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“IF YOU DON'T NURTURE THE NATURE INSIDE OF YOU, YOU WILL EVENTUALLY DIE”: A DISCOURSE-THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DISCURSIVE ASSEMBLAGE OF ECOCENTRISM AND ITS ETHICS IN THE SWEDISH TELEVISION SERIES JORDSKOTT

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ABSTRACT

*The article analyses the discursive construction of human-nature relationships in the first series of the Swedish television fiction series *Jordskott*, with its narrative about the supernatural. Driven by Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the article investigates how the series intervenes in environmental debates through an active defence of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism, using the discursive strategy of ethicisation to strengthen the claims for this assemblage and its constitutive discourses. By using the method of discourse-theoretical analysis, the article's analysis scrutinizes *Jordskott*'s three main actor groups—nature, humans and humanoids—to show the articulation of ecocentrism, entanglementism, posthumanism, indigenism and (anti-)romanticism, and how an ethical repertoire is used to strengthen the position of this ecocentric discursive assemblage, in its struggle with anthropocentrism.*

Keywords: discourse theory ▪ human-nature relationships ▪ ecocentrism ▪ anthropocentrism ▪ television fiction ▪ supernatural

1. INTRODUCTION

As is the case with many realms of cultural production, television fiction also has taken more of an interest in ecological thematics, for instance, in the Scandinavian countries (Bruhn, 2018). These television fiction series are quite diverse, but still—arguably—key interventions in the discursive-material struggles over the environment, and in particular, in the struggles between anthropocentric and ecocentric

discursive assemblages. Often siding with the ecocentric discursive assemblage, a diversity of discursive strategies is used to counter the hegemony of anthropocentrism and to promote a more counter-hegemonic ecocentrism.

In this article we want to unravel how a particular television series, the Swedish *Jordskott*, activates different discourses that are part of the ecocentric discursive assemblage, and how the particular discursive strategy of ethicisation is used to strengthen the claims for this assemblage and its constitutive discourses, privileging—to use Estok’s (2018) words—biophilia over ecophobia. Driven by Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory, and later extensions (Carpentier, 2017), we also want to show how networks of discourses—or discursive assemblages, as we will call them—allow for discourses to become aligned and strengthen each other; in this particular case, we want to show how in *Jordskott* ecocentrism becomes articulated with entanglementism, posthumanism, indigenism and (anti-)romanticism, and how then an ethical repertoire is used to strengthen the position of this ecocentric discursive assemblage, in its struggle with anthropocentrism.

The Swedish television series *Jordskott*, with its supernatural narrative, offers a highly creative and original location for our discourse-theoretical analysis, as the supernatural, for instance, allows the allocation of agency to the forest, the introduction of a range of other-humans, and the deconstruction of dualist human/non-human models. Before turning to our analysis of *Jordskott*, structured by its three main actor groups (nature/forest, humans and other-humans), we will first briefly introduce the relevant parts of Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory and its extensions, including the role of discursive assemblages and the ethical. In a second theoretical part, we will provide a more in-depth theoretical discussion on the ecocentric discursive assemblage and its four components.

2. DISCOURSES, THE ETHICAL AND DISCURSIVE ASSEMBLAGES

Discourse, as a concept, has been used (and defined) in a variety of ways in the field of discourse studies. In this article, we will use Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) discourse theory, approaching it as frameworks of intelligibility, which implies a macro-textual and macro-contextual definition of discourse (Carpentier, 2017). Defined by Laclau (1988) as “a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed” (p. 254), the meaning of discourse—in discourse theory—is closely related to the meaning of concepts such as representation and ideology, thus avoiding the equation of language with discourse. In a discourse-theoretical approach, language becomes seen as one of the materializations (and communication vehicles) of discourse, which implies a clear conceptual distinction between language and discourse. Also the way discourses are constituted in discourse theory is specific: They are constructed through the combination of different elements, a practice which is called articulation, defined as “[...] any practice establishing a relation among elements

such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 105).

This definition of articulation already indicates that, in discourse theory, discourses are only partially fixated. Driven by a non-essentialist ontology, discourses are seen as structurally contingent, with their fixations the outcome of political struggles. Even the most radical stabilizations—hegemonies—are susceptible to change, as Mouffe (2005) formulated it:

“Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i.e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony” (p. 18).

Discourses are also all-pervasive, and the opportunities for discourse analyses are thus endless. In this article, we aim to study a series of discourses articulated with ecocentrism, which we will discuss later, using literature external to discourse theory. But we also want to analyse how the ethical becomes activated in these discourses, which has been addressed in discourse theory, which is, in turn, a reason to discuss this here first. More specifically, in some of his writings from the early 2000s, Laclau (2000; 2002) introduced a key distinction between “the ethical” and “normative orders”, which will prove helpful for our analysis, connecting the discursive-theoretical logic with the societal field of ethics. For Laclau, the ethical is an empty signifier, or a signifier whose meaning is emptied so that it can be filled by particular meanings (Laclau, 1996, p. 39). This also implies that the ethical becomes the site of discursive struggle, waged between different normative orders—as Laclau calls them—that aim to occupy the seat of the ethical, and fill this signifier with the particularity of their meanings. As Laclau (2000, p.81) pointed out: “There is an ethical investment in particular normative orders, but no normative order which is, in and for itself, ethical.”

A second particularity of this article is that we do not want to focus on one specific discourse, but on clusters or networks of interconnected discourses, that, as individual discourses still have their autonomy (with their particular signifiers and nodal points), but that are still affiliated to each other. To label these clusters of affiliated discourses, we will use the notion of the ‘discursive assemblage’. Assemblage, as a Deleuzian concept, refers to “a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns - different natures” (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007, p. 69). Even though this definition suggests an exclusive focus on discursive elements (‘terms’) being articulated into a fluid whole, the example that Deleuze and Parnet (2007, pp. 69-70) immediately add—the assemblage of the “MAN-HORSE-STIRRUP” as “a new assemblage of war” and a significant innovation in military technology for cavalry—demonstrates that the assemblage has both discursive / representational / signifiatory elements and material elements that become articulated as a whole. As one of us has also extensively argued (Carpentier, 2017), assemblages do include discourses and materials, where discourses remain indispensable for giving meaning

to the material in these assemblages, and where materials are equally indispensable to provide the condensations of these meanings. This also implies that there is no necessary hierarchy between the discursive and the material, and that one does not automatically dominate the other.

Within this framework, we want to deploy the concept of the ‘discursive assemblage’, a notion that has been used in a variety of ways in discourse studies and beyond (e.g., Kinney, 2016; Kuus, 2007), but rarely in discourse-theoretical work. We want to bring this concept into the discursive-theoretical context of this article to refer to the discursive components of an assemblage, and to open up the possibility of the presence of several (affiliated) discourses in one assemblage. The reasons for this expansion are two-fold. The first reason is practical: This article reports on a discourse-theoretical analysis of a television series, which has its own signifying practices, mediating the material and communicating a series of discourses. Even though this television series has its own materiality, we will be focussing on its discursive component. The second reason is more theoretical: Our analysis also demonstrated the need to theoretically capture a situation where several discourses co-exist and become articulated into a larger whole, supporting and strengthening each other, while they each still have their own signifiers and nodal points, and simultaneously function in autonomous ways, as independent discourses. For instance, anthropocentrism and capitalism can be considered as parts of an anthropocentric assemblage, where these components are articulated and reinforce each other, while capitalism is still a discourse in its own right. As simply labelling capitalism a signifier that constitutes anthropocentrism would not do justice to the importance and sophistication of capitalism, we prefer to use the concept of discursive assemblage to capture this kind of discursive mega-formation — to paraphrase Foucault’s (1972) concept.

3. DISCURSIVE ASSEMBLAGES ON NATURE AND THEIR ETHICAL CLAIMS

When analysing the discursive constructions of the environment, nature and human-nature relations, it is difficult not to start with the discourses of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, and their struggle. Arguably, anthropocentrism, the discourse that positions humans at the centre of the planet, still takes a hegemonic position, despite the contestations of the ecocentric discourse. As Scholte and his co-authors (2020) wrote: “Indeed, the hegemony of anthropocentrism is so strong – perhaps still more powerful than that of the state or capitalism – that most people are not even aware of this world-order structure and can imagine no alternative mode of ecology” (p. 10). Ecocentrism is a counter-hegemonic discourse, that rejects the idea that humans are superior and positioned at the top of a planetary hierarchy (Lysaker, 2023; Woodhouse, 2018). Instead, this discourse articulates the entanglement of biotic and abiotic actors (Devall and Sessions, 1985), acknowledging their

agencies and rejecting the dependency of nature on humans. Instead of hierarchy, ecocentrism promotes “heterarchy” (Corbett, 2006, p. 27). Moreover, ecocentrism argues for the inherent value of nature irrespective of the instrumental, economic, aesthetic or other value humans attribute to the elements of the natural environment (Devall and Sessions, 1985, p. 69).

Ecocentrism is not a discourse that functions in isolation, but in contrast, it is a discourse that is part of a discursive assemblage. Although this assemblage includes many discourses (i.e., Dryzek, 1997), we here want to focus on four: entanglementism, posthumanism, indigenism and (anti-) romanticism. The first discourse is entanglementism, which captures the multitude of interactions and cross-fertilizations between humans and nature, which are articulated as interdependent and permanently co-determining each other. It is a discourse of pluralism that opposes the anthropocentric dualism between nature and humans (Soper, 1995), and that rejects the conflationism that ignores diversity within social categories.¹ In order to signify this “inseparability in ecological relationships that are both biophysically and socially formed” (Malone and Ovenden, 2017, p. 1), Haraway (2003, p. 12) introduced the concept of natureculture.

There are many variations of entanglementism possible, but one variation is particularly important in our context, and that is the ‘balance of nature’ concept. It is a widely critiqued notion—Kricher (2009) calls it a myth—that suggests that “nature is an essentially static, orderly system being integral to the economy of nature” (Jelinski, 2005, p. 272, emphasis removed). But when taken as a metaphor of entanglement, acknowledging contingency and non-determinism (and removing the myth of an ultimate equilibrium that will always be restored), the balance concept can also be understood to refer to the ideas of interrelationship and connectivity, in quite similar ways as the ecosystem concept.

The second discourse that is part of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism is posthumanism, which articulates the changes for the human identity, brought about by entanglementism. While transhumanism is “the extreme expression of human enhancement” (Santos, 2021, p. 378), (philosophical) posthumanism is a discourse “that is critical of traditional humanism and associated theories about the superiority of humanity” (Kopnina, 2019, pp. 1-2).

A third discourse that is part of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism is indigenism, which is a discourse that articulates the specificity of Indigenous groups, for instance, in relation to indigenous environmental knowledge, which underscores its subjectivity, situatedness and openness to contestations (Dove, 2006; Duvall, 2020). The indigenous identity itself is constructed with nature as its nodal point (Duile, 2017), with the relationship between indigenous people and nature articulated in terms of equality (Salmón, 2000), respect for all life-forms and the land (Turner, Ignace, and Ignace 2000) and harmonious coexistence with them (Salmón, 2000),

¹ The use of conflationism is inspired by Archer’s (1995) use of the concept in/about social theory.

thus resisting instrumentalism and extractivism. Indigenism also encompasses a variety of political demands of Indigenous groups, and, in terms of the environment, refers to the entitlement of these groups to full control of land and water on the territory that they consider theirs (Castree, 2004), which conflicts with capitalist and statist discourses, that, in various degrees, deny them these rights.

Finally, both romanticism and anti-romanticism are also part of this discursive assemblage. Romanticism privileges the aesthetic dimension of nature, articulating (the value of) nature through its beauty, as captured through the human senses. This discourse offers an important counter-weight to the industrialized society, and positions nature as the location where humans can find peace and discover their ‘true’ selves, which continues to provide a relevant ground for ecocentrism. Anti-romanticism is a discourse that rejects the reduction of nature to its aesthetic dimension. There is, for instance, a call not to (only) focus on the “pretty or sublime pictures of nature” (Morton, 2009, p. 160), but to concentrate on the “things that glisten, schlup, and decay” (Morton, 2009, p. 159), that is, “to hold the slimy in view” (Morton, 2009, p. 159). Also nature’s role in human salvation is questioned, “refusing claims that there is some original human nature suppressed by the artificial, from which it must be retrieved” (Clark, 2011, p. 66). As Harrison (1992) wrote: “nature also teaches us that it cannot assume responsibility for human existence” (p. 227). This implies that through anti-romanticism, nature becomes articulated as multidimensional, again moving away from nature/culture and human/nonhuman dichotomies.

The discursive assemblage of ecocentrism can thus be seen as a network of intersecting discourses, which—together—have the ambition of challenging and eventually dislocating the hegemony of the anthropocentric discursive assemblage. As argued earlier, in more general terms, this also implies the activation of normative orders, in an attempt to claim the empty signifier of the ‘environmental ethical.’ As Mouffe (2005) summarized it—in fairly radical terms—this hegemonizing strategy consists of “securing one’s goodness, through the condemnation of the evil in others” (p. 74), which can also be applied to the ecocentric discursive assemblage. This is not to argue that this discursive assemblage is formulated exclusively in ethical terms. Instead, the articulation of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism in ethical terms is one of the strategies to (attempt to) counter anthropocentrism’s hegemony.

4. ANALYSING JORDSKOTT: CONTENT AND METHOD

In our analysis of Jordskott we show that the series favours the ecocentric discursive assemblage, also through the activation of an ethical repertoire (or a particular normative order). The television series Jordskott—which literally translates as “earth

shot”²—has been described as an example of “eco-critical fiction” (Souch, 2020, p. 108), a “layering [...] of two particular generic strands – namely Nordic Noir and the so-called telefantasy” (Souch, 2020, p. 110), aligned with the “eco-Gothic” area (Souch, 2020, p. 117) and an “ecofantastic crime thriller” (Mäntymäki, 2017, p. 89). Produced by ITV, the first 10-episode season of the *Jordskott* series was broadcast in February 2015³ on the Swedish public broadcaster SVT. Its second season, with 8 episodes, started in October 2017.⁴ According to the Nordic Fantasy blog, the first season of *Jordskott* was sold to 55 countries.⁵

The *Jordskott* series starts with Eva Thörnblad, a police detective from the Swedish capital of Stockholm, returning to the (fictional) Swedish town of Silverhöjd, her hometown, after her father’s death. Years before, her daughter Josefine had disappeared there, and now another child (Anton Leander) has disappeared, which is another reason for her return to Silverhöjd. Later, six more children will disappear. Together with the local police department (in particular Tom Aronsson) and the national criminal police (with Göran Wass, who secretly works for an organisation called *Envoyés de la Nature* (‘Envoys of Nature’, EN)), she tries to solve these abductions and a series of related murders (including that of her father). They discover how these abductions and murders are connected with a conflict over the North Woods, between the Thörnblad Mineral & Cellulosa company and an other-human people living underground. In saving the forest and rescuing the children, they are assisted by several other humanoid creatures, and by the extra-human capacities given to them by the *Jordskott*, a parasite that will even save the lives of Eva and Göran.

As this summary shows, *Jordskott* uses the discourse of supernaturalism, representing the supernatural as natural. Using the telefantasy genre, which features television narratives that are “united by their representation of the otherworldly and unreal” (Johnson, 2015, p. 57), *Jordskott* taps into a fantasy world, also to reflect about the social and natural worlds, for instance, by allowing for discourses to be played out in a less direct (accusatory) way. This is a point that writer Sheree Renée Thomas (quoted in Souch, 2020) makes:

“There is power in fantasy, especially in stories that urge us to face the impossible or find ways to survive [...]. The best stories take us inside of storytelling so seamlessly, that when we emerge, the impossible is easier to imagine. This fiction creates a space in our minds to consider other perspectives and adopt new solutions” (p. 111).

2 It is the Swedish term for a natural phenomenon, where a large piece of frozen soil is lifted and moved, leaving a hole in the ground.

3 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vastmanland/hela-familjen-debuterar-i-svt-premiar>

4 <https://www.svt.se/kultur/film/premiar-for-jordskott-sasong-tva>

5 <https://nordicfantasy.wordpress.com/2017/10/18/jordskott-2-preview/>. It is likely that this is an overstatement, though.

Methodologically, our analysis uses a discourse-theoretical analysis (DTA) (Carpentier, 2017). DTA is a method that combines the basic mechanisms and procedures of qualitative textual analysis⁶ —using coding strategies as explained in Saldaña (2013)—with sensitizing concepts that originate from discourse theory (e.g., the notion of discourse itself). As sensitizing concepts on environmental discourses were also needed to support the analysis, the existing literature (e.g., Dryzek, 1997) was re-read from a discourse-theoretical perspective, providing a range of additional sensitizing concepts (some of which would be eventually included in our analysis of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism).

In our analysis, we focussed on the first (2015) season, as this was the richest in its representations of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism (and its normative order). In practice, our analysis combined a textual analysis with an audio-visual analysis, given Jordskott's strong reliance on visual aspects, coding both the audio-visual material and the transcripts. The content of season two served as contextual background for our analysis of the first season, and our analysis was further enriched by an interview with one of the writers of series 1, which took place on Zoom on 22 September 2022. This interview consisted of four parts, with (1) introductory questions on Jordskott itself (and its production and genre), (2) the identities of the actor (sub)groups in Jordskott, (3) the links in Jordskott to ecocentrism and other discourses (without naming them in the questions), and (4) the links in Jordskott with the ethical.

Through the confrontation of these empirical data with the sensitizing concepts—using what Glynos and Howarth (2007) call a retroductive approach—the analytical categories and theoretical framework were developed. This approach allows for the organization of iterations between theory and analysis, with sensitizing concepts making the researcher sensitive to particular processes or phenomena (Blumer, 1969, p. 7), without silencing the data either. Practically speaking, all material was first subjected to an initial coding, and then through axial coding (see Saldaña, 2013) the main categories of the analysis were identified. One cluster of main categories that originated from the analysis were the three main actor groups—the forest, the human and the other-human—which were eventually used to structure this article's narrative. A second cluster of main categories were the four components of the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism and their links to the actor groups. These four discourses were not pre-given, but identified through the analysis, aided by the discursive assemblage of ecocentrism as sensitizing concept. Finally, the coding then focussed on the role of the ethical in connection to the actor groups and four discourses. After the coding process, the first results were presented to colleagues on several occasions, as part of a peer debriefing strategy to ensure the quality of the interpretations (in conjuncture with the strategies of theoretical embedding and procedural transparency). Also, the results were triangulated with similar analyses of

⁶ These were enriched with visual analysis methods (e.g., Rose, 2016).

Swedish audiovisual material (e.g., Carpentier et al., 2021; Doudaki & Carpentier, 2024; Filimonov & Carpentier, 2022) further enhancing the trustworthiness of the analysis.

5. THE JORDSKOTT TRIANGLE: THE FOREST, THE HUMAN AND THE OTHER-HUMAN

As mentioned before, the main structure of our analysis is based on the three main actor groups in *Jordskott*: nature (in particular the forest), humans and other-humans, whose representation we will discuss in the following three parts. At the same time, it is important to emphasize two elements of this representation already here. First, in *Jordskott*, these three actor groups, including the forest, are all attributed with agency. Partially through the invocation of the supernatural, these three actor groups are represented as active, as capable of ‘making things happen’. Second, as Souch (2020, p. 107-108) also wrote—and as we will argue during our analysis—*Jordskott* is very much about the entanglement of these categories, and the structure of our analysis should not be read as an artificial separation of these actor groups.

5.1. The Construction of Nature in *Jordskott*

The construction of nature in *Jordskott* is very much centred on the forest, where “Western civilization literally cleared its space”, as Harrison (1992, p. ix) wrote. In a considerable number of shots we can see the forest of Silverhøjd. It is portrayed in a variety of ways, ranging from beautiful, over mysterious to threatening, which strengthens its position as non-human actor.

Jordskott also represents nature through an entanglementist discourse, in a variation that approximates the balance-of-nature argument, which brings in a particular normative order, articulating these disruptions as ethically undesirable as well. The storyline about the nix—a humanoid water creature—particularly illustrates the prominence of the balance-of-nature argument, as summarized by one of the series’ writers: “if you kill nature, you will also die” (interview writer, 22 September 2022). In episode 3, a nix is killed. The nix’s death causes the water quality to degrade, which is communicated through shots of dead/dying animals and trees, scientist measuring water pollution levels and trucks distributing clean drinking water, but through the media coverage of these changes as well. In episode 8, for instance, we briefly see a television news interview with an environmental activist, who says: “Just look around. It’s the middle of summer and trees are dying.”

Ylva, a mixture of a witch, a “wise old crone” (interview writer, 22 September 2022) and a troll, who has a raven, Vordur, as her familiar—and one of *Jordskott*’s main characters—had already discovered the disruption, by tasting the water (E4,

50:05⁷), and decided to go to Rissajaure, a lake in the very north of Sweden (in the Norrbotten County, relatively close to the city of Kiruna), which is considered to be the clearest and purest lake in the country. There, Ylva catches a tiny nix, and brings him back to her bathtub at home, where she raises him, always wearing ear protection, to prevent his screams from doing damage. In episode 8, she talks to the almost adult nix in the bathtub, again indicating how necessary he is for the restoration of the balance: “You just need to get a little bigger. The leaves are yellowing, the water is toxic, and nature is dying. If we don't get you out there soon maybe it'll never recover” (E8, 20:31). Eventually, Ylva releases the nix back into the water in the Silverhöjd forest (E9, 45:30) and immediately (in the next shot) we can see how the buds grow back on a tree.

The balance-entanglementist discourse is also represented through the human-nature relations, where the “underground people”—of which Muns is said to be the sole survivor—become articulated with nature, through their indigeneity. The disruption of the forest, caused by the Thörnblad M&C company, which aims to mine for silver in the North Woods, plays out at several levels. First, the eagerness of the company to use explosives to find the silver materially destabilizes parts of the forest, despite warnings from the geologist Börje Dahlqvist that “One explosive in the wrong place could make everything collapse” (E7, 9:15). He is subsequently bribed to change his report. One of the explosions (E7, 42:26) effectively causes a sinkhole, swallowing part of the forest and injuring several of the workers.

The second level where we see the negative consequences of the disruption of the balance is when the children of Silverhöjd start to disappear. The original abduction of Eva Thörnblad's daughter, Josefine, years before the series' actual narrative starts, was, as it turns out during the series, an attempt to force Eva Thörnblad's father, Johan, to stop the exploitation of the North Woods. Similarly, Anton Leander and Emma Eriksson—both children of Thörnblad M & C board members—and later 5 children from the local hospital, are abducted to force the new Thörnblad M & C CEO, Gustaf Borén, to halt the plans to continue the exploitation of the North Woods. Here we see that the disruption of nature's balance, also disrupts human-nature relationships, and the human world as such. Again, these disruptions become articulated as ethical undesirable, in their own right, and through the consequences they have.

A third level is the political disruption caused by the violation of the treaty signed by one of Eva Thörnblad's ancestors, Adolf Fredrik Thörnblad, with the underground people. As Ylva formulates it, when explaining the nature of the document to Eva in Episode 7: “It's an agreement between Thörnblad and the forest” (E7, 25:22), articulating the underground people as part of the forest. Ylva also describes its genocidal violation:

7 When referring to a particular part of *Jordskott*, the ‘E’ refers to the number of the episode, and the 3 or 4 digits that follow, refer to the time.

“Ylva: There lives a people who are almost like us. 350 years ago, Adolf Fredrik Thörnblad signed an agreement with them. Peace was ensured with his promise to keep the North Woods untouched. Your father had made an enemy of the forest. But your father Johan wanted to restore the Thörnblad name to greatness. He became obsessed with the rumours of all the riches. I tried to warn him, but he refused to listen to a crazy old lady.

Eva: So he started clearing the North Woods?

Ylva: He did something much worse. In 1978, Thörnblad Cellulosa used a lethal toxin on the North Woods. I was expecting the worst. But nothing could prepare me for what I saw. The toxin killed all living things. Vegetation, animals ... and those underground” (E7, 26:06).

Ylva also argues that this violation of the treaty is the motivation for the actions of Muns, the last of the underground people (still to live underground): “He’s not out for revenge. Justice to Muns would mean reinstating the agreement your father broke” (E7, 29:50). Here, the balance-entanglementist discourse is used to argue that this political disruption, resulting in the genocide on the underground people, was not only deeply unethical in itself. The consequences also affected those who disturbed the balance, at the societal level, with in total 8 children from Silverhöjd being abducted (which is highly unsettling for all its inhabitants), but at the personal level as well, as one of the abducted children is Josefine, Johan Thörnblad’s granddaughter.

A second cluster of key discourses in Jordskott’s representation of nature is the combination of romanticism and anti-romanticism, which again intersects with the complex articulation of nature’s ethical nature (enabled by positioning the forest as actor). The more romantic side of Jordskott represents the forest as a location of beauty and mystery. As Brühn (2018) writes: Jordskott has a “nostalgic representation of a lost nature” (p. 71). But in the case of Jordskott, the forest also becomes represented as a life-giver, with regenerative capacities, and thus as intrinsically benevolent. Both Josefine and detective Göran Wass use this capacity, by slipping their fingers in the soil, causing their hands to grow roots, and to feed or to revive them. Göran uses this life-saving strategy after he has been shot by Harry Storm—a mercenary hired by Thörnblad M & C—who is trying to exterminate all underground people and the other humanoid creatures. Even more radically, Josefine, who is seriously ill, is brought by her mother to a forest clearing. Also Josefine slips her fingers into the soil, with her mother lying next to her. The next morning, when Eva wakes up, Josefine has transformed into a plant, continuing her life in a different form. When Eva caresses the plant, tiny branches return her affection. Again, the forest is seen to demonstrate its capacity to protect and give life.

Finally, also the Jordskott parasite allows to represent nature as benevolent and generative. During episode 7, Göran revives Eva—who has been deadly shot—by

placing the Jordskott in her mouth. Once she regains consciousness, he explains her that “Maybe half a dozen” (E7, 44:06) people carry the Jordskott parasite, and that Eva and her parasite are now inseparable: “Killing one thing will kill the other” (E7, 43:57). Göran also explains that—apart from saving her life—the Jordskott “heightens your senses” (E7, 44:23), which will turn out to be helpful for their detective work. Thanks to the Jordskott, Eva and Göran (who also carries the parasite) are, for instance, able to “see” past events; a technique they use at several crime scenes.

At the same time, nature is represented through an anti-romantic discourse, demonstrating its deadly force and malevolence. Nature is not exclusively good, but evil and destructive as well. A very modest illustration—an early warning, one could say—occurs in the first episode, when Eva gets hurt by hogweed (E1, 46:22), and develops a rash. More importantly, the Jordskott parasite can turn against its host. First, as Göran explains to Eva: “You need to learn to control it. Or things can go very wrong. [...] How wrong? Your senses could break down. You'll go crazy for real” (E8, 11:12). Moreover, carriers of the Jordskott parasite need to feed it with a special black liquid,⁸ because, as again Göran explains, “If the parasite starts feeding on you, it's bad. [...] The parasite takes over. And you stop being human” (E7, 43:46). During the last episodes of season one, we can also see that consuming too much of the black liquid has equally problematic effects. Not only is this another example of the balance discourse, but of the destructive and malevolent nature of nature as well.

The earlier-discussed examples of the disruptions of nature are equally important examples of nature's malevolence, although this malevolence is mostly responsive, and articulated as (proportional) self-defence. In that sense, Mäntymäki's (2017) rather harsh comment that Jordskott is “Featuring a naïve ‘nature strikes back’ narrative” (p. 90) might need to be tempered by pointing to the proportionality of the response, but still, nature can lash out hard. In Jordskott, it is Harry, the mercenary, who bears the full weight of nature's destructive capacity. An overdose of Jordskott first turns him into a monster, hardly capable of walking, and his attempts to kill Ylva and Göran end in Harry being dragged into the water and killed by the nix.

5.2. The Construction of the Human in Jordskott

In Jordskott, humans are predominantly articulated through the discourses of capitalism and instrumentalism, and through a lack of (post)humanism. This representation also results in humans being mapped on the ethical scale of malevolence and benevolence, in a similar way as the forest, but here malevolence dominates. ”

This critical perspective on humanity's ethics is represented in Jordskott in three ways. First, humans are seen to have an instrumentalist relation with nature, as a means to satisfy a capitalist drive. Johan Thörnblad and Gustaf Borén, the late and

⁸ Later, in series 2, it will turn out that the secret ingredient of the black liquid is the blood of the underground people.

current CEOs of Thörnblad M & C, are both represented as ruthless in exploiting the natural resources, and as willing to go at any length in order to secure the growth of the company, and secure the related profits. Gerda Gunnarsson (Johan Thörnblad's former secretary, lover, mother of his child Nicklas and Johan's murderer), dying of cancer, is equally ruthless in instrumentalizing and exploiting the forest.⁹ As Souch (2020) writes in her analysis of *Jordskott*, the instrumentalization of the forest is also visible in how the forest is represented:

“Especially indicative are the successions of takes allowing the panoramic views to be followed by the medium and close-up shots of the thick formations of bushes and trees and, shortly after, by the images of cut tree trunks and barren sandy spots covered with dead, mouldy branches” (p. 117).

The second representation of human malevolence occurs through the absence of humanism, resulting in the omnipresence of intra-human violence. Not surprisingly for a crime series, we see an abundance of (almost) deadly violence. The series starts with Eva returning to Silverhöjd, because of the death of her father (Johan), who, as it turns out later, has been assassinated by his former lover and secretary, Gerda. Eva is deadly wounded by—as it also turns out later—her half-brother Nicklas, and can only be saved by administering her *Jordskott*. Göran is shot by Harry—the mercenary—and is only saved because he has the parasite, and the forest can thus heal him. Even Eva abducts one of the Silverhöjd children, Emma, using her as bait to get her daughter Josephine back. Eva, as one of the series' writers explains, commits “the ultimate fail of putting another child in risk to save her own” (interview writer, 22 September 2022). The plan backfires, resulting on Muns getting hold of Emma as well.

But the violence against the underground people and other humanoids is even more rampant, which we can see as the absence of posthumanism. One key actor here is Harry, who, as mentioned before, aims to kill all underground people—including those who are hiding amongst humans—and other humanoids. On Harry's website, according to Göran, it is mentioned that “his wife and children were murdered by non-humans” (E9, 4:14), but he is also paid by the Board of Thörnblad M & C. Harry kills the first nix, and then tracks down the underground people who lived undercover in the human world—the brothers Jeppe, Ebbe and Sture Bergman—of which only the latter can escape. We already mentioned how Harry meets his end: Eventually shot by Göran, Harry overdoses on *Jordskott* and is killed by the (second) nix. The second actor is Johan Thörnblad, who exterminated (almost) all underground people by releasing a lethal toxin in the forest. On one of his videos, that Eva watches after his death, Johan recounts the genocide of the underground people:

⁹ In a cathartic moment at the very end of season one, Gerda intervenes to stop the explosions, gives up on the silver, and inadvertently preserves the lives of the children, who are, at that very moment, trying to make their way out of the cave (accompanied by Tom and Ida).

“In 1978, I sprayed the forest with a toxic agent. An illegal defoliant, and it went horribly wrong. We didn't know it, but an unknown people lived in the North Woods. Adults and children ... lay dead everywhere. I panicked. Burn them. Please, get rid of them” (E8, 52:39).

The *Jordskott* series does not articulate humans as exclusively malevolent. Here, we can see a diversity of ethical positions as well, with four actor groups being articulated as more benevolent. Three of them are aligned with protecting the forest and/or the underground people, thus being connected to the ecocentric discursive assemblage. First, there are the environmental activists, who, for instance, occupy part of the forest in an attempt to stop the mining in Silverhöjd. Importantly, they are joined by two board members of Thörnblad M & C, Thomas Leander and Jeanette Eriksson. Eventually, Thomas and Jeanette will sell their company shares to Eva Thörnblad, so that she can obtain a controlling share in the company and stop the mining attempts. The second actor are the Swedish police, who are seen to do their utmost best to find the missing children and resolve the murders that have plagued the town. It is eventually detective Tom Aronsson who, with the help of his daughter Ida, rescues all missing children. The third actor is the mysterious organisation EN—which has even infiltrated the Swedish police, with Göran working for EN—whose aim is to protect the underground people and other humanoid creatures, mostly by maintaining the secrecy about their existence. And finally, there is Ylva, half witch and half troll. She turns out to be a key person in protecting the forest, the underground people—Ylva saved Muns as a baby, after the genocide—and the Swedish police officers.

Still, many of these actors are not represented as unambiguously benevolent. Eva, a Swedish police officer, abducts one of the children herself, in a failed attempt to lure Muns out of his hiding. Göran, working for EN, regularly makes evidence disappear, to maintain the EN policy of secrecy. But it is mostly EN, with its apparent altruistic motives, that turns out to be a deeply malevolent organisation,¹⁰ for instance, murdering Olof Gran, a retired Silverhöjd police officer who has been studying the underground people, and spoke out too much during a televised police press conference. As EN representative Gabriel Moreaux dryly tells Göran about Olof's assassination: “The end justifies the means” (E5, 56:20).

5.3. The Construction of the Other-human in *Jordskott*

Jordskott features a variety of humanoids. As mentioned, one significant actor is the underground people, who become articulated with the forest, where they live. This implies the activation of an indigenist discourse, signifying the proximity of the underground people with their habitat, their respect and stewardship of nature, but

¹⁰ One of the main storylines during season two is how EN is holding underground people captive, to harvest their blood for the production of the black liquid.

the indigenous epistemologies that intersect with nature as well. For instance, when Muns abducts the five children from the hospital, they quietly follow him to a tunnel, leading into the caves. Göran later explains to Eva how this was done: “There are certain decoctions that make people ... docile. It's risky. The measurements need to be precise. Or the damage could be permanent” (E9, 8:04). Simultaneously, the *Jordskott* series goes at great length to emphasize the sophisticated and encultured nature of the underground people, for instance, by showing the burial chamber of the underground people (as Ylva explains to Eva, when they are about to enter this room: “The place we're going means a great deal to him. It's holy” (E8, 36:07). Another example is the written language of the underground people, which only few humans can decode. When Muns leaves a note to Eva at the end of episode 5, with the writing clearly visible, Olof Gran has to translate it for her (in episode 6).

Again, an ethical repertoire is used to represent the underground people and indigeneity. They are seen as generous and benevolent. Only during series 2, it becomes clear that they have been donating their blood as the secret ingredient for the black liquid, that allows the people with the *Jordskott* parasite to survive. A few survivors of the genocide (try to) live peacefully in the human society (until Harry kills most of them), not seeking revenge or even justice. In the case of Muns, it is made even clearer—by Ylva in a conversation with Eva, as mentioned earlier—that “He's not out for revenge. Justice to Muns would mean reinstating the agreement your father broke” (E7, 29:50). Still, also in this case, the underground people (and in particular Muns) are not unequivocally benevolent, as he first abducted Josefine Thörnblad, and later six more children, although in *Jordskott* this is represented as legitimate and proportional resistance against the forest's destruction. For instance, when Eva goes into the cave to negotiate with Muns—through the mediation of Ylva—the latter sums up Muns's position:

“Ylva: First he wants to make sure your word is good. If they leave the forest be, he'll let the children go.

Eva: How can I trust that?

Ylva: He means what he says” (E8, 39:52).

The second example of how the ethical position of the humanoids is represented relates to Esmeralda, a young huldra (a female forest spirit, who has psychic powers). Still learning to control her powers, Esmeralda causes quite some havoc when she feels threatened. Her skills force people to harm themselves: Eddie, a 17-year-old who tries to violate her, cuts his own throat; Tom, when interrogating Esmeralda, stabs himself in the next with a pen; and Harry fatally injures his dog Kuba, and is then almost brought to shooting himself. After going through a similar experience, Göran manages to make Esmeralda stop the psychic assault on him, explaining that

“You have a power and an ability you can't comprehend” (E8, 46:13) and “You're not alone. There are others like you” (E8, 46:37). Göran then brings Esmeralda to Klara, a more experienced huldra, allowing her to learn to better control her psychic powers. Esmeralda, and the forest spirits in general, are again positioned as benevolent, and, in this case, the harm they do is unintentional. For instance, when Göran explains Tom how he ended up with a pen in his neck, he says: “It's how huldras defend themselves. But it was never her intention to hurt you or anyone else” (E9, 46:55). Later, Esmeralda's benevolence is emphasized further, when she risks her own well-being to trace Harry, and thus saves Ylva's life.

Apart from indigeneity and ethics, hybridity is used to articulate the other-humans, and the relations between humans and other-humans as well. This is the main argument that Mäntymäki (2018) makes in her article about *Jordskott*, grounded in Braidotti's (2013) work. *Jordskott* thus also represents a posthumanist discourse, again connecting it with ethics. We can return to Braidotti's (2013) book *The Posthuman* for a formulation of this posthumanist ethics: “A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism” (pp. 49-50). The *Jordskott* series defends this normative order in a variety of ways. Not only are we presented with human diversity—for instance, through the conflict between industrial capitalism and environmental activism—but this diversity is further increased through the encounters with nature (Figure 1). After Tom's unpleasant encounter with Esmeralda (a huldra), he has gained some psychic skills. Göran explains this to Tom as follows: “What she did to you leaves traces. Nothing serious, but ... it could open doors to senses you didn't know existed” (E9, 47:22). Obviously, the introduction of *Jordskott* into a human body—the merger of human and parasite—affects humans as well, providing them with additional skills. These alterations, which render them posthuman, further increases human diversity.

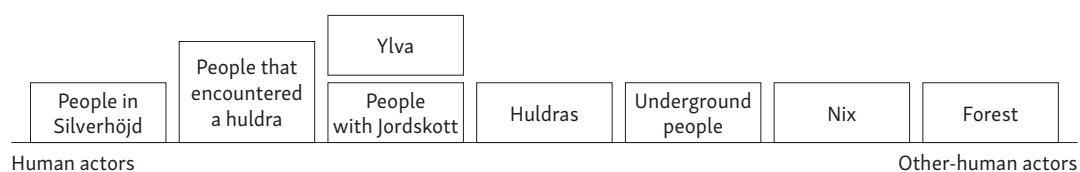


Figure 1: Diversity and hybridity in *Jordskott*

Hybridity also relates to the humanoid actors (Figure 1). Huldras can hardly be distinguished from humans. The same goes for the underground people who went undercover in human society. Their only mark is a scar, where their small tail used to be, cut-off and preserved in a box, as a reminder of their alterity. Apart from this feature, they are indistinguishable from humans. Even when Muns is different, as

he chooses to return to traditional life underground, his (post)humanity becomes strongly emphasized as well.

Jordskott thus represents the entanglement of humans and other-humans, extending the category of the human, also introducing a posthumanist ethics that welcomes this diversity, countering anthropocentric-dualist discourses by rejecting the construction of hierarchies between human and non-humans and showing their entanglement, diversity and hybridity. This becomes even clearer when Josefine—in order to save her life, which is threatened by the loss of control over her Jordskott parasite—transforms into a plant, a strategy that is not represented as a problematic descent into otherness, but as a continuation of life, albeit in a different form. Moreover, Jordskott's representation of the other-human as ethically equal to humans, and in some cases even as ethically superior—only causing harm out of ignorance or self-defence—even more fundamentally reverses the hierarchy between humans and other-humans.

One important exception is Harry Storm, who rejects any posthumanist ethics, with its entanglement, diversity and hybridity. He consistently labels the other-humans as “not human”, for instance, when he explains to Thörnblad M & C CEO Gustaf (who hired him) that the other-humans are “vermin” (E4, 41:31): “Many of them look like us, but they're not like us. They're animals, monsters” (E4, 41:37). Harry is the main representative of the anthropocentric-dualist and conflationist discourses, dichotomizing ‘humans’ and ‘non-humans’ and conflating all other-human diversity into one (side of the) dichotomy. But the Jordskott series does not side with him, as he is represented as a merciless serial killer who meets his end in a most gruesome way. In this fashion, Jordskott as a series aligns itself with the posthumanist position as well.

6. CONCLUSION

Jordskott, with its 10 episodes in the first season, is a complex television narrative, that requires a careful analysis to show the deeply structural intervention it entails. It contains a harsh critique on the capitalist instrumentalization of nature, and its genocidal consequences for an indigenous people. Humans are not necessarily represented as kind and careful caretakers of the forest, even if, at the end, the conflict is resolved by the death of some and re-positioning of the others who were blocking the resolution of this conflict.

Importantly, nature is attributed with agency, and it is seen to use this agency in not always the kindest ways. It is not an actor to mess with, but the Jordskott series still shows the benevolence of nature, and the proportional (or accidental) use of malevolence by nature-affiliated actors. Through the invocation of a balance-entanglementist discourse, we see that humans are the drivers of malevolence, but that nature is perfectly capable of defending itself. In other words, “if you don't nurture the nature inside of you, you will eventually die” (writer interview, 22 September

2022). Moreover, we also see a posthumanist ethics, that refuses the construction of a dualist hierarchy between humans and non-humans. Instead, we see that Jordskott approvingly represents an egalitarian ethics that acknowledges internal and external diversity.

Without getting too much lodged in Jordskott's narrative, its importance lies exactly in the activation of this ethical repertoire—an ecocentric normative order—as its main discursive strategy to strengthen an ecocentric discursive assemblage. As an intervention, the Jordskott narrative gently nudges its viewers towards an ecocentrist position, defending its ethical nature, to be preferred over cruel anthropocentrism. Moreover, Jordskott also allows us to argue that ecocentrism does not stand on its own, but that it is part of a discursive assemblage, where a series of affiliated discourses become activated, to enrich and strengthen the ecocentrist position.

Finally, this brings us to the use of the supernatural fiction (or telefantasy), as a framework to facilitate the activation of this ecocentrist discursive assemblage, in an almost harmless way, without direct strong reality claims. Bruhn (2018) argued that the addition of the “mythologizing or supernatural aspect to the plot” allows avoiding “an ecocritical understanding of modernisation and the nonecological understanding of nature” (p. 71, emphasis removed). We hope that our analysis shows the inverse, namely that—what Ang (1989, p. 45) labelled, when writing about television soaps—the ‘emotional realism’ of Jordskott allows it to make a persuasive and creative intervention in strengthening ecocentrism.

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