

„The Witch is Dead“

Reflexions on „The Wizard of Oz“ and the Twentieth Century

It's easy to forget that all movies are the product of collaboration. No matter how much a film is shaped by the unique vision of a single person, that person is not able to create the film without actors and camera operators and people in charge of audio and make-up and lights and costumes and drivers. Even it's a small art house low-budget film, the amount of human beings involved is staggering.

For that reason movies are like ouija boards. Apart from the story they set out to tell they always spell a different story at the same time, always carrying a message which none of the people involved has been trying to transmit. For that very reason movies are better time capsules than novels or even diaries. Every single movie is a vault in which you can find the internal conflicts, the ambivalence, the hidden hopes, fears, joys and desires of the time it was made in.

Those things are always there. You can always find them. Whatever it is society didn't want to talk about you will be able to see its traces in the movies that particular society enjoyed, believing them to be a safe heaven from troubling things. Denial is not a passive process, it's an active one, an effort of deletion that will always be incomplete. If you look closely the hidden away will become visible.

When I was a child I didn't own many movies, but I had „The Wizard of Oz“ on a VHS with a handwritten label. Young people from today - I am sincerely troubled by the fact that I am now old enough to utter the phrase „young people from today“ without there being any ironic chuckle in the room -, young people from today will find it hard to believe how awesome it felt to have a movie at home, because we are already twice removed from the VHS-era. Even collecting DVDs has become a thing of yesterday. Some of us, and I am one of them, still have bookcases full of them in our living rooms. That was considered cool not long ago, now we look at those shelves with mild embarrassment. All these movies have been too expensive to throw them out, but we also know that quite soon there won't even be devices available to watch them on. You don't need to have films on your shelves any more, you can stream whatever you want to see any moment, and still you cannot quite convince yourself to get rid of this collection, getting more ridiculous with every passing day.

But I digress. When I was eight years old I owned „The Wizard of Oz“ on VHS. Owning a movie on VHS was an unusual thing. Everyone had two or maybe three, few of us had more than five, nobody had ten. Sometimes children got a movie for Christmas - I'll never forget the beauty and excitement of properly printed VHS covers with the original movie poster motive! -, but usually we recorded them when they were shown on TV. Remember how difficult it was to make the recording device actually record anything and not get the schedule wrong? Remember? When a movie was

really important we added half an hour before and an hour after and so there was a lot of fast-forwarding to do before you finally got to the beginning and then there was even more fast-forwarding before you nervously asserted that indeed the recording had worked and you had the whole thing. And only then you started watching. Remember?

But I digress again.

I owned „The Wizard of Oz“, and I am sure I watched it about twenty times. I loved every second. I loved the music and the characters and the story and the moment when the Wicked Witch melts away into a black puddle, although it was the most brutal thing I had ever seen. Years later I also read the novel the movie was based on: L. Frank Baum was forty-two years old when he published it in 1908, a colorful work of early modernism in children’s literature. Baum was obsessed by the Fairy Tale collection of the Brothers Grimm, and one of his aims was to create something that used motives from European fairy tales in a way young American audiences could relate to. In the years to follow he published several sequels to „The Wizard of Oz“, among them „The Road to Oz“, „The Emerald City of Oz“, „Little Wizard Stories of Oz“, „The Scarecrow of Oz“, „The Lost Princess of Oz“ and „The Tin Woodman of Oz“. He died in 1919. „The Magic of Oz“ and „Glinda of Oz“ were published posthumously.

His most beloved creation „The Wizard of Oz“ got turned into a movie several times. Bear with me, we’ll be done with the lists shortly. The first movie, a silent one, was shot only two years after the book was first published, in 1910. The second movie came in 1925 and was directed by Larry Semon, the third one was a short film by Ted Eshbaugh and only the fourth was the movie the whole world knows, shot in 1939 and directed by Victor Fleming.

The movie has a heroine, a young girl, Dorothy, who is in every single scene. How old is she? Nobody ever tells us, but one would guess from her not quite mature but always reasonable and clear-minded behavior that she is around twelve, not yet in the thralls of puberty. Judy Garland was slightly older than her character, in 1939 she was seventeen - it’s quite common in movies to have a child played by somebody who is not quite a child any more. And this intelligent and rather together young girl lives in Kansas. She also lives in black and white, which, as movies usually happened to be black and white, spelled *reality* - the world as it is. Later, when Dorothy leaves reality, she will step into the brightest Technicolor. I cannot even begin to tell you how thrilled I was, every single time, watching this happen as a child.

There’s a fascinating dialectical mechanism here, as obviously color is something we find in the real world, but in the year 1939 audiences weren’t used to color as to something they could find in a movie, so black-and white, which doesn’t exist in reality, means we are in reality, whereas full color, as in reality, means that we have left reality for good. Realism has always been a tricky endeavor. So here is Dorothy, living in Kansas with her aunt and uncle - we never learn what happened to her parents, but we are familiar with that kind of parentless family structure from Walt Disney’s Duckburg: Somehow aunt- and unclehood seems to be considered the better, the un-

Freudian version of parenthood. So Dorothy lives with her aunt and uncle in a black and white Kansas, and of course she wishes to be elsewhere.

CLIP: „Over the rainbow“, 5:40 - 7:32

I still like that dog. Seeing how much Dorothy wishes to be far away it is hard not to think of another young movie hero, raised by aunt and uncle, who stares at the sky, albeit a rather different one, longingly and wishes to be far away before disaster strikes and his home gets blown to pieces by forces beyond he control.

Thunderstorm strikes, and Dorothy's house gets lifted in to the air: the world turn liquid, too, chaos rises, upheaval is complete, because leaving home for the first time isn't just traveling, it always means the destruction of a world, but that destruction, as the thundestorm-sequence shows us, is a weirdly cheerful process. Any child secretly wishes for its safe childhood home to be destroyed.

CLIP: Thunderstorm, 16:38 - 19:45

Color. Finally. So much color! As I mentioned, I clearly remember the impact this moment had on me: the strangeness, the transformative power of a world that didn't just have different things, but was different in a very profound way, different to the core. A world of color. But I, obviously, was raised on TV and used to films in color (that's not quite true, we had two TV sets in our house, one in color, in the living room, one black and white, in my father's bedroom - how utterly premodern such an object seems today: a black-and-white TV set. They still sold them until the early nineties. But again, I digress.) So I was raised on movies in color and still deeply impressed by that sudden switch from one dimension to the other - how much stronger must the impact have been on audiences who weren't used to color in movie at all. Let's not forget, the movie that carried Technicolor around the world, making it the new standard of what to expect from film, was „Gone with the Wind“, which came out the same year as „The Wizard of Oz“ and had, incidentally, the same director, Victor Fleming, who had left „Oz“ to take over the troubled production of „Gone“. Color: Most great moments in movies have a meta-aspect, there is no other form of art so obsessed with looking at itself, with being its own mirror. The moment when Dorothy steps out of her house and finds her surroundings transformed into something completely new, into a world of danger, but also of allure and beauty - this moment doesn't just show us the dream of a child, it references the very process of movies suddenly becoming colorful - it is that moment, but that moment also reflects itself in a long beautiful gliding half circle crane shot: Look at this, the shot seems to say, this is happening in the story, but it is also happening in movie history, and nothing will ever be the same. Dorothy leaves one kind of movie and emerges, as if through the looking glass, in another one.

CLIP: „Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore“, 19:45 - 20:54

But this new world is not an altogether beautiful one. Not at all. This was one of the big surprises for me when I watched the film again a few months ago on a rather lazy spring afternoon with my son - I had expected a beautiful and sometimes rather boring and maybe also slightly too cute children's movie, and I couldn't believe how much memory had deceived me. So when Dorothy steps out of her old Kansas house in the Kingdom of Oz, when she looks around and tries to assess what has happened, finding herself surrounded by ... Well, what is it she finds herself surrounded by? As she says herself, it's definitely not Kansas anymore. That's a masterful line. So in case you ever find yourself gripped by extreme weirdness and things get truly outlandish and nothing makes sense any more, when you feel the thrill and danger of something completely new opening up - this is the line to quote. „I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore“. But where are they? When I watched „The Wizard of Oz“ with my son, at first with no other intention than to show it to him and to re-live my own childhood memories, I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

CLIP: The Munchkins, 20:55 - 27:55

Enough. More than enough. But this is the longest clip you're going to see, I promise. When Dorothy arrives and is greeted by the Munchkins, played by 124 midget actors, as they were called back then, which to contemporary sensibility feels like a rather strange case of exploitation (those actors got 50 Dollars each per week by the way, whereas the dog - yes: the dog! - playing Toto got 125, I didn't make this up), so when Dorothy has to witness the singing and dancing and accepts all the congratulations for having accidentally killed somebody, an unexpected new feeling took hold of me, and I was wondering whether the success of that movie, shot in what probably turned out to be in one of the darkest years in the history of mankind, had some deeper and less visible reasons than just the fact that it is arguably a very good film. The whole Kingdom of Oz is clearly framed as Dorothy's dream, I thought on that spring day, sitting next to my son, who by the way, being raised on the much faster movies of today found the whole endeavor only mildly interesting. But, I asked myself, what kind of dream? Instead of being as cute and funny as I vaguely remembered, isn't this encounter with the Munchkins a rather nightmarish one? Doesn't it feel like a fever dream?

What films intend to show their audience can be significantly different from what is they are actually showing. As I said, being the result of a collaboration, a film will always make manifest what it is trying to be in denial of. In this case - totalitarianism. The fact that the world was sinking into darkness and that the lights were being extinguished over Europe. So I found myself, that spring afternoon, sitting on our sofa and staring into the dark heart of the Twentieth Century. Am I making

too much of this?, I asked myself, am I just projecting? At the end of the day this is a children's tale, nothing more. But nothing is ever „nothing more“, especially not in a film that resonated so deeply within the psyche of several generations around the world. Dorothy being welcomed by the Munchkins right at the moment when Stalin's terror reached its peak and when Hitler moved from victory to victory is not a small matter. Thinking of what happened elsewhere while Judy Garland and the exploited little people were acting those scenes will automatically call up images of conformity and suppression. Who are these Munchkins?, I kept asking myself, why is it not possible for me to even look at them without feeling slightly sick to my stomach? Is it because they are chanting about death? But „Hey Ho the Witch is dead“ is undeniably a cool song, and isn't a witch being killed one of the staple motives of European storytelling?

No, it's not the witch. It's the idyll, whose beaming colors even seem slightly poisonous. We don't know much about the Munchkins, but a few things become apparent right away: for example they don't allow for a lot of diversity or even difference, and they don't seem to allow for unhappiness or even a lack of cheerfulness either. Looking at their fake medieval clothes you can see right away that they value tradition. And now that the witch is finally crushed we can safely assume there will be no element of disturbance, no outside influence, no spark of anarchy in their perfectly homogenous Munchkin society - and let's not forget that as much as they bid Dorothy welcome they never invite her to stay, „Welcome“ is just a word you say to foreigners you expect to leave at the first opportunity, and neither can there be any doubt that once Dorothy has left they will keep singing and dancing and living their very traditional life without any outsider watching and judging. Also they like bureaucracy. And they definitely value authority - look at that major, look at the other guy carrying that Death Certificate. To cut the matter short: Right in the center of the beloved movie „The Wizard of Oz“, shot in the dark year 1939, there is the perfect vision of a totalitarian world - happy, homogenous and unforgiving.

I am not trying to make the case that this was in any way planned. Nobody intended it. Victor Fleming definitely didn't try to smuggle imagines of totalitarianism into his movie, neither as a celebration, nor as a warning. What I am trying to say is that you can never get rid of the reality that surrounds you - and the more you try the more it will seep into the work you're creating. There is escapism, but there is no escape. The dancing Munchkins, being freed of their oppressor, are supposed to be an uplifting spectacle - but that spectacle turns on itself and becomes the opposite of what it set out to be: This is neither the free world nor a world of free people, it's the very epitome of oppression and repression, made manifest in a powerful and creative way, better than even sharp political satire could achieve.

Just as a side note: Victor Fleming wasn't exactly opposed to Nazism. According to the actress Anne Revere he was „violently pro-Nazi“ for a while and strongly opposed to the US entering the War. We have to take this information with a grain of salt, as apparently Anne Revere didn't know Fleming well and held a grudge because of some casting decisions of his. But at least it has been proven that at the outset of the war Fleming mockingly took a bet as to how long the United

Kingdom could withstand an assault by Germany, so to say the least we can safely assume that some of the people working on the „Wizard of Oz“ were at least somehow ambivalent in their attitude towards the forces of dictatorship that in 1939 seemed to take over large parts of the world. It is this ambivalence that we see in the Munchkin song, in their sickening happiness, their Oktoberfest joy about the crushed witch.

Then the witch carcass shrivels like a dry leaf and disappears. „The Wizard of Oz“ has a remarkable attraction not just to killing, but to bodily destruction. Bodies shrivel, bodies melt, bodies get deformed. And Dorothy, whom all the Munchkins welcomed but none of the Munchkins invited to stay, takes to the yellow brick road and leaves their beautiful little nightmare place forever.

The heroine's journey begins. One by one she meets the three friends who will be with her until the end of the dream. First the scarecrow, played by Ray Bolger, who has a disturbing tendency to literally fall apart, losing his straw like removable intestines wherever he goes, and who laments the fact that he doesn't have a brain in his head, then the tin man, played by Jack Haley, who literally doesn't have a heart, as his chest is hollow, and the cowardly lion, played by Bert Lahr, who wishes he had the courage a lion should have. In Frank Baum's novel the backstory of the tin man has an even stronger philosophical resonance. Because back in the days, as he explains to Dorothy, he was an ordinary human woodcutter. But then he had an accident - or to be more precise, the Wicked Witch cursed his axe - and he cut off his leg:

„This at first seemed a great misfortune, for I knew a one-legged man could not do very well as a woodchopper. So I went to a tinsmith and had him make me a new leg out of tin. The leg worked very well, once I was used to it; but my action angered the Wicked Witch of the East, for she had promised the old woman I should not marry the pretty Munchkin girl. When I began chopping again my axe slipped and cut off my right leg. Again I went to the tinner, and again he made me a leg out of tin. After this the enchanted axe cut off my arms, one after the other; but, nothing daunted, I had them replaced with tin ones. The Wicked Witch then made the axe slip and cut off my head, and at first I thought that was the end of me. But the tinsmith happened to come along, and he made me a new head out of tin. I thought I had beaten the Wicked Witch then, and I worked harder than ever; but I little knew how cruel my enemy could be. She thought of a new way to kill my love for the beautiful Munchkin maiden, and made my axe slip again, so that it cut right through my body, splitting me into two halves. Once more the tinsmith came to my help and made me a body of tin, fastening my tin arms and legs and head to it, by means of joints, so that I could move around as well as ever. But alas, I had now no heart, so that I lost all my love for the Munchkin girl, and did not care whether I married her or not.“

Replacing a human body one small part a time - that's a thought experiment quite common in contemporary theory of mind: Of course it wouldn't change your personality or your memories at all if you just exchange one neuron (provided you could do it without causing any harm to the surrounding tissue), but if you keep doing it, exchanging neurons one by one - is there a point when you stop being you? Is there some core person that would get affected at some point - and if so, where is that point?

„The Wizard of Oz“, the novel and the movie, are shaped by an astonishingly radical understanding of human body, human character and human personality: The idea that bodies can be formed and transformed has always been an aspect of the collective imagination of the European fairy tale. But in the world of Oz the fluidity of bodies also extends to the properties of character and psyche: The scarecrow wants a brain, meaning: a mind, a consciousness, but as contemporary philosophers such as Daniel Dennett or Paul and Patricia Churchland keep pointing out, there might not be such a thing as a stable core of consciousness, an internal theatre of mind with a projection on some internal screen and single-soul audience, and therefore the scarecrow doesn't have to *get* a brain from the great and powerful wizard, all the wizard will have to do is to point out that there might not be such a clear difference between having a brain - meaning: a mind inside of the matter in your head, whether it's straw or meat - and not having one. Instead of a mind the wizard will give him a diploma, thereby pointing out that cognition might be a symbolical property more than a real one. The same applies to the tin man, who lacks a heart, meaning a stable inner being, a person. He doesn't get any of these, as it's enough for him to realize the vagueness of the concept: none of us has a stable core if it's not the others who award it to us by accepting the fiction that it is there. Therefore the wizard hands the tin man what he calls „a testimonial, a token of our affection“, a heart-shaped brooch, and he even adds: „Remember, my sentimental friend that a heart is not judged by how much you love, but how much you are loved by others.“ In moral terms this is, of course, the opposite of the truth, but the tin man accepts this blatant lie with tears in his eyes, and therefore he has all the emotions, all the heart, he will ever need for being part of human society. And then of course, there is the lion, who is in despair about the fact that he doesn't have courage, meaning: manliness. The lion with his effeminate gestures and his love for colorful hair ribbons, fancy cloths and nice flowers is pretty obviously set up as a gay man in search of becoming straight, close to the end of the film he will even sing: „If I were king of the forest - not queen“ Bert Lahr's acting could be seen as a rather cheap caricature of gayness - were it not for the fact that, again, the movie offers a surprising solution to his quest: He doesn't become courageous - meaning: manly -, as there is no such thing, being a manly hero lion has always been a very fictitious concept to begin with. The thing he gets from the wizard is a medal for courage - once again the wizard's point is that you don't need the real when you can have the symbol, as actually the symbol is all the reality you will ever be able to get your hands on.

It is baffling to find a film going from an infantile utopia of happy Bavarian fascist dwarfs to an utterly cutting edge notion of consciousness, human character and gender identity in the course of a few minutes. What is even more baffling is that the film manages to be genuinely serious about both things: endorsing the utterly modern mindset and endorsing the urge to return to an imagined pre-modern one. It is genuinely conflicted about what it tries to project, that's why watching it can induce the vertigo typically arising from seeing a neurosis in action. But that's also the reason this movie, taking the shape of an elaborate nightmare itself, tells us so much about the nightmarish Twentieth Century.

When Dorothy and her friends arrive at Emerald City there is a guardian-of-the-doors-scene that we cannot watch without thinking of Kafka: A guard, meaningless bureaucratic rules, the complete impossibility of gaining access to the center of power (which, accordingly, will turn out to be empty). Nothing like this happens in the novel, but it is still highly unlikely that the screenwriters had any knowledge of Kafka's work. But this is not a Kafka novel, it's still a story shaped by Joseph Campbell's model of the hero's journey, and therefore Dorothy and her friends have to get into the inner chamber. But in there they encounter a setup of amazing special effects that never failed to scare me as a child and that I still find astonishingly well done.

CLIP - „I am Oz the great and powerful“, 1:09:30 - 1:10:28

As it turns out later, there is no „Oz the great and powerful“. Oz is a populist, a benevolent dictator, a con man and an imposter who gained power by promising miracles he never had any intention of performing. At the core of this movie about a colorful world of miracles the heroes don't find a person of substance, they find a creator of visual special effects. Again „The Wizard of Oz“ proves to be a movie about watching movies. The great wizard commands everyone's attention and obedience with his pyrotechnics and the movie-like projection of a big green head - and to get rid of his visitors he sends them on a death mission to bring him the broom of the Wicked Witch of the West, the sister of the witch Dorothy's falling house killed. Once he has that broom, so he promises, he will fulfill their wishes. Needless to say, he doesn't need that broom. He wants them dead.

So they set out to fight the witch. The role of the witch, played by Margaret Hamilton, has shifted now; when she briefly appeared among the Munchkins she seemed to be the speck of dark in an unbearably colorful picture, the fleeting spirit of anarchy among overwhelming conformity - but now she has her own castle and an army of servants, and she has her own inner chamber of power. Contrary to the wizard the witch is no impostor. She is the real thing. Her magic is real magic, her soldiers are fiercely loyal, and her castle has all the dark symmetries we associate with fairy tale villains and with totalitarian architecture. Also her soldiers are singing and parading, even at night, even when they don't think anybody is watching. As Hannah Arendt points out it is in the very nature of the totalitarian state to always tighten its grip on its inhabitants, to never let go, to not allow any spaces free of its control. The state has to be everywhere, that's why we call it totalitarian.

Soon we get to what seems to be the climactic fight scene - the choreography of jumping and running up and down stairs and swinging swords that was already conventional in the year 1939 - but again there is a twist. The witch cannot survive the touch of water. And water doesn't just kill her, it liquifies her body, it makes her melt - a sight that deeply frightened and fascinated me when I watched it on my VHS.

CLIP: The witch dies, 1:25:56 - 1:27:31

Neither Dorothy nor her friends stop for a moment to ponder the amazing behavior of the witch's soldiers, and neither do the makers of the film seem to find it astonishing, but anyone concerned with the de-nazification of Germany should have watched this. The very moment the dictator disappears there is no fellow-traveller to be found anywhere, no fellow criminal, no guilty person, nobody who actually supported any of the bad things that happened, and everyone happily bows to the new leadership, and if the new leaders asks for the broom, they can have the broom. Six years of world war had to happen before what the world saw in this movie actually became reality, before „the Germans now, too“, as the new Nobel Laureate would put it, had „God on their side“.

So the heroes take the broom and travel back to Emerald City, where the movie treats everyone who is lucky enough to watch it for the first time to the most wonderful surprise. Will Oz the Great and Powerful grant their wishes? Let's watch it again, there is no limit to how often you can watch this scene and still enjoy it.

CLIP: The Wizard gets exposed, 1:27:32 - 1:29:06

„The is no other wizard than me.“ What a sad line. No, he cannot do magic at all. He is a very real human being, played by Frank Morgan, it was all make-believe and illusion, it was a movie. Oz the Great and Powerful is basically a movie-maker. As he explains later, he is man from Kansas, too, who captured the imagination of Emerald City with a combination of flashes and projections and magic tricks and promises whose fulfillment he always postponed to a later day - as he demonstrated before, his main trick, more important than all the others, is to be extremely hard to reach. He isn't truly evil as the witch was, he actually turns out to be a rather agreeable person (and nobody seems to remember that only a few minutes ago he sent the heroes to the witch and to certain death), he is the ultimate populist.

The Witch and the Wizard seem to be polar opposites: Real magic versus magic tricks, tense malevolence versus relaxed cheerfulness, the darkness of the witch castle versus the shining beauty of Emerald City, but there is a connection never quite explained: The witch's skin is as green as the projected head on the wizard's special effect machine, the same green we see on the streets and walls of Emerald City. The Wizard apparently sends people he wants to get rid of to the Witch in order to get them killed. The Witch on the other hand, power hungry as she is, never mentions the wizard, never makes a move to fight him or interfere with his power. As he doesn't have any real resources it wouldn't be hard for her to beat him and rule over Emerald City, too - apparently she either has no incentive to do so, or she even has an incentive *not* to. In some mysterious way that neither the novel nor the movie explains the two sorcerers are connected: The populist seems to need the dictator, and the dictator also has to be a populist. In the dream logic of this movie the honest evil witch and the nice lying wizard are one.

Without any reason the wizard, after being exposed by our heroes, suddenly gets tired of ruling and offers to take Dorothy back to Kansas in his balloon, but he botches the takeoff and Dorothy gets left behind. As a *dea ex machina* the Good Witch Glinda arrives and tells her not to worry. And so finally Dorothy makes her way back to reality.

CLIP: Leaving Oz, 1:36:16 - 1:40:29

So of course waking up was always an option. But that doesn't prove that Oz isn't real. Back in Kansas Dorothy is able to recognize them all: her three friends are the farmhands working for her uncle, the person formerly known as the wizard is now a traveling psychic - and still a fraud, and of course the witch is the rich woman from the neighborhood who wanted Dorothy's dog killed. What seemed to be utterly apart turns out to be one: You can go from Kansas to Oz and back in the blink of an eye and the click of two heels, and the reason why you can do that is because Kansas and Oz are the same thing, in the same way that the Wicked Witch and the powerful Wizard are one. „This is a real truly life place. And I remember that some of it wasn't very nice. But most of it was beautiful. But just the same all I kept saying to anybody was I want to go home.“ explains Dorothy to her aunt, and this otherworld of thrill and true nastiness and good music and real danger and great colors, this world of deformable bodies and changing identities is always available, it is and will always be „ a real truly life place“.

But the flip side of that lies in the fact that being ruled by dark forces is not something that only happens in distant worlds and galaxies far away. „It can't happen here“ is the title of a novel by the great American satirist Sinclair Lewis, published in 1934, four years before the war and five years before „The Wizard of Oz“. „It can't happen here“ of course meant: It *can* happen here. It can also happen in beautiful, calm, black-and-white Kansas.

Today Kansas is firmly in Republican hands. The dangerous half-crazy man who still has a non-negligible chance of becoming the 45th president of the United States, can safely count on the Kansas vote. Four days to go before we can calm down, at least for a moment, or four days until „The Wizard of Oz“ will prove, once again, to be more relevant and more timely than anyone could have predicted.