On two types of silent objects

Within the literature on phonologically null objects, at least two varieties seem to be firmly established in the typology: generic null objects (GNO), originally described in Rizzi 1986 and exemplified by the Italian version of Good music reconciles one with oneself, and indefinite null objects (INO), discussed most notably by Chomsky (1964), Bresnan (1978), and Levin (1993) in relation to English sentences such as I ate. GNO were syntactically analyzed as pronouns (Rizzi 1986, Authier 1992), consisting of a set of \(\phi\)-features and of a D-feature/head (Landau 2010). INO, on the other hand, were argued to be represented only in the lexicon, either in the form of detransitivizing rules that operate on individual predicates, cf. (1-a), or as two separate predicates, a transitive and an intransitive one, that are linked by a predicate-specific meaning postulate, cf. (1-b).

1. GNO. On a par with their Italian counterparts, GNO in Czech are always human-denoting. They control into infinitival clauses (2), bind reflexives (3), and function as subjects of argument small clauses (4-a). According to Rizzi (1986), all of these are evidence for their presence in syntax.

(2) Šikovný učitel přiměje [PRO] chodí na hodinu včas a připravený. 
skilled teacher makes go to class on-time and prepared-SG.MASC/SF.FEM/PL
‘A skilled teacher makes (one) come to classes on time and well prepared.’

(3) Ani nejlepší ochrana neochrání; před sebou samým/C#sam-ou/77-sam-ými.
neither best security not-protects before self alone-SG.MASC/alone-SG.FEM/alone-PL
‘Not even the best security guard protects (one) from oneself.’

(4) a. Požívání marihuany delá otopelým / *otopelého
Intake marijuana makes dull-INST.SG.MASC dull-ACC.SG.MASC
b. Požívání marihuany delá člověka otopelým / otopelého
Intake marijuana makes human-ACC.SG.MASC human-INST.SG.MASC human-ACC.SG.MASC
‘Regular consumption of marijuana makes one dull.’

The agreement markers on adjectives bound by GNO directly, as in (3), or indirectly via PRO, as in (2), reveal that GNO are specified for masculine gender, which is pragmatically neutral in the sense that it subsumes both male and female individuals. Feminine gender is accepted only in contexts where the generalization is meant to apply exclusively to women (I mark this by ‘C#’ in the examples). The same pragmatic neutrality of masculine gender is generally attested also in the case of overt nouns denoting humans and human-like entities in Czech:

(5) ředitel-\(\emptyset\) ‘principal-MASC.SG (male or female)’ × ředitel-ka ‘principal-FEM.SG (female only)’
(Non-human nouns are specified for gender idiosyncratically, and the default gender in Czech is neuter, found e.g. in impersonal constructions.) On the other hand, GNO are not specified for number, as are overt [+hum] nouns, where SG is used to refer to atomic human-like beings, and PL is used for sets of atoms with cardinality \(>1\) (Link 1983). But adjectives agreeing with GNO always have the default singular value, see (2) and (3), no matter how much we play with the context. In addition, the data in (4) show that GNO do not allow case agreement, in sharp contrast to their overt counterpart, a generically interpreted noun člověk. I explain this mismatch as a result of the missing number projection in the internal structure of GNO, i.e. KaseP selects at least NumP, not a bare NP. Finally, none of the possible combinations of person features \([\pm\text{Participant}]\) and \([\pm\text{Author}]\) is applicable to GNO – they are more like regular nouns in not having the person features at all. Both of these facts, missing NumP and no person features, lead to the conclusion that DP is missing altogether in
such as in Carlson 1977). A parallel contrast can be found in the case of indefinite singular nouns that have the semantics of regular anaphora, and aspect. Arguments.

Selected references

(Note: there are several perfectives in Czech that do allow silent objects; I assume those to be true idiomatized cases.)

**Selected references**