

**Cognition and Symbolic Structures: The Psychology of Metaphoric Transformation.** Edited by Robert E. Haskell. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1987.

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A book on metaphor which contributes to existing theory at the same time as it argues for radical epistemological and methodological changes in the study of metaphor can easily become a hall of mirrors. This is especially so of a book which subscribes to Vico's dictum that the study of a topic should reflect our primary epistemological relationship to it. Robert Haskell's edited volume, *Cognition and Symbolic Structures: The Psychology of Metaphoric Transformation*, attempts this ambitious project, with rich and hard-to-summarize results.

A straightforward summary can be made of the changes in the study of metaphor advocated by Haskell in his dual capacity as contributor and editorial organizer of the book: (1) treat metaphor as a cognitive process rather than as a linguistic "thing"; (2) recognize that current research already authorizes the claim that metaphor is the basis of all reasoning, including formal logic; (3) use both phenomenological and positivistic methods in critical combination as a means to a non-reductive, empirically based theory of metaphor; (4) admit all kinds of discourse—literary, clinical, conversational, and scientific—as sources of metaphorical data, as objects of a critical metaphor theory, and as legitimate modes of presentation for academic work on metaphor.

But such a summary would miss the most powerful message of the book, which is not only declared but also embodied in its various modes of presentation. As a book which implicitly calls for a Reichian character analysis of symbolic structures, asking us to look for primary meaning where many others see only the "transparent" vessel of style, it demands no less of its own evaluation. In line with Haskell's notion of structural metaphor as language which practices what it preaches (i.e., enacts through its own discourse what it thematizes as content), the book includes (and thereby validates) poetic, philosophical, and logical-empirical discourses on a topic which is always called metaphor, but which is given a wide range of extension of meaning. The pluralism of approach displayed here constitutes the advocated method. As Haskell colorfully puts it in his climactic concluding chapter,

Without metaphorical phenomenology, logical empiricism duplicates itself, a sort of conceptual cloning. Similarly, without logical empiricism metaphorical phenomenology grasps its own being and replicates itself parthenogenically. An isolated datum-universe is a kind of linguistic gene pool that requires an external infusion to maintain its vitality. To "critique" a pool of knowledge, then, requires that we speak from another universe of discourse, a sort of existential Godel's theorem. (p. 273)

Methods of inquiry which in isolation can only perpetuate themselves, then, become vitally productive when they meet, touch and interact.

The range of extension of the term metaphor also dramatizes this pluralism, but in a way more problematic for reader comprehension. When different contributors conceptualize metaphor in sufficiently different ways without explicitly mentioning these differences, the coherence of the volume (and the coherence of the academic conversation which it presents) is in danger. Fortunately, a key difference among the contributors seems to be along one dimension, that of generality of scope, so that one may eventually infer where a particular contributor stands along this dimension. At one end of the spectrum are those who restrict the term metaphor to its traditional meaning as a use of language which maps one context onto another in such a way as to produce novel meaning (e.g., Gibbs); at the other are those who use a world-swallowing definition of metaphor as an operation at any level of the human metabolism from neurological to formal-logical in which transformations of invariance are performed (e.g., Haskell).

In what follows, we will discuss two large issues raised by this volume: the distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, and the relevance of subjectivity to the study of metaphor. In the interests of mutual understanding, we would like to reveal something about our own standpoints *vis-a-vis* these issues. One of us (Hewitt) comes to the reading of this book as a student of linguistics and communicative disorders, with a special interest in pragmatics. The other reviewer (Galbraith) is a student of the hermeneutics, phenomenology, and linguistics of subjectivity in narrative, and therefore is interested in the relation between the philosophy of social science and the notion of subjectivity. We both participate in a multidisciplinary cognitive-science project studying the comprehension of narrative.

In recent years, some scholars have come to reject the literal/metaphorical distinction, linking it to outmoded ideas of categorization and simplistic beliefs about cognition (cf. Bosch, 1985). Many writers in the present volume appear to be in various degrees of sympathy with this view (e.g., Honeck, Kibler, and Firment; Haskell; Hoffman and Honeck). Others, such as Beck and Marks and Bornstein, tacitly accept a literal/metaphorical dichotomy along more traditional lines. While the criticisms leveled at the traditional distinction are powerful, those who explicitly reject the distinction between metaphorical and literal meaning have had trouble establishing a semantics which does not covertly make use of it. Also, eliminating this distinction means that all of communicative behavior becomes eligible for interpretation as metaphorical in the unlimited sense of the term.

Of the contributors to this volume, Hoffman and Honeck, Gibbs, and Honeck et al. are the least inconsistent in their use of the term metaphor in its broad sense. These writers hold the radical view that metaphor is more than just a trope (deviation from a norm), and more than just one cognitive process (however central). They hold that all symbolic cognition is based on the same fundamentally metaphoric processes. While many of the other contributors to this volume aim to give metaphoric cognition a more central place in the study of cognition, the writers cited above suggest the more radical move of obliterating the boundaries which caused metaphoric language to be marginalized in the first place.

As Bosch (1985) points out, the inability of traditional semantics to handle non-literal language (including literary metaphor and indirect speech acts) suggests the need for a more comprehensive theory of meaning. However, the search for more comprehensiveness may lead to the conclusion reached by Gibbs, that there is a "radical indeterminacy" in language, "such that almost any combination of words can be used to express almost any kind of intention" (p. 46). Bosch cites an experiment which

points to this conclusion, in which subjects identified the same object in two different contexts as "the black one" and "the white one." But if all language use is embedded in particular contexts and interpretable only in light of (as yet unspecified) contextual factors, then the study of language as an independent system becomes problematic.

Gibb's article, "What Does It Mean To Say That a Metaphor Has Been Understood?", speaks to the problem of retaining some systematicity in the face of the threatened proliferation of individual interpretation in an unconstrained semantic system. He makes an appeal to speaker intent in terms of "authorized inferences" as a means for placing limits on infinite possible interpretations. He cites the example "The rock is becoming brittle with age" as an utterance showing no mixing of spheres or semantic violations, but capable of a metaphoric interpretation given the right context (e.g., as applied to a testy professor emeritus). Only an appeal to context and attribution of communicative intent to the speaker can yield the proper interpretation of this utterance. Recognition of speaker intent alone is probably not enough to account for linguistic comprehension, but clearly it is a key component.

Hoffman and Honeck's chapter on "Proverbs, Pragmatics, and the Ecology of Abstract Categories" also argues a view of meaning as generated by particular occasions. In their view, a "flexible semantic base" underlies comprehension. They advocate the study of language use in natural contexts along what appears to be, from their brief comments, ethnomethodological lines. Such an approach would attempt to find and describe linguistic constraints on interpretation as it occurs in daily situations, rather than trying to identify constraints based on a formal semantics or on laboratory experiments.

Other theorists who want to argue the literal/figurative meaning distinction are less successful in eliminating this distinction from their own discourse. Haskell, for example, relies implicitly on a dualistic view of meaning in order to privilege the "left-handed" member of several polarities: dreaming versus waking, poetry versus prose, metaphor versus literal signification. Through these dualities he is able to attack the over-controlled, "constipated" discourse of positivistic thinkers. In his final chapter, "A Phenomenology of Metaphor: A Praxis Study into Metaphor and Its Cognitive Movement through Semantic Space," Haskell attempts to allow the unconscious play of metaphor to completely take over his discourse, with decidedly uneven results (perhaps because he cannot let go completely).

Marks and Bornstein's chapter, "Sensory Similarities," also shows signs of a covert reliance on the literal-vs.-figurative distinction. They assert that the perception of similarity is a primary psychological phenomenon. While their recounting of work in this area is fascinating (especially the clear evidence for hard-wired neuropsychological substrates as a basis for synesthetic perception), their reliance on received ideas about categorization weakens their account of development of metaphoric competence. This whole body of work assumes that the categories supposedly mixed in synesthesia are primitives; that, for example, perceiving a color as loud is to treat "different entities as similar" (p. 64). Their further speculation that innate synesthetic perceptions are the developmental starting points of adult figurative language suggests that metaphor is a special faculty unrelated to supposed "ordinary" experience just as, in their analysis, synesthesia is a special case of perception. It might be fruitful to consider perceptual experience more holistically, not as composed of primitive domains that synesthesia may link, but as a unitary phenomenon using all its modalities, from which particular channels such as sight and sound may be retrospectively abstracted.

We turn now from the controversy about the literal/figurative distinction to another key issue raised by this volume: the role of subjectivity in metaphoric processes. This topic is raised directly by Beck, Haskell, and Shell, Pollio and Smith, but it is also

indirectly raised by issues in Honeck, Kibler and Firment, Hoffman and Honeck, and Gibbs. One issue which leads to the topic of subjectivity: What cognitive "organ" is used to manipulate and create the sense of a metaphor? Do people see the similarities between the target (tenor) and base (vehicle) components of a metaphor based on perceptual features? This seems not to be the case, since targets and bases rarely resemble each other in visual features—e.g., Juliet does not resemble the sun in any pictorial sense. If, as Ortony et al. (1984) have suggested, metaphors transfer high-salience features of the base onto the target, then the question arises as to how this high-salience is conceived of, if not visually. Gentner (1988) has argued that subjects asked to list the high-salient characteristics of an object (e.g., a time-bomb) which is not being used as a metaphoric base do not choose the same characteristics as those who encounter the object used as a metaphorical base (e.g., cigarettes are time-bombs). In their article, "Proverbs, Pragmatics, and the Ecology of Abstract Categories," Robert Hoffman and Richard Honeck advance a "conceptual base" hypothesis which asserts a nonimagistic, nonlinguistic and nonliteral foundation for the comprehension of figurative language. This conceptual base is the cognitive means by which metaphor is generated and understood:

A conceptual base is generative. It categorizes an indefinitely large group of instances or events that are literally and referentially distinguishable and yet which, from the perspective of the interpreter, share some sort of *featureless family resemblance*. (p. 128, emphasis added)

But what sort of resemblance can be without features? And how can an abstract category be accessible to human attention? Hoffman and Honeck's use of the terms "featureless" and "abstract" could be construed as a claim that the use of metaphor is based on formal-logical operations not grounded in an actual human body. Based on a full reading of their argument, this does not appear to be their intention. Rather they seem to be claiming that there is some *felt* cognitive operation which senses similarities which are not primarily visual. Brenda Beck, in her chapter "Metaphors, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," argues that this experiential operation is sensorimotor in nature:

If forced to delimit the concept of metaphor . . . I would insist on the experiential, body-linked, physical core of metaphoric reasoning abilities. Metaphors often can operate entirely without the over use of words, as the work of many artists and cartoonists will illustrate. Even if a mathematician used one kind of formula metaphorically, as a kind of inspiration for solving a problem in another mathematical domain, it would have to be a "feeling trace" that linked the two.

By a "feeling trace" I mean a sense of what the body did as it descended through the logic of the first problem. . . . The more experience one has at a task, the more of this . . . "feel" one acquires. The expert comes to recognize the problem quickly, and hardly needs words. (p. 12)

Combining Hoffman and Honeck's notion of an abstract conceptual base with Beck's notion of a proprioceptive feeling trace, we come close to a current view of cognition summarized and expanded by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, respectively, in their recent books, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, and *The Body in the Mind*: that cognition is based on experiential schemas which emerge, as abstracted but lived relations (similar to Dilthey's notion of *Lebenszusammenhang*, lived connectedness or structure), from our bodily interaction with the world. This view may be what Honeck, Kibler and Firment are referring to when they use the term "schema-based attribute match-

ing" as one mechanism of metaphor (p. 114).

The implications of the necessity for including a notion of lived, bodily operations as the basis of metaphor are far-reaching not only for the study of metaphor but for the philosophy of cognitive science. It brings cognitive science into the struggle, begun in the nineteenth century by the German philosopher and psychologist Wilhelm Dilthey (or even earlier, as mentioned by Haskell, with Giambattista Vico), to reject a model of the human sciences conceived of as a stepchild of the physical sciences in favor of a model which, though empirical, takes advantage of our prescientific head start as understanders of everyday human experience. If the "click of comprehension," mentioned often in this book as a crucial moment in the process of metaphor, is a lived fit between felt meaning evoked by symbols and the felt meaning of a currently experienced situation (using the terms of phenomenologist and psychologist Eugene Gendlin [1962]), then metaphor cannot be properly studied (in Vico's sense) apart from a theory of human, bodily subjectivity.

But to study metaphor or any other meaningful human behavior as it relates to our everyday experience of the world is not easily done, either methodologically or politically. Speaking of this problem in relation to the "black box" approach to (or rather, avoidance of) subjectivity, Haskell argues that methods which recognize the centrality of human experience will not be legitimated in the social sciences until there is a political change in the relevant departments:

as Marcel (1983a,b) has made clear, the phenomenal experience of a subject "cannot be identified and bears no simple relationship to information processing" (p. 281) frameworks as now constituted in mainstream computer psychology. Mainstream cognitive methodology yields a great deal of control over experimental variables, but at the same time yields little phenomenological relevance.

Unlike many critics, however, the above description [sic] of the mainstream view is not intended to turn into an unqualified indictment. My own criticism of the mainstream information processing approach—as historically constituted—is not with its artificial tasks and nonphenomenological conception, but with the tyranny and power it exerts in invalidating deviating and competing approaches to the study of cognition. (pp. 88-89)

The superiority of a multi-pronged approach to social science research, combining phenomenological and experimental methods, has been argued persuasively for many years now. But the politics of academic social science continue to favor experimentalism as the only "real science," despite critiques (such as those of Jürgen Habermas [1968/1971] and Karl-Otto Apel [1973/1980]) which have shown that the precondition (and thus the foundation) for ALL science is the pragmatic, preconceptually lived understanding of its practitioners.

Unlike more orthodox social-science texts, this book is not loath to address important issues which escape experimental boundaries. The moral and emancipatory dimension of metaphor, traditionally the domain of literary and philosophical discussion, is not neglected here. For example, in the chapter, "Metaphor as *Mitsein*: Therapeutic Possibilities in Figurative Speaking," Shell, Pollio, and Smith examine metaphor as a creative act. This chapter is an example of the kind of work on metaphor which would be excluded by mainstream social science. The authors are interested in how novel metaphor may allow real human beings to engage each other and understand themselves, and thus to grow. (A philosopher and psychotherapist whose work bears heavily on this question, Eugene Gendlin, is evidently not being read by the circle of theorists who produced this chapter; another penalty of being an "alternative" social scientist is that one must dig through many sources to find, and so may often miss, the minds most relevant to one's own work.) They use Heideggerian

phenomenology as a theoretical frame within which to pose empirical questions: e.g., does a patient's use of a novel metaphor to describe his or her own situation indicate new insight on the part of the patient? By contrasting the frozen language of *Das Man*, the "they say" of speech for which no one takes responsibility, with the freedom of language exemplified by novel metaphor, Shell, Pollio, and Smith challenge the unidirectional, deterministic view of the relations between language and subjectivity which is promoted by current social-science and post-structuralist practice.

In another chapter relevant to both social-science and literary concerns, "Foucault and Language: Unthought Metaphors," Irene Harvey suggests that Foucault's use of metaphor carries implications which covertly argue the assumptions on which his theory is based, while drawing attention away from themselves. Harvey does not claim that the use of metaphor should (or could) be banished, but rather that its use should be examined and used openly, in the Derridean manner. Since metaphor is the unavoidable basis of all philosophy and theory, as has been persuasively argued by Pepper (cf. Brown's chapter, "Metaphor and Historical Consciousness") as well as Derrida (1974), and since this crucial use of metaphor tends to background or efface itself, one of the ethical duties of all responsible theorists must be to reflect upon their own discourse.<sup>1</sup>

We are unable to summarize neatly our reactions to this book. As nonspecialists in the field of metaphor, we were never sure if our frequent feelings of frustration and lack of comprehension were the result of our own lack of familiarity or of a poor presentation. We both felt that linguistics was not given its due, either as to its place in cognition as a whole or as to its place in metaphor. The contributors to *Cognition and Symbolic Structures* seem to split along two lines in their attitudes to linguistics—those who question the linguistic foundations of metaphor and reject the premises thereof, and those who have borrowed the notion of metaphor from the linguistic domain and apply it broadly to cognition. The latter group uses the word "metaphor" itself in a metaphorical sense to refer to all types of cognitive activities which are playful and unconstrained, crossing boundaries and mixing domains, as dreams do, or creating linguistic universes unto themselves, as poetry does. There is an undeniable excitement generated by the acknowledgement of the importance of these experiences to a complete account of human cognition. However, in borrowing from rhetoric and linguistics a cover term for these crucial aspects of the human mind, one should not neglect the issues of language which the original use of the term symbolized. Haskell in particular seemed to view linguistics as of marginal interest, a view underscored by the lack of contributions from this area (only Michael K. Smith is listed as being currently involved in linguistics). Haskell is at pains to point out that metaphor is a cognitive operation prior to language, but even granted this, does not metaphor have a *meaningful* function? We were confused as to whether the definition of metaphor espoused by Haskell was so low-level that it might ironically lead to a physicalistic model of metaphor as a hard-wired operation which determines, but is not available to or influenced by, all thinking and experience. If metaphor is not an operation whose essence is meaningful, then perhaps it is an impersonal and arbitrary, even if "intelligent," instrument. (The irony here is not only that this would entirely suit a positivistic model, but also that it would suit the post-structuralists, except that they would claim that it is *language* rather than *biology* which structures this instrument.)

<sup>1</sup>On the subject of reflecting upon one's discourse, it should be mentioned that the proofreaders of this volume did not do so sufficiently—there are frequent distracting typographical errors, some of which interfere with comprehension.

Despite our difficulties in completely understanding and endorsing the logic and implications of this book's many arguments, we both were excited by much that we did understand, and we felt solidarity with the book's open and critical philosophy. *Cognition and Symbolic Structures* should be welcomed by all those who are struggling for a more comprehensive approach to issues of human meaning, for more freedom of method in academia, and for more sharing between the humanities and the social sciences.

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