METAPHOR

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It. *Metafora*; Fr. *Métaphore*; Germ. *Metapher*; Span. *Metafora*. The term is from the Ancient Greek *metaphérein* ("to transport"), and it denotes a figure of speech characterized by the displacement or the extension of the meaning of words. In rhetorical tradition, metaphor is usually intended to mean a condensed simile, or the substitution of one word by another based on a relationship of similarity (for example, the metaphorical expression "Achilles is a lion", where lion is used in place of strong and brave, would be the condensed form of "Achilles fights like a lion"). However, the twentieth century debate criticized the reduction of the metaphor to a simple substitution of a literal term, instead assigning to it a cognitive function: today, the metaphor is no longer considered to be only a rhetorical and stylistic device, and also not a strictly linguistic entity, but rather a conceptual tool, a fundamental principle of human understanding that operates in a broad range of domains.

THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT

The theory of metaphors as a substitution figure or trope dates back to the famous definition given by Aristotle: "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (*Poet.*, 1457b). Aristotle's definition contains *in nuce* two ideas that have had a long-term influence on the destiny of metaphors: the idea that a metaphor is something that happens to the noun, i.e. a transfer concerning the meaning of a single word; and the idea that the metaphor is a deviation from the ordinary usage of a word. Both ideas are at the origin of the concept that assigns to the metaphor a simply ornamental function: by not bringing to it any consciousness or additional information, the metaphor would be limited to beautifying and enlivening speech. Furthermore, by transferring to an object the name of another one, metaphors infringe upon the univocity of the word-thing relationship: the traditional concept states that metaphors are not concerned with the truth (typical of philosophical and scientific speech), but with the probable, the plausible (typical of poetic and rhetorical speech).

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Although with various exceptions (e.g. Vico, for whom the metaphor is a fundamental phenomenon of language and of consciousness, or Nietzsche, for whom truth itself is nothing more than an army of metaphors), this concept prevailed until the first half of the twentieth century. In 1955, Max Black opened his famous article with the ironic observation that in philosophy the following rule applies: "Thou shalt not commit metaphor". In 1981, however, the situation already seemed to be reversed: in the introduction of the anthology *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, Mark Johnson recorded an explosion of interest that qualified as "metaphormania". The twentieth century metaphor revival can be attributed to multiple factors: from the crisis of neopositivist epistemology to affirming a linguistic turn that looked with interest to phenomena previously considered to be marginal. In fact, a determining contribution was made by an exponent of the analytic school, like Black, who criticized the reductionist logicism and, in the wake of Wittgenstein, attempted to rethink the concept of meaning. Black introduces the interaction view: a new explanation of metaphor that had already been drafted by Ivor Armstrong Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), but which Black provided with a more systematic form. According to Black, metaphors do not consist of a single word, but depend on the interaction between the metaphorical expression (*focus*) and the remaining part of the sentence (*frame*); it cannot be paraphrased in literal terms because it is not a substitute for a comparison or any other kind of literal statement, but has its own distinctive capacities and achievements. Let us consider the example "Man is a wolf", in which the frame (the word "man") is also named the *primary subject*, while the focus (the word "wolf") is the *secondary subject*. The metaphor works by applying to the primary subject the system of implications associated with the word "wolf" (predatory animal, fierce, hungry). The wolf-metaphor filters and transforms, in short, organizes our view of man. Metaphors are a cognitive tool because they create a new conceptual organization of the object or event concerned. The 1955 article "Metaphor" and Black's other writings on the topic (such as the 1960 essay "Models and Archetypes", which gave rise to a successful reflection on the role of metaphors in science) sparked a debate that would involve philosophers such as Nelson Goodman and Donald Davidson. Goodman (1968) radicalized Black's thesis, proposing a denotative theory of metaphor that accents the innovative and transgressive aspect: where there is metaphor, there is conflict, there is calculated "category mistake", but this does not preclude metaphors from being true, that is, from instituting a particular type of reference. Davidson (1978), on the other hand, criticizes Black's approach, stating that there is no metaphorical meaning, as all meaning is literal: metaphors belong exclusively to the domain of use, and are able to suggest something new using words that keep their usual meanings.

In parallel, even in continental thought during the second half of the twentieth century, the debate about metaphors acquired notable attention. The reference to Nietzsche and his writings *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873) became a recurring motivation for the rediscovery of the metaphor, to which Hans Blumenberg made one of the most important contributions. Blumenberg (1960), disagreeing with the reduction of philosophy to the logical-formal level, recognized metaphors as having full philosophical dignity, highlighting the metaphorical underpinnings of the concept of life, "absolute metaphors", which govern thought and cannot be reduced to concepts. Paul Ricœur's position (1975) is different; while facilitating a dialogue between analytical matrix theories and other theories elaborated by exponents of

philosophical hermeneutics, he brought attention to the question of semantic innovation and metaphor-truth relationships. For Ricoeur, the strategy of the "live" metaphor is a heuristic fiction servicing the re-description of reality: by producing new meanings, metaphor provides a different way of seeing the world and a concept of truth other than the concept of truth-verification.

THE COGNITIVE TURN

Since the end of the seventies, the study of metaphors has taken on a multidisciplinary nature: philosophers and literary theorists have been joined by linguists, psychologists, anthropologists, and cognitive scientists. In this context, the essay that resonated the most is the now famous *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), written by the linguist George Lakoff in collaboration with the philosopher Mark Johnson. It presents Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), according to which metaphors are a phenomenon of thought rather than of language. Conceptual metaphors are mappings of structure from one domain of experience (the source) onto another domain of a different kind (the target). Source domains are grounded in our bodily experience and are used to structure our more abstract concepts.

In the last few decades, the debate about metaphors has been dominated by cognitive linguistics and psychology; in addition to the studies on embodiment and the mind-brain relationship, there are now studies of neurolinguistics, experimental pragmatics, and neuropragmatics. Today, the cognitive force of metaphor is no longer questioned; on the contrary, it is a flourishing field of investigation that crosses the disciplines. In the context of linguistics, recent studies have appeared that, while in part criticizing the cognitivistic perspective, also assign a central role to metaphors in communication and in the ordinary use of language. For example, according to Gerard Steen's *Deliberate Metaphor Theory* (2008), it is important to reconsider that the metaphor is not only the linguistic expression of a conceptual structure, but that it belongs to the dimension of communication. Only in this dimension, is it possible to distinguish "intentional metaphors", able to change the view of the topic being discussed.

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