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METAPHOR AS A SEMIOTIC KEY IN VISUAL POETICS

Key words: metaphor, message, semiotic key, meaning, visual art

Analyzing the contexts of metaphor's application in the fine/visual arts, this paper explores its essential properties through the applicability of linguistic and artistic theories. Drawing on some of the most significant hypotheses addressing the notion, this paper anticipates the hypothesis that *metaphor* is a *semiotic key* for constructing *meaning* in the *visual arts*. Methodologically, the paper analyzes the aspects of the setting and poetic function of metaphor and procedures such as appropriation, intertext, recontextualization, and intermedia. The analyses are conducted transdisciplinarily, through the intersection of philosophical, linguistic, and artistic theories. The focus of the research is the hermeneutic approach to metaphor as a trope of similarity and a trope of deviation (Ricoeur; Henle), as a foreign body, and as an analogy (Aristotle; Ricoeur). Considered through all these insights and through the context of movement and transposition with generic potential (Lawler; Ricoeur), the process of metaphorization is located in a multi-

tude of examples from the fine arts: Matsys, Rembrandt, Dürer, Bruegel, Caravaggio, Goya, Homer, Duchamp, Picabia, Höch, Haussmann, and others.

Epistemology of the Term

The history of art bears witness to numerous artistic examples that specifically include metaphor in their artistic expression. This paper analyzes the applicability of transdisciplinary theories in hermeneutic interpretations of the semiotic methodology of metaphor in visual poetics.

One of the interpretations of the term “metonymy” [gr.: *metōnymia*] is related to its function in naming an object, person, or phenomenon with a pronounced mutual relationship between them, with some existing connection. Metaphor in its performative act means the use of words beyond their basic meaning (Минова-Ѓуркова, 2003: 95-96). Metaphor is key to creating meaning, and its power lies in the understanding of experience. Et-

ymologically, the term “metaphor” derives from the Greek word “metapherein” [meta + pherein], meaning “change” and “bear” or “carry.” Change occurs when the attributes of one thing are transferred to another through comparison, replacement, or interaction. The attributes become a filter that highlights, suppresses, or redefines associations. It serves as the carrier of the meanings associated with one thing and the associations linked to the other. Metaphor is contextually conditioned. It allows for a greater openness of meanings than literal representation (Feinstein, 1998: 136-138).

Paul Ricoeur’s eight studies (anticipated in 1971) set out *epistemological* research on the concept of metaphor. In fact, by analyzing the word, the sentence, and the discourse, he develops the transdisciplinarity of the concept through the aspects of rhetoric, semiotics, semantics, and hermeneutics. Depending on which artistic discipline (or transdiscipline) is in question, in the visual structure, the equivalents of these entities would be morphology, composition, and concept or genre determination, the structure of the work, and the context of placement/situating the concept. Based on the *theory of substitution*, metaphor is defined as a “trope of resemblance” with the function of *displacing* and *extending* the range of meaning of units (elements in the visual structure) (Ricoeur, 2004: 1). Ricoeur underlines Aristotle’s interpretation of the term as the application of a word that belongs to *something else*, as an *analogy*: “A metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing: either from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy” [μεταφορά δέ ἐστὶν ὀνόματος ἀλλοτρίου ἐπιφορά ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους

ἐπὶ εἶδος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶδους ἐπὶ τὸ γένος ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶδους ἐπὶ εἶδος ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον] (Aristotle, 1898: 76-78). In linguistic contexts, “lexis is the means by which metaphor is inserted” (Ricoeur, 2004: 13). Metaphor is determined in the context of movement and transposition with generic potential (according to Aristotle) (Ibid., 17).

Contextuality of the Setting: Poetic Function

Etymologically, “meta” + “phora” is based on movement [*kinêseis*] (Lawler, 1954: 148-158) depending on the location/context (Ricoeur, 2004: 18). Example: The white dove in the context of a bird illustration represents only one of the species, while the white dove in Christian iconography is associated with the descent of the spirit. In this case, symbol and metaphor overlap. Metaphor manifests itself at the level of the statement as a whole, focusing on the single element (Ricoeur, 2004: 3). To make it easier to understand how we can read images metaphorically, Feinstein suggests two main ideas: first, that metaphor is a general tool we can use through comparisons like analogy, simile, trope, metonymy, and synecdoche; and second, that metaphor is a way of thinking that we can access through signs. Meaning can be constructed as *either external* (idea, object, or situation) or *internal* (experience, feeling, or thought), or it can be an *interaction* between external and internal meanings. *Symbols* achieve their *communication* through *denotation* and *connotation* (one thing stands for another). She concludes that the

reading of art requires metaphorical interpretation (Feinstein, 1998: 123-127).

In Christian iconography, Christian symbols are spoken of more often than Christian metaphors. They are generally accepted, canonized, and repeated to produce the same meaning or to introduce an identical meaning into the chain of narrative. According to Goodman, “metaphor involves a change not only of range but also of realm” (Goodman, 1968: 72). He argues that “metaphor is a matter of teaching an old word new tricks—of applying an old label in a new way” and “a metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting,” concluding that “where there is a metaphor there is a conflict” (Ibid., 69). In fact, “representation depends upon a relationship among symbols and upon their use as denotative symbols” (Ibid., 227-228). The other figure that can find an applicable analogy in the context of interpreting visual poetics is the *trope*. Tropes are figures of *deviation* in which the meaning of a word departs from its lexically codified usage (Ricoeur, 2004: 2). Paul Henle explains metaphor as “a type of symbolism,” taking into account the distinction made by Charles Sanders Peirce between *symbolic* and *iconic* modes of signification. He states, “A sign is a symbol insofar as it signifies according to an arbitrary rule, insofar as it is a conventional sign. A sign is considered an icon when it signifies based on similarity. [...] Such a sign as a map is primarily iconic, although in such details as having special designations ... there is also a conventional and so symbolic element. [...] there is clearly an iconic element in metaphor” (Henle, 1958: 177). The parallel with visual poetics is in

his claim that the existence of an iconic element in metaphor means that the icon is not presented but described (Idem). The icon contains internal duality while simultaneously transcending it (Ricoeur, 2004: 223). Hence, the *poetic function* of metaphor is in “expanding the power of double meaning” (Ibid., 224).

Metaphor and Trope in Fine Art

The analysis of examples from fine art focuses on several specific works of art: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661); Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Apostles* (1526); Quentin Matsys, *The Moneylender and His Wife* (1514); Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559); Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ* (1602–04); Winslow Homer, *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865); Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819–1823).

The context of the trope of similarity and the transcontextuality of the element – the bearer of the metaphor – is recognized in the works of Rembrandt van Rijn and Albrecht Dürer. In *Self-Portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661) by Rembrandt van Rijn, the author takes on an anticipated scene, the certain execution of Saint Paul by sword (Eusebius, 1861: 6) according to the historicizations of the Holy Scriptures, contextualizing the iconographic reference (the hilt of the sword under the coat) through a metaphor – ‘what has begun will end with death’ (in the physical, but not in the semantic sense). The sheaf of paper in the context of the mission of Saint Paul here has a figurative meaning and can be identified as an attribute of the

writer of the Gospel as the equivalent of the writer of the pictorial scriptum – the work of Rembrandt van Rijn. The sword as a harbinger of the death of Saint Paul also appears in Dürer's work, *The Four Apostles* [*The Four Holy Men*] (1526), accompanied by a text in the footer – a translation of biblical passages by Martin Luther, manifesting a kind of warning and expression of spiritual inclination toward the Protestant Reformation.

In *The Moneylender and his Wife* (1514), the leading Antwerp master, Quentin Matsys, incorporates visual references that *metaphorically* contrast the secular and religious life of a Dutch family. Drawn to the financial aspect of life (money, scales), an indifference to the need for spiritual wealth (prayer book, candlestick) slowly emerges. But what do the scales and the book mean in this context? The scales are not only an object that weighs coins but also greed and the book is not only an object that serves for spiritual purification but also that which is abandoned because it is replaced by the material.

Netherlandish Proverbs (1559) by Pieter the Elder Bruegel contains a representation of numerous *iconographic references* that, when placed in the context of the 'proverb', take on a *new* visual meaning (e.g., he shoots one arrow after another but hits nothing). Illustrating around one hundred and twelve proverbs, Bruegel depicts the absurdity of human actions and the folly that prevails over reason.

In *The Entombment* (1602-03), Caravaggio depicts Christ's right hand touching the angularly inclined stone slab [Psalms 117:21], metaphorically

signifying the cornerstone of the Church and the Christian religion.

The Veteran in a New Field (1865) by Winslow Homer is a painting depicting the 'new field' after the American Civil War (1861-1865), fought between the North and the South. In this painting, Homer metaphorically illustrates the transition from war to peace and the veteran's change of occupation, as he now works in the grain fields that were once a site of devastation and death during the war. The grain (wheat) here appears in the context of salvation and renewal. The meaning of the painted elements is twofold, with the emphasis more on the meaninglessness of warfare, since after death there will be nothing more to reap.

One of the fourteenth *Black Paintings* in the Quinta del Sordo (1820-1823) by Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son* [*Saturno devorando a un hijo*] (1819-23), has several interpretations. The frescoes painted in oil on the walls of the house of the deaf man (Goya) were transferred to canvas in 1973. Depicting a metaphorically understood cannibalistic tradition, the narrative of the painting shows that Saturn or Chronos [anc. gr.: Χρόνος] almost always actually devours his sons whenever they try to take on a life of their own. The time required for artistic creation can be a disturbing factor when considering autobiographical chronography in relation to personal beliefs and the need to fully express one's creative drive, highlighting the darker aspects of romantic art. Here, 'time' through the figure of the cruel Saturn can be interpreted as a bridge from personification to metaphor at the level of the whole picture.

According to Rogelio Buendia's interpretation, Saturn is a *metaphor* for absolutist Spain, which devours its children (Buendia, 1990: 18). According to Ricoeur, *metaphor* is a kind of bridge of exchange between *code* and *message*, and the properties of metaphor rely on the code, on its polysemy (Ricoeur, 2004: 141-142). Somewhat earlier, in *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797-98), part of the series of engravings *Los Caprichos*, Goya anticipates the metaphor of the tormenting thoughts of the artist that paralyze the creative process, the artist's reason attacked by owls (stupidity) and bats (ignorance) – a combination of symbols in the chain of the narrative. Throughout these works, Goya nevertheless highlights nightmares, imagination, and emotions as aspects of the Romantic spirit, along with the erotic, the macabre, the horror, and the fantastic.

Metaphor as *Borrowing*: Appropriation, Intertext, Recontextualization, Intermedia

As Ricoeur states, Aristotle's understanding of the function of metaphor is the formulation of a riddle through a gesture of *deviation* [παρὰ τὸ κύριον] from everything that is not ordinary, ornamental, invented/forged, extended, or abbreviated (Ricoeur, 2004: 19; Aristotle, 1898: 82; Aristotle, 1995: 108).

According to the *theory of substitution*, in metaphor the notion of *alien/foreign* is not simply a substitute for something else but has the property of *double alienation* because it does not stand in place of a metaphorical but in place of a non-met-

aphorical element: “as a present but borrowed ... and as a substitute for an absent” (Ricoeur, 2004: 20). Aristotle's *allotrios* is articulated through deviation, borrowing, and substitution as a principle (Ibid., 21).

Metaphor as borrowing implies a multitude of artistic procedures in the context of the visual arts, including the gestures of appropriation, intertext, recontextualization, and intermedia. Although Dadaist practices are based on contradiction, simultaneity, and coincidence, a significant number of them demonstrate a deliberate application of the methods of metaphorical borrowing. In this context, we can include *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912), *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912), *The Bride* (1912), and Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1915-23). *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) is inspired by an analysis of movement based on photographic research (linear elements of figures – a man or a galloping horse; simplified anatomy). The human figure, here decomposed into cubist elements, does not have the function of depicting a specific person after whom the act is made, but rather metaphorically anticipates the idea of art put into the function of the mind, together with the ideas of the way of creating a new, unconventional display of the contents. This is also the case with *Chocolate Grinder (No. 1)* (1913), as an illustration of the opinion that any contact with traditional painting should be avoided. Representing a mechanical drawing, Duchamp deviates from any pictorial convention related to taste (good or bad). This practice of provoking taste continues with his ready-mades: *Bi-*

cycle Wheel (1913), *Bottle Rack* (1914), and *Fountain* (1917), especially with the last work, in which an everyday object is taken (selected) and placed in an artistic context. The naming of the work, together with its physical materiality, is in conjunction with the original context of both the title (fountain) and the utilitarian function of the object (urinal). *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23) contains a mechanized representation of an erotic act, with the function of each element in the glass precisely described – the bride at the top and the grooms below. The upper part depicts a *bride and the bride's clothes*. The upper part depicts the region of the Gilled Cooler, which contains insulating plates, a horizon, the Milky Way (or Blossoming), draft pistons (or nets), and nine shots. The lower part depicts nine malic molds, a cuirassier, a gendarme, a flunkey, a department-store delivery boy, a busboy, a priest, an undertaker, a station master, a policeman, capillary tubes, the region of the waterfall, a water mill, a chocolate grinder, sieves, and oculist witnesses. *The Bride* and *The Blossoming* in the upper part are free organic constructions, with contours taken from photographs. *Nine Malic Molds – The Bachelors* are presented as anthropomorphic cylinders showing passion for the bride. The erotic act takes place by filling the cylinders with an invisible gas, which turns the mill wheel below them, inducing the rotation of the chocolate mill. The gas that expands in the cone-shaped sieves is symbolic of the bachelor's desire to transform the bride into a liquid that expands toward the upper right corner. The liquid passes through the three oculist witnesses in the upper part. *The bachelors* direct their

blows toward the square holes of the *draft pistons* (or nets). The holes in the right side are shot into the void, meaning that the act of interaction remains unfulfilled. Duchamp abandons the true nature of the human body, transforming the organic into the mechanized, with human flesh replaced by pipes, valves, and cylinders. The term “mechanomorph” was coined to explain this Duchampian transformation.

Francis Picabia's portrait *291, nos. 5–6 (deluxe edition)* (1915) takes up Duchamp's iconography of machines as emblems and ironies of expression, creating a series of machine portraits in a “mechanomorphic style.” *291, nos. 5–6 (deluxe edition)* (1915) depicts Stieglitz as a broken harmonica of a camera, with a loose car brake and a roller gearbox, as a metaphor for the lack of interest in American experimental art. The Gothic lettering and the title itself confirm the conceptual, heraldic form of the portrait while also setting up a witty contrast between the old mechanized parts and traditional heraldry. Raoul Hausmann's three-dimensional collage *Mechanical Head: Spirit of Our Age* (1919) metaphorically suggests that the human being is reduced to a robot without reason and without direction from his will. Hannah Höch's photomontage *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919–1920) uses elements – photographic materials – extracted from one context and placed in a new one, with a new anticipated meaning. The inspiration for this photomontage comes from the chaos after the First World War, showing the leaders of the Weimar Republic in the upper right corner (anti-Dadaist) (e.g., Kaiser Wilhelm); the danc-

er Niddy Impekoven in the center throwing a bottle into the air; a depiction of Käthe Kollwitz symbolizing the protest spirit; and gears and wheels (technology). The opening line of the title *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife...* could have both a literal and figurative meaning, the former referring to the act of cutting out fragments from newspapers and the latter to the cutting up of society and culture – the fragmentation of the spirit. The kitchen knife is also a tool belonging to women at the time, alluding to the rarity of women's roles in artistic and even social processes. In the section labeled *Dadaisten* is Hach Hoch, Raoul Hausmann; the map of countries in Europe – synonymous with women's rights – literally shows the countries that had that right. Also shown are George Grosz and Wieland Herzfelde; Lenin; Johannes Baader; communist leader Karl Radek; art critic and writer Theodore Daubler; Einstein (with the slogan “He, he, young man, Dada is not an art trend”); Karl Liebknecht; and Rosa Luxemburg (with the slogan “Join Dada”). The entire composition serves to propagate Dadaism, not only as an artistic alternative but also as a *metaphor* for the liberating and progres-

sive, rebellious spirit during the oppression and repression of the intellect in post-war Germany.

Interpreting the art of the Dadaists, Herbert Read points out that the sculptures, collages, and paintings of Jean Arp, Kurt Schwitters, and Max Ernst are conceived according to a method of assembling found objects in a meaningful relationship to create a kind of *plastic metaphor*, identifying it with *the power of metaphor* in poetry. According to Read, this method also appears in surrealist sculpture as a continuity between Dadaism and surrealism (Read, 1964: 153-154). If the metaphor does not carry the *meaningful code* (the *bearer* of meaning), then it has only ornamental (decorative) value (Ricoeur, 2004: 20). The artistic examples in this transdisciplinary research and hermeneutic interpretation suggest that, through visual methodological procedures, *metaphor* is not just a replacement or borrowing but a certain *coding* of the *visual language* in whose structure the code is extracted from the placement of the element – the bearer of meaning within the framework of the *concept*.

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Натали Рајчиновска-Павлеска

Метафората како семиотички клуч во визуелните поетика (Резиме)

Анализирајќи ги контекстите на примена на метафората во ликовните/визуелните уметности, овој труд ги истражува нејзините суштински својства преку применливоста на лингвистичките и уметничките теории. Црпејќи од некои од најзначајните хипотези што се занимаваат со поимот, овој труд ја антиципира хипотезата дека *метафората* е *семиотички клуч* за конструирање *значење* во *визуелните уметности*. Методолошки, трудот ги анализира аспектите на поставувањето и поетската функција на метафората и процедурите, како што се апропријација, интертекст, реконтекстуализација и интермедија. Анализите се спроведуваат трансдисциплинарно, преку пресекот на филозофските, лингвистичките и уметничките теории. Фокусот на истражувањето е херменевтичкиот пристап кон метафората како тропа на сличност и тропа на отстапување (Рикер; Хенле), како туѓо тело и како аналогија (Аристотел; Рикер). Разгледан низ сите овие сознанија и низ контекстот на движење и транспозиција со генерички потенцијал (Јолер; Рикер), процесот на метафоризација е лоциран во мноштво примери од ликовната уметност: Матсис, Рембрант, Дирер, Бројгел, Караваџо, Ѓоја, Хомер, Дишан, Пикабија, Хех, Хаусман и други.

Клучни зборови: метафора, порака, семиотички клуч, значење, визуелна уметност

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