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Document Version:

Author accepted manuscript (postprint)

Citation for published version:

Luke, Allan; Luke, Carmen; Graham, Philip (2007) Globalization, Corporatism, and Critical Language Education. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.1-13.

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Globalisation, Corporatism and Critical Language Education

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Abstract

This essay explores the impacts of economic and cultural globalisation on language and language education. It acknowledges the spread of English and the negative impacts of this upon other languages and language communities. The case is made that new conditions of economic dominance by multinational corporations raise the stakes for schooling and language education. These conditions have established a 'new Latin' of technocratic English that services and obscures the corporate order. It argues for the continuing importance of the state and state schooling and the expansion of the definitions and practices of critical language and literacy education.

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The connection between language loss and political economic change is a focal point of scholarly, public policy and political debate. We strongly support the documented concerns about the ongoing loss of linguistic rights in the face of colonialism and neo-colonialism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The spread of English is eroding vernacular and minority languages globally, with too many governments and education systems washing their hands of the complexities and challenges of multilingualism and language rights. The picture is complicated with the shift of economic and geopolitical power to China, with Mandarin a dominant medium of economic and cultural exchange.

Language and literacy education policies matter. Schools select and shape which languages and discourses, registers and texts will count, for whom, to what material and experiential ends. Monolingual and monocultural educational policies become forms of language-in-education planning by default (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). But as the political economy changes in shape, character and scope – there is a pressing need to reconsider the forces that are shaping education and language.

This essay explores the political economy of global corporatism and its implications for language and literacy education. Our argument is that the 'new world order' of cultural and economic globalisation, escalating military, religious and cultural conflict raises the educational and public policy ante, incorporating but moving beyond language loss and retention. This new order is one largely dominated by multinational corporations whose motive forces and operations increasingly resemble a new version of feudalism (Graham & Luke, 2003). Our concern here is the language and discourses that ideologically legitimate and conceal the structures and practices of this corporate order. These constitute technocratic registers of English, but also Mandarin, Japanese, French and other dominant languages. They serve a classical ideological function: realising, rationalising and justifying corporate relations of production and representation, its human capital and communications imperatives, and its constitutive patterns of consumption and exchange - while at the same time obscuring and rendering corporate practices and their material consequences inaccessible and incomprehensible to the lay literate reader, viewer, and blogger.

Issues of language rights are now compounded by another level of complexity: the shifting and ambiguous positions and relations of the state,

the nation, the multinational corporation and their real and virtual borders. As in the corporate dystopian visions of Orwell, Huxley and, more recently, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2000), suggest the matter of 'whose language' will name and enumerate the world may as much be a question of register and discourse as one of lingua franca per se. In this new social and economic reality, the key educational questions go beyond matters of which languages will be taught and learned, to include questions about how we will teach in and around, with and against the new registers, discourses and texts of corporate, multimediated "hypercapitalism" that reshape social and ecological worlds as we speak (Graham, 2005).

The ongoing public scandals around ENRON, Halliburton, the machinations of pharmaceutical, media and energy conglomerates, provide live documentary evidence that hypercapitalism operates through complex linguistic registers that are obscure and difficult to comprehend, not just for the majority of the world's inhabitants who live outside or at the margins of information economies – but as well for the 'educated' middle classes of countries like the US, UK and Australia. These sit alongside the smokescreen of 'plainspeak' offered each day by politicians through mass media.

In current 'table talk' how often do we, the literate classes, refer to the power of the corporation and then throw up our hands in incomprehensibility of the scale, scope, sheer innumerability, and ostensive 'evil' of its operations? The operational scope and nature of corporate behemoths like BHP, Shell or NewsCorp, or even the scale of corporate philanthropy undertaken by Gates, Soros, and Buffett, defy the comprehension of a lay audience. We pose a simple question: Is one responsibility of state education to render the scope, scale, space and character of hypercapitalism and the corporate world order knowable, nameable and accessible? If so - new forms of literacy and numeracy, new forms of critical analysis, and new forms of curriculum will be required by all. Our aim here is to open up debates over multilingualism, critical multicultural education and critical literacy, raising questions about the kinds of receptive and productive positions and competences that will be needed by educators, students and citizens to critically weigh, analyse and transform this new order in their interests. We begin with a short primer on globalisation.

Globalisation

At least since the 1980s, advocates and detractors of globalisation have suggested that new information and communication technologies, economic restructuring, cheaper air travel (pre-9/11), container shipping, and the disorderly flow of people, information, ideas and commodities between spaces and places have had the cumulative effect of compressing space and time. This has been accompanied by a disruption of concepts of state, nation, nationalism and with these, the erosion of the idea that sovereign states and regions make autonomous decisions about their economic, social and cultural, and indeed educational and linguistic destinies. All the while education

systems persist under a Panglossian view that education is more or less about the interests of state, national language, values, and identity. Education remains a resolutely national project. And the state remains a site for educational reform and action.

Underpinning this, and driven by corporate interests is a fundamental shift in orientation from the concepts of the liberal welfare nation-state, to new world systems of 'generic' governance-by-market. Neoliberal models of commodification and marketisation involve the 'reform' of trade barriers, providing enabling conditions for the transnational commerce in bodies, information and discourse, material goods and, indeed, capital. This system depends upon the transregional and transnational offshoring and outsourcing of labor and production.

These movements have been abetted by the new structures of world governance, which are built around regional alliances like the European Union, supranational organisations like the World Bank, OECD, G8, International Monetary Fund, Asia Development Bank, large scale philanthropic and service non-government organisations, and, of course, multinational corporations, whose workforces, annual product and brand recognition surpass in size and influence those of many major nations and regions. Neo-liberal economics constitutes a planetary "newspeak" that lines the pages of newspapers, blogs, and screens with the language of "the market", and with its images and discourses of competitive and possessive individualism.

Postindustrial states of the North and West have progressively relaxed and reframed mechanisms for regulating the cross-border flows of bodies, goods, capital and information. With the notable exception of some Nordic countries, they also have moved towards the economic rationalisation and corporatisation (called "privatisation") of the safety net of social services and goods. These include water and energy supplies, community infrastructure and services, health and education and, in some cases, the penal and criminal justice system. This has been accomplished with increasing concentration of investment in a powerful military/industrial corporate infrastructure, global financial systems, an expanding biomedical infrastructure, transportation and media/information/digitalisation entertainment companies.

The roll-back of the state has been accompanied by powerful forces of marketisation and privatisation of what were longstanding state responsibilities. In education, it is marked by powerful pushes towards corporate private funding of universities, corporate sponsorship of schools, privatisation of childcare, and the expansion of non-government schooling. Many 'advanced' educational systems feature the supplanting of state developed curriculum by multinational educational materials, and gradual but steady moves towards a 'global' generic curriculum ('benchmarked' by international test comparisons and regional accords on credential comparability) that targets competences for what is termed the "knowledge

economy". All this sits within a new political economy of information, where the converging multinational corporate ownership of information, intellectual property, and modes of information is a new battleground for control (Luke, 2005). Partly in response, the rise of ethno-linguistic nationalisms, and the revival of religious fundamentalisms have levelled an equally serious challenge to the coherence and power of the nation-state and corporation alike – threatening, infusing and unsettling the corporate/state nexus with religious alliances.

Supporters of the nation-state argue that it remains the site of political mobilisation, that globalisation and the nation-state are "mutually self-constituting" (Holton, 1998). Indeed, we can only consolidate our conception of the global from the position of whatever 'local' place that we inhabit, which is by definition in a nation-state. Furthermore, it is national 'variables' that resist, promote or sustain shifts in global flows of money, information, people and technology. Global business remains highly reliant on national systems to provide 'pro-market' deregulation policies and a range of services from transportation to banking and legal services. Yet this same project of ostensive deregulation had led to extensive and micro-invasive legislative regulation.

Nation-states retain the ability to attract, threaten, ally with, and coopt international capital. In this regard, education systems have taken on a dual function, in addition to the maintenance and reproduction of the nation state: aiming for both the attraction of multinational capital, and the amelioration of the material and social effects of unequal and stratified distribution (Luke, 2005). The global push towards the development of English-speaking workforces – as elite traders, guestworkers and travellers in this new world system – and the development of local English-speaking labour forces to attract and service multinational capital flows (e.g., in finance, tourism, call centres, retail sales) are elements in the state education policies of both wealthy and poorer nations.

Culture counts in such an environment, but often in surprising and unpredictable ways. The ability to attract international investment may must also involve the appropriation of ethnocultural 'myths' by governing elites to present a favourable face to investors. The 1980s saw a plethora of writings that sought to explain Japan's economic success by attributing to it unique forms of capital-labour relations based on a Japanese style of management by consensus (*nemawashi*) which generated high yields. Management education in the west responded accordingly with the diffusion of Japanese management techniques and courses in Sun Tzu. In the 1990s, the success of the Asian Tigers (Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong) was attributed to 'Confucian values', which can be broadly translated to mean a diligent and docile workforce capable of collective 'sacrifice'. In other words, governments working within Confucian cultures stressed the need to defer material gratification and immediate needs, and demands for high wages for to win long-term economic and social benefits. In these ways, ethnocultural and civic

nationalisms can be appropriated in synergistic relationships with corporatism. These relationships both depend upon and create both segmented global workforces: a movable community of technocratic/information elites, and stratum agricultural, industrial, and service labor. Yet while states retain jurisdiction over the management of the in- and out-flows of people, goods and services – the movement of capital and information is driven by companies and corporations, not nations or countries. The corporate elite and the new technical classes move about the globe relatively unfettered, all the while participating in policies that keep undesirables “out”: the working and non-working poor remain the most difficult of cargo.

Cosmopolitanism is often used to describe global civil society, a global citizenry and community, the social subject of globalisation with multiple ethnonationalist affiliations, mobile on the flows of global labor opportunities, ‘outward’ looking, and at ease in a lifeworld of difference – multilingual, multiethnic, multiracial, multi-classed, multicultural (Calhoun, 2003). The combined concept of *kosmos* (world/known universe) and *polis* (city/community) is an historical ideal much like democracy – both are ideal aspirations of individuals living as ‘citizens’ or members of both ‘local’ community (village, town, city, canton, nation, state, federation of states, etc) and of the larger world consisting of multiple and different locales and locals (Archibughi, 2003).

Looking out into the world, ‘connectivity’ through globalisation, having a ‘global’ consciousness, “acting local, thinking global”, are vantage points that are meant and experienced differently for people in differently situated localities. However, rapid economic and cultural globalisation since at least the 1970s, in tandem with a range of political, economic, and labor market crises noted above, and not least the decisive and divisive ‘clash of civilizations’ debacle of 9/11, has put issues of global governance, nation-state governance, ‘citizenship’, individual and communitarian political and humanitarian rights back on the agenda. The world may seem more like a global village McLuhan (1965) envisioned but it is a much more divided place than ever before.

Like its cousin concept ‘democracy’, cosmopolitanism remains an ideal, an imaginary community of global civil society with normative rules of law, due processes and procedures that would represent and, where necessary, mediate the differences among peoples differently situated and historically contextualized through diverse religious, cultural, colonial and hegemonized legacies. As such, it departs from traditional multiculturalism that sought to showcase and give voice to differences embodied and inhabited by peoples inside borders of nation-states. Traditional 1980s multiculturalism can thus be seen as a form of nationism, undoubtedly with unintentional results of ethnic essentialising, but certainly a ‘coloring in’ of its population base following decades long exodus of postcolonial independence movements of peoples from the colonized peripheries to the centres of empire, or the longstanding American ‘open borders’ policy to ever cheaper waves of migrant labor.

Cosmopolitanism, in theory at least, seeks to conceptualize identity and community beyond the nation, beyond local points of affiliation and senses of community and belonging.

In light of this new disorder, the unequal regional and class impacts of globalisation, increased global economic and trade interdependence alongside increasing social and economic inequalities within and across nation-states, concerns have re-emerged about how to achieve social justice, equality, social integration and cohesion, how to best govern locally and globally, how to govern capital and reign in corporate excess, and how to ensure workers' conditions and humanitarian rights. We add and reiterate the centrality of educational and linguistic rights.

Language

English is both lingua franca of globalisation and language of new cosmopolitanism. Twenty years ago, Crystal already argued noted that "over two-thirds of the world's scientists write in English three quarters of the world's email is written in English [and] of all the information in the world's electronic retrieval systems, 80% is stored in English" (1987, p. 358). In 2001 80% of the world's multinational organisations were using English as their main language and 90% of all computer connections to the internet were in English speaking homes (BBC, 2001). The "Englishing of Earth" continues, with as many 1.9 billion people speaking English competently by 2002 (Morrison, 2002), and the ever expanding concentration of academic journals in the hands of multinational corporations whose *lingua operandus* is English continues apace. These have proven robust conditions for the growth and spread of the transnational business of second language instruction and translation (Pennycook, 2000).

Existing conditions of English language world dominance support the valorization of English as the bridge for cosmopolitan civil society and 'world peace': a medium with the potential for differences of understanding, values, attitudes and indeed ethnic/religious conflict. They also set the critical grounds for an argument in defense of linguistic diversity in the face of western/English linguistic and cultural imperialism.

Just as the theologically motivated drive for expanded intellectual, juridical, and territorial unification of western European mediaeval society relied upon Latin, the expansion and inculcation of neofeudal corporatist relations has relied upon highly specialised registers of English as its primary means of communication and organisation, the technocratic discourses of law, finance, econometrics, and public policy being chief among these. Marc Bloch argues that 'the singular dualism which prevailed almost throughout the feudal era' was the dualism between 'the language of the educated, which was almost uniformly Latin' and 'the variety of tongues in everyday use' (1962, p. 75). The educated classes of feudal society, were LSL (Latin as Second Language) speakers, writers, students, and teachers:

On the one hand there was the immense majority of uneducated people, each one imprisoned in his regional dialect, limited, so far as literary culture was concerned, to a few secular poems transmitted almost exclusively by word of mouth, and to those pious cantilenas which well-meaning clerics composed in the vulgar tongue On the other hand, ... educated people who, constantly alternating between local everyday speech and the universal language of learning, were in the true sense bilingual. To them belonged the works of theology and history, invariably written in Latin; the knowledge of the liturgy; even the understanding of business documents [...] Latin was not the only language in which teaching was done, it was the only language taught. (Bloch, 1962, p. 77)

The dualism of highly technicalised and conversationalised Latin coexisting with native dialects created a gap between the official means of communication and its speakers' "native" grasp on reality:

To whatever purposes it was applied, Latin had the advantage of providing the intellectuals of the age with an international medium of communication. On the other hand, to most men of the age who made use of it, it presented the grave inconvenience of being radically divorced from the inner word—the term that stood naturally, in their minds, for the concept—so that they were forced to resort to perpetual approximations in the expression of their thoughts. (1962, p. 78).

As the main language of global corporatism, English holds a comparable status to the Latin of Feudalism. We take the following quotation from no less of a source than *Wikipedia* – to exemplify the accessible 'social facts' about English proffered in the new online information environment that is, not incidentally, dominated by English:

An estimated 300-400 million people speak English as their first language. One recent estimate is that 1.9 billion people, nearly a third of the world's population, have a basic proficiency in English. English is the dominant international language in communications, science, business, aviation, entertainment, diplomacy and the Internet. It has been one of the official languages of the United Nations since its founding in 1945. (Wikipedia, 2006).

To be more precise, it is not the many vernaculars of English, spoken and written, that comprise the new Latin. It is technocratic English. Just as Latin was opaque to the "masses" of vernacular speakers, the technocratic discourses of academe, bureaucracy, international finance, and law are as opaque for most native speakers of English as they are to its non-native speakers (cf. McKenna & Graham, 2000; Saul, 1997). For most of its speakers, then, the "universal language" of technocratic English provides a far

more vague and abstract approximation of meaning than could be expressed or even conceived of in oral vernaculars. This is in large part a legacy of the literacy-orality antagonisms that the total textualisation of feudal Latin spawned (Ong, 1984). The distinction between those learned in Latin and the rest of feudal society was one of literacy and illiteracy, between those who were fluent in the Latinate languages dialects of governance, theology, and science, and those who had no access to them at all.

Today, those learned in technocratic discourses are those who define official differences between literacy and illiteracy. They provide the discursive scaffolding for the bulk of globalised knowledge exchanges in the most influential spheres of human affairs. They define wealth, power, and legality. They provide the lexicon of officialdom and the expertly expressed, complex baroque of canons that require the interpretation of specialised *literati* to be of any use to the modern "layperson" whatsoever: lawyers, financial advisors, economists, scientists, journalists, doctors and other experts at its codes.

There is glaring and significant difference between feudal Latin and contemporary English: the fact that after 700 AD, nobody who learned Latin learned it as their mother tongue. It was exclusively "learned ... through the use of writing" (Ong, 1984, p. 6). But even though there are still many millions of people who speak an English vernacular, technocratic English is the same as Latin in this important respect. It is a principally literate language, comprised of registers that are only acquired through the institutionalised learning and use of writing.

Further, as in feudal Latin, there are no childish aspects of technocratic discourse. Latin was a language in which there was "no longer any baby talk... seven-year-olds learned to use it, as best they could, in fully adult form" (Ong, 1984, p. 6). Today in schools throughout the developed world, children are introduced to the technocratic discourse of management and finance in order that they can be fully functioning adults. This is an Australian example:

Almost 600 Australian secondary schools will take part this year in an innovative financial literacy course designed to prepare Australian teenagers for managing their finances. Operation Financial Literacy will help set teenagers up for life by providing them with an understanding of things like credit management and budgeting to help them become financially successful.

(Bank of Queensland, 2006) -

http://www.boq.com.au/aboutus_media_20060124.htm

Financial literacy heads back to school)

Financial literacy in this sense is an entirely textualised affair and feudally Latinate in function and character. As Ong puts it:

[E]verything that was spoken in Latin was necessarily measured against its written texts, for independently of these it had no

existence. No one could speak it who could not write it and who had not learned to speak it through writing it. It was a chirographically controlled language, or, as we may put it, a textualised language ... To the Latinists, and to the Latinists's heirs, the text was the arbiter. (Ong, 1984, p. 7).

The idea of a "financially literate" person in the current climate assumes a capacity for high levels of abstraction separated from the orality and realities of the vernacular (Graham & McKenna, 2000; Lemke, 1995). The technocratic abstractions of contemporary finance require a substantive psychic break with everyday reality, a journey into a world of compounding interest, annuities and imaginary market 'futures' . In such a climate, people cannot become financially literate without intensive inculcation into textual disciplines whose orientation is directed entirely towards unreal futures (Graham, 2005). As with the Latin of feudalism, technocratic English is creating what Ong (1984, p.4) called a "cultural diglossia": a marked and definite split between the uses and "users" of 'a "high" language for official, learned purposes and the uses and "users" of "'low" languages', or vernaculars.

Critical Language Education

What are the implications of this situation for language education. In many ways, it revisits the classical dilemma about language, access and power. On the one hand, economically and informationally marginalised populations require access to the lingua franca in order to engage with new distributions of material goods and discourse resources: that is, English is a form of cultural capital that is invaluable to aspiring populations and nations. On the other, the field of technocratic English, like its Latin forebear, constitutes a social field, with hierarchies of discourse, register and dialect requiring selective identity papers for admission or acceptance.

The reproduction of that stratification and its effects upon vernacular languages and ways of life will require a second-order set of critical competences in order to that moderate, mediate, transform and combat the self-same deleterious effects. As in the case of Latin, unlocking the discursive levers secrets of 'hyper-capitalism' – moving it from the status of dominant leviathan to material, palpable and criticisable structure – will require a critical education. There are precedents for this – as in the undoing of Latin as an exclusive language of science, theology and governance in the Renaissance and Enlightenment; and as in the shift from literacy as an elite prepossession of those with power to a broader competence.

But it will require a broad broad-based critical agenda for language education: of learning English critically, of learning French, Mandarin and Spanish critically, while at the same time continuing the struggles to maintain displaced and localised languages. For those learning English, this requires something more than a critique of the state ideologies since these are merely partial epiphenomena of a much larger disruption. It requires a critical literacy

of the new corporate order, beginning with a demystification of its scale, inaccessible registers, and the operations of its modes of information.

Pierre Bourdieu referred to Neoliberal discourse as a “new planetary vulgate”:

Within a matter of a few years, in all the advanced societies, employers, international officials, high-ranking civil servants, media intellectuals and high-flying journalists have all started to voice a strange Newspeak. Its vocabulary, which seems to have sprung out of nowhere, is now on everyone's lips: ‘globalization’ and ‘flexibility’, ‘governance’ and ‘employability’, ‘underclass’ and ‘exclusion’, ‘new economy’ and ‘zero tolerance’, ‘communitarianism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, not to mention their so-called postmodern cousins, ‘minority’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘identity’, ‘fragmentation’, and so on. The diffusion of this new planetary vulgate - from which the terms ‘capitalism’, ‘class’, ‘exploitation’, ‘domination’ and ‘inequality’ are conspicuous by their absence, having been peremptorily dismissed under the pretext that they are obsolete and non-pertinent - is the result of a new type of imperialism (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p.1)

Our view is that the new forms of governance constitute a kind of feudal corporatism – where the workings of the transnational corporation are obscured from the view of the new peasant/serf, new urban info/tech service workers and others. That is, that the scope and scale of the new world order have become progressively more incomprehensible to people – including professionals and the intelligencia. A new critical literacy would have four foci:

- **Scale:** the size and scope of the operations of the new corporation are beyond everyday cooperation by the sheer incomprehensibility of its size, space, weight and expanse (e.g., the sheer size of recent Gates contribution to health, the size of the US national debt, or investment in the military);
- **Invisibility:** the actual operations of the corporation continue to operate outside of the visible. Further, they render millions of people invisible, such as the millions of people who were starving to death in an African famine on September 11, 2001;
- **Personification:** the operations of the corporation tend to be represented as the products of individual genius, human agency, heroism and, where they fail, personal character flaw;
- **Specialised Registers:** the close study of the specialised registers of the corporation/state nexus.

These have several implications for education. In work underway now, we are exploring the concept of a critical numeracy that makes the scope, scale, time/space relationships of the corporation visible and thereby criticisable to the general populace. At the same time, there are persistent attempts -- led by internet blogs and journalisms, bloggers, citizen journalists, and high

profile pranksters to disrupt corporate common sense. Further, the disruptive, altruistic and mischievous use of IT by youth has resisted institutionalisation and corporate profit. These require closer study.

How do we educate for these contexts? Ironically, the anachronistic structures of state educational systems remain our best recourse. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) reiterate the fact that the incorporation of Neoliberal policy is not a *fait accompli* but rather still rests within the mediating decision making of the state as social field. Saul (1997) reminds us that corporatism has been repeatedly checked through critical language awareness and analysis. Cheah (1998) argues that the conditions of possibility for a critical cosmopolitanism are best realised within the auspices of the nation-state.

To achieve any approximation of a cosmopolitan ideal—a world in which we can speak as equals— we must radically expand the purview, scope and gaze of the school curriculum. The scale and scope of the curriculum set the bandwidths for what is nameable and comprehensible in the world. State education systems set the parameters for ways of viewing the world, selecting and offering specific epistemic stances, but also scaling and delimiting space, time, and their social meanings. Decompression of space and time is in order. Social studies education, for instance, is usually about telling stories of the nation, of heroes and battles won and lost, marking its boundaries and key sociogeographic sites and features. At present little is done to mark out and analyse the scale and scope of the corporation, of the new world order – other than appeals to ethnonationalism and local voice.

An agenda of critical literacy that remains focused on a critique of the state and the struggle for voice – without working towards a broader analysis of the corporation and corporatism is inherently limited. For this – learning English and then shifting to the specialised registers of “financial literacy” and the like – as described above – will simply reinforce an order of information and discourse while at the same time obscuring its agents and structures, histories, and motive forces. Neither the Neoliberal state nor the transnational corporate order is natural and inevitable in the governance of our material and discourse resources, our everyday lives, or our social institutions. An uncritical education in technocratic English as globalised and globalising *lingua franca*, in ‘financial literacy’, ‘entrepreneurial literacy’, ‘information literacy’ and so forth, may just position us as marginal and uncritical participants, carried along by flows of capital, bodies and discourse that are beyond our imagination and comprehension.

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