

The Image of Thought: Against Cognitive Theory

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In the history of writing about the attributes of mind, the concept of the “image” has assumed priority, time and again, as the primary mode of cognition. From St Augustine’s “storehouse of images” through to the “movie-in-the-brain” account of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, the image returns as a real presence in figuring the prereflective conditions for thinking and, by extension, writing. It has always been imposed as an important attribute of thought because it leads the thinking subject back to the authentic conditions of its possibility: common-sense processes of recognition, referencing, and representation; as such, it demarcates the ground zero of cognitive deployment. Spinoza, following a long philosophical tradition of rendering cognition in visual terms, elects to retain “the customary words” in his *Ethics*: “the affections of the human Body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the figures of things. And when the Mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines” (465). Yet he is careful to contain the fallout of his linguistically expedient usage by emphasizing the distinct modes that characterize thought, language, and representation (the mind’s “imaging” of external bodies). Thought is not strictly image-based; it consists, rather, in *ideas*. The philosophical prejudice that regards ideas as “images which are formed in us from encounters with bodies” cannot get past the view of ideas as “mute pictures on a panel” (486). This pictorial notion is firmly rejected by Spinoza: “an idea (since it is a mode of thinking) consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words.” Ideas are “not the images that are formed at the back of the eye (and, if you like, in the middle of the brain), but concepts of Thought” (484). Such concepts are really a function of affirmation and negation rather than any faculty the mind may have for “imaging” traces of bodily experience.

Deleuze and Guattari, whose debt to Spinoza is well known, also speak of the image in its relation to thought. Like Spinoza, they too are careful to distance the image from any notion of figurative reproduction. In their final collaborative work, *What is Philosophy?*, the “image of thought” emerges not as a figure but as a kind of event horizon, a plane of immanence that lays out an indivisible milieu for the distribution of concepts:

The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of

what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought.... What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement or the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought (37).

This "infinite movement" of thought does not refer to fixed reference points in order to measure its variations, for the image of thought does not orientate those concepts that traverse it in terms of spatio-temporal coordinates (the plane of immanence is rather more Spinozist than Cartesian).¹ In Deleuze and Guattari's account of philosophy as pure concept creation, the image of thought lays out the pre-philosophical conditions that ensure philosophy's ongoing renewal. It is not a "program, design, end, or means" but rather "the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialization, the foundation on which it creates its concepts" (*Philosophy*, 41).

Deleuze and Guattari's image of thought accommodates complementary, if distinct, movements in their project of philosophical constructivism—namely, "the creation of concepts and the laying out of a plane" (*Philosophy*, 36). There is nothing prefigured in the founding planar "cut," nor is there a fixed schema for coordinating the absolute movement of emerging concepts. If we turn to *A Thousand Plateaus*, we find that the image of thought is not named as such; it does surface, however, as the "plane of consistency" that cuts across multiplicities in order to bring them into relations of becoming-other.² Despite first appearances, then, Deleuze and Guattari's image of thought is no image at all, but rather the development of a project first outlined in *Difference and Repetition*, undertaking, with "no ally but paradox," the destruction of "a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense" (*Difference*, 131).

According to Deleuze, the pervasiveness of this Image, with a genealogy stretching back to the ancient Greeks, springs from the assumption that "there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth or an affinity with the true, under the double aspect of a *good will on the part of the thinker* and an *upright nature on the part of thought*" (*Difference*, 131). Such a view informs the philosophic enterprise at the moment of its inception, for error thereby becomes an instance of misrecognition. Anyone who cares to protest against this authentic image of Thought is confronted with the regulative idea that no one can deny: the native good sense common to all thinkers. "It is *in terms of* this image," Deleuze insists, "that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think" (131).³ For Deleuze, then, the project of a philosophy to come must find the conditions of its beginning through a "rigorous struggle with this Image," not by way of projecting another image

capable of supplanting the orthodoxy (and thus provide a new model for judging conformities and resemblance), but rather by "discover[ing] its authentic repetition in a thought without image" (132).

Descartes's Error and the New Dualism

In a period when linguistics and philosophy are increasingly looking towards developments in the cognitive neurosciences for inspiration, the concept of the "image schema" has emerged with renewed force as the natural, common-sensical element of thought and the old presuppositions of metaphysics targeted in *Difference and Repetition* have made way for a new orthodoxy: the structural invariants of a common biological endowment. Damasio states the position somewhat baldly in his recent study of the cognitive processes subserving consciousness:

Language—that is, words and sentences—is a translation of something else, a conversion from nonlinguistic images which stand for entities, events, relationships and inferences. If language operates for the self and for consciousness in the same way that it operates for everything else, that is, by symbolizing in words and sentences what exists first in a nonverbal form, then there must be a nonverbal self and a nonverbal knowing for which the words 'I' or 'me' are the appropriate translations, in any language.... The idea that self and consciousness would emerge *after* language, and would be a direct construction of language, is not likely to be correct. Language does not come out of nothing (*Feeling*, 107–8).

Damasio's study of language, consciousness, and the body addresses the legacy of Descartes's error, that is, the metaphysical dualism that so thoroughly permeates modern thinking about the relations between mental and physical phenomena. Yet it remains an open question as to whether technological innovations in the neurosciences have, together with contemporary theories of cognitive functioning, laid to rest the old ghost of Cartesian essentialism. Indeed, Damasio's common-sense view that nothing will come of nothing resurrects Descartes's own thoughts on the relations between thinking and being in the Third Meditation, where he notes that "the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing" (29). Nothing, in the scheme of a philosophical tradition linking Damasio with the target of his critique in *Descartes' Error*, cannot body forth something any more than the idea of perfection could issue from an imperfect creator.

Yet while the doubts so eloquently advanced by Descartes in his *Meditations* have been transposed by cognitive theories of mind and language, it seems the same hard problems remain. The problem of consciousness, in Damasio's view, revolves around two interrelated puzzles: how the physical system of the brain engenders images of an object (the "movie-in-the-brain" effect) and how, in parallel processes, a sense of self in the act of knowing emerges (*Feeling*, 9). While this problem remains to be worked out in detail, many cognitive theorists remain confident that the answer lies in progressively refining the gradations of biological processes that intervene between physical systems and the "first person" mental images that make up our conscious experience. While Damasio acknowledges the difficulty underwriting his biological and evolutionary account of consciousness, he insists that this difficulty should not be overstated:

When I say that images *depend on* and *arise from* neural patterns or neural maps, rather than saying they *are* neural patterns or maps, I am not sliding into inadvertent dualism.... I am simply saying that we cannot characterize yet all the biological phenomena that take place between (a) our current description of a neural pattern, at varied neural levels, and (b) our experience of the image that originated in the activity within the neural map. There is a gap between our knowledge of neural events ... and the mental image whose mechanisms of appearance we wish to understand. There is a gap to be filled by not yet identified but presumably identifiable physical phenomena (*Feeling*, 322–3).

For Damasio, the underlying biological basis of consciousness is something to be asserted, yet in the absence of any convincing explanatory theory his hypothesis remains as much an article of faith as Descartes's theory of distinct essences. The proposition that there is an intimate relationship between observable patterns of neural activation and subjective experience is not seriously in issue; yet simply re-casting consciousness as an emergent property, or "epiphenomenon," of physical systems does little to overcome the old problems.

Indeed, it is arguable that Descartes's own account of the mind-body complex was more alive to the difficulties of his essential disjunction than is sometimes acknowledged by his modern-day critics. In his Sixth Meditation, for example, we find the following observation:

Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as

it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken. Similarly, when the body needed food or drink, I should have an explicit understanding of the fact, instead of having confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain and so on are nothing but confused modes of thinking which arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body (56).

The language of this passage is remarkable not only for the way in which it compounds the idea of an embodied self, but also because it appears to anticipate Wittgenstein's analysis, over three centuries later, of the fallacy inherent in the expression "I know how I feel." In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein argues that "It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean—except perhaps that I *am* in pain?" (89). I cannot be said to learn of my sensations, in other words; I simply have them. If it were otherwise, we ought to be able to attribute some modicum of sense to what is excluded by the proposition "I am in pain and I know it," that is, "I am in pain and I don't know it." The truth is, writes Wittgenstein, "it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself" (89). The whole cloud of philosophical confusion on this point is thus "condensed into a drop of grammar" (222).⁴

The implication of this insight, articulated in very different ways by Descartes and Wittgenstein, does not deter Damasio from proposing a tripartite structure organizing our embodied mind: an emotion, the *feeling* of that emotion, and *knowing* we have a feeling of that emotion (*Feeling*, 8, 37). The distinction may be a fine one, but for Damasio the gap between feeling and knowing separates non-conscious organic processes from the core consciousness of a knowing subject (81). Yet "simply saying," as Damasio does, that there is a gap nature has already filled (though we cannot say how), or that we can know the feeling of an emotion, is to say too simply. It is indeed something that can only be said on the basis that the mental conversion into language disfigures the continuity of the original image in ways we can simply take for granted, that while language remains always a translation, the experiential phenomenon of the image itself is directly emergent from neural patterning.

Metaphor and the Grammar of Thought

The wider implications of cognitive neuroscience for the philosophy of mind and language are still being worked through. Unsurprisingly, there is still no clear consensus on how best to accommodate the results of hard science within the framework of philosophical or linguistic inquiry. If there is one theme that joins cognitive theory across its various disciplines, however, it is a common faith in the mind's faculty of *figuration*, a view in which language is regarded as a strictly secondary phenomenon.⁵ The importance of language for informing our extended consciousness is not disputed by cognitivism's loose coalition of scientists, linguists, and psychologists; however, the gap between simply saying and simply seeing has been reimagined on the basis of a bridgeable divide. It is in this spirit that we are enjoined to imagine what lies behind language, to reach beyond the abstract textures of a disembodied syntax to the organic, prefigured patterns that structure our language habit. The works of many leading figures in what might loosely be referred to as the "cognitive school"—most notably, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner—comprise a concerted attempt to explain systematically the role of image-schematic representations in the function of mind. In the course of figuring the emergent patterns of an embodied, biologically endowed mind, theory has returned to that figure par excellence: metaphor.

Contemporary theories of mind and language have increasingly tended to promote metaphor as a key term in the cognitive protocols that structure thought and language. As much a reaction to the excesses of poststructuralism as an attempt to engage with the results of modern neuro-imaging techniques, cognitive theory has sought to return language from the *mise en abyme* problematic of signs in abeyance and realign it as the common-sense attribute of a bounded and evolved mind. On this neo-Darwinian model it is metaphor that constitutes the true grammar of our thought, arranging basic image schemas into increasingly complex acts of narrative imagining. According to Lakoff, "The generalisations governing metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought: they are general mappings across conceptual domains" ("Contemporary Theory," 203). Metaphor is not to be thought of as an exotic device restricted to rhetorical or poetic language, but a generalized index of the basic conceptual processes subserving everyday language production.

Analyzing language in terms of this metaphorology gathers up the complex relations ordering linguistic construction into increasingly general primitives. The cognitive school overlays a sprawling taxonomy of metaphor across language, in which particular instances of language use

are assigned a place in the increasingly generalized groups that order any further distributions. It is an enterprise anticipated by Bachelard's early conception of a "metapoetics" in which the projection of poetic images might be specified, in a strictly mathematical way, in terms of *groups* of metaphors. "But it remains no less," he writes in *Lautréamont*, "that a metapoetics will have to undertake a classification of metaphors, and that sooner or later it will have to adopt the only essential procedure of classification, the determination of groups" (quoted in Derrida, "White Mythology," 264).

The cognitive school has, in effect, extended Bachelard's project by sketching the lineaments of a vast *Systema Naturae* across the field of thought and language, grouping the terms of its taxonomy according to a logic of generic resemblance. Euripides's account of Alcestis confronting the ferryman at the entrance to the Underworld, for example, particularizes the generic story of an agent carrying somebody off forever, which in turn is generated by a graded hierarchy of metaphorical projections leading from DEATH IS DEPARTURE back to the fundamental EVENTS ARE ACTIONS metaphor (Turner, *Literary Mind*, 105–6).⁶ Pursuing these figurative transformations from target to source leads one, with an astonishing degree of hygienic efficiency, from the strange configurations of a poetic encounter to the prefigured banality of ready-made image schemata.

Image schemata—fundamental, asemantic, and formally discrete cognitive representations—institute the project of metaphoric transformation, for they denote *that which is given to metaphor*. It is this assumed status that prompts Elizabeth Hart to define image schemata as "preconceptual, minimalist representations of nonvisual physical stimuli, contracted in our minds prior to and contributing to the development of our semantic categories" (8). These schemata establish a structural blueprint for the generation of language, which arises by subjecting image-schematic representations to a complex, structurally determined process of projection, blending, and metaphoric transference.

Crucially, this account seeks to eliminate both Chomsky's insistence on language as the product of a transformational grammar—where it is the objective relations holding between variables in the language system, and not speculations as to the value conferred by some extra-linguistic referent, that is the proper object of inquiry—and Derrida's account of language as an effect of *différance*, where the movement of signification is never anchored upon some prior, originary presence. The use of the image schema is a crucial element of the cognitive school's program, as it grounds the pre-reflexive forms of thought beyond the purview of language while at the same time conferring priority on the twin protocols of resemblance and recognition. It therefore stands as the non-linguistic

limit against which analysis finally founders, unable to decompose further the elemental, pre-philosophical structure of language and thought. Turner's thesis in *The Literary Mind* is that "the image schema itself needs no translation: it is meaningful, when activated, as corresponding to [a] category" (24).⁷

The measure of strict correspondence between conceptual structures and the image schemata governing them is dubbed the "Invariance Principle," a regulative standard formulated by Turner in the following terms:

Conceptual projection, which has as one of its fundamental activities the projection of image-schematic structure from a source input to a target input, shall not result in an image-schematic clash in the target. Invariance is a global constraint to be satisfied in building and projecting target, generic, and source spaces (*Literary Mind*, 108–9).

In effect, metaphor becomes the true syntax of thought and language, a model in which the abstract symbols of Chomsky's transformational grammar are displaced in favor of image-schematic primitives, "already meaningful when activated," which can be stereoscoped according to a logic of structural invariance.

Diagrammatic Reasoning and the Shape of Events

The notion of structural invariance, which lies at the very heart of cognitive theory, thus takes on the aspect of a universal principle in our conceptual engagement with the world. "The question of structural invariants," Deleuze and Guattari observe dryly in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "... is essential to linguistics. It is what allows linguistics to claim a basis in pure scientificity, be nothing but science ... safe from any supposedly external or pragmatic factor" (92). It is no surprise, then, to encounter Turner's succinct statement of this position in *Death is the Mother of Beauty*: "Science models systems so that we can recognize, explain, and predict them. The conceptual metaphors implicit in our language are a kind of science"—a kind of science, moreover, explicitly opposed to that of Chomskian linguistics (194). According to Chomsky, "Human language is based on an elementary property that also seems to be biologically isolated: the property of discrete infinity, which is exhibited in its purest form by the natural numbers 1, 2, 3, ..." (3). This discrete and open-ended variation is a condition of grammatical systems, which take up the elements of language and order them through various syntactic protocols—parsing, displacement, transformation, and so on. The grammar of cognitive theory, on the other hand, finds its true extension in the

diagram: the line which passes through the *grámma*, flattening and linking the atomic elements of syntax in order to present the smooth formations of image-schematic structures.

The issue of diagrammatic representations is taken up by Umberto Eco in his recent study of Kant's "implicit semiotics," where he argues that "figuring in order to understand and understanding by figuring is crucial to the Kantian system..." (*Kant*, 80). By using the verb "to figure," Eco draws on the double sense of "delineating a structural framework" and knowing or believing something (80). The function of this figuration is introduced by way of Kant's transcendental schema: the mediating element that enables the comprehension of an object under a concept. While Eco takes care to distance the schema from any suggestion of a "mental image," it is clear that the danger he has in mind is some crude notion of photographic representation. In fact the schema, which is a "product of the imagination," does constitute a kind of imaging or figuring, though one Eco aligns with Wittgenstein's *Bild*: "a proposition that has the same form as the fact it represents, in the same sense in which we talk of an 'iconic' relation for an algebraic formula, or of a 'model' in the technical-scientific sense" (82). By reading between the lines of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Eco argues that "thinking is not just the application of pure concepts deriving from a previous verbalization, it is also the entertaining of diagrammatic representations" (83).

Eco's account of diagrammatic representations and their function in the transcendental schema is at pains not to overstate the degree of correspondence between an object of perception and its cognitive figure. In this respect, his reference to an "iconic" relation serves as a reminder of the affinities between his conception of understanding by way of figuring and C. S. Peirce's original theory of diagrammatic reasoning. For Peirce, any process of deductive reasoning requires an element of observation, as "deduction consists in constructing an icon or diagram the relations of whose parts shall present a complete analogy with those of the parts of the object of reasoning, of experimenting upon this image in the imagination, and of observing the result..." (*Collected Papers*, 213). Diagrams are used to represent relations among parts in a series in order that inferences can be made and propositions tested, for example that under certain conditions the course of a river must follow a certain direction. In its most basic formulation, writes Peirce in his "Prolegomena for an Apology for Pragmatism," "A diagram is an icon of a set of rationally related objects" (317).

There has been considerable controversy over the concept of "iconicity," with some semioticians tending to conceive of icons or diagrams in primarily visual terms.⁸ Peirce himself, however, did not restrict the diagram to a purely visual mode, noting that it "has got to be either audi-

tory or visual, the parts being separated in the one case in time, in the other in space" (*Collected Papers*, 259). He also takes care to distance the diagram from the object to which it relates, observing that "Diagrams and diagrammatoidal figures are intended to be applied to the better understanding of states of things.... Such a figure cannot, however, show what it is to which it is intended to be applied..." (260). The diagram alone cannot, in other words, identify elements of its composition with elements of the object to which it refers.⁹

Returning to the scene of current debate, a far more direct version of diagrammatic reasoning is presented by George Lakoff's thesis that image-schematic patterns present themselves through an *unmediated* perception, a perception in which the logic of relations between elements of the image schema is coextensive with the act of seeing. In his essay "A Suggestion For a Linguistics With Connectionist Foundations," Lakoff makes the following claim:

One of the most interesting properties of image-schemas is that they have built-in logics. For example, BOUNDED REGION schemas, also called CONTAINER-schemas, have essentially a Boolean logic. Consider two CONTAINER-schemas, A and B, such that A is in B, and an object X is in A. We 'see' instantly, without doing any logical deduction, that X is in B. All we need to do is shift our focus to the relationship between X and B (302).

By "focusing" on the concrete pictorial representation of the relations defining A, B, and X, Lakoff eliminates any abstract process of symbolic inference in favor of an *immediate* intuition of the relationship between X and B. Indeed, this property of logical inherence is not confined to the example of simple container schemas: "In general, image-schemas have logics built into their topological structures, and spatial inferences arise via the application of attentional mechanisms" ("Connectionist Foundations," 302).

If, as Lakoff insists, general mappings across conceptual domains are closely governed by a logic of metaphor, then it is the diagram that emerges as the mode of representation most directly amenable to the primary sense of the "I," of the subject's survey through the mind's eye. Claiming a fundamental correspondence between our cognitive topology and the structure of our language requires that both be referred to a third term, which then acts as a model for judging degrees of resemblance; hence the fixed form of the diagram, figure, or "shape." Why, asks Lakoff, is death often represented in terms of a devourer or destroyer rather than, say, an ice-cream salesman?

Destroying and devouring are actions in which an entity ceases to exist. The same is true of death. The overall shape of the event of death is similar in this respect to the overall shapes of the events of destroying and devouring. Moreover, there is a causal aspect to death: the passage of time will eventually result in death. Thus, the overall shape of the event of death has an entity that over time ceases to exist as the result of some cause. Devouring and destroying have the same overall event shape ("Contemporary Theory," 232).

But any perceived isomorphism between devouring and death comes after the event. There is nothing simply given in advance in the struggle to articulate our encounter with events in the world. Abstracting certain features of two events in order to posit a relation of similarity merely defers the question posed by Lakoff, raising the problem of why those aspects he mentions are given preference over other, no less compelling, differences. There is no necessary relation of correspondence enjoining different events by virtue of an a priori third term. The "event shape," however one cares to view such a concept, does not engineer the form of possible relations from on high. Rather, it takes up its place alongside the two events as one more term available for use.

Further, by positing the event shape, or image schema, as that which is given to thought prior to any process of intellection or understanding, cognitive theorists run up against the problem that any theory of metaphor is bound to encounter, a problem Derrida raises in acute form when he asks: "How are we to know what the temporalization and spatialization of a meaning, of an ideal object, of an intelligible tenor, are, if we have not clarified what 'space' and 'time' mean?" ("White Mythology," 227). In construing a *logos* or "meaning" in spatio-temporal terms, cognitivists get ahead of themselves, for "the general taxonomy of metaphors ... would presuppose the solution of important problems, and primarily of problems which constitute the entirety of philosophy in its history" (228).

A Parable on "Parables"

If the puzzle posed by cognitive linguists concerns the minimum conditions necessary to account for the emergence of our grammar, then to respond, as Turner does in *The Literary Mind*, "the cognitive ability to project image-schemata in terms of parable" (141) only serves to postpone the inquiry. In fact, cognitive science undertakes a kind of double-edged abdication in the field of theory: it is question-begging insofar as it subsumes, under the rubric of "parable" or "metaphor," those very pro-

cesses of semiotic transformation that it purports to explain, and it consigns the study of mind and language to a sterile search for pre-linguistic, prefigured images.

In effect, the cognitive school finds itself on the horns of that strange dilemma posed in Kafka's parable "On Parables." Addressing the common complaint that "the words of the wise are always merely parables and of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have," a man asked:

'Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.'

Another said: 'I bet that is also a parable.'

The first said: 'You have won.'

The second said: 'But unfortunately only in parable.'

The first said: 'No, in reality: in parable you have lost' (158).

This brief passage achieves its effect by silently anticipating a third participant in the unfolding dialogue: the reader. The twists and turns of the narrative play out the dilemma of this third, whose own habit of reading must struggle to fix the relations between Kafka's unfolding text and the fixed conventions of parable. Subsuming the narrative as a whole under the generic type "parable" is a strategy which "On Parables" seems openly to invite, a subsumption inevitably bent on arranging the two protagonists in "for" and "against" positions and thereby rendering the narrative in schematic terms. Yet this is an interpretation that the final line firmly resists by adding "parable" as yet another term alongside the existing "reality/parable" paradigm. In the second speaker's attempt to cover the field with parable, one term is necessarily excluded, for parable can never oversee those particular operations of which it appears as a highly mediated product. It is a point neatly summed up by Derrida in his survey of philosophy's impossible project: "If one wished to conceive and to class all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, one metaphor, at least, would always remain excluded, outside the system: ... the metaphor of metaphor" ("White Mythology," 219–20).

Thus, "On Parables" deftly eludes fixation in schematic terms by reminding the reader of the uncertain relations between the function of the term "parable" within Kafka's text and the function of parable as a generic convention. The passage moves in concentric circles from the original proposition ("If you only followed the parables you yourselves would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares") to the second speaker's attempted containment of this assertion by interpreting it as yet another parable. This strategy of containment is further framed by the reader's own response to the unfolding dialogue, a response that

parallels the second speaker by ordering the text in coherent terms through the generic conventions of parable. It is, however, a containment ambushed by the closing line. Kafka is able to achieve his effect because, in the end, parable denotes a type of relation rather than any represented term; it always remains external to the terms that it relates.¹⁰ Hence the pyrrhic victory of the second speaker, winning over reality at the cost of losing (in) parable.

In one sense Kafka's little text anticipates, in literary terms, the concept of a formal undecidability—the inside tendency of systems to remain open to an outside. Kurt Gödel, as is well known, framed his famous proofs on formally undecidable propositions in 1931, demonstrating that for any formal number system there exists a proposition the truth of which can be neither established nor refuted within the terms of the system. As a consequence, he was able to prove that any formally consistent system will include an arithmetically true proposition that cannot be derived from the terms of that system. Although the wider significance of Gödel's theorem beyond the field of numbers theory remains a contentious issue, it does serve as a powerful reminder of the uncertain relations between systems and those extra-systemic elements that necessarily inform them.

The Metaphysics of Metaphor

Gödel's own response to the startling implications of his theorem took the form of a renewed faith in Platonic idealism, believing that the intellect comes replete with a natural faculty for recognizing transcendent relations of truth. In a similar vein, cognitive theory, while struggling to distance itself from the Platonic image of thought, continues to underwrite its model of the embodied mind with what is, in the end, a thoroughly transcendent concept. Thus, Lakoff speaks not of an epistemology or a methodology, but rather an "ontology" of correspondences which determine the experiential possibilities open to the subject:

What constitutes the LOVE AS A JOURNEY metaphor is not any particular word or expression. It is the ontological mapping across conceptual domains, from the source domain of journeys to the target domain of love.... The mapping is conventional, that is, it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualizing love relationships ("Contemporary Theory," 208).

Lakoff takes care to deny the propositional nature of such metaphors despite the fact that they often take a propositional form, nor are they to

be thought of as inventions. Rather, they constitute the fixed conventions of our thought; they are structurally invariant mappings, in the mathematical sense, which "preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain" ("Contemporary Theory," 215).¹¹ The general theory of metaphor models these cross-domain mappings, and it does so on the premise that "the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another" (203).

The index of exchange regulating how one domain is conceived in terms of another remains, for all the talk of "directly emergent" or "ontological" correspondences, that of tropological *resemblance*. As Derrida points out, "Metaphor has always been defined as the trope of resemblance; not simply as the resemblance between a signifier and a signified but as the resemblance between two signs, one of which designates the other" ("White Mythology," 215). Cognitive science's project of articulating the mechanisms of mind in terms that overcome both the abstract propositionality of logical reasoning and the "disembodiment" of Chomsky's syntactical structures can never address the fundamental difficulty confronting its use of metaphor. "In its most impoverished, most abstract form," writes Derrida, "the limit would be the following: metaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme, a metaphysical concept" (219).

It is in this sense that the cognitive school really betrays the possibilities presented by developments in the cognitive neurosciences. Rather than oversee the final demise of a disembodied cogito, cognitive theory organizes the productive labor of an embodied mind in terms of a purely transcendent principle. Metaphor, an economy of resemblance circulating through the common nexus of image-schematic representations, cannot account for the origins of our thought and language as it participates in these compositions as one more concept available for use. "If language always seems to presuppose itself," write Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*,

if we cannot assign it a non-linguistic point of departure, it is because language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying.... The 'first' language, or rather the first determination of language, is not the trope or the metaphor but *indirect discourse*. The importance some have accorded metaphor and metonymy proves disastrous for the study of language. Metaphors and metonymies are merely effects; they are a part of language only when they presuppose indirect discourse (76-7).

In effect, metaphor has come to designate the overriding logic regulating syntheses in the linguistic and cognitive register; it is the grammar of our thought, underwritten by strict protocols of resemblance, identity, and structural invariance (the inference being that these protocols are the true a priori conditions of experience). It is in the context of this unholy alliance of metaphor and metaphysics that we surely hear the echo of Nietzsche's despairing fear: that we will never be rid of God while we continue to believe in grammar.

The model of ontological correspondence and structural invariance proposed by the cognitive school overlooks the real network of open-ended variation informing the embodied mind. In *The Pursuit of Signs*, Jonathan Culler canvasses the possibility of developing a theory of metaphor as *effect* rather than structure; "the study of metaphor," in other words, "should be a study of response" (208). However, the problematic nature of a study analyzing persuasion (rhetorical effect) rather than tropes (structured identity) is readily acknowledged by Culler, for "one can never construct a position from outside tropology from which to view it; one's terms are always caught up in the processes they attempt to describe" (209). Detailing the reader's production of a metaphorical reading would entail all the old problems of classification, including "distinguishing a metaphorical move from a metonymical move, essential from contingent relations, thought and perception from the mechanical operation of syntactic and phonological processes..." (209). Still, the orientation of Culler's inquiry does open the way for thinking metaphor in terms of an open-ended variation, for "a rhetoric focussed on persuasion rather than tropes will be engaged from the outset in an uncertain calculus, trying to account for effects of force which are never wholly predictable" (209). This is in part because "the figurative is the name we give to effects of language that exceed, deform, or deviate from the code; codifications of previous excesses, deformations, and deviations only create opportunities for new turns" (209).

The theory of metaphor furnished by the cognitive school, on the other hand, tends towards a thoroughgoing containment of unfolding deviations, as it refers theory back to a conventional and synchronic model of mind. If metaphor is effective by virtue of a conformity between "source" and "target" domains, then the issue of what possible deformities or creative mutations might yet arise within the genetic grammar of thought need never wrinkle philosophy's brow. To suggest, as Lakoff does, that "Abstract reasoning is a special case of image-based reasoning" ("Contemporary Theory," 229) overlooks the strange groping of the body making up its mind; it is a still-life conception of what it

means to think, one that discounts the improvised rhythm of an embodied mind in favor of certain prefigured structures of thought.

Opposed to this schematically invariant model is the form of open empiricism outlined by A. N. Whitehead and adopted by Deleuze: an understanding that "the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained; and the aim is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (*creativity*)" (*Dialogues*, vii).¹² Language, thought, and the body are engaged in an ongoing process of experiment, a process in which nothing is given in advance. In an important sense, then, novel productions of thought are pure mutations, the coming of which cannot be exhaustively re-read in the history of the subject and the prolongation of which depends less upon any measure of conformance than upon a trial of *use*. The cognitive school disciplines the improvised rhythm of productive variation, recasting it as the fixations of a mind geared towards formal operations of recognition and resemblance. The point, as Deleuze says in *Difference and Repetition*, is not to deny that recognition occupies a considerable part of our everyday lives, but "who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts?" (135).

The cognitive school's vision continues to exert a powerful appeal for many in the humanities, signaling a return from the heady pretensions of more recent French theory to the analytical sobriety of structure. It is a project extraordinarily ambitious in its reach, seeking not only to explain thought to itself but also to predict those forms it is capable of assuming. It structures image-schematic representations according to a grammar of metaphor, presenting both image schema and metaphor as primary attributes of an embodied mind. But the body suffers from being organized in this way, for structure, as Brian Massumi points out, "is the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self-consistent set of invariant generative rules" (220–1). The point is not simply to deny the claims of cognitive theory by exposing systemic weaknesses or inconsistencies; the system is in fact quite coherent on its own terms. More important is the way in which this alliance of metaphor and mind is symptomatic of a deeper betrayal, for cognitive theory broadly aligns itself with evolutionary science as well as certain promising developments in the cognitive neurosciences only to project some of the more radical implications of these fields in the form of an image they do not bear.

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Notes

1. "Spinoza was the philosopher who knew full well that immanence was only immanent to itself and therefore that it was a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Philosophy*, 48). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Spinoza's *Ethics* is described as the "great book of the BwO," body without organs being another name for "the *field of immanence* of desire, the *plane of consistency* specific to desire" (153–4).
2. "Far from reducing the multiplicities' number of dimensions to two, the *plane of consistency* cuts across them all, intersects them in order to bring into existence any number of multiplicities, with any number of dimensions. The plane of consistency is the intersection of all concrete forms" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 251).
3. Deleuze is targeting Descartes's famous observation at the beginning of his *Discourse on Method* that "Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world" (111).
4. Hume makes a similar point in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, where, after demonstrating the incoherence of "self" as a possible object of philosophical inquiry, he is led to a conclusion of "great importance"—namely, "that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties" (262).
5. See, for example, George Lakoff's claim in "Contemporary Theory of Metaphor" that "metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary" (203).
6. For Turner, the EVENTS ARE ACTIONS metaphor constitutes an "extremely fundamental" projection (*Literary Mind*, 26).
7. It should be stressed that the term "category" in cognitive theory bears no relation to Kant's categories as set out in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. For cognitive theorists, "category" may refer to any class of things conceived of as a recognizable class, and not as a singular instance of a member of a class.
8. This is Eco's tendency in *A Theory of Semiotics*, for example, though he revisits this issue in *Kant and the Platypus*, observing that in the cultural climate of his earlier work "he who uttered the word 'icon' was already

naturally anchored to the pictorial universe." This fact, Eco suggests, tended to derail debate on the subject, as the concept of the icon clearly encompassed "nonvisual experiences" as well (340, n. 5).

9. In considering a possible objection in the case of maps, Peirce argues that a map does not show localities "until the law of the projection is understood, nor even then unless at least two points on the map are somehow previously identified with points in nature. Now, how is any diagram ever to perform that identification?" (*Collected Papers*, 260).

10. I am drawing here on a point made by Deleuze in his essay "Hume," where he writes that "Hume's originality ... comes from the force with which he asserts that relations are external to their terms" (37).

11. This is Lakoff's formulation of the "Invariance Principle."

12. See also Deleuze's comment in *What is Philosophy?* that "The first principle of philosophy is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained" (7).