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T h e M e t a p h o r a s a s o c i a l t e c h n o l o g y .

- Because sometimes you can't be right.

In this essay I will consider the potential of *Metaphor* as a social technology, a tool that might enable collaborative understanding. This leads into thoughts on metaphor's relationship to empathy and the body, as it is represented within examples of speculative fiction. Questioning if the hyperempathetic protagonist could help to explore the subjective/objective space between a personal and social interaction. By the end of the essay, I hope to have measured this three-way relationship interwoven amongst subjectivity/body, empathy, and metaphor. Then, looked at what this may suggest of how metaphor could have uses as a social technology.

Metaphorical utterances are commonly understood as aesthetic additions, “*a linguistic phenomenon, used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose*” (Kövecses .2002). I would like to argue, however, that there is more to the metaphor, that can provide us with a generative social tool. The ‘*Gartner Information Technology Glossary*’ describes social technologies as: “*Any technology that facilitates social interactions and is enabled by a communications capability*” (Gartner Glossary.2021) commonly thought of as the letter, Facebook, or Twitter. This may relate to the metaphor as, if the *communications capability* of the metaphor is perhaps the written or spoken word, could the collaborative nature of the metaphor be a technology to *facilitate social interactions*? Dagut. M. (Jan 1987) added to the earlier definition: “*fusing disparate categories of experience in a powerfully meaningful semantic anomaly*”. Suggesting that the metaphor stands alone within its meaning making, whilst also bringing together concepts that would normally be understood as disparate. It is this ability to bring together difference which will be *stretched* and studied here.

In a text entitled ‘*Metaphors we live by*’ (1980) Lakoff. G. and Johnson. M. re-defined metaphor from earlier theories as ‘*the cognitive view of metaphor*’ or ‘*The contemporary theory of metaphor*’. ‘*In short, the locus of the metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualise one mental domain in terms of another. The general theory of metaphor is given by characterising such cross-domain mappings. And in the process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical.*’ (Lakoff. G. 1992, p1). Might looking at the potential of the metaphor to *reach across* conceptual *boundary lines* present an opportunity for understanding the metaphor as a tool for dissolving the rigidity of such boundaries when engaging in new modes of social relation?

“Metaphors we Live by [explains]... our fundamental ways of talking about ourselves are metaphorical... we frequently refer to the past being behind us and the future in front of us. But parts of the world see the past as being in front because it’s known. Does this influence what we consider possible or even affect our whole frame of thinking?”

(Schumacher. H. 13th July 2020)

To say something as simple as ‘*My job is putting me under stress*’ is a metaphorical statement where the subject is viewed as a *singularity/independent variable* that is being placed in a *state of pressure*. When the meanings brought to the words from alternate conceptual domains are unpacked, you are also then able to see that this gives insight into the personal/cultural truths carried along with what is viewed as objective. Here we see that this statement views the person/subject - it’s body and brain - as the *individual independent entity*. And the feeling induced by the Work, as a physical force being applied to this entity, to *induce a state of increased vibration*. Therefore, this metaphor is one that creates *a World* where the Person is the

powerless object/subject of empirical scientific experimentation. This simple statement reveals within its metaphors that it is born of a culture that values the individual as separate, and the empirical as the dominant and effecting inescapable force.

“every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions”.

(Lakoff. G. & Johnson. M. 1980. p. 57).

The knowledge shared above of the prevalence of metaphor within the everyday, reveals the (*theorised*) World as ‘*a personal World*’. One iteration of all potential *frames* of thinking. This informs my inquiry into ‘*Metaphor as social technology*’ as when words/statements *carry* meanings, they depend on varying interacting metaphorical conceptualisations or *domain mappings*. These concepts then inform the way language is apprehended, and sense is made. Often this is most apparent when engaged in the translation of languages - which will be investigated later. If, however, this *sense* is allowed to be forgotten as metaphorical - the context of creation lost - it causes those constructed meanings to be considered *objective, normal*. Looking into why these constructions of meaning become so ingrained, K. D. Vohs (2006) explains her Psychological theory of the ‘*Meaning Maintenance Model*’:

‘MMM proposes that people have a need for meaning; that is, a need to perceive events through a prism of mental representations of expected relations that organizes their perceptions of the world... [However] When people's sense of meaning is threatened, they reaffirm alternative representations as a way to regain meaning-a process termed fluid compensation.’

Showing that, people create their ‘expected relations’ to find meaning, and if these relations are disturbed it becomes a threat to their whole sense of meaning. Furthermore, those threats that disturb a person’s idea of self and self-relations ‘*such as self-esteem threats, feelings of uncertainty, interpersonal rejection, and morality salience.*’ most motivate a backlash, an ‘*impulse to generate and maintain a sense of meaning.*’ (K. D. Vohs, 2006)

‘Nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama.’

(Camus, A. 1955).

If Metaphor can be thought of as one method by which meaning is maintained within common language and conceptualisations; I hope to now investigate how this may explain the capabilities of metaphor to enable and facilitate social interaction.

In her essay on 'Metaphor and ESP' (2005) Marisol Velasco Sacristán suggests Lakoff and Johnson's 'Cognitive Metaphor' (1980) may give reason for teaching metaphors to English language learners. 'Littlemore (2004)¹ examines the tendency of language learners to use metaphoric extension strategies to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. We can see, therefore, that metaphor is a central issue in ESP teaching' (p. 117). She argues further, that for a person to understand a language they must also be aware of the appropriate background cultural information to understand the uses of everyday metaphor. Therefore, in learning how to understand the cultural metaphors, which are inherent within common language, the student is exposed to its related ideologies.

Be this in literature, conversation or any other mode of representation, the metaphor is how one person can describe the theoretical experience to another. If the represented conception takes place outside of those things that both parties can empirically understand, it is surely then expressed metaphorically. As it is using the (literally) sensed experience, to talk about the experience imagined. As explored above, this imagination extends beyond individual headspace and infiltrates culture, community, generations, languages. The metaphor is thus a cultural *touching point* for understanding and exposure. A *technology* in that it can be used to facilitate a change: understanding. A *social technology* as this change occurs between/amongst people and their relations.

'Sense of Things'(Jackson. Z.2016. Page 110) is a review of 'Brown Girl in the Ring' by Nalo Hopkinson - A Novel that explores concepts surrounding black femaleness and their bodies. 'Sense of Things' begins its introduction by describing this *touching point* through Dionne Brand's 'A Map to the Door of No Return. Notes to Belonging'. Brand comments on being and studying within the black diaspora, placed as other/outside of certain normalised *conceptual domains*. "To have one's belonging lodged in a metaphor is voluptuous intrigue; to inhabit a trope; to be a kind of fiction...To be a fiction in search of its most resonant metaphor then is even more intriguing'. Acknowledging this metaphorically constructed reality explicitly as she states that the intrigue lies within the 'most *resonant* metaphor'. Possibly as the resonance reveals where *othering* within *reality* is *loudest* and most *interactive*.

Here it is shown that possibly Brand believes that remembering the common metaphors may *expose othering*. However, if allowed to become cliché or trope - forgotten, they will *enable* it. That often, within these spaces, the *creators forget their creating*, berthing a zeitgeist. Where the metaphors *resonate so prevalently, they become like white noise*, they are so

¹ *Sacristán's citation: Littlemore, J. (2004). Item-based and cognitive-style based-variation in students. abilities to use metaphoric extension strategies. *Ibérica* 7 (p 5-32.)

encompassing that any cosmological understanding without them feels absurd. Essentially, so social the socialness is disregarded. To re-regard the metaphor, thus allows the *touching point*.

Therefore, could a *care package* be created? Where this *forgotten weapon* may become an instrument for healing once remembered. Brought back into the present, to *interact with it anew*. In understanding the 'Cognitive view of the metaphor', you *expose fixed ideas* that construct the reality, continually reinforced by them. Once *exposed* they become *malleable*. They become a tool for social empathy.

'wherein myth is embedded in realism...history and of scientific fact'. (Jackson. Z.2016.)

By the end of this essay on 'Brown Girl in the Ring' Jackson concludes with thoughts on the way the novel explores possibilities of this *new interaction*. *'In using myth to counter "myths of history," the novel reveals that myth often shrouds "fact" and claims to objective reality, and for this very reason..., a nonrepresentationalist mode of reason or onto-epistemology—may hold the potential to unsettle hegemonic modes of racist reality and their constituent myths. As such, the novel makes available a transvaluation.'* (Page 119). Jackson suggests the novel puts forward *alternate* myths with hopes to expose the *ruling* myths that *(un)silently act to reinforce* the current racist reality. The exposure hopes to initiate that *transvaluation*, allowing comparison between cosmological mythologies and the point of *touching*/realising their subjectivity.

'Ti-Jeanne must forgo faith in the idea that there is an all-encompassing transcendental structure - "reality," "the world," "truth" ... Instead, she measures claims to existence based on their metaphorical resonance and ontological effects upon a world rather than within "the world"'.

(Jackson. Z. 2016)

In summary, the *resonant metaphors* become a key component of mythologies/world construction/cosmologies, which should be measured by the effect they have on ontological understandings and evaluations.

As 'Brown girl in the ring' is a novel that explores the possibilities of myth making it is also curious to look at the decision to create a protagonist who is blessed with an ability for multiplicity/understanding beyond her own body – 'Second sight'. An ability empathetic at heart as it stretches ontology beyond the confines of the bodily self. This idea of the empathetic character is also utilized in other afro-futurist and feminist novels. For example, 'Woman on the edge of time' (Piercy, M.1983): The 'Catcher'. Or 'Parable of the Sower' where the protagonist is a 'feeler', that experiences Hyperempathy.

Empathy's relation to Metaphor is an interesting one as both inhabit/are active in the space between (normally two) given points: concepts/people. The meaning that may be understood of them both is also excavated within this space. For the empath, the question arises; whether the felt-ness is a meeting of two people or a projection of one upon the other. When using everyday metaphor, I hope I have shown that it is a projecting of the constructs of *a world* onto *THE world*, often calling it a true interaction. Forgetting to acknowledge the projection of subjectivity that our language intrinsically carries along with it. So, the problem of the reality of the empath could be the same problem that faces a linguistically constructed 'reality'. Is it an equal interaction or is it a projection of one (and all its/their presuppositions) onto the other? Furthermore, what could be understood through looking at the way that these novels have imagined the abilities of empathy within their stories?

In writing about empathy, the authors consider the *fluid inter-relationships* between (one) person and (an)other. Butler explains that she didn't want Lauren's abilities of Hyperempathy/a *feeler* to be understood as supernatural, beyond what is commonly understood as possible. Therefore, she continually reinforces an argument that tells us it is an overactive imagination, rather than a genuine 'sender and receiver' interaction. In an interview with Locus, Butler comments on her ideas of Hyperempathy. "*in the 'Parable' books I wanted to keep everything as realistic as I could. I didn't want any powers, any kind of magic or fantastical elements. Even the empathy is not real—it's delusional.*" (Butler. O. E. 2000). This suggests that she sees the Hyperempathy as an extension of Lauren's ability to construct what she considers real of her world and the people that interact amongst it. Both in *Brown girl in the ring* and *Parable of the sower*, however, the empathy is more than mental. It is a visceral, bodily, reflex happening. In '*reading ruptures*' (2015) Lundberg. E. K. adds to this thought, '*The way Lauren (and apparently Butler) understand Hyperempathy is as a psychological disability contained within Lauren's brain.*' Directly after, however, she goes on to say, '*The alternate possibility embedded in the text is that Hyperempathy could also be a social phenomenon facilitated but not solely caused by Lauren's unique physiology.*' For Lauren and Ti-Jeanne, engaging with Hyperempathy is not a premeditated decision. They seem to lose themselves to it for the duration of another person's particularly strong feelings. This physiologically facilitated social occurrence tells us that even though the empathy is understood logically to be a cognitive occurrence within the empath's brain, it is so ingrained in the individual that it is able to change the matter of that individual. They carry amongst their bodies the (imagined) relation that the empathy has given them.

The question then, of whether empathy is truly an interaction or a narcissistic projection, is a *blurred* one. If it is interactive, it seems that the subjectivity of the receiver still plays a part in the way that the interaction is understood. If it is projective, then it has been shown that it is *deep and felt in the body, visceral* in a way that means the empath is not consciously aware of themselves within the projecting.

Secondly, looking at this consideration of Hyperempathy, it suggests that our interaction with the worlds we inhabit are subjective, but that this subjectivity is *messy*. That the subjectivity does not make less of the interaction, in so far as the *separation of 'your truth' and 'the truth' is blurry* and depends just as much on all the context you have brought with you, as it does on all the information coming in. In fighting against a mystical idea of her Hyperempathy Lauren keeps herself accountable within the interaction. The empathy lies in realising the brought context and letting it show that, just like the 'Cognitive view of the metaphor', in realising it, this exposes fixed ideas that construct and continually reinforce a reality. *Once exposed they become malleable*. They become a technology for social interaction.

"There are a number of myths we live by. For instance, the myth of 'away,' as in 'I'll throw it away.' Where's that? There's no such place. It's going somewhere. Or the myth of 'my little bit won't hurt,' or the obvious myths of 'bigger is better' and 'more is better.' We have all these myths, and we believe in them without even recognizing that they're there. We just act on them – and that's liable to be our downfall."

(Butler. O. E. June, 2000)

Hyperempathy is an idea that allows us to imagine in the flesh, the fluid inter-relationships between one mind and everything outside. Therefore, it could itself be a metaphor for the association people have with their mythologies. By making the empathy involuntary and of the body, the writers of Hyperempathy describe how metaphors are *ingested and then become the very matter that builds us*. That when people don't keep themselves accountable, as Lauren does her Hyperempathy, metaphors *aren't used, they govern*. Therefore, as the 'Cognitive view' has shown that the metaphor *'is not in language at all, but in... everyday abstract concepts'* (Lakoff. G. 1992, p1). Possibly the novels are suggesting that these metaphors must also be held accountable. That it is in continuously remembering and questioning metaphors that they are *relinquished of their governing. Disarmed and exposed* of the othering they can create and the social understanding they may allow.

At the beginning of this essay, it was asked *"Does this influence what we consider possible or even affect our whole frame of thinking?"* (Schumacher. H. 13th July 2020). Within the writing and references above, I hope that I have shown that metaphors are rife within our everyday living and that they deserve close inspection in order to understand our own histories and then how we may engage with others. Understanding how metaphors become ingrained amongst our differing worlds, reveals a technology for socialness. This three-way relationship interwoven amongst subjectivity/body, empathy, and metaphor is a relationship built upon a bed of reaching for social interaction. Interactions enabled by revealing the abilities metaphors have for influencing our frames of thinking.

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