Metaphor and the Making of Sense: The Contemporary Metaphor Renaissance

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Metaphor has gained a new lease on life through the revival of rhetoric in recent decades. For promoters of "la nouvelle rhétorique," such as Gérard Genette and Roland Barthes, rhetoric came to coincide with a total science of language that is practically coextensive with all social and human knowledge, while in the Anglo-Saxon world, Wayne Booth, in the wake of Kenneth Burke, repristinated rhetoric as, not just a technical discipline, but a moral one, and, in fact, an all-embracing criticism of the humanities.[1] The fortunes of metaphor have revived and flourished in tandem with those of rhetoric as a whole. Over the more than two millennia of a progressive eclipse of rhetoric, during which it shrank from its original primacy as the master art of persuasion in law, literature, and politics and, moreover, as the general framework of culture, to the status of an ancillary art of elocution of exclusively formal import, metaphor was eventually confined to being just one particular instance within the schemes of classifications of tropes. It became an affair of style, an ornament of decorative discourse, as rhetoric came to be identified with mere *elocutio* and was no longer essentially also *inventio*—the finding of arguments, in which metaphor's role is actually paramount—and *dispositio*—the ordering of discourse into its syntactic parts, such as exordium, narration, discussion, peroration. As the originally tripartite art and science of rhetoric was amputated of two of its main divisions in the classical model established on the basis of Aristotle's three-book treatise,[2] metaphor became a merely formal enhancement and lost its roles as substantive and structuring for knowledge and discourse.

The decline of interest in philosophical, Aristotelian rhetoric had much to do with metaphor's reduction to a merely technical or decorative device. But with the recent widening practically without limit of the terrain of rhetoric, and particularly with its restoration to its original standing as a philosophical discipline comprehending the substance of argument, metaphor

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has once again acquired cognitive status and, moreover, has tended to become the name for figurative language in general and even, emblematically, for the rhetorical or rhetoricity as such. Where the power of rhetoric to reshape cognitive meaning and even to reinvent, or at least reconfigure, reality was once again recognized as irresistible throughout all the realms of discourse, the source and unity of this power seemed to require a name, and more often than not *metaphor*—on account of the transformative, inventive power associated particularly with it—has been adopted to serve this purpose.

Today, under the aegis of metaphor, the power of figurative language, arguably the originating power at the source of all language and even of an articulated world as such, has newly become an object of research and general theoretical speculation. This extension of the concept of metaphor is bound up with a renewed view of figurative language in general as not only a substantive bearer of the content of discourse, but also as ontologically constitutive of the world, as operative at the origins of things and their identities. It has become possible to view all language as being metaphorical, and accordingly metaphorical operations of transfer and redefinition have been recognized as being the very essence of language and of all that comes to articulation through it. Furthermore, as witnessed by burgeoning publications and conferences, metaphor has become a topic onto which practically all the classic philosophical problems of ontology and epistemology are projected and appear in a new, specifically linguistic, light.[3]

This new ascendency of metaphor is certainly not uninflected or uncontested, even within the camps of the new rhetoricians. Genette, in "La rhétorique restreinte" (1972), resists the "inflation of metaphor" to become the trope of tropes and the figure of figures in a wide range of writers epitomizing modern poetics—particularly Marcel Proust, Roman Jakobson, and Michel Deguy (1969). Genette argues against reduction of all figures of analogy, not to mention figurativeness as such, to metaphor. Metaphor can be given a very precise technical definition as "an unmotivated figure of analogy without identification of the compared" (1972, 36). Nevertheless, the drive to apprehend the force of figurative language on the whole under the heading of metaphor, or under any other head, proves irresistible, as Genette's own researches inadvertantly demonstrate. He even admits that there is no denying "the essential metaphoricity of poetic language—and of language in general, which is evident [*l'idée d'une métaphoricité essentielle du langage poétique—et du langage en général. Il n'est certes pas question ici de nier cette métaphoricité d'ailleurs évidente*]" (36 and n. 1). Genette simply objects to the "reduction" of all

other rhetorical figures to metaphor in some specifically delimited sense. No single definition could adequately capture all the varieties of rhetoricity, and Genette is certainly right that metaphor's epitomizing essential aspects of all figures must not be allowed to become reductive. Indeed, if metaphor is capable of representing rhetoricity as such, it must be expanded and diversified so as to suggest something about what motivates all figures rather than bracketing out their differentiated inflections in the arbitrary elevation of any one specific figurative mode. Nevertheless, metaphor still seems to be the most appropriate term under which to theorize the striking kind of energy of invention and synthesis that figures of all different types share in common and release into the languages they transform.

Actually, the universalizing role of metaphor, its expanding to become coextensive with the sphere of figurative language in general, has been affirmed and reaffirmed all along in the rhetorical tradition. Aristotle's original fourfold definition of metaphor in the *Poetics* (1457b6–9)—"Metaphor is the transfer of an alien name either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy[μεταφορὰ δέ ἐστιν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορὰ ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ εἶδους ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἴδους ἐπὶ τὸ γένος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἴδους ἐπὶ εἶδος ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον]"—already includes synecdoche (as substituting genus for species or species for genus) and metonymy (species for species), as well as the proportionate analogy that comprises metaphor in the more restricted sense that is most familiar today. Aristotle may thus be indicated as "the first to consider metaphor as the general form of all figures of speech."[4] Hence, Cicero's comment, in *De oratore* (3.38), that the distinctions among the various kinds of figurative language were as yet unknown to Aristotle, "who called them all 'metaphor' [*qui ista omnia translationes vocat*]," that is, *translationes*, in the Latin translation of μεταφορά.

In the Middle Ages, Bede calls metaphor "the genus of which all the other tropes are species" (see Eco 1984, 141) and this unique privilege for metaphor reigns equally in the Renaissance in Emmanuele Tesauro's *Il cannochiale aristotelico*, where metaphor is dubbed "*regina delle figure* [queen of figures]" (see Rousset 1953, 187). In the eighteenth century, Etienned Bonnot de Condillac explained metaphor's inclusiveness of all types of figurative senses as implied in the word's etymological meaning: "[I]f we consult etymology, all the tropes are metaphors: for metaphor signifies properly a word transported from one signification to another [*à consulter l'étymologie, tous les tropes sont des métaphores: car métaphore signifie proprement un mot transporté d'une signification à une autre*]" (*De l'art d'écrire* 2.6; qtd. in Derrida 1972, 280, n. 26). And even in the

decline of classical rhetoric in France, in the manuals of César Chesneau Du Marsais, *Les Tropes* (1730), and Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du Discours* (1830), representing the last stage of the continuous transmission of traditional rhetoric, the unity of all tropes as transfers in the senses of words was still recognizable, and could still be called *metaphor*, even though *metonymy*, too, showed some tendency to become the all-purpose term (see Du Marsais 1818, vol. 2, article 10).

But even granted this hegemony, metaphor's universality in the field of figurative language constitutes no more than a highly ambiguous privilege. For figurative language itself tended more often than not to be understood as secondary, as a play upon proper, straight, serious, unfigured language. This was so particularly during the demise of rhetoric as a speculative, philosophical discipline between Aristotle and *la nouvelle rhetorique* (with notable exceptions, such as the rhetorical theory of the Italian humanists in the Renaissance). But in the new perspective being elicited here, metaphor's role as the master figure is only an indication of a yet much greater universality extending beyond figures of speech altogether to language as such. The recently rediscovered propensity of metaphor to insinuate itself even into whatever forms of language are defined against it as "literal" testifies to a completely uncircumscribable power of metaphor.[5] Just as rhetoric has overcome its subordination to logic and stated its claim to being an originary form of knowledge, and thereby of experience and action, rather than just a decoration of some more fundamental level of language and discursive praxis, so metaphor as a principle of transformation of meaning has shown up not simply as operating upon already existing, nonmetaphorical forms of language, but as the originary nature of language itself.[6]

The proposition that all language is metaphorical appears paradoxical, so long as metaphor seems to be defined necessarily as an exceptional instance of language, intelligible only by contrast to literal language. But a new outlook with unforeseen possibilities is born with the discovery that the literal itself must be apprehended as metaphorical in its basic constitution. This ironic predicament is, in fact, written into the very term *literal*, itself based on the metaphor of the written character, the letter, being used to stand for a certain kind of meaning. The letter is itself nothing but a figure, a concrete image, for this kind of literal meaning that is purportedly devoid of figurativeness. And when presumably unrhetorical, fact-stating discourse itself is shown to be never given without presupposing a prior process, an originating movement, of transfer of meaning that is, in the deepest sense, metaphorical, then metaphor has become universal in scope,

so much so, perhaps, as to have lost all distinct definition and to have become identified with the whole elusive phenomenon of production of sense in language. And yet this moment of comprehending language as ineluctably metaphorical is capable of offering a distinctive new perspective on language and, by consequence, on all that is ontologically bound up with language. Rather than a deviant type of language defined against proper language, metaphor can then be considered an instance of language that points toward the ground of language out of which the very possibility of a distinction between proper and improper first arises. Conspicuously metaphorical language is in this way distinguished only by being especially revealing of the primordial essence of language as such.

Accordingly, recent theory of metaphor aims to open a new vista upon the whole mystery of language. Some of this, especially as it has developed since the radical questioning of the traditional substitution and comparison theories of metaphor in classical rhetoric, has been pragmatic in character. Influentially, I. A. Richards featured metaphor in the context of the general philosophical problem of language, that is, of "how words work" and of "how thought goes on" (1965, 8, 115). In his fundamental inquiry into "how words mean," metaphor emerges as "the omnipresent principle of language" (92). In Richard's revival of rhetoric as a philosophical activity in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, metaphor was no longer treated as just a technical device but as the mainspring of language's functioning. While most obviously in poetic employments, metaphor was fundamental to the production of all sorts of semantic innovation and perhaps of linguistic sense in general (lecture 5). Richard's work is a source for much of the new speculation about metaphor, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, but this development has often tended toward formalization, since it evolved primarily within the matrices of analytic philosophy and New Criticism.[7] A much broader grasp of modern "philosophy of rhetoric" as it has flourished in the wake of Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried Herder, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Nietzsche is required to comprehend the new power and expanded boundaries—or rather boundlessness—of the field of metaphor.

Already in the first quarter of the twentieth century, cognizant of the aforementioned traditions of philosophical speculation but inspired by new insights in anthropology, comparative religions, and philology, Ernst Cassirer had explored the constitutive role of metaphorical language in thought in general and pointed in directions that have been pursued subsequently by the new theoreticians of metaphor.[8] Cassirer stresses the necessary role of language, and of metaphorical language *par excellence*, in the

origination of the very world of individuated things and properties that language first brings into the focus of human ("*geistige*") experience. In order for a thing to be anything in particular, it must have defined properties, that is, it must be qualified by some qualities *as* something. Yet properties, as universals, are not simply given in the nature of things but originate first through language. It is only through a linguistic process, irreducibly analogical or metaphorical in character, whereby particulars are assimilated to one another to form general categories, that there can be identification of any particular beings at all. This sort of ontological role of metaphor then determines its status as "originary" in many of the currents of thought that have recently renovated our whole understanding of metaphor.

Such thinking takes place not only on a level of philosophical abstraction. Perhaps in every age, the way that the most originary articulation and signifying of beings by language is ultimately metaphorical in character has been most clairvoyantly devined and most pregnantly expressed not by theoretical speculation, but by poetic imagination. Contemporary with its most recent revival, the essentially metaphorical nature of the primordial transaction between words and the world is intimated, for example, in William Carlos Williams's "A Sort of Song."[9] Although certainly not a philosophical statement in any proper sense, any more than it is properly a song, it nevertheless turns out to be a sort of manifesto poem for Williams's poetry and for a good part of modern poetry to boot, with its compressed vision of words—and perhaps things too—as metaphorical all the way down:

> Let the snake wait under
> his weed
> and the writing
> be of words, slow and quick, sharp
> to strike, quiet to wait,
> sleepless.
>
> —through metaphor to reconcile
> the people and the stones.
>
> Compose. (No ideas
> but in things) Invent!
> Saxifrage is my flower that splits
> the rocks.
>
> (1963)

This poem initially wishes to assume a clear separation between the order of things and that of words: let the snake stay in his natural habitat, and let writing acknowledge itself to be made only out of words, an artificial medium, and not anything more natural or real. And yet these words are themselves precisely snake-like, alert and ready to snap into action. This slithering suggestion in the first verses already questions—through metaphorical likeness—the stated sequestering of language as separate from things. For the poem says that language lies waiting to strike with the force of a living thing. Moreover, far from remaining confined to the category of the merely linguistic, metaphor wields a peculiar power to unite, to "reconcile" real things, even things of mutually exclusive categories such as the animate—generically "the people"—and the inanimate, "the stones"—than which nothing is more lifeless. Of course, metaphor does this by rhetorical artifice, by "composing." And yet genuinely poetic metaphor, however contrived, belongs inherently to the things themselves: "No ideas / but in things." Although certainly an invention (asserted with imperative force: "Invent!"), metaphor is an "invention," not only in the sense of "making up," but also in the etymological sense of "coming into" ("in-venire") and finding. Hence, the even stronger assertion that the flowers of rhetoric have real power to change reality, to penetrate it through and through, to "split rocks." This is in fact the etymological meaning—literally "rock-rupturing"—of the name of the flower, *saxifrage*, chosen here by the poet as "my flower" to represent the flowers of rhetoric. The word is compounded of *saxum* (rock) and *frangere* (break, shatter), an etymology to which Cicero draws attention at the conclusion of his theoretical discussion of metaphor in *De oratore* 3.41.167 with his reference to *saxifragis* as a "made word" (*factum verbum*).

The poem, then, expresses a view of metaphor as rhetorical artifice, as composition and invention with words, but also as "natural," in the sense of a snake-like force insinuating itself into the making and changing of a real world. That the apparently most artificial form of language, metaphor, should nevertheless somehow be found lurking within the very nature of things, splitting apart their hard centers of self-enclosure and claiming their innermost reality as already penetrated by the flower-power of rhetoric, constitutes precisely the sort of insight most characteristic of the new, modern vision of metaphor that the present essay will now further examine as it is elaborated in the new wave of rhetorical theories.

Stimulated by the general rethinking and philosophical investigation of metaphor in recent decades, many more focused theoretical inquiries by literary specialists attempt to understand aspects of this uncanny onto-linguistic power we call metaphor. The vision of metaphor as the radically originary principle of all language, and thereby of the articulable world itself, has been glimpsed by most modern treatments of the subject from the vantage point of one of three principle theoretical paradigms: (1)

philosophical analysis of language, prevalent particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world; (2) structuralism and semiotics, which emanates from French styles of theorizing, with their many satellites, including the Italian; and (3) hermeneutics or the phenomenology of acts of understanding and sense-making, which grows especially from the soil of German philosophical thought. Particularly the third paradigm incorporates key elements from the other two and works out most fully and self-consciously the insight into the irreducible metaphoricity of language, rather than shying away from it in order to make metaphor once again comprehensible in terms of something else that is posited as known either scientifically or by practical common sense.

Hermeneutic approaches to understanding metaphor do, however, build on, in order to transform and in some ways reverse, traditional models and paradigms. Within the classical rhetorical framework, metaphor was typically approached by elaborating typologies: for Aristotle, these are logical types, from species to genus, from genus to species, from species to species, and analogies, while Quintilian's typology organizes the metaphorical substitution of certain types of things for others into a fourfold scheme (quadruplex): animate for animate, animate for inanimate, inanimate for animate, and inanimate for inanimate (*Institutio Oratoria*, 8.4.9–13). In these relatively static views, metaphor is a categorizable permutation of sense rather than an origination of sense as such (though for Aristotle it may be this too[10]). In other words, metaphorical meaning is deemed a transformation of antecedent literal meaning. But the rediscovery of metaphor in recent decades by hermeneutic thought has emphasized its dynamic capability of bringing absolutely new possibilities of significance—and even the possibility of sense itself—into existence. The metaphorical significances thus created would be not just variations on literal significances but absolute metaphorical creations of significance that set teetering all previously established, presumably stable, literal meanings and even beings.

Hermeneutic thought generally is based on recognition of the intrinsic dynamism of being and language as event.[11] Accordingly, "hermeneutic" approaches to metaphor have stressed that metaphor can be understood only through examination of *uses* of words and not merely through examination of their semantic paradigms, that is, of their dictionary meanings. Seminal work by Harald Weinrich and Hans Blumenberg has adapted Wittgensteinian philosophy of meaning as analyzable wholly in terms of use and of language's function as a way of life (especially important are *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, secs. 43 and 23) to the task of defining metaphor. In this new perspective, metaphor is treated in terms of the dynamics of discourse rather than in terms of the supposedly static meanings of isolated words, as in the older rhetorical tradition.

Weinrich's "Semantik der Metapher" (1967) defines metaphor as a peculiar sort of determination of a word's meaning by its occurrence in a given context. Normal expectations for the meaning of the metaphor-bearing word are disappointed by its use in an apparently incongruous context in a sentence or, more indefinitely, text. For example, the meaning of *paysage* in Paul Verlaine's verse, "*Vôtre âme est un paysage choisi* [Your soul is a choice landscape]" is determined not from within the normal range of meanings for landscapes, which would include sunny landscapes, pastoral landscapes, urban landscapes, and so on, but as outside this range of meanings altogether (Weinrich 1967, 5–7). Context here imposes a completely different register of meaning, a meaning metaphorically extended from physical entities such as landscapes to phenomena of the soul. Weinrich speaks here of an effect of surprise (*Überraschungseffekt*) created by "a tension between the word's original meaning and the meaning it is now forced to take on in the unexpected context [*eine Spannung zwischen der ursprünglichen Wortbedeutung und der nun vom Kontext erzwungenen unerwarteten Meinung*]" (7).

Thus, for Weinrich, a metaphor is definable as a word used in a counterdetermining context ("*Mit diesem Begriff ist die Metapher definierbar als ein Wort in einem konterdeterminierenden Kontext*"), that is, a context requiring determination of the word's meaning in a sense contrary to all the normal possibilities of meaning for that word. The minimum context for bringing about such a change in possibilities of a word's meaning is normally a complete sentence, and, accordingly, for Weinrich the metaphor is the whole sentence ("*der ganze Satz . . .* ist *die Metapher*"). But, even more broadly conceived, Weinrich's analysis requires a shift from the semantics of the word, such as dominates traditional rhetorical theory of metaphor ("*und die ältere Semantik* ist *Wortsemantik*"), to a level of the semantics of texts. For a whole text of any order of magnitude can be the context that counterdetermines a word's meaning. In what promised to be a Copernican revolution, though nonetheless closely paralleled by many other contemporary researches into metaphor, the metaphoricity of a word according to this new analysis could be defined only in the context of a whole text. In this way, Weinrich influentially shifted the analysis of metaphor from the word-semantic level to the text-semantic level.

While Weinrich defines metaphor as a particular determination or, better, counterdetermination of a word's meaning by its context, it may turn out that just this sort of determination is generally the case throughout the

whole extent of language. That is precisely what Richards's contextual theory of meaning expressly maintains. Weinrich attempts to characterize metaphors as against "normal words" ("*Metapher, im Unterschied zu Normalwörtern* . . .") as words that can under no circumstances be freed from their contexts. Metaphors have no context-free, constant, core meaning that could then be applied differently in different contexts. Their meanings are completely context-dependent and, in effect, context-created. Yet to assume that this is not the case with all words is to mistake a difference in degree for a difference in kind. Granted, the counterdetermination of context becomes starkly evident in the obvious examples of metaphor. But can a word's meaning ever be fully severed from its context, and, if not, does the context then not inevitably impinge upon and somehow qualify and counterdetermine this meaning? Does not the context always determine the word in some particular way that colors and to this extent negates its merely abstract, generic meaning? In context, is not *tree*, for example, or *table*, always some at least minimally specific kind of tree or table? If not as beech or willow, *tree* occurring in any given context will be determined as standing indoors or outside, in England or China, as imaginary or real, as perceived or not, or in some way that makes it not simply identical with an absolutely indeterminate tree. Weinrich has attempted to give a semantically precise definition of metaphor as a discrete linguistic phenomenon, but, in the end, his thought may instead suggest a universal metaphorical dimension to words in their contexts in general.

This train of reflection leads inevitably in the direction of making metaphor no longer a reflex of and derivation from some other proper sort of meaning, but original and absolute, and hence toward a conception of "absolute metaphor" ("*die absolute Metapher*"), such as that propounded by Blumenberg (1960, 7–142, 301–5). Blumenberg defines absolute metaphors as metaphors that reveal the substance of thought, assuming thereby a kind of resistance to conceptual explanation, which can never exhaust them ("*Daß diese Metaphern absolut genannt werden, bedeutet nur, das sie sich gegenüber dem terminologischen Anspruch als resistent erweisen*" [11]). Metaphor accordingly asserts itself as an autonomous and irreducible dimension of language and thought.

At the outset of his "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," Blumenberg points out that, if Descartes's methodological program for a new science had been successfully executed, all rhetorical figuration would have been rendered obsolete. Logically clear and distinct concepts would have replaced all provisional "ways of saying things" as their fully adequate and objective expression. Concepts would thus have shed their history, with all

its dark derivations, and acceded to an immediate, transparent adequacy to their objects, which would be made fully evident and intuitively present in these conceptions. In the eighteenth century, the view that metaphors could not be eliminated in this way was argued by Vico, who, against Descartes, developed a logic of fantasy. Vico recognized that language has a history that cannot be completely mastered and sublimated into the totally present consciousness of the concept. Metaphor expresses a penumbra of meaning, incalculable in its associations and suggestions, that cannot be exhaustively distilled into any purely logical concept. And this irreducibly linguistic level of meaning is what continues today to reassert itself in reassessments of metaphor as absolute.

Gerhard Neumann, in "Die 'absolute' Metapher" (1970), distinguishes between the real meaning ("*das eigentliche Gemeinte*") and the improperly said ("*das uneigentliche Gesagte*") and suggests that in modern poetry such as Stéphane Mallarmé's and Paul Celan's the two are no longer hierarchically ordered—by subordination of the improperly said to the really meant—but come to coincide with one another. Absolute metaphors come about when the referent that is being metaphorically signified is not itself identifiable by any other, proper terms, and so "the ground of the proper lies in darkness [. . . *ihr Eigentlichkeitsgrund im Dunkeln liegt*]" (210). In this way, rather than declaring dogmatically that there is no proper meaning and cannot be, it is possible simply to point out how proper meaning is not independently identifiable and isolable so as to be able to serve as a foundation. Proper meaning can itself be defined only relatively and metaphorically from within a linguistic matrix and not in terms of any absolute frame of reference.

Metaphor has, moreover, a key role in expressing what exceeds conceptualization altogether. With poets and sometimes with mystics, too, metaphor, beyond being a necessary component in all concepts and in their functioning to grasp items in or aspects of a world, opens up a realm all its own, a sphere of the purely linguistic. In "Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit" (1979) Blumenberg discusses metaphor in relation to the ineffable, particularly to Wittgenstein's observation in the *Tractatus* that the class of the unsayable is not empty ("*daß die Klasse des Unsagbaren nicht leer ist*") and his insistence on the impossibility of articulating the sense of the world ("*der Sinn der Welt*"). The sense of the world must lie beyond the limits of the totality of facts that make up the world and that *can* be articulated in straightforward, fact-stating language saying *how* it is, for this sense of the world relates to the fact *that* it is (Blumenberg 1979; quotations from rpt. in Haverkamp 1983, 444). Accordingly,

metaphor's ability to exceed the boundaries of what strictly *is* makes it indispensable also to the *via negationis* of negative theology, as well as to the preconceptual language of myth. Heraclitus's description of thought as "fire" is designated by Blumenberg as "the first absolute metaphor of philosophy" (450).

Metaphor can reach beyond all facts and objects within the world and redefine a world as a whole. Rather than simply applying concept to object, metaphor calls for reconceptualization of a whole field of objects in terms of something else, some new model. Quintilian's stock example, *pratum ridet* ("the field smiles"), radically redefines the natural world as human and expressive. As suggested by cases where nonmetaphorical language reaches its limits, as in the *Tractatus*, metaphor attains a world of reference that is not restricted to "what is" in any objective sense. In fact, metaphor, to the extent that it is live or absolute, should be conceived of always as inventing its own world and object rather than as referring to things that already exist without it. Absolute metaphors are "demiurgic tools" (*demiurgische Werkzeuge*) that create a new reality, a new synthesis that has never before existed (Weinrich 1983, 331). Indeed, to the extent that metaphor is a movement in language that exceeds and escapes conceptualization, it can have no properly definable object. It signifies, rather, an indeterminate or indeterminable referentiality, a reference to something infinite, what for Wittgenstein was "*das Mystische*" ("the mystical"). Therefore, metaphor can be defined only in terms of what it negates—a certain literal sense—rather than in terms of anything that it positively designates. Metaphor says of its referent what it is not rather than what it is. To the extent that it exceeds proper concepts, metaphor (at least live metaphor) is about what is, strictly speaking, inconceivable.

According to Weinrich, the necessary novelty of metaphor is implicit in the metaphorical negation of the ordinary meaning of the metaphorical term, as well as of the ordinary implications of the context in which it is used: in the interaction of these incompatible factors, each is negated and can only be reconceived in a new totality forged by the metaphor itself. This is the deeper ontological implication of Weinrich's definition of metaphor as "contradictory predication"[*Die Metapher ist eine widersprüchliche Prädikation*] (1983, 330) and of his underscoring of the disappointed expectations that determine metaphor as contradiction: "Every metaphor contains a contradiction between its two members and unveils it when taken literally [*Jede Metapher enthält einen Widerspruch zwischen ihren beiden Gliedern und enthüllt ihn, wenn wir sie beim Wort nehmen*]" (325).

The notion of a Copernican leap from the semantics of isolated words to the metaphorical meaning of whole enunciations also distinguishes Paul

Ricoeur's approach. Metaphor is for Ricoeur fundamentally a matter, not of denomination, but of predication, and beyond this of the pragmatics of discourse. It is thus to be treated ultimately as a hermeneutic problem: hence the affinity with German thought—indelibly shaped by Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer—even though the parallels with German scholarship remain undeveloped in *La métaphore vive*, whose preface offers only apologies and promises of future acknowledgment toward "*les auteurs de langue allemande*" (1975, 12). Still, the main insights in the Anglo-Saxon and French worlds of scholarship that Ricoeur does examine also revolve around analyzing the dynamics of metaphorical meaning in context rather than as the affair simply of an isolated word. This involves for Ricoeur a perspective on meaning as not any stable or discrete entity but, rather, as an event. That counterdetermination of a word's meaning by context involves at the same time counterdetermination also of the context by the word—as in Richard's interaction theory of metaphor—is hinted at in the vocabulary of *tension* adopted by Ricoeur (used also by Weinrich, among others).

In order to create and sustain this tension, the normal meaning of the word used metaphorically must be held together in tension with the new meaning. This specific and important point has been pursued most acutely by Gerhard Kurz. Kurz emphasizes that metaphor is formed, not just by an other sense than the usual one for an expression, but in strict connection with this usual meaning, which must necessarily be understood together with the new sense ("*Der relevante usuelle Gebrauch muß mitverstanden sein*"). It is not simply that a metaphor has a new meaning different from what the word usually means. The metaphorical meaning of an expression cannot be wholly divorced from the usual meaning or else there would be no semantic dissonance. Metaphor is, in effect, perceptible only as a derivative and deviant use of an expression, hence perception of the dominant, normal use of the expression is every bit as constitutive of its metaphoricity (1976, 58–59). That this normal meaning could be unambiguously determined without reference to the metaphorical troping is unlikely, perhaps impossible; nevertheless, a tension with what is projected as the normal, nonmetaphorical meaning of the expression is certainly constitutive of metaphorical meaning.

Theories of metaphor as "tensive" meaning characterize the distinctively modern (not to say, modernist) outlook, and they implicitly raise the issue of similarity. The tension between identity and difference forms the metaphysical center of any classical speculative problematics of metaphorical language. In this way, metaphor, the shift of word meaning in and through context, becomes no longer determinable by a general theory of meaning as predating metaphor. Meaning in general as relative to context is produced by a process that is ineradicably metaphorical. If meaning in general

is the result of mutual determination by words and their contexts, then metaphorical shifts of meaning in and through context are intrinsic to linguistic meaning as such. Meaning is essentially a determination by shifts in application of words in ever new contexts.

This elucidates how the absolute metaphor has no foundation in a proper sense that would be simply "turned" in some new direction. The absolute metaphor is itself the origin and foundation of the significance that it conveys. Meaning is not presupposed as established before the use of language, either in standard ways and with proper senses or in deviant ways creating metaphors. Rather, linguistic meaning in general is understood to be interactive in nature, that is, to first arise out of the shifting of meanings of words as they are applied in always new and particular contexts. This movement in which meaning itself arises becomes patent in cases of metaphor. Metaphor is absolute to the extent that it is not a deviant case but the originary nature of language as coming to mean something by the contextual interaction of words, their meanings being reciprocally established. It is precisely by becoming a working of context, unlimited, therefore, from any outside, since everything that impinges on and so makes sense can be absorbed into the context of sense, that metaphor can dissolve all limits and isolation and assume status as "absolute."

Of course, contexts work in producing sense always only for certain individuals and from certain points of view, that is, for some particularizing perspective that metaphor is especially apt to express. To this extent, the power of metaphor to remake its own context and in this sense to become absolute is manifest in its ability to implicitly address its reader (or receiver in general). Challenged by a live metaphor, the reader is obliged to take the initiative in redefining the word's meaning and so in defining a world of sense that is constructed through reading or, more broadly, through interpretation. Drawing out an important, quintessentially hermeneutic, consequence of the new outlook on metaphor, Eberhard Jüngel has stressed how metaphor is intrinsically addressed to its reader: "To metaphor's authentic and precision-exacting way of speaking belongs the dimension of address. Metaphors address and ought to address [*Zur eigentlichen und präzisierende Redeweise der Metapher gehört die Dimension der Anrede. Metaphern sprechen an und sollen ansprechen*]" (1974, 119). Jüngel argues that metaphorical discourse is neither improper nor imprecise, but open to a dimension of address and so different in kind from propositional, assertive discourse and its type of precision and propriety that is based on definitions of things that metaphor rather sets free: "The metaphor sets free linguistically, whereas the definition limits and fixes linguistically [*Die Metapher setzt sprachlich frei, während die Definition sprachlich begrenzt und festsetzt*]" (119).

This intrinsic dimension of address is another feature that plausibly belongs to language as such and that metaphor brings out into the open. In this way, too, with the impulse imparted by recent theoretical rethinkings, metaphor asks to be viewed as fundamental to the very nature of language, indeed, as coextensive with the linguistic. It reveals language as always addressed to someone in some particular situation and in specific contexts. Metaphor thereby comes to coincide with human experience and a human world as such, since this experience is inherently linguistic, rather than being just an adventitious twist or deviation, an occasional phenomenon of a rare sort of language found especially, if not exclusively, in poetry. It is not uncommon today to hear, for example, from Joseph Campbell, that religious experience, the most primordial experience of humankind, consists simply in metaphors for the mystery of life.

What the new, hermeneutic theories of metaphor, taken together, show is how metaphor, as absolute and "alive," affords a glimpse into the creative making of sense that makes perceptions and experiences into a world. Metaphor assumes a transcendental-hermeneutic function and reveals the world in the moment of its emergence as a linguistic creation or construction. Even from within the disciplines of language and literature themselves, the *primal metaphor*, variously named *die absolute Metapher, la métaphore vive, la metafora inaudita*, or *infinite semiosis*, has reopened the most basic ontological questions about language and its relation to the world on its own new terms. Reality has shown itself in this new perspective to be graspable, if at all, only in and through metaphor. What are the ontological implications of this mediation of all our language, and therefore of our very knowledge and experience of the world, by metaphor? In other words, what does unlimited metaphoricity, such as it has recently been rediscovered, imply about the way things are and are known? These recently reopened questions open the horizon of rhetoric in such a way that, far from accepting being relegated to the status of a technical, adjunct discipline, it is enabled to reassert its veritable vocation as first philosophy.

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Notes

1. For varied discussions of the recent revival of rhetoric, see Vickers (1982, 1988) and Simons (1989, 1990). This revived interest takes on the form of a movement with the "Iowa school" and its "rhetoric of inquiry," for which see Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey (1987). The renewed theoretical ferment over rhetoric has continued through the 1990s, as witness the ongoing stream of historico-theoretical works such as those by Kastley (1997), Eden (1997), and Farrell (1997).

2. This history of decline is retraced by Ricoeur in "Le déclin de la rhétorique: la tropologie," the second study of *La métaphore vive* (1975). Interesting reflections on rhetoric's becoming a "supplementary" discipline are offered by Gaonkar (1990).

3. A number of anthologies witness to this widespread interest, including those edited by Johnson (1981), Miall (1982), Ortony (1979), and Sacks (1979).

4. "*Aristote est en tout cas le premier à considérer la métaphore comme la forme générale de toutes les figures de mots*" (Derrida 1972, 275, n. 23).

5. Very suggestive in this regard is Nietzsche's "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne" (1980).

6. Grassi (1980), inspired throughout by Vico, conducts speculation on a rhetorical philosophy quite far in exactly this direction.

7. Many fundamental contributions were made, nevertheless, by Black (1962), Henle (1958), and Davidson (1978), for example. The continued vitality of this vein of thought is demonstrated by recent contributions in volume 31 of *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (1998) by van Woudenberg and Hymers.

8. The basic theses and arguments of Cassirer's thought, expounded fully in volume I of *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1964), can be found in condensed form in *Sprache und Mythos* (1925). Cassirer gives credit particularly to the earlier work of Max Müller, *Das Denken im Licht der Sprache* (Leipzig, 1888), originally *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. 2, 8 lessons, 7 ed. (London, 1873) and Heinz Werner, *Die Ursprünge der Metapher* (Leipzig, 1919), especially chapter 3.

9. By William Carlos Williams, from *Collected Poems 1939–1962, Volume II*. Copyright © 1944 by William Carlos Williams. Rev. ed., 1963. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp. and Carcanet Press Limited.

10. Ricoeur brings an implicit, much more modern theory of metaphor out of Aristotle's remarks on the subject, in the first study of *La métaphore vive*: "Entre Rhétorique et Poétique: Aristote" (1975).

11. Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986; originally 1927) and Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960) constitute two main pillars of this current of thought.

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