitivity, thereby opening themselves up to perceptual introjection.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Wall Kimmerer, “Becoming Animal,” 1.

<sup>318</sup> Hartley, “Becoming Animal,” 190.

<sup>319</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 235.

<sup>320</sup> Hartley, “Becoming Animal,” 191.

The depth-psychologist Bonnie Bright (2013) has identified an intriguing element in Abram's text, the ability to identify oneself totally with the instinctual and unpredictable physicality of our own flesh. Bright notes that we have a strong need to maintain a distance from this corporeal aspect of our selves while constructing scientific abstractions and designing spaces in which we can feel that we enjoy a modicum of control. But with "this gesture we also insulate ourselves from the deepest wellspring of joy [...] from the erotic warmth of a cello's voice."<sup>321</sup> *Becoming Animal*, however, persistently pulls us back to our sensual self and "re-stories" the inherent bond we form with the animate Earth.

A more urgent tone is adopted by the theologian Sam Mickey (2012) who maintains that the crucial task for humans today is "to become fully human, which requires becoming animal, enacting the reciprocal participation of our animal bodies in the earthly cosmos."<sup>322</sup> As he points out, however, Abram's approach to this task suffers from certain weaknesses such as the tendency to idealize indigenous cultures and his preference for pre-reflective modes of interacting with the world rather than those of literate modernity. The first of these objections does not seem to be wholly pertinent, since Abram himself has explained (2005) that he had spent many years living among indigenous peoples, familiarising himself with their cultures including oral storytelling; it might be expected, therefore, that his observations and insights are the result of well-considered reflection based not only on his thorough knowledge but also on his direct experience. Taking into account the perspective of eco-criticism, Mickey argues that Abram undermines his preference for perceptual immediacy beyond writing by expressing this idea in words; indeed, the more he attempts to elucidate his thinking, the more he comes to depend on language. Mickey summarizes his remark by stating that Abram, a strong opponent of dualism, is himself guilty of dualism when privileging "felt experience over "representation."<sup>323</sup>

A similar objection is raised by the American philosopher Ted Toadvine (2005) in his analysis of Abram's earlier writing *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997), a work which was deeply inspired by Merleau-Ponty's method of perception. Toadvine asserts that despite Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the continuity between perception, expression, and reflection, Abram again falls prey to a body-mind dualism when prioritizing corporeal sensibility over reflection.<sup>324</sup> If we allow Abram himself to counter this point, we find that he does not

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<sup>321</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 7.

<sup>322</sup> Mickey, "Becoming Animal," 100.

<sup>323</sup> Mickey, "Becoming Animal," 101.

<sup>324</sup> Toadvine, "Limits of the Flesh," 159.

polarize but in fact connects, as he considers reflection as a process which “unfolds not within me but rather between me and the world.”<sup>325</sup> His reflection then, so abundant in both texts, always incorporates the primordial interchange between the body and the world, positing verbal thought and sensorial perception as two complementary “forces”. The interplay between the body and the concept, in other words the continuity between perception, expression and reflection is also aptly illustrated by the metaphors which Abram applies extensively throughout the text, since the abstract concepts in the target domain grow out of and are explained by physical experience in the source domain.

Mickey introduces one more salient point in his paper when stating that “Abram misses important meanings of the subject of his book’s title by failing to engage Deleuze’s metaphysical concept of “becoming animal” and falsely opposing his strategies (“as a phenomenologist”) to those of Deleuze (“a metaphysician”).”<sup>326</sup> The chapter below will attempt to demonstrate, however, that there is no inherent conflict between the strategies of Deleuze and Guattari, and that of Abram, and that the two approaches are, in fact, mutually intertwined, enriching the means of expression with new meanings and associations.

### **3.4 Becoming Animal as the Path of Passion to Being More Human**

The narrative of Abram’s work occasionally lets the readers taste the flavour of the postmodern dispersion of the autonomous subject as they encounter the endless diversity of non-hierarchical insights and imagery which comprise the reality of the text. At first glance, the narrative appears to have abandoned temporality, the linear perception of time, and to have dissolved the flow of time into a series of permanent presents, offering a fragmented sequence of the author’s inward impressions. Only later does it become more and more apparent that all these isolated intense sensibilities are in fact committing themselves to a continuity, to the coalescence of a coherent, organic unity. The act of “becoming animal” emerges as a dominant, pivotal concept around which the narrative as a whole rotates. It guides the reader to the conclusion that “becoming animal” is not a random concept among the multiplicity of others, but might be considered as a universal path, since the lived experience of this process allows us to blend into the rhythm of a cyclic cosmology.

David Abram himself explains that “becoming animal” as a way of “acknowledging, affirming, and growing into our animality” is a means of evolving ourselves into a more

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<sup>325</sup> Abram, “Between the Body and the Breathing Earth,” 172.

<sup>326</sup> Mickey, “Becoming Animal,” 101.



essentially human condition.<sup>327</sup> He admits that there is a certain overlap between his understanding of the concept and that introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his co-author, the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. As Abram explains, he shares with them “a commitment to a kind of radical immanence – even to *materialism* (or what I might call “matter-realism”))” along with “a keen resistance to whatever unnecessarily impedes the erotic creativity of matter.”<sup>328</sup> While placing a strong emphasis on his phenomenological anchoring, Abram notes, however, that his approach is distinguished by its intensely lived experience of coming into contact with the animate earth; in contrast, “[a]s a metaphysician, Deleuze is far too given to the production of abstract concepts to suit mine.”<sup>329</sup> Although Abram concedes that the different strategies he employed developed from his intensely experienced encounter between his flesh and the Earth, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the parallels between his approach and that of Deleuze and Guattari are perhaps more profound than has been suggested by Abram himself and that both ways of thinking can potentially offer the reader a greater profundity of meaning and nuance.

In order to understand the principle of “becoming animal” and the basis on which Abram identifies unity between man and beast, it would be useful to trace the different ways in which the idea has been understood by some scholars. The British philosopher Richard Iveson takes a strongly polarizing perspective to the issue of the separation between the human and the non-human in his analysis of *A Thousand Plateaus*, in particular the chapter “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible” (2013). Iveson is convinced that the concept of “becoming” as introduced by Deleuze and Guattari advocates the discontinuity between a non-human animal becoming and a human becoming animal. While the human possesses the potential to become an animal, non-humans are subject to a permanent process of becoming in which there is no possibility of entering the assemblage of the other.<sup>330</sup> Iveson develops his thinking by arguing that non-humans can never experience an “I” as an actualized possibility, and are therefore condemned to an ongoing state of the impossibility of possibility.<sup>331</sup> When comparing this opinion with that of Abram, we find that a key element in his text is the idea of the *other* described as a centre of experience, another

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<sup>327</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 10.

<sup>328</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 10.

<sup>329</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 10.

<sup>330</sup> The term “becoming” is described by Deleuze and Guattari as the pure potentiality which “produces nothing other than itself”; it is “the entering of assemblages by contagion as the reality of non-humans” (1980: 262). “Becoming” is “the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible: the rhizome...” (1980: 294). Both authors reject the idea that “becoming” is mere imitation, the identification with the other or the establishment of corresponding relations.

<sup>331</sup> Iveson, “Deeply Ecological Deleuze and Guattari,” 40.

subject endowed with another source of power. This is exactly the kind of power which Deleuze and Guattari describe as possessing a capacity for existence, a capacity *to be affected and to affect*, a capacity to *proliferate connections* experienced by a body.<sup>332</sup> It is therefore quite radical then to assert that Deleuze and Guattari declare their support for the discontinuity between human and non-human which prohibits non-human becoming the other despite their clear efforts (found also in the work of Abram) to extend the reach of this connective, affective power also to non-humans.<sup>333</sup>

Given the apparent ambiguity which can be noted over the act of “becoming”, it might be helpful to conceptualize the idea in a more accurate way and explain what this process is motivated by. Abram is adamant that the act of entering into the intelligence of the other awakens something equivalent in the individual’s flesh. The external movements of the other, its twists and pulls, its tension and loosening, are echoed in the human sensorium. Deleuze and Guattari take a more abstract approach to the process, explaining the act of “becoming” not as an imitation but as “entering into composition with *something else*”, a process of extracting “particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes.”<sup>334</sup> While Abram is preoccupied with the external, visibly perceptible movement of the other, Deleuze and Guattari refine the idea to a molecular level and accentuate that one can become animal only molecularly, providing the example of the speed of atomic particles which have the capacity to adjust to the rhythm of the particles of the other.<sup>335</sup> Abram supplements this thinking by once again offering a more physical, directly experienced observation, emphasizing that the act of “becoming” encompasses the reorganization of senses and different levels of intensity when possessed by the carnal intelligence of the other.<sup>336</sup> Being possessed then does not evoke only a recalibration of molecular movement and rest as suggested by Deleuze and Guattari; it also extends to cover a more perceptible level of physical movement, the act of dancing oneself into the bodily rhythm of an animal. In other words, the rearrangement of molecules (from torpor to rapidity) manifests itself through the

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<sup>332</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xvii.

<sup>333</sup> Iveson, “Deeply Ecological Deleuze and Guattari,” 34.

Iveson further claims that this disconnection lies at the demarcation between the wild and the tame which results in a diminution of the ethical and creating structures of oppression, exploitation and instrumentalization of animals by humans (2013: 34, 39, 47). For a recent take on the “affective operations” in modern literature and the visual arts, triggered by and performed within various encounters between humans and objects such as the garbage dump and the empty chair, see Jirsa 2021. Jirsa, Tomáš. *Disformations: Affects, Media, Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

<sup>334</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 274, 272.

<sup>335</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 275.

<sup>336</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 239.

physical movement and gestures of the body which enable us to experience “the essence”, the flavour of the intelligence of the other.

Like Abram, Deleuze and Guattari also see *desire* rather than power as a key conditioning factor in the process of “becoming”. While Abram speaks about erotic draw toward the other body,<sup>337</sup> Deleuze and Guattari also affirm that “[a]ssemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire”; “[t]he rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play [...]”<sup>338</sup> Abram again advocates the need for directly felt experience, arguing that attraction, closeness, and intimacy can develop through careful observation, attention, and focus.<sup>339</sup> The process of becoming the other is not therefore a random, indifferent situation, but is in fact conditioned by a feeling of communion, attachment, and affinity. As we will see later in the analysis, however, Abram extends the capacity of the body to the ability to blend not only with that to which it is attracted but with everything that it perceives.<sup>340</sup>

Let us return one more time to Iveson and his claim that non-humans are denied the option of experiencing the “I” as a realized possibility, thereby denying them the opportunity of entering the assemblage of the other. It should be noted that this observation does not actually occur anywhere in the chapter in question;<sup>341</sup> indeed, Deleuze and Guattari actually discuss the famous example of a wasp and orchid which seems to suggest the very opposite, arguing that “there is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend.”<sup>342</sup> Inspired by Jakob von Uexküll, a German biologist, they continue in a highly poetic manner and explain that in the process of transcoding, an orchid (and a wasp too) possess a wasp/orchid “refrain” or a wasp/orchid “motif” in its head, and that the melodies of both serve as motives for one another.<sup>343</sup> Before entering into their mutual communion, they undergo a process of “deterritorialization”; only after undergoing this can they territorialize themselves again by absorbing and reterritorializing the melody of the other.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 229.

<sup>338</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 399.

<sup>339</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 239.

<sup>340</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 251.

<sup>341</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232–309.

<sup>342</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

<sup>343</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 314.

<sup>344</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 315, 317.

“Deterritorialization” is a concept defined by Deleuze and Guattari as the abstract line, the line of flight, the maximum dimension after which multiplicities change in nature and connect with other multiplicities (1980: 9, 21). In other words, it represents the experience of the infinite.

This experience is comparable to that proffered by Abram who repeatedly refers to his ability to be extremely porous to the style of the world, perceiving boundaries not as a barrier, but as a membrane across which melodies can flow in a reciprocal manne.<sup>345</sup> His permeability, his seeing which was felt as an exchange between himself and the seen world transforms the flesh into a meeting point where all of the diverse patterns and colours of the world can converge. Deleuze and Guattari employ a recognisably similar imagery, using the term “being unnoticed” instead of “permeability” to define a precondition for becoming everything “that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components.”<sup>346</sup> Becoming everything then means to merge, to world, to make a world which itself undergoes a process of becoming.<sup>347</sup> As Abram, Deleuze and Guattari explain, the assemblage of the other is available and attractive for both human and non-human, allowing the reterritorialized entity to undergo a newly realized possibility. This is, then, a very different approach than that which Iveson attributes to the three thinkers.

We can now direct our attention to the concept of territorializing as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari and once again attempt to identify conceptual connections with the work of Abram. Deleuze and Guattari imply that territoriality is the opposite of movement; it is represented by matter or form, and it represents the stratification and codification of multiplicity.<sup>348</sup> The existence of a territory has a balancing and soothing effect, forming a centre in the abyss of chaos.<sup>349</sup> It should be emphasized that the aspect which determines or constitutes a territory is “the emergence of matters of expression”; it is the exposure of a unique rhythm then which unifies an individual’s manifestations or qualities into a particular style.<sup>350</sup> These acts of expression, the exclusive rhythm of attributes, is also represented in various forms in Abram’s narrative every time he points to the idea of (non)human integration or coherence, a reassembly which can only be accomplished through entering into a relation with the other.<sup>351</sup>

The act of coming into a relationship might therefore be interpreted as allowing the other to serve as an element which harmonizes our inner impulses with its own momentary

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<sup>345</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 233, 236.

<sup>346</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 280.

<sup>347</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 280.

<sup>348</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4, 33, 53.

“Territorialization” is described by Deleuze and Guattari as substances represented by formed matters which “refer to territorialities and degrees of territorialisation and deterritorialisation” (1980: 41).

<sup>349</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 311.

<sup>350</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 315.

<sup>351</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 254.

condition, inspiring new rearrangements or reconstitutions and leading to the re-identification of both participants. If we follow the approach of Deleuze and Guattari, the path towards integrity might be described as a process in which the human or non-human experiencing a state of temporal territoriality enters into the other territoriality and deterritorializes themselves, thereby finding themselves in a (molecular) condition of a line of flight. Only after completing this process do they reterritorialize, organizing themselves in a new arrangement and possibly choosing to remain in their new territoriality, achieving a more organized, unified, centred (molar) condition which would be understood as integration, coherence, or identity in Abram's understanding. The idea of territorializing is in fact very phenomenological as it turns our attention toward the object which attracts and unites our senses. It is the object which offers itself in different layers and profiles (against the background of relevant wholes), and through entering into relationship with it, we, as the datives of its disclosure, can recognize and discover ourselves through thinking it. Within this act there lies a potential for the dead postmodern subject to gather together the scattered fragments of their "self" and undergo a resurrection as a unique rhythm forming their own distinct territory.

The idea of territory as a scene where one can form a relationship is also examined by the French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard who views it as "the site of a completed cycle of parentage and exchange" where, at the level of deterritorializing, there is still no subject and everything is exchanged.<sup>352</sup> The territory, as he understands it, is an entity without time and space which unites the living and the inanimate in a relationship of absolute reciprocity. Humans, however, have lost this sense of timeless immediacy, and we are left as mere dreamers of "implosion rather than explosion, of metamorphosis rather than energy, of obligation and ritual defiance rather than of liberty [...]."<sup>353</sup> Yet, as Abram asserts, the act of "becoming" allows us to achieve a "miraculous" intersection in which we regain the potential to meet ourselves through the animal, thereby giving it its own voice. As the analysis below will demonstrate, a point is reached in which the timeless background of Nature and the tame meet, dissolving the division between becoming animal and the process of permanent becoming; a relationship in which nobody is privileged and nobody is degraded.

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<sup>352</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 139.

<sup>353</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 140.

### **3.5 Metaphors Arranging the Text to Restore a New Human Sensibility**

As with sound in *Only Revolutions*, metaphors also possess the power to arrange the reality of the text and lend a sense of intertextual coherence. *Becoming Animal* consists of fourteen chapters and each of them explores the way in which various circumstances can transform our state of mind and modes of perception. The reader is exposed to a fascinating myriad of experiential subtleties which a reciprocal symbiosis with the land and the animal can offer. Nonetheless, it is not the intention of this thesis to go through the chapters of this work sequentially and analyse them one by one, because even though Abram arranges his lived experience thematically in the text, the reader can often be left feeling overwhelmed and lost in the abundance of his images and insights. The goal here then is to focus on metaphors which allow the reader to choreograph the text in a new manner.

By outlining the function of this choreography, we aim to demonstrate that, as Abram asserts, the establishment of an individual's identity, commonly sought after through a meaningful narrative, can also be achieved by adopting the ability to become animal. However exotic his suggestion might sound, the metaphors Abram uses so profusely in the text can be arranged in order to give the reader some degree of breathing space from the flood of animal images and sensualities which he depicts, and it is possible to suggest that the work is possibly arranged in such a way as to gradually reveal the transition from an autonomous, solipsistic self towards a sensuous anchored entity. The aim of this ordering is to form a step by step reconstruction of Abram's vision of a new sensibility, the emergence of a more relational non-solipsist man in a more-than-human world. The opening subchapter which I called *Isolation* introduces the reader to the initial disconnection from the world and from the self. While moving through other subchapters, the reader can witness the gradual metamorphosis of man, the journey of an individual who seeks to establish ontologically more sheltered sense of self, to become territorial, to be anchored in movements and difference of one's own rhythm.

#### **3.5.1 *Isolation***

As was noted at the outset, this thesis aims to overcome the postmodern syndrome of a deconstructed, solipsistic condition of subjective experiences by examining Danielewski's approach to sound-meaning and Abram's use of metaphor to offer an alternative in the form of a relational attitude to the self and the world, while noticing similarities between oneself and the other. Within this context, it seems pertinent to open with some observations on the issues of isolation or fragmentariness by the American art critic Hal Foster and the Dutch

literary critic Nicoline Timmer who touch upon some of the views expressed by Abram in his work. Foster presents a possible reaction from the self when exposed to the overflow of incoherent feelings: “pure affect, no affect: It hurts, I can’t feel anything.”<sup>354</sup> The bipolarity of this reactivity might stem from the non-existence of a palpable, resolute self who would be able to unify the experience of the world and produce stable emotional responses.

In her analysis of novels by Wallace, Eggers, and Danielewski, Timmer suggests that the protagonists of the works all share a solipsistic delusion or the experience of being permanently trapped inside their own minds. Their private minds, however, are unable to provide them with the safe refuge or guidance which they yearn after, leaving them instead in a state of depression and anxiety.<sup>355</sup> Timmer also notes that “a private feeling encapsulated somewhere in an isolated mind” is a result of the absence of inter-subjective connection when the self is unable to *share feelings* and is unaware of the fact that they are capable of experiencing the same things in the same way as others.<sup>356</sup> In her quest to find the way out of this conundrum, Timmer takes into consideration the importance of shared mutual exchanges, the possibility of the open body, suggesting that a well-functioning identity cannot be built around the socio-cultural construct of a firm self-concept but rather through a conscious striving for inter-subjectivity, the need for a “we”.<sup>357</sup> Nonetheless, she is somewhat vague over how such a relational space could be constructed, suggesting, for example, a challenge to the Saussurean referential approach to language or the development of reciprocity. In contrast, *Becoming Animal* is far more specific in laying out how the inter-subjectivity can be achieved, offering a substantial and far more effective recalibration from “I” to “we”.

Abram complements the above observations by positing that our mental isolation is a result of our strong engagement in virtual worlds, a perceptual realm which was not shared by our ancestors. It is also our capacity to detach ourselves from our immediate environment through ordinary everyday objects such as cars, chairs, or shoes which prevent us from remaining in intimate contact with the ground. The use of objects and the process of objectification prevent humans from participating in the sensuous interplay between themselves and their surroundings, thereby continuously mortifying their animal senses. The body loses its permeability to the tactual, real world of, say, birds and the rain, perceiving these domains as an illusory realm lying somewhere on the other side of the window.

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<sup>354</sup> Foster, „Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,“ 122.

<sup>355</sup> Timmer, *Do you Feel it Too?*, 305, 307.

<sup>356</sup> Timmer, *Do you Feel it Too?*, 45, 113.

<sup>357</sup> Timmer, *Do you Feel it Too?*, 304.

Computers and televisions only intensify this mirage-like approach, presenting its reality through flat screens on which life is stripped of its three-dimensional multiplicity, allowing the viewer to exchange the ambiguity of the actual world for the simplicity of flat representation. The act of looking *at* the objects around us means that we are no longer *in* or *of* the substance of the Earth. Similarly, science follows in the footsteps of the detached observer in its assumption that the intellect can free itself from the carnal involvement in the teeming multitude of earthly life. As Abram notes, science steps around, beneath and beyond the living world in an effort to construct theoretical, fragmentary, and temporary realms. The detachment from the sensorial world weakens our ethical sensibility and sense of solidarity, since “[t]he seeds of compassion are sown in the palpable field of our childhood encounters with other sensitive and sentient bodies, in that richly ambiguous land where we gradually learn [...] to give space to other bodies.”<sup>358</sup> However, it is not only the thickness of objects and scientific objectification which keep us aloof from the breathing world; this also occurs at the very moment at which we become “speaking selves” trapped in the whirlpool of verbal language. Abram portrays humanity as a collection of ceaselessly chattering minds, endlessly in dialogue with linguistic symbols while denying the right of the rustling leaves or the fragrant air to participate in the conversation. Representational speech has cast itself loose from the murmur, whisper, and cries of the animate, expressive cosmos.

Although metaphorical imagery depicting the isolated mind is not exactly a common feature of Abram’s work, the use of at least one of the metaphors is certainly worthy of further investigation in order to help us to understand where the concept of isolation originates from and how deeply this metaphorical expression is anchored in the physical world. When tracing the current situation of the self, Abram employs the following metaphor: (my self is) “*in a clutch of heady abstractions*” (68). This is an ontological metaphor in which “abstractions” are explained in terms of an object;<sup>359</sup> in essence, we select a part of our physical (spatial, sensori-motor) experience and map it onto the abstract part of the metaphor (i.e., “abstraction”, “theories”, or “knowledge”). It is vital to emphasize once again that our experience with physical entities including our own bodies serves as the basis for viewing “ideas” as a physical object which might be further designated as being a person. Let us categorise this specific metaphorical expression in the form of more general conceptual metaphors, which are ABSTRACTIONS (IDEAS) ARE OBJECTS, THEORIES ARE PEOPLE, KNOWLEDGE IS AN EVENT EXERTING FORCE (see: Index of Lakoff

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<sup>358</sup> Abram, “Earth in Eclipse,” 168.

<sup>359</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, 25–29.



conceptual metaphors available online). ABSTRACTIONS (or theories, knowledge, thoughts) are in the position of the target (or abstract) domain whose structure and content is *produced* by the concrete, more clearly delineated source domains OBJECTS, PEOPLE, FORCE.<sup>360</sup> In other words, we make sense of the word “abstractions” by ascribing some attributes of an object to an aspect of theories or knowledge. This object might be a machine which can develop force in the form of grabbing, holding or clutching, or it might also be a person whose capabilities (seizing, grabbing) are assigned to inanimate “abstractions” which are thus personified as a metaphorical agent which causes the situation.

In addition to the conceptual metaphor, metonymy also serves as another aspect of the cognitive model which plays a role in this analysis; within this specific context, metonymy helps us to understand the usage of the noun “a clutch”. When applying the specific form of THE PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy, we replace a person with a part thereof; i.e., the individual is replaced by their hand which is capable of holding, clutching grasping or immobilizing, leaving one feeling possessed or isolated from the world. Our experience of being imprisoned by the intrusive flow of “abstractions” is formed and comprehended through reference to bodily movement and its ability to interact with objects which occurs in recurrent patterns. The very regularity of these patterns is the thing which, as Mark Johnson asserts, renders our experience comprehensible and non-chaotic.<sup>361</sup> The body-based image schema experienced at the pre-conceptual, non-propositional level is then figuratively extended and by analogy applied to the situation of being under control of our thoughts, i.e., abstractions.<sup>362</sup>

Our comprehension of “abstractions” is thus mainly metaphorical since we typically understand it with reference to concepts related to physical kinds of experience (OBJECT, PEOPLE, FORCE). As Lakoff and Johnson highlight (1980), these defining concepts arise from our interaction with one another and with the world, and the concept which they metaphorically explain (e.g., ABSTRACTIONS) “will be understood in terms of what we call *interactional* properties.”<sup>363</sup> This means that we conceptualize OBJECT, PEOPLE, or FORCE not only in terms of their inherent attributes but as “a multidimensional gestalt of properties” (1980: 121) which encompasses their perceptual (appearance), motor-activity (handling) or

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<sup>360</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor: A practical Introduction*, 103.

<sup>361</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xix.

<sup>362</sup> Image-schema metaphors can be described as highly generic embodied conceptual universals which are based on our physical interaction with the world. They provide the conceptual metaphor with naturalness and meaningfulness. They are stored in long-term memory and because they involve very little detail, they serve as the basis for other richer concepts. Some examples include: container, force schemas (attraction, blockage, etc.), spatial schemas (up-down, near-far, etc), and others (Kövecses 2010, 2020).

<sup>363</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 120.

functional (seizing, grabbing, clutching) features.<sup>364</sup> As a result, our understanding of concepts is neither unpredictable nor fragmentary, since it emerges from our day-to-day physical experience in the world, a sum of lived knowledge which is not a mere *collection* but a multidimensional *structured* gestalt.

This detailed analysis is intended to support the assertion which Lakoff and Turner repeat several times in their work; metaphor and metonymy are not merely arbitrary, random occurrences, nor are they simply decorative means of linguistic expression existing without constraints.<sup>365</sup> In fact, they incorporate prime cognitive structures whose intention is to identify coherent correspondences in our conceptual system in order to make sense of our experience. Moreover, the properties of an object, a person, an event (all viewed as one conceptual domain) should not be perceived as isolated, disconnected elements, but as elements of an organized system of interactional qualities which manifests as a whole, as an experiential gestalt.<sup>366</sup> The internally consistent structure of a gestalt (in our example, that of a person, a machine, or a force) is imposed on the other concept, in our case on “abstractions”. An object imposing force lies at the very foundation of metaphorical schematicity and arises “from our most fundamental embodied experiences” which “are our first guides in conceptualizing experience.”<sup>367</sup> The physical concept (or the gestalt) stems from this foundational schematic level which provides the metaphor with its basic meaningfulness arising from pre-conceptual body-based structures of experience.

The existence of metaphor “as a pervasive mode of understanding” indicates that meaning is not entirely propositional, nor is it determined by mere interplay of words and phrases within a sentence.<sup>368</sup> As many cognitive linguists have attempted to prove (Lakoff 1980; Johnson 1987; Sweetser 1990; Grady 1997; Kövecses 2020), image schemata (such as an object, force or container) are non-propositional, yet they play a major role in meaning-making and in furthering the inferences which we develop. Although we have to use propositional language to express our thoughts, metaphor makes us aware of the fact that meaning originates at a figurative, ambiguous level which is firmly anchored in our sensorimotor, spatial experience, and the realisation of this connection releases us from the firm grasp of linguistic isolation. The analysis of Abram’s metaphor offered above attempts to illustrate the assumptions of cognitive linguistics which challenges the unconstrained,

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<sup>364</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 121.

<sup>365</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 203.

<sup>366</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 71, 121, 123.

<sup>367</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 68.

<sup>368</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xiv.

unlimited postmodern approach to the conceptualization of the world. The main argument of this thesis is to demonstrate that the fact of embodiment (manifested by metaphor) has the power to question the “unlimited alternativity in conceptualization and, consequently, [...] the unlimited social construction of meaning.”<sup>369</sup> The natural disposition of a human being, as Lakoff observes, is inclined towards a need for mutual understanding, a pre-condition of which is self-understanding. This capacity is achieved through our continual interchange with our immediate environment in which we persistently seek out commonalities of experience in an ongoing search for something which can unify our varied life episodes and provide a sense of coherence to our lives.<sup>370</sup> The existence of metaphor and the metaphorical operation are clear evidence of the natural capacity of humans to seek out and *create* analogies or correspondences between two seemingly different concepts. The existence of the body and its instinctual interactive behaviour undermines the idea of postmodern man as a decentred, solipsistic entity for whom meaning-making is unpredictable and capricious, trapped within the grips of language. THE MIND IS THE BODY is a prominent conceptual metaphor (Sweetser 1990) which reminds us that the non-cultural, instinctual flesh serves as one of the main bedrocks of our conceptual systems; a phenomenon which is often culturally universal and possesses an enormous potential to generate a more integrated self.

One more noteworthy aspect is the fact that the existence of metaphors in the text also stimulates the act of active reading since it is through this process of proactively seeking out a coherent organization among the concepts that we escape the trap of merely observing the world and *define, create*, and ultimately experience reality through figurative understanding.

### **3.5.2 *Opening the Reader to the Other***

The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world.

(Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945)

*Becoming Animal* does not allow us to luxuriate in abstractions out of the Earth for too long since Abram’s style of speech has a remarkable ability to peel the reader out of the skin of propositional language, inviting them into an intimacy with words which grants them a tangible sense of the world. His evocative metaphorical language slowly frees us from the

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<sup>369</sup> Kövecses, *Where Metaphors Come From*, 78.

<sup>370</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 232.

position of an isolated observer placed in front of an inanimate text and leaves us to discover its scenery as an emerging sentient organism of which we ourselves are part.

Abram uses rich poetic imagery to express the process out of separation which can be arranged in two thematic patterns. In the first, Abram delicately unlocks the reader's sensuality through an approach he describes as "*awakening to citizenship in this broader commonwealth*" or "*tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain*" (9). He argues that our perceptual senses have always evolved with the chemistry of the surrounding habitat, "*shaping themselves to the particular patterns of the animate earth*" (78) and "*our ears are now tuned [...] to the howling of wolves and the thrumming of frogs*" (78). We can sharpen the sensitivity of our perception by "*blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers*", "*mingling our ears with the thunder*" (3). In all of these metaphorical expressions the world ceases to represent a passive, unexciting object, but manages to rouse our body and senses from their torpor and detachment, sparking their sensitivity, causing them to perceive, turn to, respond, and seek out a common rhythm. In our metaphorical analysis, which again attempts to prove that our metaphorical understanding of the world derives from our direct physical interaction with it, we take the basic image schema BODY IS A CONTAINER as a starting point, a conceptual metaphor which is the unifying and underlying concept of all of the selected metaphorical expressions.

This concept is complemented and specified by another conceptual metaphor PERCEPTION IS RECEPTION (see Index). As we are aware, however, metaphors are not only conceptual but also contextual (Cameron 2003; Kövecses 2020), and it would therefore be apt to take into account our context of the body and look for a common rhythm with our surroundings.<sup>371</sup> BODY IS A CONTAINER is then further supplemented by the addition of more precise information from the context, giving rise to the metaphor A PERCEIVING PERSON (BODY) IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT (A CONTAINER). In this specific context, the sentient person adopts the position of the target domain delineated metaphorically as a musical instrument (the source domain). The motivation for these metaphorical projections is the proposition that a well-tuned musical instrument creates sounds correctly since its tones have been adjusted or harmonized to meet a received standard of pitch. Similarly, a person in Abram's text who is tuned to the stimulus of the Earth becomes receptive, sensitive to, and harmonized with its rhythm, and thereby becomes connected with the tone of the world.

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<sup>371</sup> Kövecses emphasizes that metaphors originate not only from physical experience and cultural specificities, but also from context (2020: 11).

As we can see, metaphorical understanding is not the result of an arbitrary, eccentric projection from one domain to another but is precisely demarcated by physical experience which limits the “input” of the metaphorical projections. All of the above metaphorical analyses can perhaps be encapsulated by the very eloquent primary metaphor SIMILARITY IS PROXIMITY, the motivation of which is explained laconically by Grady as “the tendency for similar objects to be clustered together.”<sup>372</sup> In the first step then the reader is provoked to rediscover the vast scope of sensuality and the absorbency of their flesh which will always respond to the pulse of another flesh. The text constantly reminds us that the body is an inseparable entity which does not allow its bearer to languish in solitude or solipsism, but which always seeks to establish relationships with the other either through attraction or repulsion.

The second thematic pattern is preoccupied with language, urging the reader to perceive it not as a tool which fixes and immobilises the flow of the living cosmos but rather as a song, a melody, or an improvisational movement and gesture of the breathing world. The text encourages the reader to avoid using words as flat labels attached to the objects around us but as living entities which we can feel and be filled with. Abram grants us the possibility of sensing that the “oral *language gusts through us – our sounded phrases borne by the same air that nourishes the cedars and swells the cumulus clouds*”. As a means of melting the silence between one and the other, “language remains *a way of singing oneself into contact with others and with the cosmos*”. When describing the expressive power of speech, he remarks that “language’s primary gift is not to re-present the world [...] but to *call ourselves into the vital presence* of that world”. He develops this further by focusing on the tonal level of meaning and points out that mutual understanding would be impossible without “the primordial power of utterance to *make our bodies resonate with one another and with the other rhythms that surround us*” (11).

Abram repeatedly emphasizes his belief that language is an open organism which absorbs and echoes the rustles and whispers of the Earth. While sitting by an open door, he is strongly aware of the chattering leaves which “*will feed my thoughts*” (12). Metaphorical expressions slowly prepare the ground for the reader to accept the fact that they themselves are not the ultimate owners of language and that meaning is not a private matter but stems instead from interaction. Language, in Abram’s view, is a floating entity which cannot be grasped or held in possession by humans, since it emerges from the Earth. Furthermore,

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<sup>372</sup> Grady, “Foundations of Meaning,” 283.

Primary metaphors are interpreted as simple conceptual metaphors which possess a clear experiential basis. They are often combined to form more complex ones (Grady 1997; Kövecses 2010).

human language does not necessarily have to rely on its verbal level but can also take advantage of its extra-linguistic, physical basis. The process of establishing a connection, of “bridging the silence” occurs not only through the exchange of concepts, but through the discovery of a shared rhythm. Merleau-Ponty himself who favoured the use of figurative language in his writings, an approach which gave his thinking a cohesion which was nonetheless open (to a certain extent) to interpretations, notices that “the idea of *complete* expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive – that is, if you wish, silence.”<sup>373</sup> Words are intended here not to serve as a representation of reality but instead as a demonstration of their somatic open texture which does not suffocate the world but allows it to exist on its own terms.

When searching for the conceptual metaphors used by Abram which most aptly capture this understanding of the concept of language, we can perhaps make use of a combination of two of them, each of which highlights its own differing aspect.<sup>374</sup> The first of these focuses on the way in which language manifests itself, drawing due notice to its melodic, pervading nature. The target domain (more abstract) “language” is metaphorically conceptualized by the source domain (more physical) “a song”, or “a melody” to provide the resulting conceptual metaphor LANGUAGE IS A SONG / MUSIC / MELODY. In contrast, the second example is an ontological conduit metaphor which does not foreground the manifestation of language but its communicative, connective function expressed as COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS FROM ONE MIND-CONTAINER TO ANOTHER.<sup>375</sup> The metaphorical expressions are based on correlations with physical experience, making us aware once again of the involvement of the body (the language of birds, body/mind as a container fed by food/ideas) in ensuring that the concept of language and communication remains rooted in the physical world. Once the reader’s sensuality has been awoken, they are exposed to another level of becoming animal, more specifically the perception of language and understanding as an intersubjective exchange. The somatic dimension of language can no longer keep its user held in a state of solipsism, since the body is not simply “a mass of sensations, doubled by a kinaesthetic image, but [...] *a way of systematically* going toward objects.”<sup>376</sup> Although transmitted through the act of reading the

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<sup>373</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 43.

<sup>374</sup> The theory of conceptual metaphor emphasizes that when a source domain metaphorically conceptualizes a target domain, only some (not all) aspects of the target are brought into focus, with the others remaining hidden (Kövecses 2010: 91–92).

<sup>375</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor: A practical Introduction*, 84.

A conduit metaphor is an ontological metaphor based on the presumption that ideas travel along a conduit. It is comprised of a series of three conceptual metaphors: THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, COMMUNICATION IS SENDING IDEAS FROM ONE-MIND CONTAINER TO ANOTHER (Kövecses 2010: 84).

<sup>376</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, 35.

text, metaphors repeatedly draw the reader out of the sentential structure, negating the idea that its meaning is expressible in a strictly propositional manner. The existence of figurative language and the way in which it couples the physical with the abstract illustrates that the structure of rationality greatly exceeds the conceptual or abstract patterns in significance, as it is nourished and driven by physical interaction with the external environment.

***“Everything Begins with Refrains”***<sup>377</sup>

The previous chapter has hopefully prepared the reader for the acceptance that the human body possesses a natural capacity which is responsive, reciprocal and that it can perceive a living form as vibration, a music to which we are sensitive and affected by.

In the first thematic pattern we employed the conceptual metaphor A PERCEIVING PERSON IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT, while in the second we used LANGUAGE IS A SONG / MUSIC / A MELODY. In *The Structure of Behaviour* (1942) Merleau-Ponty observes that “[s]ince all the movements of the organism are always conditioned by external influences, one can [...] readily treat behaviour as an effect of the milieu.”<sup>378</sup> Drawing upon the work of Jakob von Uexkill and the German psychologist Wolfgang Köhler, he continues by pointing to the melodic structure of behaviour, asserting that “[t]he activity of the organism would be literally comparable to a kinetic melody since any change in the end of the melody qualitatively modifies its beginning and the physiognomy of the whole.”<sup>379</sup> What connects both of our thematic patterns then is the recognition that a person, and language, and nature are music, an act of “singing the world” whose vibrations arrange and are arranged by the vibrations of the other.<sup>380</sup> The reader becomes aware of the fact that they need not necessarily remain trapped in a position of an isolated postmodern note, immobilized by “an infinity of possible ensembles”,<sup>381</sup> “the milieu of all milieus”;<sup>382</sup> they have the capacity to free themselves from the in-between state before chaos turns into rhythm and become a melody, understood not as a sum of separated notes haphazardly layered on top of each other, but as a merging of each with its surroundings to create an interconnected structure. Only later does Abram’s text encourage the reader to perceive individuals and language as being organized by the unifying music of nature rather than as random creations.

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<sup>377</sup> “Everything begins with refrains [...] and everything comes to an end at infinity in the great Refrain” is the phrase used by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* (1991/1994: 189).

<sup>378</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, 13.

<sup>379</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, 104.

<sup>380</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 217.

<sup>381</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, 87.

<sup>382</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 313.

Deleuze and Guattari follow Merleau-Ponty's musical motif in their adoption of the concept of the soothing, stabilizing effect of song as the centre in the abyss of chaos, creating a wall of sound which, as a refrain, determines the territory of the singer.<sup>383</sup> Abram initially invites the reader on a journey to experience the stability of their own musical motif or refrain, allowing them to tune into the constancy of the periodic repetition of their milieu transmitted by their own flesh. He does so by instructing the reader to immerse themselves *in* the fact that they have a skin, nostrils, and ears which exist to perceive the other not as a subordinate space but as something whereby they can return to themselves: "My right hand is reaching for a book", Abram says in an effort to demonstrate the urgency of remaining attentive to every single physical movement.<sup>384</sup> The first and the most important step is to identify oneself with the pure physicality of the flesh even though this may entail losing our accustomed feeling of certainty and control over ourselves.<sup>385</sup> The reader is urged to familiarise themselves with the potency of their own "rhythm that has become expressive", which gives us the feeling of possessing an identity signature, thereby holding at bay the intrusion of chaos.<sup>386</sup> By "territorializing" our body, we can come to the realisation that we have always been surrounded by the other not as something distant and unreal, but as something which opens us up to the potential of reciprocity and exchange. Once territorialized, we can turn to the Other, to a different code or refrain, and prepare for the possibility of transcoding, entering a new milieu and creating a new plane. A fuller awareness of our own established milieu serves as the basis for passing into a different code, disclosing to us the fact that sentience is not a quality of the flesh existing in solitude but that it emerges out of the interplay between our body and the body of the other.

### **3.5.3 *Bringing Nature to Life***

After the metaphors have granted the reader access to the feelings of reciprocity and permeability, the next group of metaphors build on this experience and allow the initiate to progress further, offering them the possibility of access to a new, non-anthropocentric endeavour. We should not be lulled by 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. Cautiously we come to realize that we are loosening the reins of our habitual control while simultaneously

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<sup>383</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 311.

<sup>384</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 25.

<sup>385</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 6.

<sup>386</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 315.



sensing that the environment itself “*envelopes and gathers* a range of other bodies under its sway” (21).

Over time the reader accustoms themselves to the possibly alarming idea that we are not the only active object in the realm of inanimate nature, since also the entities usually regarded as stationary and passive are themselves possessed of a dynamic and mobile character. Furthermore, the reader surprisingly learns 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, but that “it is *the mountain that lends its gregarious power* to the multiple elements of this place” (21). There are numerous metaphors in the text which express the experience of these new encounters with objects as agents that willingly affect and organize 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* (15). 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” (17). 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” (18). As he discovers, the surrounding landscape is never still and unchanging but is in a constant state of metamorphosis and transformation – “a wooded hillside *is now extending a muscled shoulder in* my direction” (83). As the sun falls, he eagerly awaits “the *night fragments as they begin to leak out from* the tree” (18).

Having introduced relevant metaphors, we will now move on to analyse 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; all of their features (for example, mountain, shadow, sun, and night) are personified as (moving) bodies /containers/ substances which walk toward him, scrutinize him, touch him, extend towards him, seep into his flesh. Again, we are confronted with the fact that metaphor displays the incarnational character of linguistic meaning which is rooted in a physical dimension (body, container, substance) and from which it emerges. While examining the motivation of the selected metaphors, we can once again draw upon our own experience with physical bodies (especially that with which we are most familiar, our own body) which serves as a source material for ontological metaphors. The most obvious ontological metaphor, as Lakoff suggests, is that in which the physical object is associated

with the identity of a person.<sup>387</sup> Personification represents the 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. 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 which already involve images which are generally understood as humans.<sup>388</sup> 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 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 a container/object or a container/substance bounded by a surface, therefore it is possible to say “to step *into* the shadow of this mountain” (21).

Thus, spatial orientation (inside-outside, up-down) reflecting 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” (18) or “*leak out from* the tree” (18). 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, wilful 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 to step out of our perceptual oblivion and possibly lead to the establishment of an alliance, bond, or solidarity with the surrounding world. This observation might be summarized by one more primary metaphor noticing that INTERRELATEDNESS IS PHYSICAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS.

Nature is brought to life in the text not only through its movement, perceptual abilities, or the influence which it can bring to bear on its participants. Stripped of our attention, Nature tirelessly attempts to call us back by luring us, captivating us with its charm and beauty, striving to find the match between the erotic pulse of its flesh and our own. Another

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<sup>387</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 33.

<sup>388</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, 95.

consciousness is always prepared to open up the possibility of intimate perception with other participants and to make it apparent that the visible body is not a depleted, asexual container but is enriched by an erotic schema. When discussing the immanent function which facilitates the emergence of sexuality, Merleau-Ponty suggests that “[t]here must be an Eros or a Libido which breathes life into an original world, gives sexual value or meaning to external stimuli.”<sup>389</sup> As a result, the object strongly motivates us through perception to reject the state of being un-touched and to embrace that of being touched and touching, absorbed and absorbing. This stunning, mysterious Cosmos, capricious and unpredictable, always strives for alignment and sensual participation between the vital enigma of its presence and us as participants because it is fully aware that it has the potential to trigger our sexual behaviour at any time. Abram creates a wide range of metaphorical expressions which envision the inexhaustible ways in which objects can seduce us, such as “*the vitality of stones and the vigour of soil [...] struggling to rise through the black [...] carapace*” (28). He remarks that “each stone [...] *catches her eye*”; “the things of the world [...] *beckon to us* from behind the clouds of words [...] *calling out to our animal bodies, tempting our skin* with their varied textures” (40). Every possible entity “*calls, gestures, beckons* to other beings or *battles them* for our attention [...] *shouting* with their loud colours or *whispering* with their seeds [...] *alluring* beings, each of which *provokes the imagination* of our eyes [...] *coaxing our senses* into a new conviviality with the local earth” (71). In addition to the apparent personification of the objects which shout, battle, and whisper, other conceptual metaphors which are applied include GRAVITY IS EROS and EMOTIONAL INTIMACY IS PROXIMITY / PHYSICAL CLOSENESS. These are illustrated by specific metaphorical expressions such as “*gravity quietly invites the house to settle more intimately into the ground*” (29) or “its (body’s) *erotic draw toward other bodies*, its incessant *negotiation with that grander eros we call “gravity”*” (229). While walking through the woods and passing the trees and bushes, he enjoys the presence of “their limbs (of trees) *brushing my shoulders or slapping my legs*” (95). A solipsistic individual, usually isolated by abstractions, can be surprised when suddenly alarmed and taught by their body that it constitutes the axis, the Archimedean point which stands as the provenance of their existence and experience, their perception and knowledge.

Abram’s text is strongly reminiscent of Husserl’s return to “the things themselves”, a line of thinking elaborated further by Merleau-Ponty who aptly noted that “[a]ll my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science

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<sup>389</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 180.

would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced.”<sup>390</sup> This clearly demonstrates that direct physical experience, the very flesh of our solipsists constantly informs them that it has been always situated and anchored in the world, therefore being relational and interactive, sensuous and awakened to the call of Nature. Yet another of Abram’s metaphorical expressions exemplifying our firm, participative place in the world is that which describes his encounter with a simple wooden post: “each wooden post was suffused with its own singular character; all those wooden beams [...] *quietly gave me back to myself, rooted my mind back in the loamy soil of my breathing body*” (34). Once again, the body represents the only place where the mind can be anchored, providing it with self-awareness and a solid foundation. This assertion is succinctly summarized by another conceptual metaphor explaining that (EMOTIONAL) STABILITY IS CONTACT WITH THE GROUND.

#### **3.5.4 *Entering Reciprocity***

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

The metaphors selected for this chapter may be even more effective in dislodging the reader from their separation, since their embrace, caress, and delicacy work to soften, melt and transcend reader’s anthropocentric position. By enticing them with the promise of an erotic union, they can recognize their deep interdependence with a world no less intelligent or vital than their own. Any readers, then, who are still pinned to their seats with the surrounding objects overwhelming their minds rather than their bodies, are slowly persuaded to rise to their feet while being aware of their posture. They are urged to start moving *towards* the

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<sup>390</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, ix.

objects and finding their face to which they could turn and talk. The group of metaphorical expressions selected in this chapter are intended to persuade the reader to move forward from mere existence with objects or thinking and talking *about* them towards intimate conversation *with* objects. Through their devoted talk and passionate touch, they can discover the strong point of orientation anchored in their own body. The aim is to evoke the understanding that “beneath intelligence as beneath perception we discover more fundamental function, a vector mobile in all directions like a searchlight, one through which we can direct ourselves towards anything [...] and display a form of behaviour in relation to that object.”<sup>391</sup> This newly revealed body grants them access to a true sense of groundedness and self-coherence; through this carnal stability they can act and respond confidently to the world they are merged with. Abram’s unbridled imagination opens up a magical world of being flesh of its flesh in which “each *being radiates* into the world around it, and each *is affected (even infected) by the others*” (51); “you are also *being touched by the tree [...] the leaf is gently exploring your fingers, its pores, sampling the chemistry of your skin*”. Even the act of walking barefoot becomes conceived as the ultimate pleasure, sensing the soil which “*presses up against my bare feet and shapes itself to them*” or feeling the trampled grasses which “*massage and wake up my soles*” (58). We learn step by step that we are not necessarily “centrics” who handle and expropriate objects, but that the objects themselves possess the capability to respond actively to our physical emergence.

Nature and her entities swiftly provide support for our bodies, adapt their forms to our movement, reach out their hands to caress us or to hurt us. Abram constantly reminds us that while our bodies can be perceived as a dividing border separating the internal from the external, they are also a meeting and melting point for all of the fleshs involved, participating in a perpetual exchange by “*breathing.[...] offering ourselves to the world at one moment and drawing the world into ourselves at the next*” (61). During every communication “*the boundary between the human and the-more-than-human world stayed [...] permeable [...] that boundary never hardened into a barrier, but remained a porous membrane across which nourishment flowed steadily in both directions*” (236). In observing that “*changes in the terrain begin to release and mirror my own, internal changes*” (133), 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 left them with a sense of feeling

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<sup>391</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 157.

detached, therefore powerful, secure, and invulnerable, is always accompanied by the dimension of “being seen” and “being touched”, capable of breaking down their 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 sexual aspect of embodiment plays an important role in Abram’s imagery since, as “a form of original intentionality”, it vigorously directs us towards the other, letting us perceive it with an extraordinarily powerful urge and fascination.<sup>392</sup> In Abram’s text the act of perception becomes a communion, a sexual act during which the perceiver ascribes an erotic significance to the Earth and thus finds within it a stimulus for their sexual response and pleasure. Sensing the other remains (our) “*improvised dance with the sensuous medium that enfolds us*” (61) which develops into “*steady intercourse with the entities and elements around it [...] exerting its participation in the ongoing emergence of what is*” (51). Every living entity participates in “this ageless *intercourse between the body and the earth*”, and “this *coevolution* – has *shaped* the organs and tissues of every earthly organism, *deepening the colour* of our feather and the power of our claws” (73). On a different page the reader is “*penetrated by it* (the atmosphere), *encompassed by it, permeated*” (124). Nonetheless, the ability to experience the world in such vivid detail as that related by Abram is greatly dependent on the extent to which we are nourished by our underlying sexual charge, a force which affects our perception of the world and our acts and expressions within it.

In this section of the thesis, we will examine the selected metaphors from the perspective of the conceptual metaphor theory, placing a particular focus on the concept which most closely unites the majority of the selected metaphors: “perception”. Since the concept “perception” discloses numerous shades of meaning, we apply more conceptual metaphors which will accentuate its different profiles. The suggested options are PERCEPTION IS RECEPTION (51, 58), PERCEPTION IS INTERACTION / INHALING-EXHALING / INTERCOURSE / SEXUAL ACT / DANCING (51, 61, 73, 124). The concept of “perception” (involving “touching” and “feeling” in our examples) in the position of the target domain is explained in terms of different source domains, such as “reception”, “interaction”, “inhaling-exhaling”, “intercourse”, “sexual act”, and “dancing”, because each source domain highlights some aspect of the concept and it is difficult to identify a single

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<sup>392</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 182.

example which could simultaneously demonstrate all of the features of “perception” (Lakoff 1980, Kövecses 2010).

We can note, however, that despite the focus on the different qualities, there is a distinct coherence or connection among all of the source domains. Reception as “the action of taking in or receiving something physically, spatially, or mentally”, emphasizes the fact of “getting”.<sup>393</sup> Inhaling-exhaling, intercourse, the sexual act, and dancing (with a partner) complement the idea of “getting” with mutuality and rhythm while maintaining the stress on communion, interchange, coordination, and bodily movement.<sup>394</sup> The sexual act and dancing also enrich the concept by implying the exchange performed concurrently in the sense of “touching is being touched”. Although there is no conceptual metaphor which could provide a single consistent and complete image of “perception”, all of the source domains presented here are nevertheless coherent and contribute to our understanding of “perception” as gestalt, i.e., as the complex of attributes appearing together. As will be demonstrated below, the existence of metaphor and synaesthesia undoubtedly suggests that the fundamental human cognitive attribute is not the fragmentation of reality but the search for similarities and correlations. The act of deconstruction presupposes a construction, and this requires solid ground. In other words, since metaphor is such a powerful tool for creating and constituting a new reality rather than merely to showing us how to conceptualize an already existing reality, it creates and constitutes the reality of similarities, not disparities.<sup>395</sup>

All of the above conceptual metaphors can be united into one very general primary metaphor: EVENTS (i.e., perception in our case) ARE ACTIONS (i.e., reception, dancing, intercourse, interaction) (Grady 1997), which ascribes agency to an object which is causally associated with the event. This metaphor, therefore, is a gateway to personification, since an event in the form of perception is personified as a human activity or action which explains the process of perception. Perception is commonly understood as a concrete physical ability and is therefore expected to occupy the position of the source domain. In our case, however, it appears in the target domain position as an abstract concept explained figuratively, not literally. This can be explained by the fact that we are adopting a new conception of perception and are attempting to redefine it, to constitute and display newly revealed shades of its meaning. Additionally, it also contains conceptual dimensions (for example, intensity, existence) “that are complex and abstract enough to call for metaphorical

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<sup>393</sup> The definition of “reception” is provided by [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>394</sup> All the definitions are provided by [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>395</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 144.

conceptualization.”<sup>396</sup> Perception as an abstract concept can therefore be recognized “as a metaphorical agent, and the event is an action by that agent”: it emerges as an interactive actor which can dance, breathe, make love.<sup>397</sup> The purpose of the above explanation is to reiterate that most metaphors are grounded in correlations with physical experience, often enhanced by human qualities.

### ***Synaesthetic Metaphors which Are Possibly Neither Synaesthetic nor Metaphors***

Mutual exchange, permeability, or reciprocity is very often presented in the text in the form of synaesthesia viewed as “the truth of perception” in which the body intermingles with every phenomenon it encounters. Synaesthesia is apparent in Abram’s visual perceptions in which visual descriptions are combined with inward sensations; he feels the movement of trees or sunflowers as a tension and loosening, sensing them as twists occurring inside his own body.<sup>398</sup> Numerous synaesthetic metaphors in the text portray the way in which Abram perceives the objects and the terrain around him as objects which actively draw his attention and unify his senses. His body becomes the point at which all sensual modalities meet and inform each other, defining the very structure of his perception.

Other synaesthetic metaphors in the text provide examples of unexpected cross-modal correspondences, submerging the reader in the colourful network of multimodal reality. On a trip to a lake, Abram describes his intense preoccupation with “the *aromatic dark* of the soil [...] and *high-pitched scent* of the green needles” (14–15). In the far distance he hears “*darkly laughing scent* of cool water lapping up against the shore” (15). On another occasion, the light at sunrise allows him to “*taste the spreading ecstasy* of the leaves” (52); while walking through a forest, his “*gaze opens outward to touch* the needled shadows and the sky above” (97). As the day draws to a close, “a soaring crowd of *voices lights* the late-afternoon air” (185).

The precise definition of the phenomenon of synaesthesia is still a matter of considerable scientific debate. The condition is often explained as the “merging of the senses [...] or cross-sensory experience in which sensory/perceptual stimuli triggers unusual sensory/perceptual experiences.”<sup>399</sup> As the British neuropsychologist Julia Simner argues, any attempt to define synaesthesia as a purely sensory-perceptual condition can capture only a fragment of its multi-variant character since it can be “triggered by, or give rise to, higher-

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<sup>396</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 344.

<sup>397</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, 37.

<sup>398</sup> This type of synaesthesia demonstrates the connection between kinetics and vision (see the various synaesthesia types listed at <http://www.daysyn.com/Types-of-Syn.html>).

<sup>399</sup> Simmer, “Defining Synaesthesia,” 5.



order cognitive constructs, such as language, personality, and other abstract notions.”<sup>400</sup> Her expanded definition therefore includes not only sensory-perceptual experiences but also cognitive constructs.

Given the transgressive nature of the synaesthetic experience itself, let us examine to what extent we can consider the metaphors in Abram’s text to be synaesthetic metaphors. In the first metaphor “the *aromatic dark* of the soil”, the concept of VISION (dark – in the position of the target domain) is structured metaphorically by SMELL (aromatic – in the position of the source domain) to form the conceptual metaphor SEEING IS SMELLING. While an investigation of the conceptual structure of individual sense modalities as a structured whole and a discussion of which part of a particular sense is mapped onto the target of another sense would certainly be fruitful, it lies beyond the scope of this study and would distract us from the main aim of the thesis. What then is the intended meaning of the metaphors listed above? The expression *aromatic* envelops the otherwise humble soil in the haze of something warm and inviting, noteworthy and pleasurable. The conceptual metaphor theory emphasizes that if the structure of one domain (in this case a sensory modality) can be mapped onto another distinct domain (a second sense modality), a metaphorical connection has been made. On this basis, it is possible to assert that the examples can be defined as metaphors.

The expression “*high-pitched scent* of the green needles” involves the mapping of a sharp, intense auditive content onto the target domain of SMELL. The use of the adjective *high-pitched* may indicate the stinging and acute quality of the olfactory experience accentuated by the shape of the needles. In another metaphor we are presented with the “*darkly laughing scent* of cool water” which is a combination of three sensory modalities in which SMELL is conceptualized as AUDITION, and AUDITION is conceptualized as VISION. We might detect something sinister or even threatening in the composition *darkly laughing*, which perhaps suggests that the unexpected contact with cold water can be uncomfortable, displeasing, destructive, potentially leading to a life-threatening situation.

The slightly more complex metaphor “*taste the spreading ecstasy* of the leaves” in which the target domain EMOTION (ecstasy) is commonly explained as the source domain ENTITY (see metaphor index), therefore allowing the possibility that *ecstasy* might be “tasted”. EMOTION is synaesthetically connected with GUSTATION and highlights the

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<sup>400</sup> Simmer, “Defining Synaesthesia,” 23.

Simmer demonstrates that 88% of synaesthesia cases were activated by language units, e.g., phonemes, graphemes, or words. This is illustrated by letter-colour synaesthesia in which the colour of the letter emerges on the basis of the category of the letter, not from its perceptual feature (Simmer 2012).

evident abundance of greenery which awaits the hedonist who wants to give himself up to its gustatory delights or to be swallowed up and devoured by its mouth. Another metaphor “*gaze opens outward to touch* the needled shadows” presents a very regular primary metaphor frequently used in the form of VISION IS PHYSICAL CONTACT (Grady 1997) which depicts the urge to eliminate the distance between the seer and the seen, seeking out the pleasure of touch, the sense of coming into bodily contact with the enigma of another flesh. The last expression “a soaring crowd of *voices lights* the late-afternoon air” combines the auditory quality with vision; the *voices* here have the potential to activate, excite and awake the languid aspect of the late afternoon. At first sight, then, all of the expressions seem to meet the criteria of synaesthetic metaphors; nevertheless, a deeper examination can offer a surprisingly different perspective on the issue.

The British cognitive linguist Bodo Winter (2019) has suggested that synaesthetic metaphors may be neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical, pointing out the need “to distinguish between a neuropsychological and a linguistic phenomenon.”<sup>401</sup> Indeed, it is open to discussion whether Abram’s metaphors are examples of linguistic synaesthesia or “a linguistic phenomenon that directly relates to extra-linguistic perceptual processes.”<sup>402</sup> Either way, Abram is using synaesthesia to accentuate the existence of sensory reciprocity and communion and to reveal that this cross-talk between brain functions allows us to enter into a specific otherness more intensely.<sup>403</sup> On this basis, it seems somewhat irrelevant to discuss whether he himself applies a verbal simulation or actual perceptual imagery in light of the fact that synaesthesia is a scientifically recognized phenomenon. As Abram explains, however, synaesthetic experiences are so commonplace that they form the very structure of perception, a fact which perhaps leads to the conclusion that Abram’s synaesthetic descriptions have a neurological basis in any case.<sup>404</sup>

Winter also argues that the adjectives used in common expressions (e.g. *sweet melody*, *loud perfume*) do not depict synaesthetic qualities but instead serve an evaluative purpose which weakens the modality-specific perceptual content.<sup>405</sup> In Abram’s case, the source domain *aromatic* used in the metaphor “the *aromatic dark* of the soil” is defined as “having

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<sup>401</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 111.

Linguistic synaesthesia is defined as “a verbal simulation of synaesthetic perception or of a linguistic creation of cross-modality illusions” (Holz 2007: 193).

<sup>402</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 111.

<sup>403</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 252.

<sup>404</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 252.

<sup>405</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 112.

the fragrant smell, and warm, slightly pungent, taste, of spice”.<sup>406</sup> This expression can evoke the feeling of both pleasure and disgust depending on its intensity, and in this case it can therefore be considered as evaluative. It is more challenging, however, to claim unequivocally that *aromatic* evaluates *dark*, since it is not immediately clear whether the colour of the soil is pleasing or displeasing. The soil could be interpreted as a neutral or lifeless material which is not worthy of notice, but it nonetheless is capable of drawing our attention despite its rather modest appearance. The adjectives employed in the metaphors “*high-pitched scent of the green needles*” and “*darkly laughing scent of cool water*” can be considered as evaluative, since “high-pitched” is often defined as loud and unpleasant, while “dark” often acquires negative associations in line with the primary metaphor BAD IS DARK (Grady 1997). In summary, it is by no means a straightforward task to determine with certainty whether it is indeed the intention of the author to broaden the patchwork of synaesthetic perception or simply to evaluate the phenomena. Even if the act of evaluation weakens the modality-specific perceptual content, synaesthetic connective activity is still in effect in the background.<sup>407</sup> On such a basis, it seems somewhat short-sighted to assert that evaluative expressions should not be treated as synaesthetic in nature.<sup>408</sup>

Winter’s final point, however, is perhaps the most interesting since he appears to contradict the traditional Aristotelian system of senses, thereby throwing into question the metaphorical work performed between domains in a synaesthetic metaphor. Referring to the studies of different researchers (Ortony 1987; Spence and Bayne 2015), he maintains that “sensory perception is highly multimodal, involving all of the senses simultaneously” and that the sensory modalities, i.e., taste and smell or sound and touch, “share partially overlapping brain networks.”<sup>409</sup> Turning his attention to cultural anthropology and neuropsychology, he asserts that the Aristotelian five senses model is a cultural construct which has come about through our tendency to think *about* language rather than actually use it.<sup>410</sup> Irrespective of the numerous studies revealing the existence of even more sense modalities and demonstrating the continuity of perception (Connell 2009; Carlson 2010; Lynot and Moller 2012), traditional linguistics categorizes this fluidity while still working with five modalities. This leads to the conclusion that if we accept this culturally inflicted model, we are confronted with a conceptual conflict between the two distinct sense modalities (or, in other words, conceptual

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<sup>406</sup> <https://www.oed.com/>

<sup>407</sup> When exploring the evaluative function of adjectives in synaesthesia, it has been emphasized that sensory modalities have evaluative properties *in addition* to their descriptive functions (Lehrer 2009).

<sup>408</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 105, 121.

<sup>409</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 115, 119.

<sup>410</sup> Winter, “Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical,” 117.

domains) and would therefore be forced to concede that the above expressions are synaesthetic metaphors. As Winter suggests, however, synaesthetic metaphor is an apparent separator of the senses; as a result, it can be considered as a cultural construct and is therefore neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical.<sup>411</sup> Since the experience of sensation as a form of communion is strongly advocated throughout Abram's text, we might accept the fact that different sense modalities within a metaphor do not count as conflicting mappings and therefore cannot be granted the status of a synaesthetic metaphor.

The purpose of this extended subchapter has been to reinforce the main argument of the thesis and corroborate Merleau-Ponty's argument (1945/2005) that the union of the senses (as well as our natural ability to form a coherent union between the concepts within a conceptual metaphor) is founded on the integrated quality of our embodiment established through intentional and interactive engagement with reality. We cannot be forever isolated or fragmented entities since we can always rely on our capacity to pull the fragments together through co-existence and synchrony with the other, while remaining strongly rooted in our integrated body as a "synergic totality".

### ***Perception as Reception***

The aim of this subchapter is to reopen the issue of separating sense modalities through reference to a study by Zoltán Kövecses (2019) in which he subdivides the senses into further categories and works with the distinction between passive and active conceptual frames (i.e., *emit* and *sniff* in the case of smell). This issue is deserving of further exploration because this type of linguistic categorization once again appears to contradict the living experience of the author expressed in the text. If we adhere to Winter's ideas outlined in the previous subsection, it is possible to argue that Kövecses's system of categorisation is also a cultural construct. As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, synaesthetic metaphors (which appear not to be metaphors) tend to blur the boundaries between different sense modalities. Moreover, Abram's view of the reality is even more expansive and demonstrates that any act of perception has the capacity to blur the line between the active and passive.

While thus far we have highlighted the reciprocal role of the human body as an essential part of any act of perception, Kövecses takes a different approach and draws a sharp distinction between the patient or the experiencer of each sense modality and the agent who performs the action.<sup>412</sup> His effort is to identify a single prototype (either active or passive) for

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<sup>411</sup> Winter, "Synaesthetic Metaphors are neither synaesthetic nor metaphorical," 122.

<sup>412</sup> Kövecses, "Perception and Metaphor," 332.

a given category, arguing that smell, for example, demonstrates the passive variant of the smell frame.<sup>413</sup> Drawing from the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS PERCEPTION, Kövecses identifies a correlation between emotion and perception in which the latter serves as a source domain for the former. The reason for elaborating on this relationship is the fact that emotion emerges as a result of the surprise which we experience as “an immediate loss of control.”<sup>414</sup> The moment of surprise, therefore, is the quality which unites emotion with different sense modalities in terms of the lack of elaborated control aspect. Based on this reasoning, he concludes that the prototypical frame for different sense modalities “is constituted by the passive version [...] not the active one” since we actually have no control “over whether we perceive or over what we perceive.”<sup>415</sup> The occurrence of the active version as an intentional and controlled act is, therefore, less likely.<sup>416</sup> This argument has been supported by another Hungarian linguistic researcher Ádám Galac whose work on olfactory verbs notes that “olfaction’s culturally assigned role seems to delineate a subordinate, rather unconscious and uncontrollable sensory modality [...] often linked with negative emotions.”<sup>417</sup> Galac proceeds to further subcategorise the sense of smell by attributing to it a negative aspect.

Both linguists are then in agreement that smell (and possibly all perception) is in general an accidental act to which we are exposed on a haphazard and unpredictable basis. Kövecses summarizes this by declaring that “[a] curious property of perceptual experience is that we do not have control over what we experience.”<sup>418</sup> It is important to note, however, that when exploring smell (and other sense modalities) as a target domain, Kövecses identifies three dimensions by which it can be characterized, namely EXISTENCE, INTENSITY, LACK OF CONTROL.<sup>419</sup> His analysis sees perception in terms of reception alone, as a process of passive reception which tends to be unexpected, and therefore possibly unwelcome. However, Kövecses fails to take into consideration the interactive, reciprocal dimension of perception which is most definitely not a matter of solitary idiosyncratic imagery, but rather the manifestation of a fully attentive, focused, and reciprocal mind. Neither Kövecses nor Galac have ever scrutinized a world in which the perceiver is simultaneously in the position of a perceived entity; in such a relation, perception “is formed

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<sup>413</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 333.

<sup>414</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 334.

<sup>415</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 334, 342.

<sup>416</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 334, 343.

<sup>417</sup> Galac, “Semantic change of basic perception verbs,” 125.

<sup>418</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 31.

<sup>419</sup> Kövecses, “Perception and Metaphor,” 339.

in the midst of the world and as it were in the things.”<sup>420</sup> The porous “in-between” quality of the flesh does not differentiate between *either* active *or* passive nor does it split perception into two opposing experiences. *Becoming animal* means to return to the wildness of the flesh, to its pre-reflective fluid attribute; not what “I *think*”, but what “I *live through*”. The ability to feel that I am “actively” touching forms part of a circle: it emerges from the experience of being touched by the tangible which constitutes me as a toucher. I am simultaneously both in the “passive” position of a tangible object and in the “active” position of a touching one. The very existence of the perceived activates me to perceive in the same way as my existence activates the perceived to perceive me – each of us is the cause for the other’s perception, and our presences mutually constitute one another during the active/passive process of recognition.

It should be emphasized, however, that the classic perception verb paradigm and traditional conceptual metaphor theory fail to take the chiasmic (i.e., reciprocal) way of perception into consideration, and it would therefore be feasible to propose a complementary solution. Conceptual metaphor is typically unidirectional (i.e., the target is conceptualized by the source, not the other way round) and written in a linear form, while the experience of convertible mutuality is reversible, immediate, and active/passive. We would therefore propose that mutuality (including the state of activity/passivity) might be expressed by a *circular conceptual metaphor* which would eliminate the borderlines of this dichotomy, providing us with the impression of a more instantaneous experience. The schematic circular conceptual metaphor thus can be expressed as TO PERCEIVE IS BEING PERCEIVED IS TO PERCEIVE, depicted not as a linear form but as a circle. Another question which might arise, however, is whether TO PERCEIVE IS BEING PERCEIVED IS TO PERCEIVE can actually be considered to be a metaphor, which means that the target and the source function at the level of an “as if” connection. It might also be the case that they exist at the level of “is connection”, i.e., the identification of one entity with the other, which would essentially mean that they do not function as metaphors. This would be somewhat difficult to accept, because if we do not agree with Merleau-Ponty’s observation that perception is a reciprocal act, TO PERCEIVE IS BEING PERCEIVED can be understood as a metaphor. However, if we accept the phenomenon of intertwining, then TO PERCEIVE IS BEING PERCEIVED can no longer be seen as a metaphor but rather as an identification in which the source merges with the target. One solution here might be to describe the process of metaphor transformation (starting from “as if” and moving towards a “through” metonymical connection) in parallel

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<sup>420</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 134.

with the transformation of our perception which starts from the point of the separation of the self and the world and which ends up as connection. It is at this point that the target and the source melt into a unified and unifying whole and cease to function as a metaphor.

### 3.5.5 *Coming into the Earth's Mind*

With the previous chapters the reader is gradually becoming accustomed to the fact that their secluded mind is finally finding its way into the embrace of the body, a journey which will introduce them to the broader company of the material world. Slowly but surely, they descend from the location of a detached on-looker into the ebb and flow of the wind, the rushing body of a river and the whispering embrace of the trees. The readers start to realize that their thoughts and abstractions are shaped and nourished by the way in which they move through the world; they sense the world and absorb the world.

This chapter relates one of the last phases of this cycle, the introduction to the Great Refrain of the Earth's Mind. But before the reader can be restored to the soothing, safe environment of the Earth's womb, they are exposed to yet another disturbing episode in which they feel the sensation of losing control. After learning to pay careful attention to the rhythm of the body and to use it as a guiding metronome, the eye in the storm of chaos, they are struck by the disorientating realisation that their body is not their private possession under their ultimate control. As they merge more closely with this all-embracing world, they become increasingly sensitive to the foreign rhythm of a different entity which possesses the capacity to enter their own internal environment and transcode it. Abram ushers the reader into the land of "*sunlight [...] that coloured all my thoughts*", making them aware that "the slow spread of a *mountain's shadow alters the insect swarms*" (112). He exposes the reader to the dynamic, all-pervading wind that trails in its wake the personae of all the regions through which it has passed and accentuates that "*a wild wind can return us to our own vitality*" (148). This sense of reverberatory repetition is not restricted to Nature alone, however, but is also found in non-natural objects as cars, shoes or houses. Exposed to rain, and wind, and sun, "*old buildings [...] finally become gestures of the local earth [...] which seeps into the very core of our own rhythm*" (134). Every place, each piece of land and entity is vibratory and displays a code which is "in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction."<sup>421</sup>

The reader notices with a sense of growing disquiet that the vibration of another entity is like amoeba capable of producing "a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu"; the rain is modifying the atmosphere of the land, deterritorializing itself by adapting

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<sup>421</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 313.

to the form of the Earth.<sup>422</sup> The Earth in return, is at first deterritorialized by the torrent of water, but soon absorbs it and incorporates it into its own rhythm in the process of reterritorialization. All of these titanic movements alter the tenor and temper of the reader's thoughts and perceptions, rapidly dissolving their own code of being. Vaguely sensing that "seeing was a steady trading of myself here with the things seen there" (251), they gradually begin to accept the idea that the body is not an airtight casemate but is instead an open refrain whose intention is not necessarily to overwhelm or destroy other refrains but to integrate them as motifs for its own.<sup>423</sup> Most importantly, they see that the fact of interchange does not leave them adrift in agonizing arrhythmia or an intermediate state without any rhythm whatsoever; instead, they observe the creation of a new plane, a new territory with an innate drive to borrow "from all the milieus [...] since it is built from aspects and portions of milieus."<sup>424</sup> Even in the existence of endless realms, the beat of the single metronome does not fade away, but keeps its rhythm, beating out the bounds of the territory.

### ***The Great Chain of Being Metaphor at Odds with Reciprocity***

The metaphors given as examples above can be analysed with reference to one of the two general systems of metaphor, the Great Chain of Being metaphor.<sup>425</sup> By attributing human qualities to nonhuman entities by means of personification, metaphors allow us to gain a fuller understanding of the complex attributes of human beings. When performing this transition, we apply the Great Chain of Being, a cultural model which arranges living and non-living entities on a hierarchical scale from high to low. Humans share higher-order qualities (aesthetic, moral, rational) leading to higher-order behaviour, and their innate animal desires and untamed emotions are glossed over or disregarded; instinctual behaviour of this nature is instead attributed to lower forms of life, namely animals. Further down the Great Chain we can find plants representing biological attributes and complex objects manifesting structural and functional features. Natural physical objects are located at the very bottom of the scale, displaying natural physical characteristics and behaviour (Lakoff and Turner 1989). The key function of the Great Chain Metaphor is to present the idea that human beings can be better understood in terms of animal features or that the less comprehensible qualities of animals and the inanimate realm can be more easily grasped in reference to human qualities. The

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<sup>422</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 314.

<sup>423</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 314.

<sup>424</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 314.

<sup>425</sup> The concept of "The Great Chain of Being" (as a metaphor) appeared in *More Than Cool Reason* (1989) by Lakoff and Turner, being qualified as a largely unconscious cultural model which categorises objects and beings on a vertical scale from "lower" to "higher".



Great Chain metaphor is therefore a powerful conceptual tool since it conditions how we conceive of all of the world's entities.

Our examples in which “*shadow alters the surroundings*”, or “*sun colours one's mood*”, “*wind returns us to our vitality*” seem to be at first sight to be straightforward cases of personification. However, the target domains (shadow and sun as inanimate phenomena) are not necessarily in a metaphorical “*as if*” position but instead adopt a direct “*is*” position, which suggests the possibility of literality, thereby meaning that the expressions cannot be considered as metaphors and are thus excluded from the Great Chain of Being structure (the question of what does and does not constitute a metaphor in Abram's text will be returned to in the following chapter). The abilities of the source domain (i.e., of a human agent), such as to “return somebody to”, “alter”, “colour”, are all higher-order human capacities since they “exercise voluntary control” (1989). These qualities are then mapped onto lower-order entities in order to allow a better understanding of their behaviour. When we make use of the conceptual metaphor INANIMATE PHENOMENA ARE HUMAN AGENTS (1989), we are saying that “inanimate lower-order phenomena” are *only as if* “human higher-order agents”, because they follow biological or physical laws in an automatic manner and lack the properties which humans have. In essence, this approach to the denizens of the non-human world deprives them of their capacity to exercise voluntary control. As Lakoff and Turner have noted, “[t]he cultural model of the Great Chain concerns not merely attributes and behaviour but also dominance.”<sup>426</sup> In other words, by ranking humans as the pinnacle of creation, we are claiming the right to dominate animals and nature, because “to subvert that dominance in any microcosm is to challenge the correct order of the macrocosm.”<sup>427</sup> This hierarchical thinking has enormous social, ethical, political, and ecological consequences, but a deeper examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this work. (Non)Metaphors in Abram's text, however, break free from the shackles of the *as if* condition, drawing us into the world of inter-action where humans have lost their monopoly of imposing control on the Earth, emphasising instead a reciprocal confirmation between the self and the other, while inter-weaving an individual's pulsing threads with those of the other into a single fabric.

### ***Ideas Which Are Not Our Own***

As they delve deeper into the narrative, our reader is exposed over and over again to entirely unexpected revelations with the potential to shake their carefully built-up belief system and

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<sup>426</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, 208.

<sup>427</sup> Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, 210.

self-confidence to the core. They come to the realisation that the categorization of our senses along with the dichotomy of active and passive are a cultural construct and begin to question the hitherto uncontested anthropocentric worldview. The reader discovers that their body is not a self-contained capsule cut off from the influences of the surrounding world to safeguard its supposed stability and safety, but that is undergoing a constant process of remodelling through its intertwining with the external environment. Yet, they might believe that the only remaining refuge of their sense of security and uniqueness is the private realm of their thoughts and reflections. Further reading, however, might lead them to doubt whether their own thoughts and ideas are in fact their own private property. Thoughts *occur to them, cross their mind*, as autonomous elements possessing the mind of the reader rather than being conjured into existence by the individual mind itself. The reassuring certainties of the earlier world start to crumble away before their very eyes, and the reader is confronted with the vexing question of how to start afresh in a new reality in which the framework of the previous world no longer applies.

When carefully observing the content of his own mind, Abram notices that “*a simple thought bursts upon my awareness [...] like a gentle rain beginning to fall around me, soaking my head and my chest, moistening the ground and raising its mingled scents to my nostrils*” (123). He recognizes that his thoughts behave as independent entities, remarking that “*certain ideas were like deer, visiting our awareness in much the same way that wild deer make contact with us [...] yet slipping back into the forest [...] certain lightweight thoughts flutter in the air around us, so small and erratic [...] while other more muscled notions lope unexpected across our roads*” (118). Abram is positing here that even ideas can appear and disappear like ephemeral creatures in our mind which are impossible to be enclosed in the cabinet of our private consciousness. In this understanding, ideas have an external origin and exert a powerful effect on our feelings and emotions. They radiate creative energy, sometimes in the form of sombre, gloomy blocks weighing heavily upon us, at other times revitalising us with their brightness and delicacy. On occasion they can sneak up on us in silence or intrude upon us impertinently, disturbing our hard-won mental balance. One way or another, with insistency and vigour they allow our mute world to explode into song; they both offer us a seemingly endless cavalcade of variety while simultaneously trying to arrange and make sense of it for us.

While applying the conceptual metaphor uniting the diverse facets of “idea” and helping to comprehend its meaning, we make use of IDEAS ARE OBJECTS / SUBSTANCE, in which the target domain “ideas” is conceptualized by image schemata. Given the multi-

layered nature of CM, the image schema (object, substance, motion) is placed at the very bottom as the most skeletal conceptual structure which fills the experience with meaning.<sup>428</sup> As highly schematic gestalts and directly meaningful pre-conceptual structures,<sup>429</sup> image schemata are able to make the abstract concept (in our case “idea”) meaningful and view it as something physical that can move, change forms, exert force and be held. In the process of this metaphorical projection, it is the image which is mapped, not the concept, guiding us directly to the reoccurring pattern of our perceptual and sensorimotor experiences and providing us with a sense of coherence and structure. As Mark Johnson stresses, “experientially based, imaginative structures of this image-schematic sort are integral to meaning and rationality.”<sup>430</sup> Johnson again leads us back to the focus on the body as the foundation which initiates pre-conceptual non-propositional experience from which the imaginative structure of understanding stems. At the very base of our understanding of “ideas” there is the highest level of schematicity which is represented in the form of an object, substance or force. When elaborating on the concept in more detail, we advance to the next level of the domain, not as “imagistic patterns of experience” but rather a phenomenon which is “propositional in nature in a highly schematic fashion.”<sup>431</sup> Together with the frame (the next highest category on the metaphorical hierarchy), the domain provides more conceptually precise information, and therefore the concept of “idea” is elaborated further by different domains/frames such as BOMB (“a simple *thought bursts*”), WATER (“*soaking my head*”) or ANIMAL (“*sipping back into the forest*”).<sup>432</sup>

The pinnacle of the cognitive structure is reserved for a mental space defined as “very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk, for purpose of local understanding and action.”<sup>433</sup> The mental space, determined also as a current discourse space “shared by the speaker and hearer as the basis for discourse at a given moment”, is therefore conceptually rich, detailed, and context specific.<sup>434</sup> In our example, the concept of “idea” being a “substance” at the most schematic level becomes “water” at a more elaborated domain/frame level, and finally takes the specific form of “rain” at the immediate level of its local rainy

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<sup>428</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 51.

<sup>429</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 53.

<sup>430</sup> Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, xiv.

<sup>431</sup> Kövecses, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, 53.

<sup>432</sup> Metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon, consists of four levels of schematicity. The most schematic is an “image schema” level followed by a “domain”, “frame”, and “mental space” level. The first three are based on our experience in the world, providing us with the primary patterns of conceptual systems. In the mental space the speaker, while being in a distinct communicative setting, can exploit and manipulate this experiential knowledge according to the available situation (Kövecses 2020: 145).

<sup>433</sup> Fauconnier, “Mental Spaces,” 351.

<sup>434</sup> Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, 59.

context which can “fall”, “soak” or “moisten” one’s head. The source domains “substance” and “object”, representing the conceptualisation of the target domain “idea”, complement each other in a coherent way, disclosing the facets of “idea” in their own distinct yet united manner. “Substance” focuses on the material of which an object is formed and in virtue of which it possesses certain properties: as a result, the ideas might be said to fly or soak and constitute moisture or vapour.<sup>435</sup> ‘Object’ provides ‘substance’ as a material shape which can be placed in front of us, thereby allowing ‘ideas’ to be pictured as a perceivable element which is physically tangible and capable of being held.

Although the narrative is committed to breaking down the familiar, at no point does the reader feel compelled to succumb to ruin and despair. Eventually, the narrative allows us to draw a solid circle around our still brittle and unsettled centre, creating a protective space above the rising waters of havoc. During his endless walks and explorations of the wild, Abram maintains an attitude of calm certainty as he notices the “*mind*, here in this high valley” which “seems *a vast thing, open and at ease*” (113). As his absorption deepens, he offers a different perspective on the mind, describing it as “more like *a wooded valley, or a meadow* shadowed by cloud: and *open terrain* through which I was wandering” (117). After casting doubt on our capacity to possess our own thoughts, he goes one step further and begins to question whether the mind itself truly belongs to the Earth rather than to humankind. He thinks of the mind as “*a power in which we are carnally immersed*” (123), reversing its position. The mind is not situated within us, it is we who are planted inside the mind. He develops his observations further by noting that “our lives and thoughts *unfold in the depths of a mind* that is not ours”, allowing us to “participate with our actions and passions *in the broad psyche of this sphere*” (123). Abram’s concept of enveloping nature of the Earth’s Mind restores an experiential sense of reality, which he depicts as a geocentric universe, as an all-encompassing womb which offers us protection and sanctuary.

In his work *Being Salmon, Being Human* (2017), the Norwegian eco-philosopher and writer Martin Lee Mueller comments on Abram’s maternal understanding of the cosmos and claims that it “must have been born from an intimate and intense sense of interiority, a sense of living inside something much larger than ourselves.”<sup>436</sup> Abram himself frequently refers to indigenous peoples who perceive the sky as a shelter, a house, or a vast canopy shielding their lives, and Lee Mueller sees a parallel here in the collective pre-Copernican experience which saw the Earth as the centre of the cosmos which held the living world safe at its heart (2017:

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<sup>435</sup> Definition of “substance” is provided by <https://www.oed.com>.

<sup>436</sup> Mueller, *Being Salmon, Being Human*, 10.

10).<sup>437</sup> With the discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, however, the universe suddenly expanded, losing its local, homely attributes and leaving humans assailed with anxiety and doubt in its near-infinite expanses. In contrast, Abram's text shows the reader a trajectory out of the impersonal vastness of the heliocentric space, letting them be reborn in the cosy mind of the Earth to harmonize with its lunar rhythms. The Earth is presented to us as a territorial assemblage, "an act of rhythm that has become expressive" which offers itself as an unambiguous sign in the unsigned chaos, a safe haven among the maelstrom of "the forces of a raw and untamed matter" which possesses the power to absorb the rhythms of innumerable milieus, to territorialize them and use them as building blocks for its own rhythm.<sup>438</sup> Abram's text offers us this sense of security while interwoven with the repetitive, cyclical organisation of the world, echoing and harmonising with the rhythm of the ebb and flow of the seas.

The French Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre differentiates between great cyclical rhythms (days, nights, seasons) and linear repetition (stemming from human activity) as the components of the antagonistic union of relations.<sup>439</sup> We are encouraged to turn to our bodies as a first step in order to learn to listen to and identify the unique rhythm which becomes a "preparatory discipline for the perception of the outside world" through which we can "consequently appreciate external rhythms."<sup>440</sup> A willingness to appreciate or rather to enter these rhythmical multiplying multiplicities in confidence demonstrates that the time has come when our reader needs no longer to fear the risk of losing themselves in the maze of possibilities, since "each multiplicity is symbiotic; its becoming ties together animals, plants, microorganism [...] a whole galaxy."<sup>441</sup> This symbiosis will allow them to establish a relationship in which each entity willingly provides a background for the continued beat of the other, a rhythm which will remain exclusive.

The metaphorical analysis reveals that the Earth's mind (or Nature in general) is comprehended via very skeletal non-propositional image schemata OBJECT, CONTAINER, FORCE, thereby creating the conceptual metaphor such as THE (EARTH'S) MIND IS A BODY / AN (OPEN) CONTAINER / POWER. This conceptual metaphor is grounded in the primary metaphor conceptualizing CONDITIONS, EXISTENCE, SITUATIONS, STATES as LOCATIONS or FORMS (Grady 1997, List of Primary Metaphors). The primary metaphors

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<sup>437</sup> Mueller, *Being Salmon, Being Human*, 10.

<sup>438</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 315, 338.

<sup>439</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 8.

<sup>440</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 19–20.

<sup>441</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 250.

as the simplest level of metaphors serve as atomic components for more complex arrangements and “are part of the cognitive unconscious” acquired “automatically and unconsciously via the normal process of neural learning.”<sup>442</sup> The primary metaphor does not therefore involve a conscious multi-level process of comprehension but is the result of an instantaneous mapping of neural connections.<sup>443</sup> Following the Narayanan neural theory of metaphor, the actual neural work is explained as cooperation between two groups of nodes which relate to source and target domain, with the circuitry established between them corresponding to the mapping process. In primary metaphors we map the sensorimotor domain (the source) to the domain of individual, abstract experience (the target). This process gives rise to a key assumption which is summarized by Kövecses as follows: “we do not only *understand* (or conceptualize or think about) target domains *in terms of* source domains, but we *experience* target domains *as* source domains.”<sup>444</sup> Since these metaphors are carried in our brain physically, they root our abstract thought in the physical work of the brain, and in our existence in the world as a body.

When discussing Earth’s Mind, Abram draws both unconsciously and naturally on the most fundamental human experiences, a context without which this abstract concept would be impossible to understand, setting us free from the semiotic circulation within language. He takes advantage of the container metaphor which is based on the experience of our own body as a bounded space with an input-output orientation. He projects this experience onto the abstract Mind or Nature but also onto the more physical entity of the Earth. By imposing borderlines, he marks off or delineates a territory, an act which represents the basic human instinct to establish a safe zone far away from the forces of chaos or the unknown. This conceptual metaphor is further enriched and elaborated by context in the form of EARTH’S MIND IS VALLEY / MEADOW / HOME / WOMB / MOTHER. As in the previous examples, each of the source domains develops the concept of Mind in a unique way, highlighting one of its many aspects. VALLEY emphasizes the hollow nature of the Mind, MEADOW focuses on its spaciousness, abundance, and openness, while HOME and WOMB evoke the feelings of safety, intimacy or closeness. The Mind in Abram’s text can also be understood in terms of FORCE which is metaphorically conceptualized as SUBSTANCE; this connection allows it to be quantified, viewed as a cause or reacted to.

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<sup>442</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 56.

<sup>443</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 57.

<sup>444</sup> Kövecses, *Metaphor: A practical Introduction*, 10.

### 3.5.6 *Making the Reader Rooted Inside*

The reader's sojourn through Abram's animate landscape has sharpened their animal senses and enveloped them with a warm feeling that the external world is not a mute, insensitive, and immobile object, but is in fact constantly reaching out to us, actively inviting us into dialogue. We are slowly adapting to our new life in a reality where animals, plants, and stones want to communicate to us and listen to us, entangling us in the matrix of interchange. Our journey through the text has revealed that the land is not just a creation but is a fully creative and living force which expresses itself in countless ways.

In one particularly evocative passage of his work, Abram describes the apple tree in his garden after it has burst forth into blossom in the bright spring sunshine: "*the whole yard was listening, transformed* by the satin eloquence of the petals". Not only is the apple tree able to communicate to the wider world around it, but "even ostensibly "inert" *objects radiate out of themselves, conveying* their shapes, hues, and rhythms to other beings". He is left in no doubt that "we are being *listened to or sensed by the earthly surroundings*" (172). The sense of being immersed in the body of the world, existing as an anonymous element of What Is, "being *in intimate alliance with the bedrock*" (261), with something much greater than us, brings us a feeling of protection and safety. However, we may wish to ask what exactly is it that places us "in intimate alliance with the bedrock"; what does this intimate alliance actually mean? One possible answer is perhaps provided by Henri Lefebvre and the distinction he draws between "present" and "presence". The present, as he notes, is both here and there, obvious and visible; "[i]t is an adulterated product that simulates **presence** as a forgery imitates a fact of nature, fruit, a flower, etc."<sup>445</sup> The "present" duplicates the real, producing a commodified copy of life which lacks its flesh and profundity.

How is it still possible that even while being here, it is only the imitating "present"? Lefebvre states that the transformation of presence into simulacra, into a thing, is an almost magical act, describing the essence of the process as follows: "if you have the ability to take the flow and streams (T.V., the press, etc.) as **rhythms** among others, you avoid the trap of the **present** that gives itself as presence and seeks the effects of presences."<sup>446</sup> This is a key statement which can help us to understand all of Abram's efforts throughout his text and reveal its central message. The statement is saying that it is actually *us* who have the capacity to integrate the things "in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming

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<sup>445</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 22.

<sup>446</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 23.

them no longer into diverse things, but into presences.”<sup>447</sup> Firstly, we have the mutual cooperation between the author and the reader, who both offer their own presences and absorption while describing and interpreting their experiences. Abram’s presence manifests itself as the quality of being utterly attentive and captivated, a state which is perceived directly by his body. His body is in the eternal “now” and it speaks and displays itself, by the way in which he perceives the world and by the affection which is apparent in his articulation of words: “I feel my way toward the precise phrase with the whole of my flesh, drawn toward certain terms by the way their texture beckons dimly to my senses [...] choosing my words [...] by the way they finally taste on my tongue as I intone them [...].”<sup>448</sup>

Abram sees the fact of letting the body involve itself in the here and now by speaking or acting in the world in order to palpably transfer our intentions or emotions as an act of honesty. This might also constitute the magic which transforms “present” into “presence” by bringing the rhythm (of an individual) into an objectified form of life, an essentially reciprocal act, since the world as an expressive entity constantly speaks to us, affects us, listens to us, mingles our rhythm with its own. The full circle of bringing and taking is once again enclosed by our body which, by maintaining it in a state of alertness, develops our capacity to experience the world as a responsive entity. By “being in intimate alliance with the bedrock”, we transfer the present bedrock into presence by offering it our own alert and honest individuality, wide-open and receptive to its rhythm; no longer “speaking *about* bedrock” but instead “speaking *to* bedrock”, placing it directly in front of our eyes, teaching us to feel intimacy and care.

***(Everything Begins with Refrains) ... and Everything Comes to an End at Infinity with the Great Refrain***

Everything begins with refrains; a molecular condition which traces a line of flight in response to the process of fragmentation and the disorganized condition of chaos. The point of the examination of Abram’s text is to revive our animal sensitivity in order to re-establish our relationship with the world through our bodies. By re-creating the connection with our body and the world we can enter into a more (human) reciprocal, complementary condition through which we identify our own refrain, a territory we can call our own which serves as a form of refuge, integration, and coherence. Becoming animal as a new realized possibility means the

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<sup>447</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 23.

<sup>448</sup> Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 168.

Videos of Abram speaking about his experiences illustrate wonderfully his physical and mental absorption when uttering every single word; see, for example, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed44p94\\_B0k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed44p94_B0k).



process of becoming rooted, becoming territorial, a transformation which offers us the possibility of meeting ourselves inside the animal and through the animal. The purpose of this momentous change is to signify that the thickness of the flesh, the distance between the seer and the object does not separate them but in fact unites them in dialogue, since the gap causes the thing to be seen, making the seer aware of it and provoked into reflection upon it. Throughout this territorializing process we have the chance to acquire a new sense of confidence and independence stemming from the fact that our territorial assemblage will always serve as a strong constitutive background from which we can pass to another with greater ease.

Becoming animal as a membrane-like condition for inter-assemblage might be, however, the preparation or precondition for its own end at infinity with the Great Refrain, the entry into a state that “exceeds the capacities of any possible assemblage, entering another plane.”<sup>449</sup> Deleuze and Guattari talk about a deterritorialized Cosmos where the territorialized forces organized as the forces of the Earth are unleashed: “The forces of an immaterial, non-formal, and energetic Cosmos.”<sup>450</sup> The potency of this immense Great Refrain symbolizes a colossal desire to overstep the fixed certainties of the molecular terrain and experience the ecstasy of free-fall, the ecstasy of permanent becoming, a Cosmos.

### ***Metaphor as a Means of Linguistic Silence***

Other metaphors in Abram’s work familiarise the reader with a personified reality in which all the world is given the space to speak, listen, 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 section has already analysed personification metaphors, but in this section we will examine the larger issue of whether these metaphorical expressions really speak of something as though it were another.

In the metaphor “*the whole yard was listening, transformed by the satin eloquence of the petals*” 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.”<sup>451</sup> Fauconnier (1997) and Kövecses (2015) also note that different constituents of the conceptual system (e.g., frames and their elements)

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<sup>449</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 326.

<sup>450</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 43.

<sup>451</sup> Yoos, “A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor,” 84.

are linked to each other not only metaphorically through an “as-if-connection” but by “is-connection” called an identity relation.<sup>452</sup> In view of the above observations, it is possible to suggest that the expression might 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, the “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 brought together in the constitution of one under the aspect of the other.”<sup>453</sup> 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 appearances, it would appear that the examples of personification used by Abram might be literal expressions taking 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.

The Australian phenomenologist Berndt Sellheim (2010) examined the metaphors used by Merleau-Ponty in an effort to develop a terminology which could best describe a new non-dual space, namely the ontological intertwining of body and mind. His research highlighted the impossibility of formulating a precise linguistic framework when it comes to the experience of an embedded corporeal subjectivity that is 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.”<sup>454</sup> 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.”<sup>455</sup> Sellheim understands this silence as a quality which is determined by our body, by our perceptual experience, in the process of uniting corporeality, sense, and utterance..<sup>456</sup> Before we 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.<sup>457</sup> We are supposed to “plunge into the world instead of surveying it”, an experience which is reflected

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<sup>452</sup> Is-connection, i.e., an identification or identity relation, is defined as the connection during which a conceptualizer identifies a concept with another or s/he categorizes one entity or concept as another (Kövecses 2015: 44).

<sup>453</sup> Yoos, “A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor,” 85.

<sup>454</sup> Sellheim, “Metaphor and Flesh,” 265.

<sup>455</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 46.

<sup>456</sup> Sellheim, “Metaphor and Flesh,” 266.

<sup>457</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38.

precisely in the indeterminate metaphor in which body with language merge.<sup>458</sup> Merleau-Ponty's idea of metaphor as a tool of silence which strips 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.<sup>459</sup> 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 never flourish in the immobilizing 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 want to reflect the pre-established (culturally, linguistically) precise signification, but the imaginative silence pregnant with subtle tones of meaning resulting from the intimate contact of the perceiver with the perceived. Sellheim rightly remarks that polyvalent metaphors have the ability to echo the activity of life in a more "clinging" way than the expressions more semantically resolvable.  
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The points 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, but 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 a statement of identity can alter our apprehension of and attitude towards the described reality. As a result, this can eventually bring about the realisation that humans are not in fact the ultimate rulers of the world, thereby transforming our anthropocentric behaviour accordingly. On the other hand, literal explicit language deprives us of the perfection of inexact forms which have 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

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<sup>458</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 39.

<sup>459</sup> Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," 268.

<sup>460</sup> Sellheim, "Metaphor and Flesh," 270.

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.”<sup>461</sup>

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 forge a hitherto unknown reality which can be viewed from a new light, possibly leading to a transformation in our behaviour and actions. Figurative reading is also a key component of this approach which allows metaphors to preserve their conceptual “oceanic” openness, giving meaning the space to linger at the level of poetic silence.

Analysing texts with an emphasis on the extra-linguistic mode of understanding, i.e., embodied meaning, mediated by metaphor (and also, as was demonstrated in the previous analytical chapter on Danielewski, by sound) is the most effective way out of the enclosed system of definitive semantic structures and of forming a more immediate alliance with the external world.

### 3.6 Concluding Remarks

Man never accepts chaos but the world.

(Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 1995/1998)

As Jan Patočka, one of the most prominent Czech philosophers, stressed in his lectures (1968–69), man cannot exist in chaos. Our idea of the world does not grow from the chaos of impressions which later crystallize into order, since human beings, insofar as they exist, always do so in something they are capable of understanding.<sup>462</sup> The analysis of metaphor, an approach which has always been closely linked to cognitive research, attempts to demonstrate that the property of thought is not an atomistic phenomenon but makes use of gestalt structures through which we can comprehend the world as a coherent, interconnected whole. As Lakoff has emphasised repeatedly, “conceptual systems are organized in terms of categories, and most if not all of our thought involves those categories.”<sup>463</sup>

The prime intention of this work has been to demonstrate that the two texts under examination, *Only Revolutions* by Mark Z. Danielewski and *Becoming Animal* by David Abram, provide a possible alternative to the postmodern proliferation and fragmentation of

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<sup>461</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 42.

<sup>462</sup> Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 76.

<sup>463</sup> Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, xvii.

cognitive spaces in which we can so easily find ourselves lost and deprived of coherence. The study has attempted to navigate a route through the assemblage of diverse universes residing both within and beyond ourselves in order to encourage the reader to pay greater attention to their bodies, notice the patterns, subtle rhythms, regularities, and correlations around us, “discreetly” interconnect the individual body with the body of the world, and establish the experience of solidarity and sharing. The crucial element, the primordial zone from which we start, is the body, both that of the protagonists and those of the reader, representing the core of existence and knowledge, an entry point from which we can view and possess the world. Once we cease to think of the body as an isolated object among other objects, either dualistically or reductionistically, we have the chance to slough off our solipsistic tendencies.<sup>464</sup> Its intentional, active nature allows us to understand the world not on the basis of stimulus-response, but as a result of a conscious, dynamic movement towards it. If we allow the act of perception to being interact with nature, we establish communication and communion with the external surroundings and also with ourselves. Bodily existence is reflected in language and its somatic features, i.e., acoustics and articulation, endowing it with significance and meaning and releasing it from the carousel of conceptual closeness.

The rich metaphorical framework found in the text *Becoming Animal* was analysed as a key interpretational device, since it guides us directly towards the body, thereby supporting the main argument of this thesis. It suggests that relativistic and socially constructionist postmodern understandings of the world can be called into question by the fact that the physical context serves as the basis for (metaphorical) conceptualization and provides the universality and constraints to otherwise endless processes of meaning-making. By examining relevant metaphors and organizing them into thematic clusters, the reader can experience the narrative not as a fragmented reality, but as a cycle or a journey during which they can gradually overstep the limits of an isolated “object” and enter the realm of reciprocal communion with the world. Metaphor then serves as a strong unifying tool which can convey meaning and sense in the experiential fragments of Abram’s narration. Moreover, as a pervasive feature of thought, metaphor naturally and effortlessly connects the visible (physical source domain) with the invisible (abstract target domain), loosening the grip of abstract concepts and enriching them with the spontaneity of the flesh. As an intersection and

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<sup>464</sup> Commenting on the Enlightenment as the essential ethos of Western modernity with the capacity to marginalize nature, body, woman, and the non-Western world, the American political science scholar Hwa Yol Jung observes that “Descartes erected the canonical institution of the *cogito*, which is by necessity disembodied, monological/narcissistic, and ocularcentric.” He continues by saying that it created an incorporeal solipsistic man, whose mind was the only entity which needed to exist. (2007: 239).

unifier of consciousness and matter, metaphor is the only tool which is able to express “the doubling-up quality of chiasmic reality and embodiment” simultaneously, as is summarized by the American philosopher Jerry H. Gill.<sup>465</sup> Using the body as background, metaphor animates language, constantly reminding us of the somatic aspect of our existence and situating us simultaneously in language and our body, granting us a glimpse of how we might be located in the world. This implies that language is not an enclosed cabinet whose meaning is a matter of mere signification; instead, metaphors and extra-linguistic devices allow us to encompass the objects of the world, to “touch” them and “sense” them. “The intentional threads of embodiment and speech” liberate us from separation, suffusing us in the relational reality of the intersubjective.<sup>466</sup>

The above analysis has also demonstrated that metaphor, namely personification, can be read either literally or figuratively, and therefore its figurative meaning can be transformed at any time into the literal without resulting in any change. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of chiasm as an intersection or unifier of opposing entities is also applicable to metaphor, a structure which not only possesses the ability to unite polarities (the physical versus the abstract) but also the ability to be reversible (the figurative into the literal). The metaphorical “as if” condition can be reversed into the literal “is” condition, placing into question the entire hierarchy of the cultural Great Chain Model and the idea of the human as a solitary and dominant force in nature. The metaphorical reversibility makes it abundantly clear that humans are not at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, objects standing aloof from the world, but are instead part of a broader community in which nobody is downgraded and nobody is privileged.

By analysing the concept of metaphor, the thesis has demonstrated that the act of perception is naturally multimodal and does not separate but softens the edges of the opposites, causing them not to contradict each other, but rather build on each other and mingle with each other. The reader is thus invited into a world in which the active merges into the passive and sense modalities dissolve through synaesthesia. The very fact of becoming animal relativizes Saussurean dichotomies and draws attention to the borderline where one phenomenon can blend smoothly into another. The reality of Abram’s text is not a realm of unrelated, polarized, fragments, but one of fluidity, of permeable borders, a continuity of transition. The text advocates a greater porosity of borders between all beings, both human

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<sup>465</sup> Gill, *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor*, 70.

<sup>466</sup> Gill, *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor*, 128.

and non-human, rejecting hierarchy and centrism of all kinds, primarily the force of anthropocentrism which “destroys the transversal “circulation” of all beings and things.”<sup>467</sup> Abram’s text offers the potential to recover our submerged bodies, and in doing so we are able to restore our integrity and nurture a more compassionate relationship with ourselves and the world in which we dwell.

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<sup>467</sup> Jung, “Merleau-Ponty’s Transversal Geophilosophy and Sinic Aesthetics of Nature,” 251.

## 4 CONCLUSION

In his analysis of postmodernist cultural productions, Frederic Jameson laments the fact that the subject has lost its ability “to organize its past and future into coherent experience” and has therefore lost the sense of unity of the external world. Jameson argues that this fragmentation of the external world also entails the structural disintegration of the subject, the absence of ontological security, with the result that “it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but heaps of fragments.”<sup>468</sup> In the work of John Cage, Samuel Beckett, or the language poetry emerging among a younger generation of San Francisco poets, he notices that the position of a signifier in a text in free-standing isolation no longer reflects the state of the world; no chain of signification is formed in this art, and instead we gain the impression that the entire architecture of narrative is collapsing around us. He summarizes his observations by stating that “psychic fragmentation” which “promoted to the very motor and existential logic of the late capitalism itself” becomes “a better term for what ails us today.”<sup>469</sup> Expanding upon the collapse of the pre-existing organic entirety, he observes that this is greatly reinforced by “the emergence of the multiple in new and unexpected ways, unrelated strings of events” creating “absolute and absolutely random pluralism” in the form of “unrelated fuzzy sets and semiautonomous subsystems [...] replicated by the rhetoric of decentering.”<sup>470</sup>

Nonetheless, this form of hallucinogenic perception of the multidimensionality of spaces in the form of a stream of disorganized images is aptly balanced by Jan Patočka who stresses that the fundamental part of our being is understanding the world before I *know* it. Initially, we do not cognize the environment because we understand it the same way as we understand how we breathe. Patočka exemplifies this by explaining that if we pick up a piece of chalk, the act involves an act of understanding which does not include *a knowledge* about its purpose but “an integration within a certain internal context which functions within me.”<sup>471</sup> This is the reason why “humans can never be amid chaos” since “as they are *existence*, humans always exist amid something they understand.”<sup>472</sup> He does admit, however, that we

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<sup>468</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 25.

<sup>469</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 117, 90.

<sup>470</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 373.

<sup>471</sup> Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 105.

<sup>472</sup> Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 105.



can experience a state of disarray and that “chaos is also a kind of understanding [...] but that is something secondary, that is an anomaly, presupposing something else.”<sup>473</sup>

Even if we encounter “absolutely random pluralism” and we gain the impression of the structural disintegration of the self, the aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate that humans are driven by a strong disposition to look for meaning, to seek out a reality which is comprehensible, logical, and ordered. The novel analytical tools and approaches of phonosemantics, CMT, and phenomenology were selected in order to find out whether it is possible to find an alternative to the existing interpretations of the selected texts which (namely *Only Revolutions*) highlight the aspects of disintegrated man who creates disintegrated worlds through an enclosed linguistic system. Phenomenology reveals the significance of the process of noesis, a synthesizing act through which we demonstrate a tendency to constitute the object as a homogenous, unified, and meaningful element regardless of its diverse layers and profiles. The analysis of *Only Revolutions* by Mark Z. Danielewski illustrated how the fragments of the text could be synthesised or connected by identifying unifying phonic and suprasegmental elements and grouping seemingly unrelated semantic fractions into interwoven thematic wholes. It was also possible to find a connection between the inner states of the protagonists and the graphical representation of single words, their phonemic quality and the nature of the situations which the words reflect. We are even able to connect this with the inner feelings of the reader who has the potential to become involved in the experience of the protagonists and ally with the ongoing situation in the text by identifying the parallels.

The exploration of David Abram’s *Becoming Animal* further demonstrated that our understanding of reality occurs in the form of entire domains and not through isolated concepts. The analysis of Abram’s metaphors through the application of conceptual metaphor theory demonstrated that the process of mapping one domain to another is not random or unsystematic process but is in fact a highly organized act in which a source domain gives rise to a coherent structuring of experience mapped onto the target that is then constituted correspondingly as an orderly domain. The mapping strategy exploits the full complex of an object or situation’s multidimensional properties experienced as a unified whole known as a gestalt. This capacity manifests that we perceive and conceptualize a situation or object not as a chaotic heap of unrelated occurrences or fragments but as a whole which can be understood

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<sup>473</sup> Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, 105.

as the interplay of the object's purposeful properties, permitted sensorimotor activities, and perceptual (i.e., the way it looks, smells, etc.) or functional properties.<sup>474</sup>

The examination of the metaphors in Abrams's work and the sonic qualities of the words in Danielewski's novel have revealed that the imaginative structures of experience emerge from our body and its interaction with the environment, confidently cementing the reader into their own physicality and making them aware that their embodiment with its constraining or corrective capacity has the power to challenge and curb the unlimited scenarios of meaning-making. The examination of both texts makes clear that noesis, sound, and metaphor exhibit the human urge to seek out and create analogies among the diverse manifestations of an object, to find similarities between a sound of a phoneme and the sounds of the external environment, and to draw correspondences between different conceptual domains. The analogies, correlations, and relations between the sound of a word and the external reality or between the physical and abstract domains in metaphor identified in the study reveal beyond doubt that the natural world and its objects are no longer required to operate as a function of language, as they dynamize this aspect from outside; they animate language and shape it through their own embodied rhythm, enriching it with meaning and value. Both sound and metaphor have the potential to direct the readers out of the linguistic sign towards their body granting them the chance to re-live and re-experience situations in which they exist as a movement and gesture.

This process of re-living and re-experiencing situations through the attentive and devoted articulation of certain expressions gives the protagonists or the reader the opportunity to recognize themselves as a body by placing their own corporeal self into prominence, thereby contributing to the gradual recognition of themselves as self-immediacy, self-presence, as a more coherent, grounded being. The creative activity of decoding metaphors as the act of constituting the meaning of an object through the synthetizing process enable readers to reveal their own dynamic attributes, their agentive self-presentation which could serve as a process of individuation, the development of a "territorial assemblage", a more unified, ontologically secure sense of self. Moreover, this newly rediscovered body opens the individual up to the other, allowing the protagonists and the reader to experience a soothing sense of reciprocity and mutuality which contributes to a greater degree of stability through which they can act and respond more confidently to the world to which they are connected.

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<sup>474</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 123.

### ***Possibilities for Future Research***

Phonosemantic iconicity offers considerable potential in analyses of both poetry and prose, especially when such research is conducted into the audio format of such works. The main focus of attention of our research is phoneme semantics, but a related field which is equally deserving of note is that of prosodic semantics which examines suprasegmental units such as rhythm, tempo, pauses, and speech melody.

As the research of linguists such as Perlman (2010), Nygaard (2009), and Ephratt (2008) has shown, suprasegmental units also display non-arbitrary iconic properties, acting by either intensifying or moderating lexical meaning. An exploration of rhythm would enhance meaning in an original way, particularly when considering how it might affect the quality of expression, the speed of situations, or the overall mood of the narrative. Furthermore, rhythm has also a huge connective capacity and can generate a meeting point between the protagonists, or the situation and the reader. A study by Perlman, Falck, and Clark (2015) explored the relationship between pitch and vertical space or size, and it might be useful to adopt their conclusions when approaching an audio form of a literary text.<sup>475</sup> Pauses or periods of silence, the subject of research by Ephratt (2008), can also exhibit non-arbitrary meaning, and such expressions may in fact be much more informative than any verbalization. Zoriana Nasikan notes that voice quality, including those of loudness or melody, is another element which is worthy of analysis, since not only does it possess enormous potential for iconicity, but it is also extremely versatile and echoes the most subtle tones of a speaker's emotions.<sup>476</sup>

The perspective of phoneme or prosodic semantics might be an inspiring approach when applied to the texts of African American poetry to discover how the poets use and adapt the medium of music to create poetry, taking advantage of rhyme, rhythm, meter or the specific quality of phonemes. One text which might benefit from such an approach is the songbook *The Anti-Slavery Harp* (1848) compiled by William Wells Brown, as it might be of interest to explore how sound and suprasegmental units can extend the meaning of poems, making them more agitative, connective, urgent, and activating in order to more powerfully vocalize the experience of slavery and initiate a possible response among its listeners. Another African American writer whose work might be examined in this respect is the contemporary poet and activist Nikki Giovanni. Her politically and spiritually charged poetry is often read aloud with musical accompaniment and would therefore open a wide range of possibilities for phonosemantic insights. The poet Yusef Komunyakaa integrates musical

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<sup>475</sup> Magnus and Ohala have demonstrated that high pitch is associated with smallness and low pitch with largeness.

<sup>476</sup> Nasikan, "Phonosemantics," 4.

aspects such as syncopated beats, melancholy blues measures, and jazz improvisations into his poetry, all highly stimulating elements for examination using both prosodic and phoneme semantics. Lastly, an analysis of the metaphors used in their poetry could also offer fascinating conclusions regarding the way in which their conceptual system is grounded, highlighting how physical experience enveloped by cultural assumptions, attitudes, or values has shaped their way of conceptualizing the world.

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