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Metaphor and Material Culture

Christopher Tilley

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Introduction

Metaphor is one of the tropes (twists and turns of language) of classical rhetoric, the other main ones being metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Rhetoric, in linguistic theory, is one of the primeval ancestors of structuralism. It was an attempt to analyse and classify the forms of speech which make language possible and intelligible. Going back to the ancient Greeks and Aristotle onwards there was an entire theory of rhetoric. With the development of a formal discourse on linguistics, the study of rhetoric fell somewhat into disrepute. It was the development of structuralism and semiotics during the 1960s that has done so much to revive a theory and interest in the tropes of language, an interest that is now paradoxically superseding structuralism itself in the form of various post-structuralist discourse theories. Like so many other so-called 'developments' in the social sciences the process of going forwards has entailed moving backwards to revive elements of a theory of language preceding the advent of structuralism.

To many contemporary linguistic theorists metaphor has been taken as the key, or most important trope, and often the term has been used to subsume all the others. Books on metaphor invariably consider the other

tropes, but metaphor is taken as being the most important of all. While there have been many books and conferences on the subject of metaphor, such attention to metonymy or synecdoche seems unlikely. One reason is that metaphor has been considered to be the most complex, and therefore, the most interesting of the tropes to analyse. But there is something more: metaphor has become a figure for figurality in general (Culler 1981: 189), and conforming to this unwritten convention, this is the manner in which the term will function in the present account, where distinctions between it and other tropes are not explicitly made.

A usual division is made between literal language, language that means what it says and says what it means, and rhetorical or tropic or figurative use of language. Traditionally, it has been assumed that the language we use is predominantly literal. Tropes are an embellishment, an abuse, a deviation from the norm, performed for purposes of persuasion and ideology. We should therefore be somewhat suspicious of metaphor or properly confine it within a particular and limited domain. Metaphor has above all been linked with the imaginative faculties. The heartland domains of metaphor are literature and especially poetry. Fiction, in this view, is fundamentally opposed to facts and metaphors should not therefore be the domain of the serious social scientist. They, to use a metaphor, muddy an understanding of the world. Metaphor is linked with emotion and subjectivity and opposed to a disinterested and objective understanding.

The argument made here is that this is a tradition of thought that is fundamentally in error. An alternative position is that (1) without metaphor human communication would be nigh impossible; (2) metaphors provide the basis for an interpretative understanding of the world, the goal of the historical and social sciences.

Metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche: some initial definitions

Metaphor involves a move from a whole to one of its parts to another whole which contains that part, or from a member to a general class and then back again to a member of that class. In the most general sense metaphor involves comprehending some entity from the point of view, or perspective, of another. In this sense all knowledge and all interpretation may be claimed to be metaphorical. It is an illustrative device in which a term from one level or frame of reference is used within a different level or referential frame. It involves a transfer of one term from one system or level of meaning to another (*metaphora*: carrying over). From Aristotle we get the definitions that metaphor involves: the transference of a word to a sense

different from its proper signification and 'giving the thing a name that belongs to something else' (Aristotle 1924: 1457b6–9). In this conceptualization, metaphor involves a transfer of meaning from the word that properly possesses it to another word belonging to the same shared category of meaning, a form of compressed analogy in which, unlike simile, the reader is made to do the work of establishing the connections, constructing the particular logic involved. By contrast, similes have less potential for producing an excess of meaning since the basis for the comparison is more controlled, stating explicitly that the terms are comparable and frequently providing the basis for the comparison: 'he struck out at her like a viper, his words were as if full of venom'. In metaphor, like simile, there are two conceptual domains, one being understood in terms of the other. An entire schematic structure involving two or more entities becomes mapped onto another. Some examples:

She is in full bloom (= maturity)
He is withering away (= dying)
He attacked my argument (arguments are war)
He was a lion in battle (= fierce etc.)
The foot of the hill
Time is money
His mind decayed
It was music to his ears
Our marriage is on the rocks

Metonymy

Metonymy involves a move from a part to a whole. In the statement 'Jane has been chasing those trousers' the trousers and the man are related as part of a notional or visual whole and related together. By contrast with metaphor, metonymy only involves one conceptual domain, so metonymic mapping occurs within a single domain rather than across domains. Consequently it involves an 'internal' rather than an 'external' relationship. One can refer to one entity within a schema by referring to another. One entity is taken as standing for another entity in the schema or, alternatively, for the schema as a whole. Metonymy accomplishes a transfer of meaning on the basis of associations that develop out of specific *contexts* and cultural traditions. Referring to the Queen by the phrase 'the crown' is only possible because of the historical association of queens and crowns. So metonymy, unlike metaphor, relies for its production of meaning

on connections that build up over time or associations of usage. Some examples:

She's a pretty face (face for person, part for whole)
I hate to read Foucault (producer for product)
He hired a gun (object for user)
Clinton attacked Kuwait (controller for controlled)
Sainsbury's have introduced a new loyalty card (institution for people responsible)
The White House hasn't responded (place for institution)
Watergate changed our politics (place for event)

Synecdoche

Synecdoche is often regarded as being the most basic (and therefore relatively uninteresting) rhetorical device. It involves any series of part/whole relationships allowing one to move from a part to a whole or a whole to a part. Imagine we wish to talk about beech trees. A consideration of part to whole relations means that we can conceptualize beech trees in terms, for example, of woods, gardens, beech mast, doors, tables, spoons (things containing or made from beech). Alternatively, if we consider whole to part relationships we might understand beech trees themselves in terms of leaves, roots, trees or branches. A synecdoche involving a movement from a member to a class might involve a consideration of beech trees in terms of strong things or tall things or non-animate things. Movement from a class to a member might involve consideration of different varieties or shapes of beech trees.

Some further examples:

We need new blood in the company (= new people)
I've got a new set of wheels (= car, motorbike)
We need some good heads in the department (= intelligent people)

In general, synecdoche can be taken to be a special case of metonymy.

The Role of Metaphor or Why it is Important

Many scholars agree that metaphors arise because of inherent problems in the precise relationship between a world of words and a world of things, events and actions (Ortony 1975; Fainsilber and Ortony 1987; Gibbs 1994: 124ff.). Given that there always exists a gap between words and

things and the actions and events that those words attempt to describe, capture or interpret (however many words I may try and use it is impossible to exactly reproduce in text the simplest of objects such as a chair, or of actions, such as a handshake), metaphorical expressions become necessary rather than contingent features of language. According to the *inexpressibility* thesis, metaphors provide ways of giving form to ideas and descriptions of the world virtually impossible in a literal language. The statement 'the ship is taking a bath' can serve to express far better the nature of childhood experience and the creation of meaning than any literal expression (Game and Metcalfe 1996: 48). In particular, emotions, feelings and understandings for others become positively banal when stated literally. Love requires the metaphor of the red rose. This general position has often been used to account for the power of poetry in stretching our imagination and producing insights into the nature of human lived realities. It provides a crucial link between metaphor, creativity and the human faculty of the imagination. Such a view forms the basis of Coleridge's philosophy. He understood metaphor as the power enabling the imagination to be put into *action*:

> The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity . . . He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of the imagination . . . [It] reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order. (Coleridge 1971: 253)

This is not so far from Ricoeur's more general statement that to 'present men "as acting" and all things "as in act" – such could very well be the *ontological* function of metaphorical discourse, in which every dormant potentiality of existence appears *as* blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action *as* actualized' (Ricoeur 1978: 43).

The *compactness* thesis suggests that metaphor often provides the simplest or most parsimonious means of communication between socialized individuals in the same culture. To describe the actions of a person as those of a fox or a viper, through commonly held cultural conventions of the connotations of the fox or the viper, can be a very succinct way of conveying information about him or her. Through metaphorical means it becomes possible to convey complex configurations of ideas with a very few

words. Many metaphors cannot be paraphrased in a literal language. Often either a metaphor is used or nothing can be said (Ortony 1976).

Invariably linked with the previous two arguments is the *vividness* thesis. Metaphors facilitate the capturing of our phenomenological experience of the world in a unique way. They are a means of linking subjective and objective experience, conjoining them and resulting in a fresh 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1975); they reside, therefore, at the heart of a hermeneutic or interpretative practice in the social sciences. This is also why, of course, metaphors are so common in poetry and literature: to create vivid and memorable images of the world.

It follows from this that metaphor and memory are frequently closely connected, and that the use of metaphor may enrich both the encoding and recall of information. A vivid metaphorical image, such as saying 'they cooked the land', is likely to be remembered far longer than a statement such as 'they burnt down the forest'. In so far as metaphors can evoke vivid mental images they facilitate memory. In this respect it is perhaps no coincidence that many of the titles of books and articles in the social and historical sciences exploit metaphors to the full.

One of the most important functions of metaphors in the process of understanding and interpreting the world is that they actively facilitate the production of novel understandings and interpretations. Metaphors provide a means by which we can connect together objects, events and actions that appear to be empirically (factually) disparate and unconnected. For example, by conceiving of human bodies as containers (of fluids and substances, with orifices – entrances and exits) one can begin to examine symbolic linkages between the body as container and other types of containers such as baskets or pots (Tilley 1996). Metaphor, then, provides an interpretative thread by means of which we can weave together into a fresh constellation the brute 'literal' facts of the world. In an empiricist or objectivist account of the world a body is a body and a pot is a pot. Metaphor provides a powerful means of overcoming this fragmented view of the world and examining systematic linkages between different cultural and material domains. Metaphor provides a way of mediating between concrete and abstract thoughts. A metaphor 'points to the existence of a given set of abstract relationships hidden within some immediately graspable image' (Beck 1978: 84).

In the most general sense metaphors promote self-reflexivity. An awareness of metaphor and its ubiquity helps us to understand better how and why we do research, and the extent to which we are trapped in the prison house of language, that our thought and writing is fundamentally metaphoric in character. We begin to see the metaphoric in what we take to be literal 'factual' or conventional statements about the world, an act of unmasking. Thinking about the metaphors we typically employ in interpretation leads us to a position in which we can begin to understand the manner in which the employment and emplotment of different metaphors leads to alternative conceptualizations and knowledges. If working with social science invariably involves working with metaphors this may help us to read better and write better.

Metaphor may not only serve as a binding element in providing an interpretative account of the world, it can also be conceived as a quality which links together individuals and groups. The fact that metaphors are culturally relative implies that members of the same culture may share many distinct metaphorical understandings in common. Others may be confined to distinct sub-cultures. Working out a speaker's attitudes and beliefs may be a key aspect of metaphorical understanding. Corradi Fiumara (1995), Gibbs (1994: 135ff.) and others have noted that metaphorical talk often presupposes and reinforces an intimacy between speaker and listener. Many figurative uses of language may be all but inaccessible to outsiders who do not share specific information about specific knowledges, beliefs and attitudes. The metaphors employed may very well be difficult to decode or understand by those who do not share the same frame of reference. In this manner metaphors may be utilized as vehicles of power in the sense of social domination and control. Those who do not understand the metaphorical meanings at work in culture, invariably linked to knowledges deemed fundamental to social reproduction, are almost inevitably those who have little or no authority. Learning metaphor becomes part and parcel of the process of the acquisition of cultural knowledges and the authority residing in their acquisition.

Metaphor has, of course, long been noted as a primary persuasive element in political rhetoric. Aristotle's tripartite division of language into logic, rhetoric and poetic in the *Poetics* (for discussions see Hawkes 1989; Derrida 1982) opposed rhetoric to logic, defining the former as having persuasion as its central role, the latter clarity. Both rhetorical and poetic language represented for him distinctive and specialized departures from ordinary language use which aimed at expressing things as clearly and as unambiguously as possible within a community of speakers. Conceived positively figurative use of language added spice, or seasoning, to its basic non-metaphorical nature. A great politician is, of necessity, a master of metaphor, and ever since Aristotle, this persuasive art of language use has been regarded with suspicion. This suspicion of the motives lying behind

the use of metaphor has historically done considerable intellectual damage to the concept. Metaphor may become easily conceived as an ideological discourse, be accused of promoting manipulative representations of the world, a propagation of falsity. While metaphors may indeed produce a deliberate misrepresentation of the world this hardly seems to be a reason for speaking literally, since literal speech as much as metaphorical speech can be used to convey falsehoods. Metaphor itself is a mode of representation which can be used, abused and contested. The manner in which metaphor is employed in relation to social strategies and social struggles depends very much on the context of the events and actions and places in which it is set to work. But this persuasive purpose of metaphor is hardly confined to overt political discourse. All social scientific texts are motivated by an art of persuasion in which authors employ the powers of metaphor in conjunction with a presentation of empirical materials, or evidence, to convince their readers of the veracity and significance of the statements they are making.

Metaphor is fundamental to all belief systems. Myth and ritual may be reasonably argued to have their entire basis in a networking of metaphors. Fernandez (1986) writes of a 'mission of metaphor in expressive culture'. Defining metaphor as 'a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to a performance' (ibid.: 8), he argues that the essence of religious experiences is a desire to change the way people feel about themselves and the world in which they live. Metaphors accomplish this end (ibid.: 23). By persuasion and performance they revitalize and empower the individual, connect things together, establish and re-establish, in symbolic strategies such as revitalization movements, a sense of wholeness and the relatedness of things in a reconstructive play of tropes (ibid.: ch. 8). This play of tropes in ritual achieves a number of ends. Amongst other things, it provides a sense of identity for inchoate subjects; enables movement in these subjects between states, provides a plan for ritual performance and enables the 'subject to return to the whole' (ibid.: 62). In short, metaphors provide a basis by means of which communities create and understand their collective experience. One of the most important points in Fernandez's thesis is the stress that he places on the metaphorical process as a form of movement linking together different domains. Metaphors provide a form of mediation between partial or abstract principles expressed in a verbal plane and concrete sensual images working on a non-verbal plane of experience. Beck advances this argument to suggest that metaphors mediate between the verbal and the non-verbal. Metaphors work to 'introduce nonverbal material into logically structured, semantic contexts. . . . Metaphor and the metonym are two sides of a single device used to bridge the gap between rational and sensory thought processes' (Beck 1978: 87). Rather than to suggest that metaphor is a mode of mediation between the verbal and non-verbal, between sensual experience of objects etc. and abstract thought, it seems far more to be the case that metaphorical processes are constitutive of both. Metaphor is in the artefact, in language, in the mind. It has ontological significance in language, culture and thought.

If culture, sociality and everyday conversation inevitably take on metaphoric forms we should expect this to be reflected in the discourses of the social sciences, and indeed this is the case. All sociological theories of life embody what might be termed root metaphors, fundamental images of the way the world is. In functionalist theories society is variously conceived as an organism, or like a machine. In structuralist positions culture and society are conceived as languages. Notions of cultural evolution are bound up with ideas of an evolution of the species. In ethnomethodological and other interpretative approaches social conduct is viewed as drama, or as a game. People are actors following rules, life is like a theatre. All use of models in the social sciences is metaphorical in nature. Analogies are forms of metaphorical reasoning in which the formal implications are spelled out so that Society X or social practice X may be said to be like Society Y or social practice Y. Photographs, employed as 'evidence', act as metaphors for the reality they portray. All maps are metaphors for the towns or landscapes they represent. In this manner it is possible to claim that metaphors structure social scientific thought from the most general to the most specific levels (see Brown 1977 for a detailed discussion). They are essential and lie at the heart of the transmission of theories and their replacement. Metaphors establish links between language use in the social sciences and the worlds that are described and discussed (Kuhn 1993).

Metaphor and Language

Attempts to theorize the metaphorical process in language have been many and various. In this section I want to discuss briefly some of the most influential perspectives. According to a traditional *substitution* view of metaphor the process of understanding a metaphorical statement requires translating out of the metaphorical terms into a literal language. So metaphors of the kind 'John is a fox' can simply be expressed literally as 'John is crafty'. A metaphor, in effect, says one thing and means another.

Metaphors tell us nothing new, they merely provide an embellishment of literal meaning. By contrast, Ricoeur shows us that metaphors are fundamental in creating new insights and forging new links between things. A basic condition for metaphors to work at all resides in the polysemic character of words in natural languages, that they have many meanings and cannot be reduced to a single strict and 'proper' sense. Polysemy then provides the foundation for the creative extension of meaning produced through metaphor. The actual operation of polysemy, like metaphor, can only be understood at the level of the statement or sentence, in the manner in which words interact with others to create meaning and sense.

One of the problems with Ricoeur's tension theory resides in the manner in which he opposes literal to metaphorical or figurative meaning, from which 'tension' arises. The implication of his approach is that a reader expects literal meaning first and when this expectation is not fulfilled the tension arises. The reader then translates, in his or her mind, from a literal frame of reference to a metaphorical one. Literal meaning still seems to be granted a priority in Ricoeur's position. But it can be argued that normally we do not have the problem that Ricoeur describes: we simply and immediately read and understand the statement directly as being metaphorical without first passing through a literal stage of confused reading. The implication is that metaphor is more than a mere matter of language use.

Metaphor and Thought

Cognitive psychologists and linguists have presented a detailed body of work demonstrating that metaphor and metonymy are fundamental tools which allow us to understand both abstract concepts and abstract reasoning. Avoiding a mind/body dualism the mind is effectively put back into the body, conceived as embodied. Metaphorical understanding is grounded in non-metaphorical preconceptual structures arising from everyday bodily experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987).

Metaphor is not so much a matter of language in general, and literary use of language in particular, but a matter of *thought* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gibbs 1994). We do not just employ and construct metaphors but live through them. Our ordinary conceptual system by means of which we live, think and act is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Metaphorical concepts structure perception, action and social relationships. Because of the routinized character of the vast majority of social life we simply do not realize the extent to which our conceptual system or thought processes are

metaphorically structured. Communication through language is, of course, based on the same conceptual system guiding thought and language. By analysing language use we can obtain a good idea of the form and character of the conceptual system that produces it. The kind of scenario Ricoeur describes is, in fact, only likely to arise when we are confronted with particularly striking novel metaphors in poetry and literature, precisely the kinds of metaphors that the majority of critics have discussed rather than the normal everyday metaphors guiding our ordinary conceptual system.

Lakoff and Johnson define the essence of metaphor as *understanding* and *experiencing* one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 55). While poets and literary writers may be masters of metaphor they only take to a 'higher' or more 'refined' level what everyone does every day – think in a poetic or figurative manner. Virtually all everyday talk reflects the ability of people to think routinely in ways that are not literal. The implication of this position is that while metaphors may help to create new insights and interpretations the fact that these processes take place at all reflects underlying schemes of thought that have a fundamental figurative quality. Even if we wished to do so we could not evade metaphor and the meaning and construction of human culture would be impossible without it. This position, a 'poetics of mind' (Gibbs 1994: 16–17), involves the following main propositions:

1 The human mind is inherently non-literal in character.
2 Language reflects the human perceptual and conceptual understanding of experience.
3 Figuration is not just a matter of language but provides much of the foundation for thought, reason and imagination.
4 Figuration is not ornamental but commonplace.
5 Figurative modes of thought motivate the meanings of many linguistic expressions typically viewed as having a literal interpretation.
6 Metaphorical meaning is grounded in non-metaphorical aspects of recurring bodily experiences or experiential gestalts.
7 Scientific theories, art, music, myth and material culture exemplify many of the same figurative schemes found in everyday thought and language.
8 Figurative language does not require special cognitive processes to be produced or understood.
9 Children's figurative thought motivates their significant ability to both use and understand many kinds of figurative speech. A whole series of experiments by cognitive linguists, reported by Gibbs, has

demonstrated that no special processes are required to understand metaphors. They are readily comprehended by young children, so an ability to cope with metaphor seems to be as normal and everyday a part of thought processes as is its use. No unique or special decoding processes are required.

For Lakoff and Johnson metaphor involves a mapping from a source to a target domain. The source domains are familiar, often of the physical world. They are easy to think with because the thinker can readily conceptualize relations among the elements in such domains and changes in these relations when the elements are set in motion conceptually. The target domains are abstract conceptual domains, frequently of the internal mental and emotional world or unseen and unknown domains of the physical world. Lakoff and Johnson argue that a small number of schemas of physical world relations, termed *image schemas*, underlie metaphors and are based in bodily experiences and the manner in which the body interacts with the physical environment. Spatial concepts are a primary example:

> Our spatial concept UP arises out of our spatial experience. We have bodies and stand erect. Almost every movement we make involves a motor program that either changes our up–down orientation, maintains it, presupposes it, or takes it into account in some way. In other words the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant spatial experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment. (Ibid.: 56)

Our understanding of containment is based on looking into and taking things out of containers, going into and out of containers like rooms, and comprehending our bodies as containers of – fluids, sensations, organs. Our understanding of the physical world of containers and containment then becomes mapped onto abstractions so that theoretical arguments can be understood as containers. Our lives are filled with pathways, routes of movement to and from places. A human understanding of pathways develops soon after birth when a child starts to crawl around so that it is not perhaps surprising that human purposes become described in terms of destinations that we try to reach, and so on (Johnson 1987: 113ff.).

In his analysis of the word 'anger' in American English Lakoff argues that in common expressions such as 'You make my blood boil', 'Don't fly off the handle', 'He blew up', 'They were having a heated argument', 'He went over the top', 'He got red with anger', the 'ANGER IS HEAT metaphor, when applied to fluids, combines with the metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER OF THE EMOTIONS to yield the central

metaphor of the system: anger is the heat of fluid in a container' (Lakoff 1987: 383). In the central metaphor coolness and calmness correspond to a lack of anger in such expressions as 'keep cool' and 'stay calm'. The central metaphor has a rich series of metaphorical entailments, e.g. when hot fluids start to boil the fluid goes upward, hence it is possible to make a statement such as 'her pent-up anger ***welled up*** inside her', which is conventionally understood by everyone. Lakoff's basic argument here is that metaphor governs rather than facilitates reasoning and constitutes understanding. An important part of Lakoff and Johnson's project (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987; Lakoff and Turner 1989) is the systematic undermining of objectivist and empiricist accounts of language and the world. Underlining the significance of metaphor in thought and language provides a direct challenge to objectivist accounts in which only literal statements, concepts and propositions can describe and explain the world. They successfully demonstrate that even basic concepts such as anger do not exist as literal objective descriptions of reality, and that these cannot be understood apart from their metaphorical grounding and entailments. A language that is non-metaphorical in nature could logically only consist of proper names. But natural languages do not have proper names. To name something is to ascribe it properties, to perceive similarities, to engage with metaphor. This is an assertion of the cognitive value and respectability of figurative language in an analysis of the social. Culler notes that 'the act of grouping distinct particulars under a common heading on the basis of perceived or imagined resemblance, which is the central act in any narrative of the origin of language, corresponds to the classical definition of metaphor: substitution on the basis of resemblance' (Culler 1981: 203). The historical implications are clear. If language originates in tropes then literal language is a language whose tropic origin has been forgotten through cultural convention. Through time a figurative understanding of the world becomes converted into literal understandings and this process runs in tandem with the development of an abstracted 'scientific' knowledge. Scientific terms represent a last stage in the mummification of language. They ***appear*** to express something about their discursive objects completely and exactly but are in fact a residue of conventional or frozen metaphors.

Deconstructing the Literal/Metaphorical Divide

> The appeal to the criteria of clarity and obscurity would suffice to confirm [that] . . . this whole philosophical delimitation of metaphor already lends itself to

> being constructed and worked upon by 'metaphors'. How could a piece of knowledge or a language be properly clear or obscure? (Derrida 1982: 252)

Any attempt to maintain an absolute distinction between the literal and the metaphorical inevitably breaks down. The binary opposition is far too crude. The literal, the privileged term in many discussions of metaphor, is supposedly the opposite of an 'ornamental' figurative language but, as has already been noted, by an ironic twist a literal expression can be argued to be a metaphor whose figurality has been forgotten. Metaphor, traditionally regarded as secondary and derivative, can now be regarded as basic. However, this does not necessarily lead to the claim that *all* contemporary use of language is metaphorical because metaphors typically rely on some basis of comparison with an entity in a different conceptual domain. We do not conventionally understand a sausage, or a dog, by mapping them in relation to something else. We can have a metaphorical understanding of a dog. The dog's tail might be understood as a flag, but this does not mean that the tail cannot be understood simply as a physical attribute of the dog, as a tail. Despite this, it may often be misleading to try and rigidly divide concepts and statements into those that are metaphorical in character and those that are not, because metaphoricity is bound up with aspects of conceptual structure and the polysemy of words. While descriptions of the world may or may not be metaphorical in nature, interpretations of the world almost inevitably *are* since they typically involve the mapping, or understanding, of one unfamiliar and poorly understood domain in terms of another. To deconstruct the literal/metaphorical opposition is to displace it and situate it differently, to undermine the 'common-sense' priority and status granted to the literal in our culture. It should not result in a monism in which only metaphor is left. This position recognizes that literal language is a language in which key elements of figurality have been forgotten instead of considering figurative speech as a deviation from a supposed norm of literality.

Dead and living metaphors

In a consideration of the difference between dead and living metaphors we can distinguish between statements such as 'I *see* (i.e. understand) what you mean' and 'he's almost *gone*' (i.e. died), which are elements of ordinary metaphoric expression in English, and isolated metaphors which are idiosyncratic and are not used systematically in our language and thought, such as the *face* of the clock, the *legs* of the table, the *mouth* of the tunnel,

the *belly* of the pot, etc., which are far more specific (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 54).

One claim is that all these dead metaphors are no longer properly metaphoric, so that to say 'I "see" what you mean' merely suggests that 'see' has, historically, come to have 'understand' as one of its meanings, or, similarly, that one of the meanings of 'gone' is died. While this is undoubtedly the case, *seeing* as a metaphor for understanding has profound effects on the structuring of our unconscious and the routine habitual actions we carry out in the world. In Western culture, since the Enlightenment, the sedimented importance of the visual in language is linked with a culture that can be called 'ocularcentric', dominated by vision (Jay 1993: 4), in which vision becomes the 'noblest of the senses' (Descartes 1965: 65) and knowing becomes indelibly connected with seeing. Dead metaphors, apart from the isolated idiosyncratic descriptions of specific things mentioned above, which cannot be claimed to play a major role in our conceptual system, are not so much dead in the sense that they are inactive or unimportant to us. They are only dead in so far as they remain hidden rather than recognized, and indeed, because of their loss of strangeness this may be a fundamental component of their very power and veracity in our culture. The whole notion of dead metaphor, implying the metaphor has become so conventionalized as to become literal and essentially passive in our thought, depends on setting up an opposition between the literal and the metaphorical in which the former is granted primacy in so far as it is claimed that ordinary conventional language is in *essence* not metaphorical. This is mere presupposition. The ubiquity of dead or conventional metaphors in fact leads to the opposite conclusion (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 130; Gibbs 1994: 276). Dead metaphors remain dead only in so far as the user *does not think of them*, i.e. they are part of the unconscious, of the mind.

Metaphor and Culture

Jakobson (1956), in a famous paper, put foward strong arguments for the centrality of both metaphor and metonymy in language use. Discussing *aphasia*, a loss or impairment in the ability to speak or understand speech, he argued that aphasia affects either the paradigmatic or the syntagmatic axis of language. The former is the selective dimension of language use (relating to Saussure's *langue*), the latter is the combinative dimension (relating to Saussure's *parole*). Any particular utterance or message involves

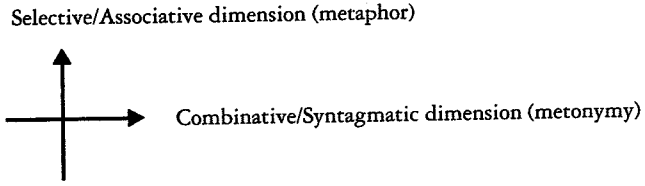

Figure 1.1 'Horizontal' (metonymic) and 'vertical' (metaphoric) components of linguistic messages according to Jakobson.

a combination of constituent parts (e.g. sentences, words, phonemes) *selected* from the repository of all possible parts. Any utterance can, therefore, be understood in terms of a 'vertical' movement selecting the parts to be used from the inventory of language as a whole, and a 'horizontal' movement in which the parts get combined together to form a particular message or sentence. The combinative or syntagmatic process manifests itself in *contiguity*, one word being placed after another; the selective process expresses itself in similarity, one word or concept being 'like' another. Jakobson further argued that the mode of the former is metonymic, the latter metaphoric (Figure 1.1). These two distinctive poles of language use, according to Jakobson, are such that aphasia may result in *either* a 'similarity disorder' (metaphor) or a 'contiguity disorder' (metonymy). Aphasics suffering from the similarity disorder showed a marked inability to use alternative words for the same object or to reason analogically – in other words, the inability to use metaphor. Those suffering from the contiguity disorder did not have the ability to use the 'syntactical rules organizing words into higher units' (Jakobson 1956: 85).

The general distinction that is drawn here between metonymic and metaphoric modes of thought forms the basis for Lévi-Strauss's (1966) discussion of the workings of the 'savage mind' in relation to totemism and myth. Opposing a 'civilized' abstract science with a 'primitive' science of the concrete (see Tilley 1990 for a discussion), the central features of his argument are that through a process of bricolage or a series of culturally contingent ad hoc responses to the environment, the primitive mind acts so as to establish a structured series of correspondences between an ordering of nature and an ordering of culture. These become, in effect, mirror images of each other and provide a means for explaining the world. This process involves the interplay of paradigmatic and syntagmatic associations, an interaction of metaphors and metonyms: metonymy celebrates the parts of experience while 'the more eloquent metaphors of the myth . . . refer back to the whole for significance' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 242).

Myths serve to establish homologies between natural and social conditions, making it possible to equate significant contrasts found on different planes, e.g. the geographic, zoological, botanical, technical, social and ritual (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 93). The essence of savage thought is that it is analogical in character, a system of concepts embedded in images, 'building mental structures which facilitate an understanding of the world in as much as they resemble it' (ibid.: 263). Particular cultural conceptualizations of an ordering of nature provide the source of metaphors to produce an understanding of the target domain, culture: 'thanks to the myths, we discover that metaphors are based on an intuitive sense of the logical relations between one realm and other realms; metaphor reintegrates the first realm with the totality of the others. . . . Metaphor far from being a decoration that is added to language, purifies and restores it to its original nature' (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 339). In totemic thought, social differences between clans may become mapped or understood analogically in terms of differences between bird species: Clan A is to Clan B as Eagle is to Crow and so on. The particular metaphorical transformations are culturally determined by the specific series of differentiations, contrasts and oppositions and the range of analogical transformations involved. The savage mind takes the physical and concrete as its starting point and moves towards the abstract, whereas modern scientific thought works in the opposite direction.

Evans-Pritchard (1956), in a discussion of the classic Nuer metaphor 'twins are birds', reports that in order to characterize twins the Nuer employ expressions which seem contradictory. On the one hand, twins are one person, conceived in the sense that they are said to have a single personality (ibid.: 128). On the other hand, twins are not persons at all, but birds. This is because twins are manifestations of spiritual power and considered children of God.

In his structural analysis of the statement, Lévi-Strauss (1962: 79–82) argues that the sky for the Nuer is the abode of the spirit and twins are associated with it as 'persons of the above' and contrasted with other humans, 'persons of the below'. Since birds are of the sky and thus 'of the above' they belong to the same celestial order as twins (Figure 1.2). Lévi-Strauss concludes that 'Twins "are birds," not because they are confused with them or because they look like them, but because twins, in relation to other men, are as "persons of the above" to "persons of below" and, in relation to birds, as "birds of below" are to "birds of the above"' (ibid.: 80–1). They thus occupy, as do birds, an intermediary position between the supreme spirit and human beings. Terence Turner, in his re-analysis of the

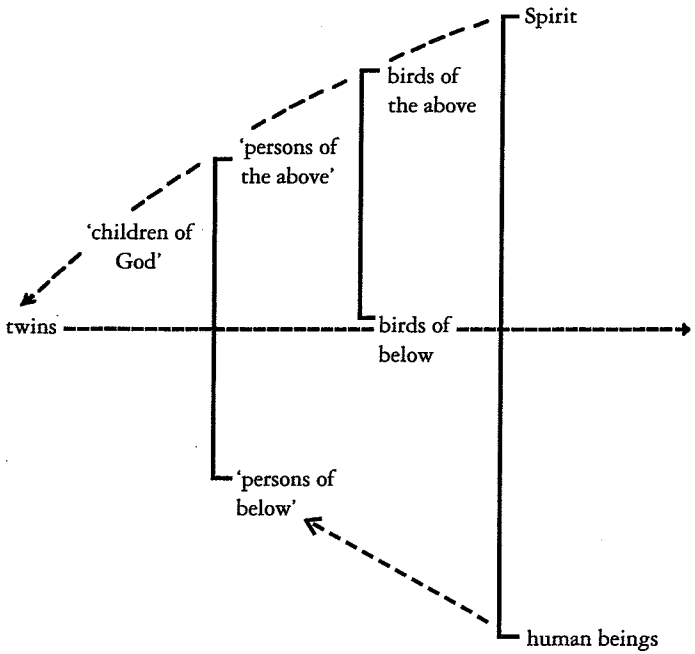

Figure 1.2 The relationship between conceptions of twins and birds in Nuer mythology.
Source: Lévi-Strauss (1962). Reproduced by kind permission of Merlin Press.

discussions of Evans-Pritchard and Lévi-Strauss (Turner 1991: 141–6), notes that birds, for the Nuer, are divided into:

1 those unambiguously of the sky: high or good fliers with bright pure colours;
2 those more ambiguously associated with the ground: birds of the below: ground-walking and dappled species such as the pied crow and guineafowl.

It is the latter, rather than just any species of birds, who are specifically likened to twins by the Nuer. Although twins are associated with the spirit world and, therefore, 'of the above', they are also humans and reside on the ground. The specific analogical relationship between 'birds of below' and twins is thus comprehensible as a metaphorical correspondence of an ambiguous combination of associations between sky and earth, above and below, spirit and human worlds.

Turner argues that the chain of reasoning pursued by Evans-Pritchard

and Lévi-Strauss rests on an unanalysed Nuer category of spirit. Pointing out that twins and birds are claimed by the Nuer to have one substantial identity (i.e. they are parts of the same species of beings), he argues that the relationship between them is metonymical rather than metaphorical in nature (Turner 1991: 143).

Twins are ambiguous with respect to conventional Nuer notions of personhood. They are separate persons but share a common identity because of the circumstances of their gestation and birth. They resemble each other yet they are different. Twins are also ambiguous as both ordinary humans and distinctive extraordinary sacred beings. They combine difference and sameness in a manner contradicting usual social realities. In transcending ordinary reality they acquire the sacred quality of Spirit: a union of oppositions, a synthesis of contradictions. The sky together with birds, its inhabitants, constitutes for the Nuer a separate non-human transcendental plane. It is inaccessible and Other. It also cross-cuts the boundaries and differences characterizing normal human existence on the earth, being unconstrained and homogeneous in form. The high-flying species of birds, with light or homogeneous colours, participate in the attributes of the sky most purely. Ground-dwelling birds like the crow, having a dappled plumage, combine the colours and attributes of both the earth and sky. They, like twins, also have an ambiguous essence, being birds, and thus associated with the above, but living on the ground, and thus of the below. Consequently, they can act as effective metaphorical mediators between the two domains. So a parallelism exists between the relationship of twins to ordinary humans and crows to ordinary high-flying monocoloured birds. This forms the material basis of the metaphoric association. But, Turner points out, this is in fact a complex tropic construct combining metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche (twins and birds are part of a single continuum of spirit).

According to Turner, the problem with the way a theory of metaphor has been used in much anthropology is that it has concentrated on the analysis of individual tropes such as 'we are parrots' and 'twins are birds' in isolation, abstracting analysis from social, ritual and narrative contexts. There is a crucial need to embed a consideration of metaphor in relation to social action and other tropes – synecdoche and metonymy, a play of tropes in culture. Part of the process of making culture is the creation of a sense of totality or wholeness in which what appear to be fragmented differentiated domains of human experience and action become fused together. The play of tropes back and forth creates the fusion. An understanding of the statement 'we are parrots' involves much more than simply stating that

it is a metaphor (Crocker 1977; 1985). In a cultural and ritual context it simultaneously involves metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. The archetypal themes of myth and ritual involve the constitution of specific linkages between nature and culture or society. This involves (a) the reorganization of the object world and (b) the transformation of the subjective perspective in dialectical interplay.

Turner attempts to exemplify this position most fully in his fine analysis of the role of parrots in Brazilian Bororo and Kayapo cultures. Parrots are the preferred animal form entered and possessed by dead human souls for copulation and eating, which they otherwise cannot perform. Parrots are thus conceived as a medium for the materialization of human essence. 'We are parrots' is a statement referring to a metamorphic process following death in which the soul of a human enters into the form of the parrot. The meaning of this statement has to be considered in terms of a division between the profane and sacred domains of culture. The Bororo distinguish between male and female semantic domains in which men become explicitly identified with parrots. They are metaphors for men. According to Turner, the essence of the metaphor 'we are parrots' can be best understood as 'we make ourselves parrots' (Turner 1991: 136). Men don red parrot (macaw) feathers in communal ritual. These feathers are both scarce and prestigious. The men 'become parrots' by performing this action. They have to make themselves parrots in order to be Bororo in the context of ceremonial performance, the most important constitutive element of social reproduction in Bororo life. Since men alone perform these ceremonies they serve to constitute the essence of maleness in Bororo society. The ceremonies make and sustain men. But for men to be men (having a physical body and a soul) they need to become parrots. Turner points out that the collective or plural form of the Bororo word for plumes also means spirit or ancestor. This polysemy of words provides the basis for the subsequent metaphorical transformation. The Bororo conceive of the spirit of a thing as creating the external visible world of appearances. Red parrot plumes, especially the tail feathers, are the most spectacular ceremonial items in the Bororo world. They are difficult to obtain, a scarce resource. Hence they become emblems of the spiritual world. They are a material medium through which the Bororo men simultaneously acquire and manifest the spiritual essence of their humanity: 'by covering themselves with arara plumes, the Bororo create themselves *in the form* of creators of social form' (ibid.: 139). They create themselves as spirit beings. The men, then, empower themselves as spirit actors in the context of rituals designed to reproduce society. A linkage occurs here between the transcendental

powers of souls (conceived as flying) with the lightness of feathers. Among the neighbouring central Brazillian Kayapo, ceremonial dance is likened to flight: 'the metonymic assumption by the ritual actors of feathered form as plumed "spirits" becomes the metaphoric basis of their power to reproduce the forms of society through collective ceremony' (ibid.). The act of Bororo men becoming parrots involves, therefore, metonymy, metaphor and synecdoche, in an ascending order of complexity.

At an initial metonymic level of meaning the detached part, parrot feathers, stands for the whole, the parrot. Parrot feathers signify the spiritual powers of parrots, involving flying (lightness) and the ability to grow feathers, constituting the outward form of 'parrotness', and simultaneously spirituality. There is also a metaphorical relation at work here: the lightness of the feathers metaphorically represents the capacity for transcendence associated with flight. The donning of feathers in ceremony by Bororo men allows the metonymic acquisition of the spiritual powers of parrots, simultaneously metonymically and metaphorically embodied by the manner in which feathers are conceived.

On a metaphoric level, the powers men obtain by donning the feathers are the powers of the ritual reproduction of the social order, metaphorically transformed in ceremonial performance. By becoming flying beings men separate themselves, in the ritual context, from normality. They acquire the spiritual powers necessary for social reproduction through harnessing the generative powers embodied in the feathers.

At a final synecdochic level of meaning the feathered dancers move within the patterns of village space recreating these patterns and with them key transformations in social relations that are the focus of the rites of passage being celebrated. The direction of these powers into the reproduction of social form as a whole, Turner argues, suggests that social form is itself conceived as a parrot form. The form created by the parrot dancers assumes, as a whole, the character of the parts, i.e. the parrot dancers who create it.

Turner's work, and in a more opaque fashion that of Fernandez (1986) and Wagner (1975; 1986), sensitizes us to the role of tropic interplay in the social production and reproduction of culture, so that we cannot afford the reductionism involved in an assimilation of all tropes to metaphor. It also underlines the importance of analysing tropic meaning in a performative cultural context. But there are other theoretical issues at stake. One of the most significant of these is whether a theory of tropes at work in culture offers us anything very different from a structuralist understanding of what culture means.

Metaphor in Culture: A Digital Logic or Analogic Logic?

Barth (1975), in a detailed analysis, usefully stresses that the symbolic value of elements in Baktaman (Highland Papua New Guinea) ritual depends very much on the particular manner in which metaphors become employed and the relative degree of structuring and coherence between them within different symbolic domains. The Baktaman, Barth argues, in an archetypal fashion, use the domain of the familiar (nature) in order to grasp the significance of the unfamiliar (culture) by means of metaphoric analogical reasoning. As part of this process something less clearly conceptualized becomes illuminated by the analogies made. The analogies so constructed may then also act back recursively on the more familiar element of the metaphorical relationship and also serve to clarify it by subsuming it under a more generalized cultural model implicit in the formation of the analogy itself. There is a crucial need for understanding metaphor in relation to objects and activities.

Barth makes the very important observation that the *material* metaphors at work in culture are not entirely arbitrary. In the process of making metaphorical connections there is always likely to be an inherent connection between form and meaning. The two questions: what does a symbol mean? and why is this particular symbol selected? are inevitably interconnected. So, the meaning of dew rubbing in Baktaman ritual is clarified by an understanding of how dew occurs. The meanings of pigs as symbols are linked to what pigs do, and how they behave.

Barth contrasts the analogic reasoning involved in producing metaphoric connections with a Lévi-Straussian structuralist digital logic of binary oppositions. The problem with a digital logic is its presumption of arbitrariness. The meaning of symbols can only derive from the place each occupies in the code as a whole. So in the Saussurian perspective of Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, cat is cat because it is not dog, etc. In an analogic code if I symbolize 'humanity' with a stick-line representation, this is clearly not an arbitrary process. The meaning depends on an understanding of the transformation effected from an object to a symbol by means of a particular mode of representation, and the manner in which I actually experience reality. Consequently, it is possible to argue that the concrete symbol's objective qualities and apparent suitability to its actual meaning are vital. As Barth puts it, the 'meaning arises independently of any total code and not from the symbol's systematic place among a limited set of alternatives within such a code' (Barth 1975: 208). A structuralist

binary logic involves the *weakening of contrast as source of meaning*. Complex messages, as in ritual, cast in an analogic code, are specifically suited for multiple interpretations. A ritual message can be interpreted simultaneously by different participants using different keys for decoding. The multiplicity of actors and sacred and other objects in ritual entails a relatively loose structure of messages, rather than the structuralist's presumption of a tight system in which one cultural domain is presupposed to mirror another. Precisely because there is, and can be, no tight structure at work linking together all the different domains of society or culture, the message can still communicate to the unperceptive, e.g. the initiate.

Rites not only say something, they *do* something. They are embedded in a means-to-ends context. Imagery fetched in ritual from the various domains of the mundane world through the contrivances of ritual practice creates and elaborates associations providing material for metaphor. For example, painting ancestral sacra and novices with red adds new metaphorical content to the meaning of the colour.

An analogic code involves a linking of metaphors employed in *different contexts*, particularly in myth and ritual. There may be various degrees of coherence between the elements. There is no presumption of a totalizing systemness linking everything in a culture into a tight structuralist fit, where one domain mirrors another and analysis is concerned with making all the pieces fit. We can expect various degrees of fit and coherence. A key point here is the improvised nature of culture, that it is a contrivance. This position avoids a 'simplistic assumption of total logico-deductive integration in culture' (ibid.: 213). Various natural species may have characteristic features or qualities, making them apt for abstract thought. This is a rather different position to regarding relations between the species in a taxonomic structure as being in some way isomorphic with the relations between other social and cultural categories, providing a vehicle for their expression, as in the work of Lévi-Strauss (1966) and Douglas (1970). Metaphor is part and parcel of cultural creativity for which structuralism has no role. It allows an understanding of ritual in its performative and social context, and in terms of the individuals who take part in them and their improvised and contingent transmission of knowledges.

As an example we can consider the symbolic role of pandanus (a variety of palm) in Baktaman life (Barth 1975: 188–9). The most valued species of pandanus is the one that develops a scarlet red fruit up to 50 cm long. It has a tangy flavour. Plants are carefully guarded, personally owned, and the fruits harvested, cooked and eaten. The cooking process is hedged around with taboos. The fruit must be hollowed out with the femurs of cassowary

(the largest ground-dwelling bipedal bird in the Baktaman universe) and cooked with cooking stones used for cassowary, and not those used for cooking pig or marsupials. The cooked fruits are only shared between men of close initiation rank, and not with women. They thus become associated with men. The association made between the pandanus and the cassowary is based on an empirical association, as well as constituted in ritual: cassowaries, like people, also seek out and feed on pandanus fruits. The pandanus fruits are phallus shaped and this similarity in shape to the penis is a premise for the metaphorical symbolism linking them to men. Penis gourds, worn by men, are attached by plaited bands made of pandanus leaf fibres. These fibres are taken from the leaves that cover the developing pandanus fruit. The metaphoric identification between the penis and the red pandanus fruit thus becomes quite explicit. The same pandanus fibres are only used by the Baktaman in one other context: to attach arrowheads to their shafts. The identification of the arrow and the male organ is expressed through the metaphorical medium of red pandanus. Red is the pre-eminent sacred colour signifying, in an expressive and generalized way (see the discussion of summarizing symbols below), descent and the ancestors. Red pandanus fruit is also used to colour 4th-grade initiation novices, and in the ceremonies explicit associations are made between pandanus and fertility in general. An artifical wig of pandanus leaves is worn by the initiates. Here another set of associations is created between sexuality and hair as symbol of fertility and growth, puberty and male fertility. The Baktaman make further associations between pandanus and fire making. Pandanus leaves are also used to wrap sacred relics linked with the ancestors.

Here there is no overall coherent code linking pandanus into a totalizing system of symbolic linkages between different domains of thought and action. Rather, pandanus enters individually into larger ritual contexts and messages. The implication of this example is that the kinds of integration that result from the subsumption of several meanings under the same material symbol are almost inevitably loose and partial, but they do become cognitively and emotionally linked by the associations created in performative contexts which, in themselves, may pose an intellectual problem to the actors involved. Core symbols, such as the pandanus, have different *independent* sources of meaning in the separate metaphorical linkages which cannot be conceived as being connected in a tightly structured way, as symbols operating within a digital code would be. An analogic code needs to be understood in the context of its praxis. Ritual builds on metaphors and may transform their original understanding. In the

Baktaman world only material objects persist while linguistic communication is, by definition, ephemeral. Thus, only those messages which are constantly recreated and used will be transmitted and persist as part of the tradition, those metaphors that catch on and are re-used as part of the corpus of material codes. This is the structure that persists – 'not exemplified paradigms with an almost infinite productivity of the "sayable"' (Barth 1975: 229). The material symbols serve as anchors not only of abstract thought but of ephemeral communications in general.

Key Metaphors

To argue that there is no necessity to presume a totalizing cultural coherence produced through metaphorical linkages does not imply the converse, a completely fragmented view of culture. What it suggests is that different symbolic, cultural and social domains will be linked together in different ways. Sometimes they may mirror each other, in other cases they will be contradictory. Some metaphors will be more inclusive, others more exclusive. Ortner (1973), Victor Turner (1974), Barth (1975) and others have all referred in various ways to the presence of core symbols with a condensation or multiplicity of meanings. One and the same symbol can serve as vehicle for several distinct metaphors. There may or may not be a contradiction between alternative metaphoric imageries, or ways of seeing. For the Baktaman, water has certain 'objective' properties from which metaphorical understandings and elaborations 'flow': cold in a mountain environment, it puts out fire, washes away substances and appears out of thin air as dew. Any one of these referents or aspects of water can be used to create metaphorical meaning without compromising its other perceived qualities. Water as a concrete symbol can have its metaphoric meanings elaborated and used differently among different Mountain Ok groups in Highland Papua New Guinea or it can take on different meanings in different ritual contexts (Barth 1987). Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1974) similarly stresses the multivocality of symbols in ritual contexts. Despite this quality, he argues that their referents tend to polarize between physiological phenomena (e.g. blood, milk, semen, birth, death, coitus) and normative values (e.g. reciprocity, generosity, obedience, respect), which are themselves linked to principles of social organization (matriliny, patriliny, age-grade organization, kinship, etc.). The drama of ritual action metaphorically links the poles of physiology (the 'orectic' pole) and cultural norms and values. In the process the normative referents

become charged with emotional significance and the biological elements ennobled.

Ortner (1972) distinguishes between what she terms summarizing and elaborating symbols. The former have focusing power, drawing together referents, intensifying experience. They are synthetic and collapse experience into a perceived sense of wholeness. Most traditional sacred symbols such as the cross in Christianity or emblems such as a national flag are examples. The metaphorical meanings invoked may principally be of an emotive kind (e.g. the flag as invoking senses of patriotism and national unity). Elaborating symbols permit the ordering or sorting out of experience and action, linking together disparate domains through an analogic logic. They are vehicles for sorting out complex feelings and ideas so that they may be communicated to others: 'they may have primarily conceptual elaborating power; that is they are valued as a source of categories for conceptualizing the order of the world. Or they may have primarily action elaborating power; that is, they are valued as implying mechanisms for successful social action' (Ortner 1972: 1,340). Ortner terms symbols with a capacity for conceptual elaboration as root metaphors. Their mode of operation is likening many aspects of experience through the symbol itself providing common sets of categories for conceptualizing different experiences. These root metaphors may be contrasted with symbols that facilitate particular patterns of social action (in Ortner's terminology 'key scenarios'). This distinction between thought-directed core symbols and action-directed ones, and that between elaborating and summarizing symbols is, of course, relatively arbitrary. Any particular symbol may have different degrees of synthetic or elaborating power and the capacity to link together different areas of thought and life, or to direct action.

To return to the Baktaman case, dew, pig fat, fur and hair are all metaphorically linked as symbols of growth and increase. Growth and increase are processes whose significance the Baktaman try to grasp through these material metaphors and through repeated ritual acts such as dew rubbing and fur burning. Dew (a miracle: water that grows spontaneously on the leaves of the forest) and pig fat (a symbol of wealth and well-being) are rubbed on the body of the initiate. Fur that grows on marsupials is identified with taro growth. Hair is identified with vegetation in general, and taro growth in particular. Through a linkage of these material metaphors, growth in pigs, taro and boys is conceived as one and the same process. The deeply physical aspects of concrete symbols are isolated by the Baktaman and given occult significance. There is a high degree of coherence. In initiations a substance or object with a widely recognized significance provides a metaphor for the transmission or conferment of this quality (in this case, growth, increase and fertility) and acts so as to embody an understanding of the real and hidden nature of things to the initiate.

By contrast, the conceptualization of pigs in Baktaman thought is highly ambiguous. Wild pigs are an obsession for the Baktaman. They ravage gardens and are dangerous. Baktaman men are constantly at war with them. Yet the boars impregnate domestic sows and are symbols of sexual potency and masculinity. Their meat is considered delicious and is highly valued. Pigs, because of the damage they create, are opposed conceptually to garden fertility. There are numerous taboos on entering gardens after eating pig meat. In Baktaman thought they become highly ambivalent and potent symbols with multivalent meanings and ambiguous metaphorical associations. They are models of forces both promoting and threatening fertility. Here the meanings of pigs, and the metaphors employed, clearly do not have the coherence shared by conceptualizations of dew, fat, fur and hair.

Conclusion: Metaphor and Ontology

> The domain of metaphor is constituted by these problems: the unstable distinction between the literal and the figurative, the crucial yet unmasterable distinction between essential and accidental resemblances, the tension between thought and linguistic processes within the linguistic system and language use. The pressure of these various concepts and forces creates a space . . . that we call metaphor. (Culler 1981: 207)

From the point of view of an empiricism and an objectivism that would deny the power of metaphor in the construction and interpretation of the social we apparently require the maintenance of a linguistic hygiene so that we can express ourselves clearly and unambiguously. But there is the essential irony that any attempt to *remove* that which Culler refers to as the 'space of metaphor' from our discourses can only be accomplished by metaphorical means. The only sensible alternative to a futile attempt to banish metaphor is to appreciate its significance in our writings, and as a mode of interpreting and understanding the world.

One of the very real problems for the interpretative social sciences has been the persistent tendency, in the majority of writings on the subject, to produce an analysis of metaphor on the basis of the often highly unusual and novel form it may take in literary and poetic works. These may well be

the most interesting of metaphors, in so far as they stretch the mind to understand them. A burgeoning cottage industry of literary critics and philosophers has much work to do in order to understand these peculiar metaphors. The resulting convoluted analyses may, however, do little to aid an understanding of the manner in which metaphor operates as part and parcel of the structuring of everyday life, the social world as mediated through language and material culture and cultural norms and values.

For Lakoff and others we have seen that metaphors become systematically linked in the functioning of the human mind, which – avoiding the mind-body dualism set up in empiricist positions – is itself embodied, i.e. directly implicated in bodily experience and action. Yet metaphors are culturally specific. There are relatively few universal quintessential human experiences of the world that can embody the mind. The alternative position put forward by Quinn (1991), amongst others, is that metaphors do not so much constitute understanding but instead become selected to fit into pre-existing and culturally shared models:

> metaphorical systems or productive metaphors typically do not structure understandings de novo. Rather, particular metaphors are selected by speakers, just because they provide satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings – that is, because elements and relations between elements in the source domain make a good match with elements and relations among them in a cultural model. (Ibid.: 65)

It would seem most sensible to develop an analysis of metaphor in language and culture in an ontology of bodily experience and perception that is understood as being dialectically linked to cultural understandings. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasizes the mediational character of the somatic dimension of human cognition and existence, explicitly developing a parallel between physical embodiment and the 'incarnational' quality of linguistic meaning in and through the metaphoric use of speech (Merleau Ponty 1962; see discussion in Gill 1991). The body is the ground or anchor by means of which we locate ourselves in the world, perceive and apprehend it. The centre of our own existence is always our body, as an axis from which spatiality and temporality are orientated: the human body *inhabits* space and time (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 138). Rather than mirroring the world, speech can be conceived as an extension of the human body in the world, a kind of artefact, by means of which we extend ourselves in the world, gain knowledge of it and alter it. Metaphor is an essential part of this process. Cognition is essentially a process of seeing something *as* something and this is the core of metaphorical understandings. Seeing

something as something is grounded in culturally mediated bodily experiences. As Johnson puts it, 'concrete bodily experience not only constrains the "input" to the metaphorical projections but also the nature of the projections themselves, that is, the kinds of mappings that can occur across domains' (Johnson 1987: xv). Structures of bodily experience work their way up into abstract meanings, embodied imagination. The body, culture and metaphor act so as to constitute each other. Contextualizing both metaphor and a metaphorical human mind in this manner, it may be possible to avoid the inherent danger of what Culler refers to as the 'tropological inflation of tropes' (Culler 1981: 202), an unhelpful form of idealism in which the entire world becomes a tropic form in which both culture and language become reduced to nothing more than an endless play of tropes.

There is no necessity to grant analytical primacy to either an originary metaphorically structured human mind, or to sets of non-metaphorical cultural understandings adapting metaphors within a pre-existing framework functioning somehow prior to metaphor. Lakoff, Johnson, Gibbs and others have argued convincingly for a natural reflex to think metaphorically. Accepting this as an attribute of the human mind, the most interesting questions are those to do with the way in which a mind, with this propensity, becomes articulated, through cultural experience, to produce particular kinds of metaphorical links within historically determinant and determined social circumstances.

An analysis of metaphor grounded in the solid domain of material culture, the subject of the next chapter, may go some way to redress the ever-present tendency towards an idealism present in a great deal of contemporary metaphor theory. By taking metaphor out of language and into artefacts, we may hope to appreciate its significance in a rather different manner.