Chapter 6
'Primitive Language' – Theories of Metaphor

"Do you know what a symbol is? … Do you want to try to imagine how sacrifice first emerged?"[1] These two questions, posed by Gabriel to Clemens in a dialogue staged in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Gespräch über Gedichte" (Conversation on Poetry, 1904), initially seem to Clemens and the reader to have little to do with each other.[2] Yet Gabriel corrects our mistake by explaining that in the act of sacrifice, an animal is substituted for a human victim and that in like manner, the lyrical symbol takes the place of "a state of sensibility" (*ein Zustand des Gemüts*).[3] The experience of sacrifice, he claims, is based on the sacrificer himself dying "for a moment"[4] in the animal, and this momentary co-identity is the precondition for the substitution to function. The same is understood to hold for the lyrical symbol: sensibility dissolves in the symbol in such a way that the recipient understands its meaning immediately without being able to express it in words.

This remarkable theory of symbols is not as speculative as it might first seem. Rather, it is symptomatic of the trend around 1900 of basing theories of language and metaphor on the new disciplines of the human sciences, in particular ethnology and developmental psychology.[5] In these anthropological theories, metaphor was seen to derive from the ways of thinking and speaking exhibited by indigenous communities (who, according to the paradigm of the 'primitive,' were thought to represent early human culture) and by children

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1 Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Das Gespräch über Gedichte," *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Bernd Schoeller, vol. 7, *Erzählungen, Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe, Reisen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979), 502. The ellipses are Hofmannsthal's.

2 The German version of this chapter has been published in shortened form: Nicola Gess, "'So ist damit der Blitz zur Schlange geworden.' Anthropologie und Metapherntheorie um 1900," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 83.4 (2009).

3 Hofmannsthal, "Das Gespräch über Gedichte," 500.

4 Hofmannsthal, "Das Gespräch über Gedichte," 502.

5 Benjamin Specht reaches similar conclusions: "In studies of myth and ethnology," metaphor "also represents the rudiment of a primitive level of culture that is supposed to make it possible to reconstruct the genesis of language and consciousness, [...] 'the Paleontology of the human mind,' as Friedrich Max Müller put it" ("'Verbindung finden wir im Bilde.' Die Metapher in und zwischen wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen im späten 19. Jahrhundert," in *Metaphorologien der Exploration und Dynamik 1800/1900. Historische Wissenschaftsmetaphern und die Möglichkeiten ihrer Historiographie*, ed. Gundhild Berg, Martina King, and Reto Rössler [Hamburg: Meiner, 2018], 44; the author is referring to Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language* [London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864], 338.)

(who, according to Haeckel's law of "biogenetic constitution," were placed in analogy with the latter as well).[6] In this way, the human sciences were elevated to a superior status as supplier of facts, where previously only speculation had reigned. On the other hand, the very same anthropological theories of metaphor also demonstrated that the propositional knowledge of the sciences itself derives from metaphor. That is, it was formed on a foundation traditionally ascribed to rhetoric and literature (a feature evident, for example, in the literary quality of the ethnological and psychological writings examined in Chapters 2 to 4).

In response to ethnological and psychological research and in recognition of the metaphorical basis of all science, three anthropological theories of metaphor emerged around the turn of the century: First, as long as the epistemic ideal of accessing the world-in-itself persisted, this recognition of the metaphorical basis of science could lead to a skeptical attitude toward knowledge per se and to a preference for literature as the realm of conscious illusion. Alternatively, it led to claims of an emphatically other knowledge that is genuinely literary and based on metaphorical thinking. Through such language the world-in-itself becomes accessible – quite in contrast to the operations of scientific knowledge.[7] Finally, a third response involved weakening the boundary separating the "two cultures" of literature and science by rendering the metaphoric and indeed *poietic* dimension of all forms of knowledge more recognizable.[8] In the following I will present these three theories of metaphor. Before that, however, I must address the theories of language that developed around 1900 in ethnology and developmental psychology.

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6 As one reads in the *Historische Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, the first use of the term *primitivum* in Latin grammar served to distinguish between *verba primitiva* and *verba derivativa*. In this light, modern usage in the 'human sciences' takes up a very early sense of the word ("primitiv," 7: 1316).

7 Here affinity exists with the perspectives of vitalist philosophy, which stresses nonrational modes of relation to the world – e.g., intuition in Bergson, understanding in Dilthey, vision (*Schauung*) in Klages, and fantasy in Jung (who, like the other writers here, classifies it as "primitive").

8 Wolfgang Riedel has devoted a great deal of attention to theories of metaphor in the context of literary primitivism, especially in the essay "Arara ist Bororo." Sabine Schneider discusses Hofmannsthal in light of Riedel's reflections in "Das Leuchten der Bilder in der Sprache," *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch* 11 (2003).

Constructions of 'Primitive Language': The Cratylist Tradition

From the outset, scientific reflections on 'primitive thinking' were connected with the construction of a 'primitive language.' Four key features stood at the center of deliberations by ethnologists and developmental psychologists on language: The first included the vivid nature of 'primitive languages,' that is, their detailed imagery based on an abundance of metaphors. The second was the naturalness of language, i.e., how it is motivated through its objects. The third was the participation or even co-identity of language with its objects. This latter relationship leads to the fourth characteristic that language was thought to possess: magical power.[9] In the following I will explain these four characteristics in more detail.

Vividness (*Anschaulichkeit*) describes on the one hand 'primitive language' in the sense of *parole*, which ethnologists characterized as lacking in abstraction and having the tendency to describe events in great detail. According to Wilhelm Wundt, for example, a "Bushman" expresses the idea of a "warm welcome from the white man" by means of a series of verbal pictures dramatizing the interaction: "The white man gives him tobacco, he fills his pouch and smokes; the white man gives him meat, he eats this and is happy, etc."[10] Yet, vivid language also describes 'primitive language' in the sense of *langue* and its wealth of grammatic forms and vocabulary that together aim to convey the greatest possible specificity. Lévy-Bruhl, for example, notes an abundance of verbal forms in "Indian languages," which capture shades of meaning entirely unknown to Europeans: "A Ponka Indian in saying that a man killed a rabbit, would have to say: the man, he, one, animate, standing (in the nominative case), purposely killed by shooting an arrow the rabbit, he, the one, animal, sitting (in the objective case)."[11] Similarly, the indigenous lexicon is rich in words for tangible, sensory experience. Instead of classes and kinds, it offers "image-concepts," which always have a particular referent (not "foot" in general but the foot of a certain person, not "fish" but, more specifically, a perch). Lévy-Bruhl explains these "image-concepts" in analogy to highly detailed drawings, and accordingly sees the entire language as a "drawing" bound to the language of signs and gestures: "If verbal language [...] describes and delineates in detail positions, motions, distances, forms, and contours, it is because sign-language uses exactly the same means of expression."[12]

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9 On theories of signs and metaphor in the context of primitivism, see also Werkmeister, who reaches similar conclusions in *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift,* 197– 247, especially 231– 237.

10 Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 72.

11 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think,* 119.

12 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think,* 140.

However, the vividness of 'primitive language' does not refer only to the utmost specificity of *langue*, but also to the motivated quality of words. In this context, it is important to distinguish between an indexical and iconic relationship between language and world.[13] On the one hand, for ethnologists and developmental psychologists alike, language derives from indexical gestures that they understand as both deictic and expressive. Their phonetic counterpart are demonstratives that trace back to "reflexive vocalizations" accompanying expressive or referential gestures. Clara and William Stern, for example, consider the interjection "there!" a "natural, outwardly directed vocalic gesture."[14] On the other hand, ethnologists and developmental psychologists thought language derived from iconic imitation, gestures that imitate the signified object or trace its outward form.[15] Thus, the Sterns speak, for example, of "sound gestures" made by movements of the mouth but corresponding to certain hand or arm motions that are for their part mimetically motivated.[16]

Another important dimension of the vivid quality of 'primitive languages,' for ethnologists and developmental psychologists alike, was its heavy use of figurative language (*Bildlichkeit*). They noted that, paradoxically, an object is vividly described (*anschaulich abgebildet*) when a word from a *different* context is employed, in other words, when metaphor is used. Thus, E. B. Tylor writes of the "wild and rambling metaphor which represents the habitual expression of savage thought."[17] Along similar lines, James Sully observes

> We may detect a close resemblance between children's language and that of savages. In presence of a new object a savage behaves very much as a child, he shapes a new name out of familiar ones, a name that commonly has much of the metaphorical character.[18]

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13 On the distinction between deictic and mimetic gestures, cf. Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 63–66. Tylor already noted that all languages share "sounds of interjectional or imitative character" (*Primitive Culture*, 1: 145); likewise, Sully considers expression and imitation to be the two sources of human language (*Studies of Childhood*, 147). See also William Stern, *Psychology of Early Childhood,* 90–95; and Clara and William Stern, *Die Kindersprache. Eine psychologische und sprachtheoretische Untersuchung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), 319–320, who distinguish between natural sounds, which provide the first words for affect and desire, and acts of imitation, which represent the first form of objective description.
14 Stern and Stern, *Die Kindersprache*, 368. On expressive motion, cf. Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 53–60.
15 On this distinction, cf. Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology,* 105–106.
16 Stern and Stern, *Die Kindersprache*, 355.
17 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2: 404.
18 Sully, *Studies of Childhood,* 168.

The reasoning behind this process is supposed to lie as much in the unfamiliarity of the object as in the speaker's need for greater vividness. At any rate, according to these scholars, it is motivated by the similarity between two phenomena or objects, which the metaphor connects.[19] To illustrate the point, Sully notes that "the Aztecs called a boat a water-house.'"[20]

Ethnologists and developmental psychologists emphasized that such metaphors are viewed as comprising real relations by those who employ them: "given the lexical paucity [*Wortnot*] of the first stages of language, primitive man reaches for the first word that presents itself by chance, in keeping with a vague likeness, [and] uses it as a substantive designation for the object."[21] Indeed, some researchers therefore maintained that "metaphor" is an inaccurate term for these linguistic renderings.[22] Such doubt attests both to a strictly Aristotelian conception of metaphor and to an awareness of the fact that European rhetorical concepts here get transferred onto languages of foreign cultures. One result of this projection was that many scholars ascribed a particular talent to indigenous cultures because of the supposed metaphoricity of their language, even seeing them as the first poets (once again a well-worn topos in the European tradition of the philosophy of language).

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19 However, if – like Lévy-Bruhl – one does not assume that 'primitive thinking' is based on association (the working premise of English ethnologists) so much as participation, metaphors do not express a perceived similarity between objects. Instead, the objects are co-present in a single perception, and the name they share indicates their mutual participation.

20 Sully, *Studies of Childhood,* 168. Richard Thurnwald sums it up as follows: "Characteristically, most languages of peoples in a state of nature derive a new word by synthesizing images commonly in use, for instance: 'spring, well' = 'eye-water.'" He also calls this process a "metaphorical mode of expression" ("Psychologie des Primitiven Menschen," in Gustav Kafka, *Handbuch der vergleichenden Psychologie,* vol. 1, *Die Entwicklungsstufen des Seelenlebens* [Munich: Reinhardt, 1922], 269). Like Lévy-Bruhl, Heinz Werner calls such coinages "concept-images" (Werner, *Einführung in die Entwicklungspsychologie*, 194). Ernst Kretschmer refers to them as image-agglutinations, whereby he makes the distinction (taken from Freud) between processes of condensation and displacement (*Medical Psychology*, 87–88).

21 Stern and Stern, *Die Kindersprache*, 324.

22 The Sterns also understand metaphor only as a *consciously* "improper" expression, thus excluding 'primitive' transfers of meaning born of the lack of adequate terminology from being classified in this way. For Heinz Werner, it is only possible to speak of metaphor when "allegorical consciousness" (*Gleichnisbewusstsein*) has emerged (*Die Ursprünge der Metapher*, 28, 34). According to Lévy-Bruhl, it is not a matter of transfer so much as the expression of participation always already in place. Thus, he stresses that signs become necessary for 'primitives' when participation is no longer directly felt but still mythically represented. Hereby, the content of myths is not as important as the mystical atmosphere surrounding words (i.e., their participation with what they designate) (Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think,* 323–327).

Based on its indexical, iconic, and metaphorical features, ethnologists and developmental psychologists deemed 'primitive language' to be 'natural' – that is, directly motivated by its objects.[23] Tylor, for example, contends that "savages possess in a high degree the faculty of uttering their minds directly in emotional tones and interjections, of going straight to nature to furnish themselves with imitative sounds."[24] Thereby, the indexical relationship affirms connection through contiguity, which is understood to be language's physiological motivation: an inner tension is involuntarily discharged in a physical movement that is related to language in a way that can be explained by physiology.[25] In contrast, iconic and metaphorical relationships hold that language is motivated by similarity between word and object and between two objects denoted by the same motivated word, respectively.

The vivid and natural traits of 'primitive language,' as ethnologists and developmental psychologists argued, go hand in hand with the belief that words are directly tied to the objects they designate and therefore possess magical power. This supposed connection signifies more than just the motivation of words. It points to the ontological basis of the claim that signs are not arbitrary, but motivated by their objects. This basis entails the belief that words are either components of the objects to which they refer or have been incompletely separated from them – that is, they still participate in them. The Sterns write,

> [f]or children – as for primitive human beings in general – the word, once acquired, and the object constitute an organically coherent whole [...]. Children and peasants cannot think otherwise, than that the long, dark form baked from flour is not only called, but is "bread." [...] The word is conceived as the quality, the proper intuition of the thing.[26]

As part of its object, the word expresses the object's essence. Knowing the word for an object amounts to recognizing it for what it truly is. Such participation means reversing cause and effect: the object in question counts as the cause of the word that now names it; conversely, the word has the potential to cause events that happen to the object. Thus, Lévy-Bruhl writes of the mystical character of words,

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23 As already noted, Kretschmer distinguishes between condensation and displacement as two different modes of image agglutination; thus, metaphoricity would be complemented by metonymy (Kretschmer, *Medical Psychology*, 87–88).

24 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 147. Tylor explicitly refers to theories of the natural origins of language, e.g., de Brosses (146) but urges caution about indulging in etymological speculation.

25 Cf. Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*, 21–22.

26 Stern and Stern, *Die Kindersprache*, 320.

> [t]he use of words can never be a matter of indifference: the mere fact of uttering them [...] may establish or destroy important and formidable participations. There is magical influence in the word, and therefore precaution is necessary.[27]

Knowing names involves not just recognizing objects, but also gaining power and influence over them.

In their conception of 'primitive language,' representatives of early ethnology and child psychology were obviously working in the Cratylic tradition.[28] Like the philosopher in Plato's dialogue of the same name, turn-of-the-century theorists sought to prove the naturalness of 'primitive language' by pointing to its indexicality, iconicity, and metaphoricity. At the same time, however (and following the admonitions of Socrates), they were forced to acknowledge that their claims often depended on speculative etymology, without which no traces of such natural qualities could be found. In this respect, their theories display an orientation that Gérard Genette would describe as "mimological"[29] by clinging to the always already lost ideal of a seamless correlation between words and things, which they ascribed to a 'primitive language' of their own construction.[30] Thus, once again, turn-of-the-century ethnologists and child psychologists did not develop new concepts so much as they found confirmation for European linguistic tradition in other cultures. 'Primitive culture' was supposed to offer proof of what generations of philosophers had merely speculated or fantasized about: the natural origin of human language.

Malinowski and the Magical Power of Language

To a certain extent, ethnologists and developmental psychologists developed the concept of a 'primitive language' only in passing. They claimed it to be a result of

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27 Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think,* 154.

28 The Sterns explicitly invoke the Platonic dialogue (*Die Kindersprache*, 127, 319).

29 Gérard Genette, *Mimologics,* trans. Thaïs E. Morgan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

30 Interestingly, this holds both for those who showed sympathy for 'primitive thinking' and its critics. Proponents of rational thought also dreamed of a language that would stand in direct connection with concepts and therefore cause no falsification of them (cf. Charles K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* [San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1989], who fault the logicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for clinging to the ideal of a natural language).

'primitive thinking,' which was the actual focus of their work.[31] The writings of Bronislaw Malinowski, who inaugurated the practice of field research and in so doing founded the modern field of ethnology, provide a contrasting perspective. Not only do they demonstrate the transformation of ethnology and developmental psychology into semiotic theory, but furthermore reverse the relationship that was supposed to hold between thought and language by deriving the former from the latter. To do so, Malinowski starts out with the idea that language possesses magical power. For in this new framework, the issue is not how language *represents* reality, but how language *impacts* reality. In terms of linguistics, the focus is pragmatic. Unlike the authors I have been discussing, Malinowski is not searching for a natural language. Instead, by examining the potential of language to *do* things – its performative dimension (in the sense used by J. L. Austin) – he affirms the validity of indigenous belief systems.

On the basis of linguistic usage among the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski develops – in *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*, a supplement to Charles K. Ogden und Ivor A. Richard's *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) – the concept of the phatic function of language, later taken up by Roman Jakobson.[32] In this capacity, language does not serve as a "means of thinking" so much as a "mode of action."[33] In consequence, Malinowski comes to question Ogden and Richards' principle of "symbolic relativity," that is, the notion that mere convention governs the connection between symbol and referent. In contrast to the authors treated so far, he does not do so in the name of the supposed naturalness of language; instead, he focuses on the analysis of children's language acquistion and use, in which he sees parallels to indigenous peoples. Accordingly, he observes the following:

> To the child, words are […] not only means of expression but efficient modes of action. The name of a person uttered aloud in a piteous voice possesses the power of materializing this person. Food has to be called for and it appears […]. Thus infantile experience must leave on the child's mind the deep impression that a name has the power over the person or thing which it signifies.[34]

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31 This was especially true for ethnologists (see, e. g., Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1: 271; Thurnwald, "Psychologie des primitiven Menschen," 266). Among developmental psychologists, a greater interest in language was evident from the outset because it allows the development of thought in children to be observed most fully.

32 Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," in Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*.

33 Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," 315.

34 Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," 320.

Early childhood experience, Malinowski maintains, shapes people for the rest of their lives, and this is therefore where belief in language as a magical force – based on a direct connection between symbol and referent and the power of words bound to that immediacy – begins. Malinowski revisits and expands this thesis in later texts, observing that modern European adults still have experiences over and over again that suggest words possess a magical power: "knowledge of the right words [...] gives man a power over and above his own limited field of personal action."[35] Thus, Malinowski opposes Freud's concept in *Totem and Taboo* of an "omnipotence of thought" with the "omnipotence of words":

> Magic is not a belief in the omnipotence of thought but rather the clear recognition of [...] its impotence. [...] Verbal magic grows out of legitimate uses of speech, and it is only the exaggeration of one aspect of these legitimate uses.[36]

In semiotic terms, the peculiar network of relationships that 'primitive thinking' spins between things is not a result of the naturalness of language, according to Malinowsky, but appears rather as a kind of participation between symbol and speaker experienced during the act of speech. By means of this participation, language acquires magical power and the belief in magic is founded.[37]

Theories of Metaphor around 1900: Nietzsche, Mauthner, Vischer, Biese, Cassirer

At the time, Malinowski's thesis that magical thinking originates in language was a departure from the views of his predecessors in the fields of ethnology and developmental psychology.[38] However, his claim was unexceptional in the

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35 Malinowski, "An Ethnographic Theory of the Magical Word," in *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, vol. 2, *The Language of Magic and Gardening* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 235. The text was written in 1935. As Ken Hirschkop has recently observed, for Malinowski, "the force of magic was just a concentrated version of the general pragmatic force of all language, which, in the second half of the century, would become a subfield of linguistics and a live topic in analytic philosophy" (*Linguistic Turns: Writing on Language as Social Theory* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 165).

36 Malinowski, "An Ethnographic Theory of the Magical Word," 239.

37 See Robert Stockhammer, *Zaubertexte. Die Wiederkehr der Magie und die Literatur, 1810 – 1945* (Berlin: Akademie, 2000), 26.

38 With the possible exception of Karl Bühler; on the basis of his study *The Mental Development of the Child*, he had already spent several years investigating the performative nature of language

context of the theories of metaphor elaborated by philosophers and scholars of literature around the turn of the century, who also sought to demonstrate the relevance of metaphor for 'primitive thinking.' Indeed, establishing this conviction was necessary for the subsequent claim that this thinking could be revived in modern literature.[39] Thus, philosophers and literary scholars took up the views of their contemporaries in the human sciences and radicalized them with the help of recent developments in the philosophy of language to claim that 'primitive language' was not the outcome but the starting point of 'primitive thinking' and even formed the basis of contemporary and scientific thought.[40] At the same time, they expanded the definition of metaphor to include all transmission processes involved in the creation of language. Iconic and even indexical relations between object and word were now understood as transfers (from object to gesture or sound) and, in this sense, as metaphors. In this way, 'primitive language' turned out to be completely shaped by metaphors. Thus, for example, Mauthner, whose theory of metaphor likewise drew from findings in anthropology, claims that "the metaphor or the poetic image is the origin and essence of all language," and as such it forms the foundation of modern concepts and thought processes as well.

This tendentious reference to the human sciences enabled theorists of metaphor to go beyond the speculations of Giambattista Vico or Johann Gottfried Herder by determining metaphorical language as original speech in an anthropo-

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– which he then presented in *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language*, trans. Donald Fraser Goodwin (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011). For an overview of affinities, see Stefan Henzler, "Der Handlungscharakter der Sprache bei Karl Bühler und Bronislaw Malinowski," in *Betriebslinguistik und Linguistikbetrieb. Akten des 24. Linguistischen Kolloquiums, Universität Bremen, 4.–6. September 1989*, vol. 1, ed. Eberhard Klein, Françoise Pouradier Duteil, and Karl Heinz Wagner (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991).

39 This stands in the context of a widespread critique of civilization: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, myth seems to provide the answer to the negative impression of having lost an original connection to the world in the present. In his 1911 essay, 'Concept and Tragedy of Culture,' [Georg] Simmel gets to the heart of the fundamental critique of modernity." (Anja Schwennsen, "Kunst und Mythos zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation," in *Zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation. Formen und Funktionen des Mythos in theoretischen und literarischen Diskursen*, ed. Bent Gebert and Uwe Mayer [Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014], 207). Schwennsen exempts Cassirer from this "frame of mind, which was paradigmatic for *Lebensphilosophie*": for the latter, art is not "the last refuge" but a "process [...] of giving-form" (209); I will return to this point below.

40 It is important to distinguish between such histories of the development of thought in terms of evolution or simply genealogy and perspectives (which were less widespread) that posted two different types of thought (e.g., Lévy-Bruhl) or multiple, culturally specific types of thought (Boas).

logical and apparently empirically secured way. Subsequently, they were able to come up with a new classification and justification of literature. Against the backdrop of these new disciplines, old questions concerning the nature and purpose of art now received new answers. These theorists of metaphor suggest that the use of tropological language in literary arts relates it to 'primitive thinking,' thus enabling the latter's revival or further development. Opinions differed, however, in terms of the epistemic value attributed to metaphorical language (and therefore literature). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, three tendencies may be noted: (1) Because it is regarded as an inauthentic language, metaphor leads to false concepts and prevents any awareness of 'real reality.' If one holds this opinion, one must either lead a futile battle against metaphor and its falsehoods (like the pioneers of analytical philosophy), or one must abandon the quest for knowledge with resignation (like Fritz Mauthner) or with an aesthetic posture in relation to a world of unauthentic illusions (like Nietzsche). (2) As an original and motivated form of language, metaphor represents a privileged access to reality. From this perspective (held, for example, by Alfred Biese and his appreciative reader, the young Hugo von Hofmannsthal), one turns from scientifically based concepts and knowledge to poetry in hopes of gaining immediate access to the world-in-itself. In contrast to Malinowski's concern with the performative nature of language, these first two tendencies look to language's descriptive reference to an extra-linguistic reality. What separates them is the understanding of metaphor as either arbitrary or motivated. In a sense, each view focuses exclusively on just one side of the metaphorical equation. A metaphor declares, "A is B" – which is all that proponents of the second thesis hear. On the basis of the identity posited, they conclude that metaphor is motivated by the world-in-itself and grants privileged access to it. At the same time, saying "A is B" presupposes that the likeness of A and B is not in fact given; proponents of the first thesis stress this implicit non-identity, and they conclude that metaphor is not authentic and misrepresents reality. [41] (3) The third tendency's focus on the positing power (*Setzung*) of language sets it apart from the first two: as a positing language, metaphorical language reveals the *poietic* activities of the human mind, that is, the role of creation in cognition – a view held, for example, by Ernst Cassirer. In the following I will give four examples of the positions mentioned (Nietzsche, Mauthner, Vischer and Biese, and Cassirer), concentrating on

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41 See Monika Schmitz-Emans, "Metaphor," formerly in the now-offline *Basislexikon Komparatistik*; it is now accessible via: https://docplayer.org/25246668-Metapher-autorin-monika-schmitz-emans.html.

texts evincing an appreciation for metaphor and poetry (that is, leaving aside theories dismissing the metaphoricity of language).

Nietzsche

Nietzsche's influential "Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne" (1873; "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense," 1977) does not offer a theory of metaphor so much as a critique of language and epistemology.[42] However, this critique is based on metaphor in a double sense. Nietzsche simultaneously starts out from both the linguistic dependence of all knowledge as well as the origin of language in a twofold process of transfer, which he calls metaphor: "To transfer a nerve stimulus into an image – first metaphor! The image [is] again copied in a sound – second metaphor! And each time a complete leap [takes place] out of one sphere into an entirely new and different one."[43] Nietzsche does not understand metaphor in the Aristotelian sense but uses this term in the sense of a transfer process from one sensory realm to the other: a nerve stimulus leads to a mental image, which prompts an auditory sensation. At the same time, he denies that any one of these relay-points captures the essence of any 'thing in itself.' In contrast to the scholars and theorists discussed above, Nietzsche considers both stages of transmission to be "arbitrary"[44] since they each necessarily focus on a single aspect of the object to the exclusion of other features.[45] Also,

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42 Tylor's study appeared in German translation the same year that Nietzsche wrote this text, and he read it thoroughly. However, Nietzsche first borrowed the translation from the university library in Basel in June 1875, so it is uncertain whether he already knew of it in 1873. On Tylor's influence on Nietzsche, see Hubert Treiber, "Zur 'Logik des Traumes' bei Nietzsche. Anmerkungen zu den Traumaphorismen aus 'Menschliches, Allzumenschliches.'" *Nietzsche-Studien* 23 (1994): 6n16.

43 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense," in *On Truth and Untruth*, trans. Taylor Carman (New York: Harper, 2010), 26. Gustav Gerber also assumes the metaphorical quality of all languages in *Sprache als Kunst* (Language as Art, 1871) (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), e. g., 309, 312; Nietzsche borrowed this title from the university library on 28 September 1872 and took up key aspects of it in his own writings (cf. Meijers and Stingelin, "Konkordanz zu den wörtlichen Abschriften und Übernahmen," *Nietzsche-Studien. Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung* 17 (1986). As Benjamin Specht has recently noted apropos of Gerber, Wundt, and Dilthey, Nietzsche "demonstrably drew inspiration from the linguistics of the time [...]. There one finds a corresponding expansion of metaphor as the genetic principle of speech and thought, albeit without the same critique of epistemology" ("'Verbindung finden wir im Bilde,'" 43).

44 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 28.

45 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 27–28.

the initial stimulus is overly subjective and says more about the individual experiencing it than it does about the thing perceived. Nietzsche concludes that already at its earliest stage, where intuitive metaphors abound, language can convey no knowledge about the world: "We think we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers, yet we possess only metaphors of the things, which in no way correspond to the original essences."[46]

Paradoxically, Nietzsche's insight into the metaphorical basis of all language (that is, the fact that it is *not* motivated) did not lead him to give up on the model of a descriptive language truly depicting reality. He remained attached to the idea, albeit in negative fashion, by stressing the vitiated nature of language and the knowledge it affords; the farther one gets from the "thing in itself," the greater the deficit.[47] In particular, then, Nietzsche's verdict bears on conceptual language, into which individual intuitive metaphors are dissolved during a later stage of language development. The concept no longer fulfills a mnemonic function as the intuitive metaphor does; it does not call to mind a "single, absolutely individualized original experience"[48] but rather serves a systematic purpose, inasmuch as it creates order. The sense of security such order provides is purchased by twofold oblivion: First, one forgets that intuitive metaphors are arbitrary and "takes them for the things themselves."[49] Second, concepts are formed through "forgetting what distinguishes one [thing] from the other"[50] – information that was still given in initial metaphors.

Nietzsche calls those who successfully master this double forgetting and live quietly ever after in their conceptual framework "rational." In contrast, an instinctive and intuitive person will work against these processes of oblivion by shattering traditional concepts with new metaphors and in full cognizance that the latter are simply metaphors. Such individuals relate to the world of objects in a thoroughly "aesthetic" manner insofar as they do not seek to access 'things in themselves.' Instead, they are continuously enacting transfers between registers of meaning (well aware of their arbitrary nature) in order to inhabit a world of metaphor built on "semblance and beauty."[51] This terrain does not be-

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46 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 26 – 27.
47 See Klaus Müller-Richter and Arturo Larcati, '*Kampf der Metapher!*' (Vienna: VÖAW, 1986), 225.
48 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 27.
49 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 35.
50 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 28.
51 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 47.

long to science, the province of rational beings who believe in objective knowledge but to art, which Nietzsche likens to dreams.

Nietzsche's designation, "intuitive," like other terms he employs, indicates an anthropologically oriented theory of metaphor. Elsewhere in the text, he even more clearly refers to the "*drive* [*Trieb*] to the formation of metaphor"[52] as a uniquely human trait, an activity that differentiates humans from other animals. At the same time, Nietzsche does not present the forging of metaphors as a cultural feat so much as a matter of raw biology: as an instinctual urge, which is based on a certain use of the intellect induced through the struggle for survival – namely, the dissimulation through which "weaker individuals" continue their existence. Though it had already been in use in the original state of a *bellum omnium contra omnes,* for civilization to emerge (on the basis of a social contract between human beings requiring a peace agreement), it must yield to stable designations, which represent the first step toward conceptual thinking.[53] In brief, metaphor is attributed to humanity's state of nature, while concepts emerge with the beginnings of civilization.

Another of Nietzsche's theses underscores the proximity of metaphor to raw nature: "Everything that distinguishes man from beast hinges on this capacity to dispel intuitive metaphors in a schema, hence to dissolve an image into a concept."[54] In contrast to Nietzsche's declaration above, the metaphorical drive is not what makes human beings human; instead, metaphor remains in the realm of "beasts," from which humankind emerges only through the formation of concepts. In this light, the conduct of "intuitive man" appears regressive. This category of human abandons the achievements of civilization and yields to instinct, which serves individual self-preservation, and in doing so breaks the social contract. Nietzsche speaks of the "primitive world of metaphor" and envisions a new, but also ancient "culture" of conscious and collective self-deception. The world of semblance this yields is treated (i.e., formed and received) as art. Even though art does not provide the means for attaining "true reality," it is invested with the pathos of first beginnings and great originality in descriptions such as "a mass of images that originally flowed forth hot and liquid from the primal power of human imagination."[55]

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52 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 42. Emphasis added.
53 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 26.
54 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 31.
55 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie," 35.

Mauthner

At the heart of Fritz Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (Contributions to a Critique of Language, 1901) is the theory of metaphor developed in its second volume.

> Language [...] grows by transferring a complete word to an incomplete impression, by comparison, that is – through the eternal act of approximation, the eternal paraphrasing and speaking in images, which constitutes the artistic strength and logical weakness of language. [...] Our language grows through metaphors.[56]

Elsewhere in the study, Mauthner makes a distinction between two types of "emphasis of similarity"[57]: The first is analogy, which subsumes a group of things that appear the same (but are in fact only like each other) under the same word. The second type, metaphor, designates a thing with a word, whose meaning had until that point only been similar to the thing. Both are products of the human imagination, its unconscious workings in the case of analogy and conscious operations in that of metaphor. At the same time, Mauthner constructs a hybrid form of the two by invoking the initial metaphor that cannot reach back to pre-existing words, which he understands as a "forging of analogies without self-deception."[58] In this way things evincing similarity are designated by the same word, even though the one naming them is conscious of the difference between them. Such underlying awareness, Mauthner continues, vanishes over the course of time – until the term is no longer perceived as a metaphor and enters the "organism of language" as a "proper" word.[59] That said, at still another point in the study, Mauthner suspends this key distinction when he treats the belief of the ancient poets (a product of the unconscious creation of metaphors), the symbolic work of more recent poets (a product of their conscious creation), and knowledge as one and the same: "Thus ends for us the generic distinction between knowing, symbolizing, and believing."[60]

Like Nietzsche, Mauthner holds that metaphor is not a motivated form of language. In fact, he employs the term whenever he wishes to point out the arbitrariness and conventionality of language. For instance, to criticize the claim

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56 Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, vol. 2, *Zur Sprachwissenschaft* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1999), 451.

57 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 416.

58 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 416.

59 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 451; see also 414.

60 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 469.

that language arose from the imitation of sounds, he draws attention to the metaphorical character of such imitation: "Because the sounds of both dead and living nature in no way equal the articulations of human language, all these new, imitative creations fall under the category of metaphor."[61] In other words, and as he observes repeatedly, language is characterized precisely not by "natural" but rather "conventional" imitation, which in a strict sense is no longer imitation at all. In his eyes, language is constituted precisely by the *difference* from the original sound and the purely conventional connection between sound and representation.

Accordingly, for Mauthner, the decisive question that an onomatopoietic theory of linguistic origin would have to ask is, "How did human beings – in addition to their ability to realistically mimic sounds of nature – come to reshape these same vocalizations by convention?"[62] The answer he ultimately offers is contingency. He concedes that language developed out of necessity, but insists that the figures it shapes in the process of developing are coincidental.[63] Offering – despite himself – an origin scenario, he gives the following example: "Each primal human being, we may presume, associated for some reason (which we must call coincidental) the chosen or involuntary sound with rolling motion."[64] The connection between speech and imagination is initially a coincidence; only habit and usage lead to a given word ultimately coming to be viewed as the only "right" one.[65]

However, this still does not clarify the question of how humanity could emerge from a condition of speechlessness to the formation of the first metaphors. Because of his epistemological doubt, which is based on his insight into the fundamental metaphoricity of language, Mauthner remains cautious here. He hypothesizes that language derives from three "reflexive sounds" with which human beings in "primeval times" expressed three main affects: wonder, pain, and joy.[66] These verbal reflexes came to be used metaphorically, that is, to refer not only to affect but also to its various possible causes.[67] At the same time, vocalizations function as imperatives directed toward a counterpart who is expected to resolve the affect.[68] For Mauthner, the purpose of lan-

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61 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 420.
62 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 436.
63 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 488.
64 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 521.
65 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 523.
66 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 439.
67 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 339.
68 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 441.

guage is not communication for its own sake (and certainly not naming for its own sake), but (as with Malinowski) for the sake of a specific goal that the speaker wishes to achieve:

> That first linguistic vocalization [was] neither a noun, nor a verb, nor an adjective, but already an intention: the wish to suggest something to the other who had food – in this case, the mother. [...] Thus, given the purpose of language, we may suppose [...] that in a certain sense the imperative form is older than the concept of "milk."[69]

Later on, Mauthner expands this thesis by attributing language with a mnemonic function: "The original words [sought, with help of a detail taken from an overall image] to recall the image in its entirety; [...] even developed language [affects] nothing more than the evocation of particularly striking [*belichteten*] memory-pictures."[70] These theses can be connected if they are understood as two successive stages of language development. Mauthner suggests as much when he speculatively describes how language develops from poetry to drama to epic.[71] In this picture, affective vocalization corresponds to lyric (which, strictly speaking, would represent a prelinguistic phenomenon), imperative utterances correspond to drama, and acts of recollection to epic.

Unlike Nietzsche, Mauthner – with his insight into the metaphoricity of language – also abandons belief in a world-in-itself independent from language. This is perhaps also why, unlike Nietzsche, he does not arrive at a euphoric affirmation of the world of semblance, since there is no 'actual world' that language belies. Unlike Cassirer, whom I will discuss below, his insights lead him to adopt a resigned attitude.[72] For, as a scholar, he clings to the ideal of objective knowledge, even though he knows language makes it impossible.[73] Accordingly, because standing concepts are not to be trusted, he is unable to further pursue his own hypotheses about the origin of language[74] and declares them to be poetry at best[75] – which, in this scientific context, was understood as devaluing.

Rarely does any alternative to this stance present itself, and when it does it is only when Mauthner turns his attention to the creative power of metaphor. For instance, he states that "the most general form of metaphor" is what gives us

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69 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 445.
70 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 524.
71 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 441.
72 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 440.
73 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 454.
74 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 440.
75 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 437. Hence the richness of Mauthner's metaphors.

"our reality in the first place, in the form of our vocabulary."[76] For this reason, he refuses to compare the 'primitive language' of children with pathological phenomena. It is not (mental) illness but "flourishing poetic force" that has led such language to develop.[77] In contrast to Cassirer's view, the guiding idea here concerns a completely individual language.[78] Mauthner divides the linguistic development of children into two stages: a first phase in which the child forms random words and thereby creates a "personal original language,"[79] and a second one in which the child says goodbye to this original language and learns the language along with the syntax of adults. This transition amounts to a loss of paradise: "For the first time, the child combines two words into a sentence, thereby losing the paradise of youth; whereas an accidental word still harbored a whole world, acquired language is no longer as majestic."[80]

In contrast to Nietzsche, Mauthner does not emphasize the unique and incomparable qualities of the object that get lost with this paradisical language but rather the uniqueness and incomparability of the speaking subject that disappear in the process of submitting to convention. Just as singular is the world that the speaking subject opens up through his or her individual language. Mauthner imagines, for instance, that in this world "the name 'cake'" might represent "a kind of god, who gives [the child] physical contact with the sweet thing"[81] it desires. In this world, the imperative function of language imbues language with a magical force.[82]

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76 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 472; see also his discussion of Vico, 2: 484, 488.

77 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 411.

78 As Magnus Klaue shows, this emphasis on radically individual language also has a political dimension: "Mauthner's theory of language and metaphor runs counter to the *völkisch*-nationalistic call for linguistic purity, which [...] was propagated by institutions such as the Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein and popularized by schoolbooks and light entertainment literature" (Klaue, "Aufbauende Zerstörung," *Sprachkunst. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 37 [2006]: 46). "Local linguistic practices and dissident forms of discourse such as poetry" he observes, "undermined compulsive homogenization." In this regard, Mauthner understands "linguistic usage [...] as a field of combat" and its "colonization as illusory as [the possibility of] liberation" (48).

79 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 405.

80 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 406.

81 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 389; see also 402.

82 Klaue points out that in Mauthner's "method of constructive destruction" metaphor represents the "expression of an insoluble aporia: only to the extent that the critic of language constantly calls his basic assumptions into question can he free himself (and, to a certain extent, language itself) from the 'tyranny of language'" ("Aufbauende Zerstörung," 36). Here lies a utopian potential that is only "rarely perceived, since its critique was mostly viewed in terms of the

As I noted above, Mauthner posits an arbitrary connection between the sounds of speech and the objects they signifiy. On a few surprising occasions, however, he expresses an opposing notion, which can eventually be explained by the longing for a primordial language just described (which would be motivated for its speakers). In this spirit he writes,

> [t]he push for such bold metaphors (such as the transfer of space to time, or color to sound) comes from a compulsion lying in the conditions of the real world, which have not yet been revealed. Language is metaphor, but metaphor somehow corresponds to the world.[83]

Here, Mauthner abandons the metaphor as a world-creating force and comes back to the idea of metaphor as a 'true,' motivated representation of the world, passing from the idea of creation to that of discovery. The example he provides to illustrate this idea is how a small space and a large one are imitated by motions of the glottis and mouth, that is, with a narrow aperture for the "i"-sound and a broad one for "o." The German words for "small" and "large" (*klein* and *groß*) are thought to be motivated by their object by means of mimetic gestures. Mauthner goes as far as to speculate that there might be a fundamental "kinship of substance [*Ding-Verwandtschaft*] between the circumstances of reality and sound"[84] that is responsible for the features of spoken language. In Chapter 9 I will return to this notion in the context of Walter Benjamin's writings.

Vischer and Biese

Friedrich Theodor Vischer's influential essay, "Das Symbol" (1887; "The Symbol," 2015), calls upon the second type of anthropological theories of metaphor. Vischer constructs three stages of development for the symbol, which, in his view, correspond to those of humanity as a whole. In the first phase, the symbolic image and its meaning still coincide (or are confused with each other). In the last stage – that of the present day – they stand clearly separated, for it is now clear to the conscious mind that their relationship is the result of a mediation. The second stage represents a peculiar intermediate position between the two

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'hatred of language.' Only Gustav Landauer recognized the explosive power of the method of innovative destruction" (37).

83 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 453.

84 Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2: 454.

and is for Vischer the actual home of language.[85] At this point there prevails an "instinctive and nevertheless free, unconscious and yet in a certain sense conscious ensoulment of nature [*Naturbeseelung*],"[86] which he grounds in anthropological terms: it is in the nature of the human soul to project itself and its conditions into other forms of being.[87] Such empathy (*Einfühlung*) is based on "point[s] of comparison," that is, on involuntary moments of perceiving similarities between humans and the natural world (for instance, when natural forms are regarded as expressive faces). Thus, at this level, the symbolic image and its meaning are perceived to stand apart while still interacting in an intimate relation of kinship. Vischer ascribes a "truth in the higher sense" to this empathetic process, which he again explains on an anthropological basis: empathy is an "essential act of the soul" that derives from the fact, and simultaneously proves that "the universe, nature, and spirit [*Geist*] must be one at root."[88] Poetry represents the preservation of such truth in modern times, for its tropological language sustains awareness of the inner relationship of all being.[89]

In response to Vischer, the literary historian Alfred Biese developed an anthropologically-oriented theory of metaphor in *Philosophie des Metaphorischen* (Philosophy of the Metaphorical, 1893). Brigitte Nerlich and David D. Clarke summarize his position as follows:

> Biese agrees with all those who no longer say that metaphor is an abbreviated comparison. He therefore praises Gerber, but also Wilhelm Dilthey who had written around 1880 [...] that figures of speech are not mere decorations of speech but are an integral part of poetic creativity [...]. Biese declared: "Metaphor is not a poetic trope but an original form of cognitive perception."[90]

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85 Bernhard Buschendorf points out that the second level mediates between the opposing poles (religious versus rational symbolism) and concerns the aesthetic nature of the symbol, whose "animating effect" is especially apparent in language and, more specifically, metaphor ("Zur Begründung der Kulturwissenschaft," in *Edgar Wind. Kunsthistoriker und Philosoph*, ed. Horst Bredekamp, Bernhard Buschendorf, Freia Hartung, and John Michael Krois [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998], 230, 229).

86 Friedrich Theodor Vischer, "The Symbol," trans. Holly A. Yanacek, *Art in Translation* 7, no. 4 (2015): 428.

87 On Vischer's aesthetics of empathy and its status in the history of science, see Müller-Tamm, *Abstraktion als Einfühlung*, 214–248.

88 Vischer, "The Symbol," 430; see also 446–447.

89 Vischer, "The Symbol," 446.

90 Brigitte Nerlich and David D. Clarke, "Mind, Meaning and Metaphor," *History of the Human Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2001): 49. Specht stresses that Biese is "at the height and vertex of delivering metaphor from rhetoric, not at the beginning" – which started, in his eyes, with Nietzsche's early works ("Verbindung finden wir im Bilde," 43). Nerlich and Clarke do the same: "Biese stands in

Nevertheless, Biese defines "the metaphorical" rather vaguely, as the "reciprocal transfer between inside and outside."[91] This exchange is said to result from the epistemological dilemma that human beings can only make the "foreign" accessible through "what is fully known, i. e., our inner and outer life,"[92] and at the same time have to rely on symbolic forms to give shape to their thoughts and feelings. Accordingly, Biese claims, humans reach for analogy as the "innermost schema of the human psyche," from which the "metaphorical" arises as the "primary form of perception."[93]

Biese also derives language from metaphor in a double sense: language proceeds metaphorically and is itself a metaphor: "Language is metaphorical through and through: it embodies the spiritual, and it spiritualizes the physical; it is an abbreviated image of analogy of all life, which is based on the reciprocal and profound fusion of body and soul."[94] His concept of rhetorical figure thus represents much more than ornament. It reflects the "primary form of perception," as well as language formation and poetic creation.[95]

Invoking Giambattista Vico, Biese concludes that the language of tropes was not invented by writers but instead involved forms of expression necessary to "prehistoric peoples" that were only perceived in our own times as metaphorical transfer. Thus, lyric's tropological manner of expression is the earlier, authentic linguistic form, whereas the prosaic expression of prose discourse is the later, artificial form. The former is so fundamental for all language that even today the analogies it forges "continually proliferate in linguistic creation [*Sprachschöpfung*],"[96] whether in everyday usage or literature in particular. The difference from the practice of "prehistoric peoples" is simply that poetic works now count merely as beautiful semblance. Biese claims this view of literature is false, however. He adduces an array of ontological and epistemological reasons and critiques standing notions of human understanding and conceptual thought in order to demonstrate that an "eternal truth" inhabits the metaphorical language of poetry, namely the "inner harmony" of nature and spirit and ulti-

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a long line of thinkers on metaphor," e. g., Scherer, Dilthey, Wundt, Brinkmann, Kohfeldt. "All later readers of these major and minor works agreed on the fact that metaphor could no longer be regarded as a shortened comparison" ("Mind, Meaning and Metaphor," 50).

91 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 15.

92 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 3.

93 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 13, 15.

94 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 22.

95 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 220.

96 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 81.

mately the "divine" as the "creative" force in human beings.[97] Although he fails to provide a convincing argument, the sheer quantity of his claims attests unambiguously to his desire to promote belief in the power of metaphor to his contemporary readers.

Nietzsche, Vischer, and Biese entangle themselves in a fundamental contradiction. According to their shared assumption, all language is based on metaphor. In contrast to Mauthner, they do not draw the consequences from this insight and revise their accounts of a descriptive model of language in favor of a constructivist one – that is, they do not give up on the idea of an extra-linguistic reality that language either represents successfully or not. Instead, and despite their insight into the metaphoricity of all language, they all adhere to a descriptive model of language. In Nietzsche's case, this leads to a fundamental skepticism about our (language-based) knowledge of the world. For Biese (and the young Hofmannsthal, who reviewed his work approvingly[98]), the result is that only the metaphor, not the concept, is capable of disclosing the world-in-itself. Yet this view of poetic metaphor is made possible only by ignoring metaphor's positing nature (*Setzung*). Recognizing the metaphoricity of all language, Nietzsche embraces disbelief; Biese, however, adopts what Genette would call a mimological outlook and hopes to gain access to 'true reality' via motivated metaphors.

The difference of Nietzsche, Vischer, and Biese's theses from those advanced by Malinowski and Mauthner is plain. The latters' ethnological and developmental observations lead to their abandonment of the descriptive model in favor of a positing model of language. For Mauthner, this entails resignation or the sentimental longing for a paradisiacal, personal language. For Malinowski, metaphor represents neither failed linguistic representation of reality (that is to be denied, ignored, or skeptically affirmed) nor its ideal realization; instead, metaphor simply demonstrates the characteristic of all language to change discursive reality in the course of its use. According to Malinowski, indigenous peoples understand

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97 Biese, *Die Philosophie des Metaphorischen*, 224. Hereby, "creation" does not mean the "invention" so much as the "discovery" of the right words (as in Plato's *Cratylus*).

98 In the review, he agrees so much with Biese's view of metaphor as the root of all thinking and speech that he declares it a commonplace. What Biese's book lacks, in his estimation, is consideration of the process by which metaphors emerge. For Hofmannstahl, it is fueled by drives, laden with affect, and belongs – as he illustrates with numerous metaphors of his own – to the realm of the sublime: a "strangely vibrating state, in which metaphors [...] rain down on us amidst terror, lightning, and storms; in this sudden [...] illumination we sense, for a moment, how the whole world fits together" (Hofmannsthal, "Philosophie des Metaphorischen," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Bernd Schoeller, vol. 7, *Erzählungen, Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe, Reisen* [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979], 47).

this positing force of language as magic. What is mistaken, in his eyes, is not the belief that language can influence reality but the reduction of this power to an ontological unity of sign and referent. This, however, is exactly what Vischer and Biese do. In this regard, their theories of metaphor are committed to a magical conception of language.

Cassirer

Cassirer occupies a position between these earlier theorists of metaphor (Nietzsche, Vischer, Biese) and Malinowski, even though he may not have been familiar with the latter's works. He also engages intensively with the paradigm of 'primitive thinking.' *Sprache und Mythos* (*Language and Myth*, 1946), which appeared in 1925, examines the role of language in what he calls "mythical thinking." The study advances the claim that language did not arise from myth, and myth did not come from language. Instead, both derive – in a phenomenological sense more than an historical one – from one and the same root: "It [the form of spiritual/mental conception (*geistige Auffassung*) in myth and language] is the form which one may denote as *metaphorical thinking;* the nature and meaning of metaphor is what we must start with."[99]

Like Nietzsche and Biese before him, Cassirer does not speak of metaphor in the Aristotelian sense, but of "radical metaphor,"[100] which translates "cognitive or emotive experience" into sounds and mythical forms. This primeval transfer is the condition for all concept formation in language and myth and lives on as the principle of transfer in linguistic and mythical thinking. In either case, "the law of the leveling [...] of specific differences" prevails; "every part of a whole is the whole itself; every specimen is equivalent to the entire species."[101] Thus, for Cassirer, the Aristotelian definition of one of the main types of metaphor (as *pars pro toto*) logically arises from mythical thinking as he defines it but with the key difference that what represents a mere figure in formal rhetoric means "real identification" for both myth and language:[102] "whatever things bear the same appellation [must] appear absolutely similar."[103] Indeed, by means of metaphorical usage, language can have a retroactive effect on myth: "If the visible image of

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99 Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1953), 84. Emphasis in original.

100 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 87. The term comes from Max Müller ("Metaphor," 377).

101 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 91–92.

102 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 92.

103 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 95.

lightning, as it is fixed by language, is concentrated upon the impression of 'serpentine,' this causes the lightning to *become a snake*."[104]

Up to this point, Cassirer's view still seems compatible with those of Vischer and Biese. Yet he decisively parts ways with them by considering those who relate tropological speech to a longed for world-in-itself as followers of a "naïve realism that regards the reality of objects as something directly and unequivocally given"[105] – a judgment (as my explanations above have shown) that bears on both Vischer and Biese as well as Nietzsche, *ex negativo*. By contrast, Cassirer stresses the positing power of language; one must "see in each of these spiritual forms a spontaneous law of generation; an original way and tendency of expression." From this perspective, language, myth, and art are symbols "in the sense of forces each of which produces and posits a world of its own." At the same time, they perform a descriptive function inasmuch as "in these realms the spirit exhibits itself in that inwardly determined dialectic by virtue of which there is any reality, any organized and definite Being at all."[106]

Not stopping at this insight, Cassirer examines how the first positings (*Setzungen*) and therefore the "genesis" of "primary linguistic concepts" came into being. By his account, they were created in a process that began with an emotional shock to the "primitive" consciousness through an encounter with an existentially significant object or event. Much like what Mauthner describes, this shock, i.e., the sensory content connected to it, was objectified and took the shape of an expressive utterance that continues even after the affect subsided. This first utterance is what Cassirer calls "radical metaphor," the condition for all further language formation.[107]

He furthermore extrapolates the belief in the unity of sign and referent from the moment of shock, an express rejection of claims based on the suggestive or imperative power of speech (whereby he might be referring either to Mauthner or to Malinowski). His point of departure is that, during the moment of shock, "sensory content" forcefully seizes "primitive" consciousness and "reign[s] over practically the whole experiential world." Under such conditions, the radical meta-

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104 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 96.

105 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 6.

106 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 8.

107 Nor is that all. As Birgit Recki observes in her incisive study, Cassirer's "definitions of transfer into another medium and of pars pro toto make every punctuation mark a semantic fulfillment of sensory experience. With that, the 'form of metaphorical thinking' is described, which lies at the foundation of all symbolic forms. [...] The radical metaphor is the functional principle of culture sought by the question about the unity of symbolic forms" (*Cassirer, Grundwissen Philosophie* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013], 40–41).

phor fuses with its content into "an indissoluble unity."[108] In contrast to Vischer and Biese, Cassirer does not accept that there is an analogy-based relation between radical metaphor and the sensory content connected with the shock. Instead he draws on affective theories of 'primitive thinking' that appeal to a physiologically motivated connection between the two that originates in the act of expression. In this way, he defines radical metaphor as a (physiologically and affectively) motivated positing that propagates in linguistic thought and action as the principle of transfer.

Cassirer acknowledges that language and myth drift apart in the course of development, so that in his era language only commands its metaphor-forming force in the literary sphere. But it does not enact this force through the persistence of mythical thinking, as Vischer and Biese would have it. Rather, the word forms itself "into artistic expression."[109] Cassirer, then, does not affirm the revival of mythical identity between sign and referent or the (supposed) truth of myth that this implies.[110] For him, literary works constitute a "world of illusion and fantasy" in which – contra Nietzsche (and Mauthner) – "the realm of pure feeling can find utterance, and can therewith attain its full and concrete actualization" and, most importantly, the "mind [*Geist*]" learns to understand language as "its own self-revelation"[111] (specifically, I should add, a revelation of its affective and physiologically motivated *poietic* activity, which at the same time guarantees human cognition). Understood along Foucauldian lines, this might be taken to mean that in modernity the magical conception of language returns in modified form; it is no longer oriented toward the inner connec-

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108 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 58.

109 See also Schwennsen, who writes, "Through this break, which Cassirer identifies between reflected and unreflected representation, art and myth are separated" ("Kunst und Mythos zwischen Präsenz und Repräsentation," 215). And moreover: "The separation between myth and art begins, according to Cassirer, at the point where aesthetic expression goes beyond a spontaneous outpouring of powerful sensations. Art is not just expressive, but also form-giving and constructive and represents, in its way, the 'dynamic process of life itself' that goes missing with the overcoming of myth" (216).

110 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 99. For this reason, I have reservations about Hirschkop's recent claim that – unlike "those who thought that myth was a danger" (e. g., Ogden and Richards, Orwell, Bakhtin, Frege) – Cassirer belongs to a group of thinkers (among others, Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jacobson, and Walter Benjamin) "who welcome language's mythical inclinations" (*Linguistic Turns*, 162) and for whom "myth remain[s] an ineradicable feature not only of religion, but of every other symbolic form as well – science, art, language – perpetually threatening their progressive achievements" (198).

111 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 99.

tion between language and things, but between language and its speakers. As Foucault writes,

> [l]anguage in the nineteenth century [...] was to have an irreducible expressive value [...] for, if language expresses, it does so not in so far as it is an imitation and duplication of things, but in so far as it manifests and translates the fundamental will of those who speak it.[112]

This chapter has shown that around 1900, anthropologically oriented theories of metaphor emerged in domains adjacent to ethnology and developmental psychology that undermined the Aristotelian distinction between proper and improper speech. Metaphor, these theorists were convinced, cannot simply be replaced by the 'proper' word; the content it transports can be expressed only in that one way and none other. Similar views had been voiced a century earlier, but what was now new was the historical-genealogical and especially the supposedly empirical basis of the human sciences, which lent the idea broad currency and persuasive force. Now, metaphor was no longer mere rhetorical ornament. Verified by science, it gained the status of a 'transcendental a priori' anterior to all thinking and speaking.[113] Wolfgang Riedel has described this turn as the beginning of an unprecedented reevaluation of metaphor that continues to this day.[114] Yet, certainly, there is an essential difference between it and today's theories of metaphor. As we saw on the preceding pages, many theorists at the turn of the century – Malinowski and Cassirer excepted – paradoxically still clung to the ideal of language motivated by extralinguistic reality. Either they skeptically viewed metaphor as the most original but nevertheless contingent sign that was capable, at best, of establishing a culture of semblance, which was then to be euphorically embraced or endured with resignation. Or, citing anthropological and epistemological reasons, they elevated metaphor mimologically to the position of a natural sign. This outlook fit with the rather conservative but extraordinarily successful model of *Dichtung*, or poetry and literary arts in general, as a means of disclosing 'true reality' – a quasi-magical way of (re)discovering greater intimacy between human beings and the world they inhabit.

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112 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 290.
113 Riedel, "Arara ist Bororo," 238.
114 See Riedel, "Arara ist Bororo," 238–241.