



Metaphor and Metonymy: Jakobson Reconsidered¹

Roman Jakobson's 1954 article 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Aspects of Aphasic Disturbance' has fundamentally altered the way literary critics use the terms 'metaphor' and 'metonymy.' Before that article metonymy was a little-regarded rhetorical trope distinguishable from synecdoche only with difficulty. Some indication of its prestige can be gathered from the fact that 'metonymy' is not indexed in either I.A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* or Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature*, although both works index metaphor.² Since Jakobson, metonymy has been elevated to a status equal to metaphor, and is perceived as its contrary. In the process both 'metaphor' and 'metonymy' have ceased to designate only rhetorical tropes and have become the labels for cognitive relationships. 'Metaphor' is the label for relationships of 'similarity,' and 'metonymy' for those of 'contiguity.' The following discussion is a critical analysis of Jakobson's article with a view to locating some of the confusions arising out of the displacement of tropological concepts by cognitive ones while retaining the same labels for both sets.

Before turning to the article which established the current popularity of 'metonymy' as a rhetorical term, I should make clear what I mean by the distinction between cognitive and tropological concepts. Since much of the controversy endemic to rhetorical discourse is traceable to the placement of this distinction, one can expect any placement of it to be hotly disputed.

Classical  a trope is a deviation, a 'turning' – some alteration of standard linguistic practice so as to draw attention to the expression so denominated. Perhaps the simplest model of the trope is the pun. In this humble trope an acoustically similar word is substituted for the 'correct' one: 'Bare with me.' Here the 'turn' is a mis-selection of a word or lexeme – 'bare' meaning to expose, instead of 'bear' meaning to carry or, in this case, 'put up with.' The explanation or explication here offered is, in my terms, a cognitive one. I call it 'cognitive' because the explanation appeals to the sense, meaning, denotation, or reference of the lexemes in question, and not just to their linguistic roles.³ Even the pun cannot be construed within the horizon of language, but requires  appeal beyond language to a cognitive realm where expressions have content and not just form.

Since Gottlob Frege's work, logicians and linguists alike have built their systems on the axiom that meaning is a purely formal matter involving definitions and operational rules. Within this Fregean universe there is no room for 'dirty' cognitive elements involving the content of the expressions – that is to say, information about the properties, characteristics, locations, relationships, etc of those entities and events the expressions might be supposed to 'pick out' or designate.⁴ Cognitivism – varied and disputed as it is – involves the assumption that expressions *have* contents and that their contents have a role to play in their interpretation. The main stream of twentieth-century thinking has resolutely denied the pertinence of content in interpretation. It has done so in pursuit of the will-o'-the-wisp of 'objectivity.' Within linguistics, structuralism follows this tendency in its insistence on language's independence of any cognitive content it may be supposed to carry – on its independence of meaning and reference.

Richard Boyd sums up one current view of the pertinence of content in interpretation of linguistic expressions as follows:

Scientific metaphors raise truly fundamental issues about language and linguistic competence, and the theory of reference required to understand them has several quite startling consequences, which are important both to an understanding of metaphorical language, and to an understanding of language in general. We shall discover, for example, that there is, in an important sense, no such thing as *linguistic* precision; there are rational strategies for avoiding referential ambiguity, but they are not a reflection of rules of linguistic usage (as the empiricist theory suggests).⁵

Semiological theories of language such as Saussurean structuralism or that of Jakobson's Prague school are grounded on the assumption that *linguistic* precision is attainable – indeed, that such *formal* precision is virtually inescapable within linguistic systems because those systems are self-referential, if they can be considered referential at all. Hence the slogan, 'Everything is a sign.' It is in the light of current rethinking of the long dominant formalist and content-free logic which has informed virtually all rhetorical discussions of this century that the following discussion should be read.

Jakobson's article, following the technique of the Prague School, develops an asymmetrical binary scheme for the articulation and interpretation of discourse, and labels the resulting pair 'metonymy' and 'metaphor':

The development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed form in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (P 254)⁶

In support of his theory, and as an illustration of it, Jakobson appeals to a 'well-known psychological test'⁷ in which children are supplied with a word and invited to reply with the first thing that comes into their head (so long as it is a word or phrase). He takes a sampling of the children's replies to the stimulus word 'hut' and categorizes them on the basis of his two 'lines': contiguity and similarity. Immediately he finds that his model must be made slightly more complex. Similarity and contiguity – although introduced as 'semantic lines' – now operate both semantically and syntactically. Thus we have a four-square schema: the metonymic 'pole' of contiguity operates on both the semantic and syntactic planes, as does the metaphorical pole of similitude:

	<i>contiguity</i>	<i>similarity</i>
semantic	metonymy	metaphor
syntactic	metonymy	metaphor

Jakobson cites the children's responses of 'den' and 'burrow' to the stimulus-word 'hut' as examples of the function of similarity (that is to say, as examples of metaphor). Dens and burrows may very well be similar to huts, but it is difficult to see how they can count as metaphors. They are single words elicited as responses to a stimulus word. If they are metaphors, then metaphor is a one-word trope – the trope of substitution. It is apparent that Jakobson has silently adopted a conclusion about metaphor that remains highly controversial among logicians and rhetoricians.⁸ Most literary scholars hold an interactive or combinatorial theory such as Aristotle's, while most linguists and grammarians hold a substitutive theory. An example of a substitutive theory is that of Group Mu for whom a metaphor is 'the product of two synecdoches.'⁹

Among the children's responses to 'hut' characterized as metaphoric are 'cabin,' 'hovel,' and 'palace.' The first two Jakobson identifies as synonyms of 'hut', and the last as an antonym, but they still belong to the metaphoric pole, for they exhibit 'positional' (that is, syntactic) and 'semantic' similarity. Now these six words are presented to us as the observed responses of children to the stimulus word 'hut.' Jakobson is anxious to isolate the principle of correlation on which the children selected these words so as to uncover the underlying principle of metaphor. Why he assumes that the associational responses of children to a stimulus word will reveal the principle of that ability that Aristotle called the 'token of genius' is a little unclear. What is clear from this list is that 'semantic similarity' does not amount to resemblance. Huts do not resemble burrows or dens. All of the things designated by these six words share membership in the category of *dwelling*. Thus 'semantic similarity' amounts to shared membership in a category or class. Such a definition of metaphor is in strong contrast with Aristotle's (which still carries considerable prestige and currency): 'Metaphor is the application of a strange

term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy' (*Poetics*, 21.7).¹⁰ Of course, Aristotle may be wrong and Jakobson right, but it is worth noting that Jakobson does not draw attention to the novelty of his definition of metaphoricity as categorization, but writes as if that were what everyone already understood.

However, more central to my case than Jakobson's disregard for standard usage is the distinction between syntactic and semantic upon which his theory of metaphor rests. The distinction is of long standing in logic, but belongs within the formalist logical empiricism which is now being brought into question. Syntax consists of the rules of combination governing any symbolic system – whether linguistic, mathematical, or logical. The semantics are the 'meanings' of the symbols or terms – their sense or referent. As we have seen, within logical empiricism, meaning is reducible to reference, and reference is a purely formal relation between terms. In short, language and logic are entirely insulated from any polluting contact with the accidental, disorderly, and unruly experiential world. This austere view of linguistic meaning is now being challenged by logicians. Boyd sums up the new scepticism as follows:

... the phenomenon of reference has some quite striking properties: It can be manifested by pointing, by explicitly defining, by dubbing, or by stereotyping; it is essentially connected to the knowledge-gathering efforts of experts and specialists; and it admits of partial manifestation. It is reasonable to ask what sort of relation between language use and the world it is, that has such varied manifestations. Indeed, it is reasonable to ask what the justification for the presumption that there is a *single* phenomenon of reference with all these different manifestations. (Boyd, p 378)¹¹

To avoid the entanglements of the term 'semantic' we need a new term, less embedded in any theory. The term I suggest is 'epistemic.' The 'epistemic' is what we believe ourselves to know in the sense of 'be acquainted with.' It is, in a sense, primitive knowledge prior to the socialization of categorical knowledge or the verification of theory-formulated knowledge. Metaphor appeals to just this kind of knowledge. In short when someone is described as 'horsey,' we mean to appeal to what one knows of horses at this epistemic level, rather than to any approved categorical knowledge of horses such as might be possessed by a zoologist, and still less to any logically rigorous meaning that would qualify for 'semantic.'¹²

Metaphors, I submit, do not typically appeal to the semantic component of words. That is to say, in construing a metaphor we do not normally read the words as *terms*, but rather as *labels*, that is, as names for things or events, for the perceptual, experiential world. If I am right, a

strict semiological theory of language cannot tolerate metaphor. For on strict semiological grounds all meanings must be formally defined within the schemata of linguistic rules. They must, in short, be both arbitrary – for only the arbitrary can be formally defined – and endowed with sense or meaning by their syntactical role. The term ‘epistemic’ involves the claim that words are *names* or *labels* for things or actions. In other words, the realm of metaphor is not language itself, not pure semiosis, but *notation* – the use of language (or another semiotic system) to designate the extra-semiotic or observable. But the notion of the epistemic evades the requirement of positivist notational theory that the designation be verifiable. That is to say, I would accord the status of epistemic to unicorns and bald kings of France so long as some community could agree that they understood or could interpret such designations. For example, depiction of a unicorn would count as an interpretation of ‘unicorn.’

The epistemic, then, is ‘what we are acquainted with’ as well as ‘what we believe to be the case.’ Unlike the semantic and even the encyclopaedic, the epistemic is culture-bound, and may even be idiosyncratic. The set of beliefs and observations of a Trobriand Islander is doubtless distinct from that of a resident of Toronto, and that of one individual resident of Toronto from that of another – the teenager’s from the old man’s, the professor’s from the stockbroker’s, and so forth. It is to just such indeterminable, but socialized, ‘data stores’ that metaphors – and other figures as well – appeal. It is for this reason that we need a neologism like ‘epistemic’ to designate this particular unruly collection of information.

Aristotle’s theory of metaphor, then, is at once catachretical and epistemic – as opposed to Jakobson’s associational and semantic theory. For Aristotle, metaphor is a misnaming that is impertinent with respect to semantic categories, and is construed by an appeal to the epistemic property of resemblance. On the Aristotelian theory an expression such as ‘the childhood of the year’ counts as a metaphor because it is semantically impertinent.¹³ Years do not have childhoods; a misnaming has been committed. The speaker means to say the *beginning* of the year, or *early* in the year. We construe the metaphor on grounds of resemblance of relationship (that is, analogy). We know that human lives and years are both temporally disposed, and can therefore see that the relationship between a human’s childhood and his adulthood resembles the relationship between the early months of the year and the later ones. The resemblance is slight, and amounts to little more than temporal sequence.

For Jakobson, as for Aristotle, metaphor would seem to be catachresis or ‘mislaming’; but rather than being categorically impertinent, the misnaming amounts to the substitution of one member of a category for another. Both of his metaphors for ‘hut’ are, in fact, terms designating dwellings. Interestingly, he is a little uncomfortable with the label of

semantic similarity in the case of the 'hut'-'palace' substitution, and provides a new, still metaphoric, category of relationship called 'semantic contrast.' What is happening here is that Jakobson's semantic, categorical relationships are troubled by epistemic, observational relationships. Huts do not resemble palaces, even though both indisputably belong to the semantic category of dwelling. Huts and palaces are judged to be contrasting because some categories have a scalar component. The category of dwelling, for example, has hut near the bottom, house in the middle, and palace at the top. Substituting a member of the category from the top of the scale for one from the bottom constitutes Jakobson's 'semantic contrast.' The familiar rhetorical trope of hyperbole, then, becomes a metaphor relying upon 'semantic contrast.' This tendency of Jakobson's theory to suppress long-standing and non-controversial tropological categories such as hyperbole is a characteristic of the logic of binary schema, and one of the reasons it is worth one's effort to engage in a critique of the theory.

It would seem that Jakobson isolates 'den' and 'burrow' as paradigmatic metaphors because, while they belong to the genus 'dwelling,' they do not belong to the species 'human dwelling.' Thus 'den' and 'burrow' are metaphors for 'hut' on what are, after all, Aristotelian grounds in that they are categorically impertinent – but only mildly so in that all items belong to the same genus though not to the same species. In short, Jakobson adheres to the dominant Aristotelian and categorical view of metaphor sufficiently to draw in an incautious reader – and perhaps to mislead himself as well.

All of these terms also possess what Jakobson calls 'positional similarity,' that is, 'the capacity of two words to replace one another' (p 255). All of the words surveyed can complete the expression, 'She lived in a ...' Positional similarity is a syntactical property. All of the children's responses belonging to the metaphorical pole are nouns. Thus positional similarity – like semantic similarity – is a categorical property. Jakobsonian metaphor is substitution of one term for another *within* categorical constraints, but in this case the categories are syntactical rather than semantic. He is, at the end of the day, very close to Aristotle. There remain, however, important differences. Aristotelian metaphor is categorically impertinent; it is not the trope of lexical substitution – as it is for Jakobson – but is a *misnaming*. The Aristotelian metaphor, that is to say, is epistemic, not semantic.

It would lead us too far astray to pursue the question here, but it is worth noting that a catachretical theory of metaphor cannot fit very well with a structuralist or semiological view of language. Catechresis can exist only if words are indeed *names*, that is, labels or referring characters for things and events. On the Saussurean view of language words are merely signs made up of signifiers and signifieds. The signifieds are not observ-

ables, are not encyclopaedic or epistemic items, nor are they semantic categories, but are merely 'concepts' holding the relationship of equivalence with the signifiers. The crucial point within Saussureanism is that this relation of equivalence is *arbitrary*, that is to say, autonomous of both historical accident and such 'motivations' as similarity, resemblance, contiguity, association, etc. Because the association is required to be arbitrary, misnaming or catechresis is theoretically impossible. The so-called 'misuse' of a signifier can only count as a recodification of it. Thus, to call the support of a table a 'leg' is not to commit a metaphor, for 'leg' has simply been recodified by this usage to mean 'support of a table.'

Jakobson evades this difficulty by modelling his theory on the behaviourist stimulus-response model. Metaphors are, for him, verbal responses to verbal stimuli. However, for the rhetorician, metaphors are verbal devices designed to elicit *cognitive* responses in construers. Readers or hearers of metaphors are neither required nor expected to respond to them verbally. Jakobson misleads himself and his readers by retaining an interactive component to his theory, but misplacing it between a stimulus and a response, rather than between a symbol and its construal. To put it another way, one does not construe poetry by free associating with the written or spoken words – and even if one did so, it would not count as metaphorization, but only as the *construal* of metaphors. A metaphor is not an event or phenomenon, but a *device* parallel to designation, denotation, signification, etc. All of these are symbolic devices or procedures which must elicit *operational* responses, not merely automatic neurological responses. A metaphor elicits a response in a manner closer to the way in which an instruction to multiply five times six does than to the way in which ringing a bell caused Pavlov's dog to salivate.

A metaphor, like a sign, is a functive, a component in a procedure, and not an entity. It is not, in other words, a stimulus which elicits a neurological response, but a *prompt* which invites a calculation or operation. Even if it turns out that human beings are very complicated automata, as the more austere behaviourists maintain, it would still be appropriate to describe those complicated networks of secondary neurological stimuli (which the prompting stimulus must elicit) as *operations*. It is evident that there is a difference between 'thirty' as a response to the 'stimulus' of 'five times six' and withdrawal as a response to the stimulus of heat. Less evidently, but still intuitively, plausible is my claim that there is a difference between the response of 'thatch' to the stimulus 'hut' and the interpretation of a metaphor or metonymy. The latter is the result of an operation similar to arithmetical calculation in that it is a learned *procedure*, and neither a physiological response nor a mnemonic irrelevancy – nor, indeed, a mnemonic relevancy.

A test of Jakobson's theory would be to ask what would count as a metaphor within its criteria. It seems to me that on his theory, all colour

terms should be metaphors for one another because they are all 'semantically similar' – all being colour terms – and are also positionally similar – all being adjectives. I have no doubt that one could collect a group of children who would provide responses such as 'blue,' 'green,' 'magenta,' and so forth to the stimulus word 'red.' But we would not count these as metaphors even though they meet the criteria imposed by Jakobson's theory.

In order to assess the theory fully, we must consider the metonymic pole as well, for the theory is a binary one. Jakobson lists the following words as metonymic replies to 'hut': 'thatch,' 'litter,' and 'poverty.' These, he says, 'combine and contrast the positional similarity with semantic contiguity' (p 255). 'Thatch,' 'litter,' and 'poverty' are all nouns, and therefore 'positionally similar' to the noun 'hut.' But they are 'semantically contiguous' rather than 'semantically similar.' Here 'semantic' would not appear to mean 'bearing categorical meaning' as was the case with 'semantic similarity.' Litter, after all is not categorically contiguous with dwelling. Indeed, it is not clear to me what could count as categorical contiguity. The category to which litter belongs is presumably **DISORDER**. It is certainly true enough that disorder is often found physically contiguous with poor dwellings – which is the subcategory to which huts belong. But the contiguity here is not semantic; rather it is encyclopaedic. It is the case that poor dwellings are commonly more disorderly than substantial middle-class dwellings. It is also true that the abstract category of poverty can be pertinently applied to those who live in poor dwellings. And, I suppose it is true that poor dwellings often have thatch roofs in Europe. None of these, however, are semantic properties. It is not a semantic impertinence to speak of a neat, shingle-roofed hut.

Jakobson, in short, is not correctly applying his own criteria. His examples do not fit his theory. Part of the difficulty is traceable to his use of 'semantic' to cover both categorical and encyclopaedic information. Categorical information is incorrigible or certain – short of destroying the taxonomy it instances. For example, whales are mammals however much they look and behave like fish, for they suckle their young. Even when men were ignorant of the mammalian nature of whales, the whales were indeed mammals. Observational information about whales naturally led men to misclassify them as fish, and that misclassification went into the encyclopaedia.

In most cases we do not have precise taxonomies for the encyclopaedic information that we possess. Such is the case with 'huts'; huts are, indeed, categorized as 'poor little dwellings,' and, as we have seen, it would be categorically impertinent to label a large sumptuous dwelling a 'hut.' However, our 'encyclopaedic' or epistemic information about huts includes 'accidental' or non-categorical features such as the materials out of which they are typically constructed in our experience of them

(whether through observation or hearsay), the tendency of their residents to be poor, unkempt, and messy – and so forth.

Poverty, thatch, and litter are associated with huts in our accidental or historical knowledge of them. The association is encyclopaedic or epistemic, not semantic. In the minds of the children, hut, litter, and thatch are all *indices* of poverty. Where you find one, you frequently find the other. Indication, however, is an epistemic or encyclopaedic relationship, not a semantic one; it depends upon empirical and historical knowledge, rather than categorical knowledge. One knows that thunder is an index of lightning (or vice versa) without any need to possess a taxonomy which would assign them categorical places, or a theory defining 'lightning' and 'thunder.'

Oddly enough, none of Jakobson's metonymic replies qualify tropologically as metonymy. Classically, metonymy is the trope of substitution. When we say, 'The pot is boiling,' we have committed a metonymy. 'Pot' has been substituted for 'water.' Metonymy is identified by its epistemic impertinence. We know that pots do not boil. At the same time we construe the trope on epistemic grounds. We know that we use pots as containers in which water is boiled. Hence we have the simple figure of substitution of container for contained. But we cannot perform lexical substitution with the metonymic responses to 'hut.' We cannot say, 'She lived in thatch.' And while we can say, 'She lived in litter' or 'She lived in poverty,' these expressions are not equivalent to 'She lived in a hut.' By contrast, 'The pot boiled' is equivalent to 'The water boiled.' At the same time, all of Jakobson's candidates for metaphor do permit lexical substitution, and to that extent qualify as metonymies better than those responses he labels metonymic. But, of course, they are not metonymies because they do not permit substitution without a change of meaning. 'She lived in a palace' is not equivalent in meaning to 'She lived in a hut.'

A word must be said about the distinction between metonymy and synecdoche. My position is that 'metonymy' is the appropriate label for the trope of lexical substitution (on etymological grounds), and therefore that synecdoche is a variety of metonymy. There are two basic modes of construing metonymy: 1 / on grounds of association (epistemic or encyclopaedic grounds); 2 / on grounds of logical relation (semantic grounds). Often metonymy is restricted to the first type and synecdoche to the second. But in practice it is often possible to construe the trope of substitution on both grounds – as in the example I employ, 'The pot is boiling.' Both a logical or semantic and an epistemic or encyclopaedic relation exist between the pot and the water it contains.

Group Mu takes the opposite tack and makes 'synecdoche' the inclusive term, maintaining the traditional distinction by labelling the different means of construal 'modes.' For example the substitution of 'sail' for 'boat' is a mode Pi synecdoche ('distributive decomposition'), and

'weapon' for 'dagger' is a mode Sigma synecdoche ('attributive decomposition').¹⁴ 'Distributive decomposition' moves from the ordinate to its component parts as in 'tree → bough → branch → leaf.' 'Attributive decomposition' moves from the ordinate to instances of the class, for example 'tree → poplar *or* oak *or* beech.' Although both varieties are semantically defined, it is evident that they have a strong encyclopaedic component. One can construe 'bough' as a metonymy for 'tree' only if one knows that BOUGHS are components of TREES. The same requirement applies to the substitution of 'poplar' for 'tree.'

So far we have drawn out three of the four combinations possible in Jakobson's four-square schema of dialectical relationships. By 'similarity,' he means shared membership in a category. Two things which bear 'positional similarity' to one another belong to the same part of speech. Two things which bear 'semantic similarity' to one another belong to the same category. By 'contiguity' he seems to mean 'proximate to.' Thus two things which bear 'semantic contiguity' to one another will be found adjacent to one another in the world – either in space or in time. (Apparently, abstracts like litter and poverty can somehow qualify as adjacent to concretes like hut and thatch.) 'Positional contiguity' – the fourth and last combination – turns out to be a syntactic designation, like 'positional similarity.' The response 'is a poor little house' is described by Jakobson as positionally contiguous with the stimulus 'hut.' This response is, of course, the predicate in a sentence whose subject is 'hut.' The expression 'A hut is a poor little house' thus counts as a metonymy. Indeed, Jakobson's label for the relation of positional contiguity is 'predication' (p 254).

As a dialectical theory, Jakobson's schema is too offhand to warrant serious attention. As a guide to rhetorical analysis it has serious problems. For Jakobson it is metaphor that is the trope of substitution, and metonymy that is the trope of combination. Thus, he neatly reverses common usage within the literary community. If we apply Jakobson's principles to a simple and non-controversial metonymy such as 'The pot is boiling,' we will find that 'pot' is positionally contiguous with 'is boiling,' and that the boiling is 'semantically contiguous' with the pot. Hence, 'is boiling' is metonymic for 'pot.' But this analysis is clearly erroneous. 'Pot' is metonymic for water. It is the water that is boiling, not the pot. Jakobson's analysis will work only for pertinent lexical strings such as 'The water is boiling.' On his theory, such an expression is metonymic for it involves predication. One can well imagine the response 'boiling' to the stimulus word 'water.'

I do not know how one would label an expression such as 'The pot is boiling' in Jakobson's theory. It cannot be a metaphor. 'Pot' and 'water' are certainly positionally similar – both being nouns – but they are not semantically similar. They share only the category of physical object,

which can hardly count as semantic similarity. In effect, the traditional trope of metonymy is ruled out of Jakobson's schema, permitting the adoption of its label for non-categorical co-ordination or correlation. There is no place in his theory for such paradigmatic metonymies as 'pot' for 'water,' 'sail' for 'ship,' or 'Ottawa' for 'the government of Canada.'

Jakobson's theory works a little better with metaphor – or at least with simile. I would distinguish similes as distinct from metaphors in two respects: 1 / unlike metaphors, similes are not impertinent; 2 / similes appeal to categorization, and metaphors do not. For example, the expression 'He is a lion' counts as a metaphor only if the 'he' referred to is not, in fact, a lion. It must be an impertinent predication. The expression 'He is like a lion' is not impertinent; it is not false – indeed, it is difficult to imagine how an assertion of likeness could be judged true or false; anything may resemble anything else. However, this expression is still not a full simile, for there is no appeal to categorization. A full simile would take the form 'He is as brave as a lion.' This expression specifies the shared category – Jakobson's 'semantic similarity.' The individual to whom one has referred shares with the lion the abstract characteristic of bravery. Both belong to the category of brave organisms.

The distinction between metaphor and simile is even more tangled than the metonymy-synecdoche distinction. It comes down to the issue of whether metaphor is a deviation within the rules of the notational system of language – as Group Mu argues – or a distinct cognitive procedure belonging to discourse. Most philosophers who address the issue come down on the cognitive side, but with rather severe limitations. Ricoeur's position is fairly typical, and amounts to conceding a heuristic function for metaphor:

If the *imaginatio* is the kingdom of 'the similar,' the *intellectio* is that of 'the same.' In the horizon opened up by the speculative, 'same' grounds 'similar' and not the inverse. In fact 'wherever things are "alike," an identity in the strict and true sense is also present.' (P 301)

In other words, similarity and resemblance are just juvenile approaches to the genuinely cognitive and philosophical recognition of identity. Metaphor is a kind of 'baby talk.' Monroe C. Beardsley's 'controversion' theory of metaphor is essentially of this type.¹⁵ And Max Black's well-known 'interactive' theory is another heuristic modelling of the cognitive role of metaphor.¹⁶

One philosopher who departs from this view is Donald Davidson, who found himself challenging both Max Black and Nelson Goodman in a 1978 symposium on metaphor. Davidson's position is that 'metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.'¹⁷ Davidson concedes a heuristic role for metaphor, but only in

provoking thought, not through carrying meaning. Metaphorical statements, he insists, are either false or platitudinous: 'a metaphor *says* only what shows on its face – usually either a patent falsehood or an absurd truth' (p 41). I find myself more in agreement with Davidson than with the philosophical consensus on metaphor. However, what Davidson says of metaphor is equally true of metonymy. He debunks the cognitive analysis of metaphor, but does not advance a tropological analysis.

The theory of metaphor which has perhaps the greatest currency among literary scholars is that of I.A. Richards as developed in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.¹⁸ Richards's pair of 'tenor' and 'vehicle' has the virtue of stressing the combinative rather than substitutive nature of metaphor, but everyone who examines it – Ricoeur, Beardsley, and Black most carefully – finds it a little incoherent. The essential difficulty with Richards's theory is that the 'tenor' is really not an element of the metaphorical expression, but is its interpretation. Thus, on Richards's theory a metaphor must be defined as its expression or formulation, plus its interpretation: 'the tenor [is] the underlying idea or principal subject which the vehicle or figure means' (p 97). But a theory of metaphor requires that the mechanism whereby interpretations are attached to expressions be articulated as somehow distinct from simple encodation. Richards himself sets the problem in this light: 'In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction' (p 93). If this is true, the theory of metaphor must formulate the device whereby these 'different things' are identifiable. His theory fails to do that.

For Jakobson there can be no distinction between metaphor and simile; both involve appeals to categorization. To say 'He is a lion' must be exactly equivalent to saying 'He is as ... as a lion,' and both will be construed by an appeal to categorial similarity. Both expressions conform easily to Jakobson's theory of metaphor. Humans and lions are 'semantically' or categorically similar in that both are predatory mammals. And of course, 'he' and 'lion' are positionally similar in that both are substantives. The metaphor, then, is construed as the substitution of 'lion' for 'predatory mammal.' However, most readers would interpret this hackneyed metaphor as meaning that he was brave, ferocious, domineering, or, perhaps, hirsute – that he was *like* a lion, that he *resembled* one in some one or more respects.

In fact, it is metonymy that is the trope of lexical substitution and metaphor that is the predicative trope – exactly the reverse of what Jakobson argues. He achieves this reversal of customary usage by treating metonymy as belonging to discourse, and metaphor as belonging to the notation of discourse. He is led into this error, no doubt, because metony-

mies always involve substantives – labels or names for existent entities or for abstractions which themselves embrace existent entities (such things as those designated by ‘hut,’ ‘poverty,’ and ‘litter’). To substitute one substantive for another is to appeal to the existential correlation of the two substantives. And it is true that this account helps us to understand how we construe metonymies. But the metonymy itself is not its construal. We know a metonymy has been committed on notational, as well as on discursive, grounds. Discursively, a metonymic expression such as ‘The pot is boiling’ is simply nonsense. In order for such an expression to qualify as a trope and not merely nonsense, we need a notational rule something like: ‘nonsense should be corrected by substituting an ordinate or associate of the thing referred to so as to correct the nonsense or impertinence.’

Metaphor, by contrast, is a discursive trope. We construe a metaphor such as ‘that man is a lion,’ not by substituting some substantive for ‘lion’ in order to correct the nonsense and convert it into a platitude, but rather by assuming the nonsense to be in some sense true. Typically we ‘correct’ the nonsense by searching our knowledge of the two terms of the metaphor (the man and the lion) in order to discover some attributes shared by them. In other words we read metaphor as an assertion of resemblance between those things designated by the two terms. When the grounds of resemblance are specified, we call the trope ‘simile’: ‘That man is as brave as a lion.’ When the grounds of resemblance are unspecified, and we have simply a counter-factual predication, we call the trope ‘metaphor.’

Both metaphor and metonymy are discursively counter-factual. The distinction between them is notational. Metonymy is the trope of substitution within the notational schema – this lexeme for that.¹⁹ Metaphor is the trope of combination – above all, of predication. It transcends the notational schema, for the combination is of *that which is notated* – the entities or events in the world. Predication involves the assertion that a relationship of equivalence holds between items ‘in the world.’

Similarity and contiguity – the two great principles of Jakobson’s schema – are not applicable to notational schemata except in trivial ways. Certainly predicates are contiguous with subjects, but this datum is hardly a component of a tropological theory; if it has any pertinence, it must be in a grammar. It is equally true that in a classificatory grammar all instances of any part of speech – nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc – will share a category, and therefore qualify as similar to one another, but substitution of one noun for another hardly counts as figuration *unless there is an impertinence which can be corrected by an appeal to epistemic information.*

Similarity and contiguity will not yield rhetorical or tropological distinctions as Jakobson tries to make them do. Instead of leading to a tropologi-

cal theory they lead to a theory of discourse and of cognition. As we have seen, the question of metaphor is difficult and controversial just because it raises issues of cognitive theory.²⁰

Contrary to Jakobson's argument that metaphor is a trope of substitution on grounds of categorical similarity, in truth metaphor is a trope of combination appealing to the relationship of 'resemblance' – a relationship that exists *outside* semantics and outside semiology in the world itself, and to which we have cognitive access even though the relation of resemblance is itself ill defined. Part of the purpose of this article is to point out that resemblance is ill defined precisely because it belongs to the world and not to our notational schemata. Metaphor is the growing point of language where it assimilates information supplied to it by human cognitive processes, but for which we have no labels. But metaphor is not an essentially linguistic phenomenon – as I have insisted from the beginning of this paper. It is the linguistic face of the *cognitive process* of categorization itself.

NOTES

- 1 This article is based on a paper delivered at the Learned Societies Conference held at the University of Montréal in June of 1985. It was part of the program of the meetings of the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English.
- 2 Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Aspects of Aphasic Disturbance,' in *Selected Writings* (Paris: Mouton 1971).
- 3 I employ four words designating the interpretand of a linguistic term because each of those words carries with it a small troop of theoretical hostages – with which I do not propose to deal directly. Nonetheless I want my reader to be aware of the contentious and tangled nature of all discussion of meaning, sense, etc at this particular point in our cultural history.
- 4 For a discussion of the impact of Fregean thinking on twentieth-century logic and linguistics see Howard Gardner, *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (New York: Basic Books 1985), chapter 4. Gardner traces the recent loss of hegemony of Fregean formalism in the face of critiques by W.V.O. Quine and Hilary Putnam from within logical empiricism, and from J.L. Austin, John Searle, and Richard Rorty from without.

In this connection it is worth noting J.S. Mill's remarks on the familiar terms 'denotation' and 'connotation': 'whenever the names given to objects convey any information, that is, whenever they have properly any meaning, the meaning resides not in what they *denote*, but in what they *connote*. The only names of objects which connote nothing are *proper* names; and these have, strictly speaking, no signification' (*Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed J.M. Robson, vol VII [Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973], p 34). Current usage virtually reverses Mill's originating distinction, for today 'connotation' means the secondary and accidental properties of that entity or action 'de-

noted' by a term. The reason for the shift is the formalization of *meanings*. In post-Fregean logic genuine meaning has, strictly speaking, no signification, no naming function, but only a definitional meaning or formal meaning, like proper names. My discussion would move us back towards Mill's position on linguistic meaning. Connotations are what I call 'content.'

- 5 Richard Boyd, 'Metaphor and Theory Change: What is "Metaphor" a Metaphor for?' in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed Andrew Ortony (London: Cambridge University Press 1979), pp 356–408. Citation is from p 377.
- 6 Jakobsonian structuralism has had a remarkable success and cannot just be brushed aside, but it should be noted that the explanatory power of his system of asymmetrical binary opposition is so great that its utility is questionable. The case of metaphor and metonymy is merely a tiny corner of his system, but it does reveal that the weakness of such a simple schema is precisely its excessive power. Binarism cannot fail as a descriptive schema, for if there are only two categories, everything must be either 'a' or 'not-a.'

There is some room for empirical input in Jakobson's system in determining which of the pair is to be privileged – which is to be 'a' and which 'not-a.' In the case of metonymy and metaphor, Jakobson has privileged metonymy – presumably because it is more clearly content-free than metaphor.

- 7 So far as I can determine, Jakobson is not citing the results of an actual experiment, but is using 'typical' results to make his case, for he writes: 'In this experiment two opposite linguistic predilections are invariably exhibited ...' (p 254). This manner of speaking does not suggest that he is citing a genuine instance of the psychological test. However Jakobson is not unequivocally clear on this point.

One should not make too much of the vagueness of Jakobson's empirical evidence, but it is characteristic of the Prague school that there should be an appeal to empirical support despite the essentially *a priori* character of the argument.

- 8 Monroe C. Beardsley's *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1958) remains the best general discussion of the various theories of metaphor, despite the impressive and more up-to-date survey conducted by Paul Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1977). The most succinct discussion is doubtless the entry 'Metaphor' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – also by Beardsley.

Despite the thoroughness of Ricoeur's book, he remains firmly entrenched in the twentieth-century view that metaphor is a departure from rigorous, positivist reference: 'Signifying is always something other than representing. The same capacity of inscription in logical space enables the interpretation functioning in perception to become the seat of two distinct aims: one that tends towards individual things, and the other that tends towards logical signification, where interpretation at the perceptual or imaginative level plays nothing more than a "supportive role"' (p 301). In this remark one can see the

reversed reflection of the citation from Mill, for whom signification is still grounded in what Ricoeur dismisses as the 'perceptual or imaginative level.'

- 9 Group Mu, *A General Rhetoric*, trans Paul B. Burrell and Edgar M. Slotkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 1981), especially pp 108–9. They write:

We may express the metaphoric operation as follows:

$$s \rightarrow (i) \rightarrow R$$

where *s* is the starting term, and *R* the resulting term, the passage from one to the other being effected by the intermediary term (*i*), always absent from the discourse and which is a limit-class or a semic intersection, depending on the point of view chosen.

Decomposed in this way, metaphor is revealed as the product of two synecdoches, (*i*) being a synecdoche of *s*, and *R* a synecdoche of (*i*). (P 108)

They illustrate the model with the following examples:

$$s \rightarrow (i) \rightarrow R$$

$$\text{birch} \rightarrow (\text{flexible}) \rightarrow \text{girl}$$

$$\text{boat} \rightarrow (\text{bridge}) \rightarrow \text{denture.}$$

This theory, of course, rests on the assumption that only arbitrariness can function in language operations. In short, similarity or other semantic or encyclopaedic relationships are ruled out from the beginning.

- 10 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans W. Hamilton Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library xxiii (London: Heinemann 1932). Aristotle's position on metaphor is essentially that it is a deliberate misnaming. Such a theory is a catachretical one. However, catachresis differs from initial assignment of meaning to words in that the catachresis is not arbitrary, but motivated. There is some resemblance, analogy, or other relationship between the 'proper' and the 'catachretical' meaning.
- 11 It should be noted that the theories of 'pointing,' 'dubbing,' 'defining,' or 'stereotyping' are all variants of the Saussurean position that the meanings of words are *arbitrary* or conventional rather than *motivated* or *caused*. That the meanings of words are conventionally or arbitrarily assigned cannot be seriously challenged, and has been the mainstream position throughout the history of Western study of language. However, on any theory, metaphor cannot be simply arbitrary, for then the term 'metaphor' would have no sense; it would not be a discriminate of literal. This is one locus – the non-arbitrary, non-conventional nature of metaphor – where the issue between content-free and content-sensitive views of language is often joined.
- 12 Boyd argues that metaphors (and other linguistic practices) give 'epistemic access' to features of the world: 'the notion of ostension, and indeed the notion of reference itself, are fundamentally epistemological notions, and ... the issue

of reference for a general term is the issue of its role in making possible socially coordinated *epistemic access* to a particular sort of thing or natural phenomenon' (p 358). My argument is parallel to his except that I would stress that the lexicon is already a set of terms giving pre-theoretical epistemic access to the world. In effect, my position is a modification of the Humboldtian position that all lexemes are metaphors, in that I would claim that ordinary language is best perceived as providing access to the world in a rough-and-ready way very similar to tropological practices. And that the lexicons of natural languages are a mixed set of arbitrary and motivated lexemes – of forgotten analogies, catachreses, puns, onomatopoeias, and so forth.

- 13 This term, 'impertinent,' is used by Ricoeur (*The Rule of Metaphor*) to indicate a semantic rather than syntactic deviation as the mark of the rhetorical figure.
- 14 Group Mu, *A General Rhetoric*, pp 100–4.
- 15 Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1958). See especially pp 134–41.
- 16 Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1962). Like Beardsley, Black cannot find it in his heart to concede metaphorical expression any cognitive respectability: 'Now if an archetype is sufficiently fruitful, we may be confident that logicians and mathematicians will eventually reduce the harvest to order. ... But clearing intellectual jungles is also a respectable occupation. Perhaps every science must start with metaphor and end with algebra; and perhaps without the metaphor there would never have been any algebra' (p 242). I assume Black was aware that he was not only employing metaphors, but mixing them as well.
- 17 Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean,' in *On Metaphor*, ed Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1979), p 30.
- 18 I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press 1936).
- 19 Of course, not all lexical substitution is metonymic – only those substitutions which are construed by an appeal to our encyclopaedia. Obviously puns, synonyms, foreign locutions, and the like can be seen as lexical substitutions, but such substitutions are not metonymic, for they must be construed on notational grounds alone. The pun, for example, depends upon the resemblance of – in Saussurean terms – the *signifiers*, the marks or sounds of two or more lexemes.
- 20 Of those who have endeavoured to confront the general problem of figuration in this century, only Lakoff and Johnson have directly confronted the dominant cognitive theory of our time: 'Standard theories of meaning assume that all of our complex concepts can be analyzed into undecomposable primitives. Such primitives are taken to be the ultimate "building blocks" of meaning. The concept of causation is often taken to be such an ultimate building block. We believe that the standard theories are fundamentally mistaken in assuming that basic concepts are undecomposable primitives' (George Lakoff and Mark

Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980] p 69.) They argue that metaphors are based instead on what they call an 'experiential gestalt.'

There are many points of contact between my own position and that of Lakoff and Johnson, but their argument is too remote from rhetorical considerations to be very useful in the discussion of Jakobson's theory. Tropologically speaking, they concern themselves almost exclusively with analogy rather than metaphor.