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METAPHORS AND MODAL MIXTURES

1. Half a century has passed since Black, in his article on metaphors, stated that he intended to address literary critics, so as to cast some light of the working of a figure of speech which philosophers had looked down on as worthless (with some important exceptions, such as Aristotle)¹. Thanks to this article and the discussion that followed it, the possible cognitive properties of metaphor were also admitted to the context of epistemology oriented towards the natural sciences. Nevertheless, the link between metaphor and knowledge remains obscure.

Much progress has been achieved in the description of the linguistic mechanism, which is also a psychological, mental one, of the best known figure – and it is of little importance that no single descriptive model has predominated. Competition between the various theories is stimulating. Equally noteworthy progress does not appear, however, to have been made concerning the problem under discussion here. When cognitive potential is attributed to metaphor, what is meant by this? Taking for granted, after Black, that the proposition (or utterance) is the minimum dimension of metaphor, are metaphors considered to provide knowledge similar to that supplied by other cognitive utterances, empirical utterances such as “snow is white” or “the cat is on the carpet”? So should metaphors be judged with the criterion of truth as correspondence, *adaequatio*? However, they may provide a different kind of knowledge – let us accept this expression as satisfactory, for the moment –, and their cognitive ambition would then be made

¹ Max Black, *Metaphor*, in *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca-New York, Cornell U.P., 1962, pp. 25-47, p. 25.

legitimate by other conceptions of truth, i.e. truth-coherence or truth-*aletheia*. In short, a metaphor could be seen not so much as a representation as an interpretation, i.e. a *perspective*.

In Black's view this appears to be metaphor's most important contribution to the cognitive dimension. A few years later he wrote: «Perhaps every science must start with metaphor and end with algebra; and perhaps without the metaphor there would never have been any algebra»². What strikes one here is not so much the cautious tone as the fact that, when setting up a link between metaphor and science, Black hastens to add that this link is an *ephemeral* one. Being introductory and inaugural, metaphor is no longer mere ornament, employed for didactic or aesthetic reasons, but, in its provisional and non independent condition, remains an ancillary figure.

Black's embarrassment is evident. One could say that only now did he perceive the limits of his reassessment. In the 1954 article, his criticism of the substitutive and comparative conception had been satisfactorily formulated. Convincing criticism had been made of the idea of reversibility between figural and literal language. When a metaphorical utterance is restored to the literal form in which it presumably originated, i.e. when a paraphrase is made, this results in loss (Black was obviously referring to good, creative metaphors, rather than catachreses or banal expressions): «One of the points I most wish to stress is that the loss in such cases is a loss in cognitive content; the relevant weakness of the literal paraphrase is not that it may be tiresomely prolix or boringly explicit (or deficient in qualities of style); it fails to be a translation because it fails to give the insight that the metaphor did»³.

This is what is lost: not some semantic trait, which can always be restored by a careful 'translation', but rather the *perspective* character of metaphor. We could say that it is this perspective thrust that gives rise to subsequent elaborations and developments. A science may be able to start out from a metaphor, but not from a paraphrased one.

² *Models and Archetypes* is the title of a lecture delivered in 1958 and published for the first time in 1960 (in Id., *Models and Metaphors*, pp. 219-243, p. 242).

³ Id., *Metaphor*, p. 46.

2. By beginning with an utterance, discourse or text, it will (arguably) always be possible to adequately transpose its content, the *dictum*. When an utterance, discourse or text aiming to be equivalent is created, the greatest difficulty lies in the transposition of the *modus*. It is not that the two aspects must always be inseparable. There are certainly ‘zero-perspective’ discourses, originating in anonymous subjectivity (it is unlikely that an utterance of the type “the train for Florence departs from platform 14” will reveal the personality of the person saying it). On the other hand, it is equally certain that utterances, discourses or texts exist, in relation to which a perspective zero setting would cause serious, irreparable damage. These include metaphors, or at least some of them, in which *insight* – to use Black’s term – has a modal function.

Non arbitrary reference has thus been made to a distinction philosophers are used to encountering when dealing with categories. Kant, for example, identified three groups of categories (quantity, quality, relation) articulating the sphere of the *dictum*, and added a fourth group (modality) concerning the sphere of *modus*. We shall return to Kant’s conception in a moment. At this point, it is perhaps a good idea to anticipate the thesis we intend to posit, i.e. that the problem of knowledge *by means of metaphors* can be correctly and adequately addressed *only on the ground of modality*. This, however, requires the introduction into the theory of knowledge of the notion of ‘modal mixture’. Metaphors, as we shall see, can only be understood in their cognitive properties by going beyond the effectuality mixture.

Black looked for allies among literary critics. But if we really want to address the problem he avoided, we must return to the philosophers. That metaphor acts as a *redescription* mechanism, as a filtre selecting and highlighting, reorganising our vision of an object (or situation or problem) still does not demonstrate its knowledge power. Knowledge is a set of true discourses. Nevertheless, are we willing to call a discourse *true* that only states a possibility, a discourse that *could be* true? Is a new intuition, a new vision of something – this undoubtedly is what metaphor offers – already knowledge or only a possibility of knowledge? We agree with Black on the fact that metaphor is able to produce not only aesthetic but also cognitive suggestion. Nevertheless, suggestion, or a perspective, is still not knowledge (not only for those

still attracted by the theory of truth-*adaequatio*). Therefore, Black ended up by attributing an ephemeral character to metaphorical intuitions: they *may become* knowledge – which means this is not yet the case.

The intuitive, perspective component also characterises fictional discourses, both artistic ones and those arising from everyone's private lives (for example, dreams and day dreams). It is generally maintained that fictional discourses are not equivalents of true discourses: they originate in the imagination, not knowledge. Is this too strict a contrast? In any case, if we really want to bring it up for discussion, it is the entire theory of knowledge that must be re-examined. Accepting that perspective – the *mode* of knowledge – plays a decisive (non ephemeral) role, no theory of truth as correspondence can be accepted, even in its most sophisticated variants: the '*res*' to which the subject should 'adapt itself' would no longer coincide with the object, but rather, surprisingly, with the subject itself (*adaequatio* would concern *intellectus* and *modus*). To be more precise, the primacy of *modus* over *dictum* would also be that of the subject over the object, individual peculiarity over universally accepted neutrality, desire over neutral understanding. This research orientation will inevitably take us beyond the distinction between *modus* and *dictum*, as it has been formulated in the classical doctrine of categories. It is from here that it is best to start out.

3. The presentation of modalities in the *Critique of Pure Reason* could be the best starting point. Kant returned to a well established tradition, highlighting the difference between 'thing' and 'modal' categories. «The *modality* of judgments is a quite peculiar function. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it contributes nothing to the content of the judgment but concerns only the value of the copula in relation to thought in general»⁴. Further on he states:

The categories of modality have the peculiarity that, in determining an object, they do not in the least enlarge the concept to which they are attached as predicates. They only express the relation of the concept to the faculty of knowledge. Even when the concept of a thing is quite complete,

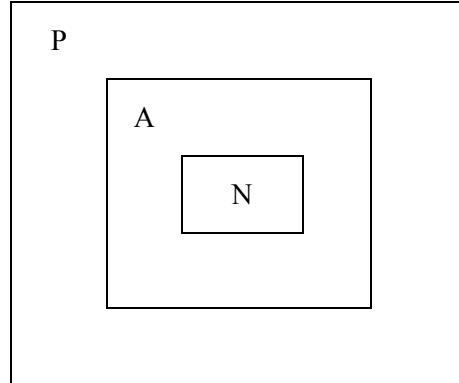
⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781-1787), Eng. trans. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1929, p. 109.

I can still enquire whether this object is merely possible or is also actual, or if actual, whether it is not also necessary⁵.

Kant's position could be represented by the following diagram:

Diagram 1

P = possible
A = actual
N = necessary



This 'concentric right-angled' diagram shows the passage from the possible to the actual and from the actual to the necessary, by means of a progressive restriction. Only a given number of possibilities are actualised. The N rectangle could be empty.

It should be noted that, in accordance with this philosophical conception, which is confirmed by common sense, necessity is thought as *rigid*: that which is necessary cannot be otherwise⁶. Furthermore, necessity is included in the existent/actual (only something that is existent can also be considered necessary). And since rigidity is a distinguishing characteristic of the actual – nothing can change the past, or make the existent never exist – one wonders whether the rigidity of the necessary derives from that characterising the actual. In short, the actual, in this conception, plays a decisive role: it limits the possible and contains the necessary. It would not seem arbitrary to use the term *actuality (modal) mixture* for the combination of modalities under discussion here, thus highlighting the dominant category.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 5, 1015a35-1015b6.

Should a theory of knowledge drawing inspiration – whether conscious or not is of little importance – from the actual mixture identify actuality as the truth model? This is the precise meaning of truth as *adaequatio*: truth consists in indicating the possible that has become actual (or which has necessarily always been so).

However, the dominance of actuality in the theory of knowledge may be the expression of a fallacy. For the time being, let us restrict ourselves to noting the link between knowledge and modal categories, and let us try not to lose sight of the plurality of links.

4. Rejection of truth-*adaequatio* in the name of truth as coherence, or *aletheia*, could be fruitfully explored in the perspective we have begun to outline. Intuitively actuality appears not to be predominant in these conceptions. However, it is advisable not to directly compare the major theories and move forward along a narrower path, where we come across propositions (or microtexts). Let us examine a number of examples:

Yet certaine it is, that wordes, as a Tartars Bowe, doe shoote backe vpon the vnderstanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle, and peruert the iudgement (Bacon)⁷

I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present...but must I now become reconciled to the narrow one-dimensionality of a straight line? (Rushdie)⁸

My head is as stiff as a board (García Márquez)⁹

Can these propositions be judged to be true or false? They do possess the first conditions we are used to requiring, i.e. they are declarative propositions and not questions or exclamations. Even the last part of the Rushdie passage is, on closer examination, a rhetorical question, and can thus be included in the declarative sphere. Could we say that they are statements? Equivalence between ‘declarative’ and ‘statement’ is widely

⁷ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, 1605, ed. Michael Kiernan, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000, p. 117.

⁸ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981), Vintage, 1995, p. 150.

⁹ «Tengo el cerebro tieso como un palo», Gabriel García Márquez, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*, Barcelona, Random House Mondadori, 1999, p. 30; *No One Writes to the Colonel*, Eng. trans. J.S. Bernstein, London, Cape, 1971.

accepted. And yet, in the face of these examples, we have the feeling that the traditional classification of propositions must be reconsidered. The part of the Bacon extract that reads: «wordes... mightily entangle, and peruert the iudgement» seems to be a genuine statement, but when they «doe shoote backe vpon the vnderstanding of the wisest», this twist of the upper part of the body – a minute before we were unaware of the fact that they had a similar body to ours that could twist round and move like an archer on horseback turning round to shoot at his pursuers – is enough to cause some uncertainty. Uncertainty grows when considering the other examples. Metaphors suggest similarities. Do they go as far as stating them? Should we *believe* in the similarity between an individual and the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities? If this is the case, how can we represent this similarity?

What experience, what state of affairs could offer the above mentioned metaphors empirical confirmation? However, the impossibility of finding empirical confirmation does not derive from the vague nature of these propositions, and not even from the fact of their expressing a strictly private experience. All of us are capable of understanding and agreeing with the psychic condition expressed by the words «My head is as stiff as a board», though paraphrasing this utterance would be by no means a simple task.

Despite their declarative character, these propositions appear to differ radically from “snow is white” and “the cat is on the carpet”. Unlike these empirical statements, the metaphors used by Bacon, Rushdie and García Márquez are not genuine statements and are not empirical. They are not genuine statements, inasmuch as they suggest a perspective («try and look at things in this way»), and they are not empirical, because – and we can now say it – they do not belong to the actuality modal mixture.

The argument could be reformulated thus: since these propositions, which make sense and offer non trivial perspectives with regard to the states and events they describe, do not appear to be ‘empirically oriented’, and since we believe we must clarify their modal status, i.e. their difference in respect of empirical (or actual) statements, we are forced to hypothesise *at least one* different modal mixture from that of actuality. Does this hypothesis originate in, and will it remain confined to the emotional sphere? Or is it a hypothesis that, albeit conceptually new, is confirmed by a number of major authors?

5. Subordination to the actuality mixture has always been vigorously attacked in the history of philosophy. We could even say that refusal to subordinate thought to actuality is the very essence of philosophy for many great philosophers. This is not the case for all philosophers, though: it is not the case for empiricism, positivism, neopositivism, Quine's naturalised epistemology etc. The reasons, in the name of which the *actual fallacy* has been criticised – this is our description of subordination to actuality, and its deforming results¹⁰ – have often been as equally subject to criticism as the fallacy they rejected. It is enough to think of Platonism, i.e. the type of philosophy that argues in favour of the autonomy of thought by splitting empirical reality, referring to *ideal*, higher actuality, whose identity, arguably, has the traits of reality devoid of imperfections. This is, however, not the route indicated by Nietzsche and Heidegger. To be able to fully understand Nietzsche we must complete and specify one of his best known statements: if the task of philosophy is to overturn Platonism, it must be added that this should not be understood literally (otherwise, Plato's "true world" would already have been overturned, by the empiricists and positivists).

In Heidegger's terms, the actual fallacy is the attitude of those who favour the intraworldly entity and attempt to formulate the problem of being starting out from the entity. The actual fallacy thus derives from forgetting the ontological difference (and also the difference between intraworldly entity and *Dasein*). I have shown elsewhere how Heidegger's philosophy is *modal*, and encourages fresh reflection on classical modalities (the possible, actual and necessary)¹¹. Here I shall restrict myself to mentioning one of the fundamental theses of *Being and Time*: «Higher than actuality stands possibility»¹².

¹⁰ From the ontological point of view, the actual fallacy is perfectly represented by Quine: «A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: "What is there?"» (*From a Logical Point of View*, 1953, Harvard U.P., p. 1).

¹¹ On this see Giovanni Bottirolì, *Le scissioni dell'alfa privativo. Per una concezione modale della verità*, in «Oltrecorrente», 5, 2002, pp. 9-16. On my conception of modalities, and the modal revolution, cf. *Teoria dello stile*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1997.

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Eng. trans. *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1962, p. 38.

What does ‘higher’ mean? Not larger, not numerically more substantial. We can exclude this interpretation. Heidegger means ontological superiority, which only becomes fully understandable by recalling the overall vision of *Being and Time*. Possibility can only appear ontologically richer than actuality if one does not think of possibility as the realm of shadows, which need to drink blood to become consistent. So Heidegger’s possibility is not a *dictum* authorised to cross the threshold beyond which it will acquire existence, but rather a possibility maintaining the riches and strength of the possible even when being activated. It is a possibility ‘overtaking’ existence – ontologically, not empirically (it is not a supplement of existence).

Is this perspective obscure? Perhaps, inevitably, until we examine its ontic manifestations. We can already state, however, that a possibility keeping its strength, which is not used up in the realisation process, *must be* a necessary possibility. And this implies a modal mixture that is not empirically oriented.

Let us quickly change over to logic. Logic as well as ontology can suggest a non-actual or anti-actual vision, as far as thought activity is concerned. Logical reflection is in itself an act of autonomy in respect of empirical descriptions: therefore an inference (cats have five paws; Felix is a cat; Felix has five paws) may maintain its own *validity*, its own formal correctness, even in the absence of *truth*, understood as correspondence to facts. Nevertheless, there are authors who have suggested subordinating logic to reality. For example, Bertrand Russell, in whose view logic is an abstract natural science, which «must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features»¹³.

This approach does not deny the distinction between logic and reality, nor that between analytical and synthetic. Nevertheless, logic is imprisoned in actual reality. “A bachelor is an unmarried man” is only a legitimate, meaningful proposition because it is legitimate and meaningful to ask oneself, in certain circumstances, whether an indi-

¹³ Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1919, p. 169.

vidual, belonging to the human species, to ‘what there is’, is a bachelor or not.

When returning to the *modal* autonomy of thought, the split between logic and reality must be stressed. This appears to be the route pointed out by Wittgenstein. The specificity of two types of proposition can already be seen in the initial phase of his thought: they *have to do* with the cognitive dimension, albeit less directly than with single empirical propositions. What these propositions have in common is their ‘declarative non assertive’ character. On the one hand, there are propositions expressing scientific laws, which should not be seen as true statements, but rather rules for the construction of descriptive utterances («Distinction between ‘statements’ and ‘hypotheses’: An hypothesis is not a statement, but a law for constructing statements»)¹⁴. If a law (or hypothesis) were a statement, it would describe facts; not this or that fact, but *general facts*. But general facts do not exist; therefore scientific laws are not really statements. On the other hand, there are expressions in which philosophical thought takes shape, but philosophy is not a doctrine; it is more of an activity and thus does not result in statements: «Philosophy does not result in ‘philosophical propositions’, but rather in the clarification of propositions»¹⁵.

If we suppose that all propositions with cognitive value be statements, there would be propositions, which, being devoid of immediate empirical reference, and not being interrogative, imperative or exclamatory, are to be classified – at least provisionally – as *non assertive declaratives*. These propositions, arguably, have a special status, and require recognition. Just as, in Wittgenstein’s view, the specificity of logical propositions requires recognition: «The correct explanation of the propositions of logic must assign to them a unique status among all propositions»¹⁶.

Was Wittgenstein attempting to remove logic from the subordination to actual reality posited by Russell? The important thing is not the

¹⁴ Cf. *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle (1929-32), conversations recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, Eng. trans. Joachim Schulte and Brian McGuinness, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979, p. 99.

¹⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), 4.112 (Eng. trans. B.F. McGuinness and D.F. Pears, London, Routledge, 1961).

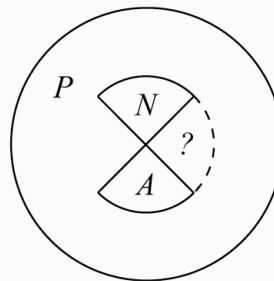
¹⁶ *Tractatus*, 6.112.

philological correctness of this reading. The essential questions are different: *can a combination of classical modalities which is not dominated by actuality be thought?* i.e. a modal mixture which does not correspond to the concentric right-angled diagram? *And how many types of mixture can (or must) be thought?*

Let us try to build up a diagram in which the possible does not have to result in the actual and in which the necessary does not inevitably come out as an area within the existent – are these not the first decisive moves towards freedom from the dominance of actuality? The diagram could be:

Diagram 2

P = possible
 A = actual
 N = necessary



Here the necessary is no longer filtered by the factual; it flows directly from possibility. The hour-glass or bow-tie shaped figure shows the difference between the two modal mixtures in the circle of possibles: one consists in the possible (P) passing to the actual (A), the other in the possible becoming necessary (N). There is a possible additional empty area to be occupied by the (also) necessary actual already provided for in diagram 1. But the true novelty is the direct combination of P and N .¹⁷

This combination requires further investigation. Conceptually, its novelty could be reappraised if we were not able to endow necessity with a meaning different from the traditional one. Does necessity re-

¹⁷ St Anselm's ontological argument is based on this combination: it indicates the passage from P to A by way of N , while the a posteriori proof sets out from A , the actual, to infer a necessary entity.

main rigid in the *P-N* combination? This question implies another one: what makes necessity rigid? The filter of actuality, as we have already seen, but also, it must be added, logical style. Rigidity has two faces: necessity is a priori rigidity, the actual a posteriori rigidity. While the rigidity of the actual results from its ‘having happened’¹⁸, that of the necessary is implicit in ‘what cannot be otherwise’. So the servitude against which thought rebels, in the name of a necessity different from that which it is fighting against, is to be identified with rigidity.

What force could oppose rigid necessity, the unbreakable *Ananke*? How can victory over rigidity be imagined? Let us examine the new modal combination, given in the hour-glass diagram – an image which seems to offer a further metaphorical resource in respect of that of the bow-tie. What can we call this new mixture? The possible necessary? It would be an ambiguous name. It would not be clear whether we were talking about the *necessarily possible* or *necessary possibilities*. The two expressions do not appear, except through mental laziness or prejudice, to be in any way synonymous.

Necessarily possible: what is possible, but not ‘simply possible’, ‘only possible’ – in this case the function of the adverbial modifier would be incomprehensible. Nevertheless, can there be a possibility which is only (or merely) possible? “It’s going to rain tomorrow”: it is possible; is it necessarily so? In other words: it will not necessarily rain, but is the possibility that this will happen not perhaps a possibility rigidly inscribed in the alternative “is it going to or not going to rain tomorrow”?

Alternatives of this type are called *tautologies*. These are propositions that are always true, on the basis of their structure. They belong to the set of logical propositions, to which, in Wittgenstein’s view, a special status should be assigned in respect of other propositions (presumably statements). The difference between “it’s going to rain tomorrow” and “it’s going to or not going to rain tomorrow” is usually described as follows: “it’s going to rain tomorrow” is an empirical proposition, and its truth can only be established by a test. To judge the truth of a tautology such as “it’s going to or not going to rain tomorrow” linguistic analysis is enough. In Wittgenstein’s view:

¹⁸ In the words of an old precept: “Factum... fieri infectum non potest” (What has been done cannot become undone).

It is the peculiar mark of logical propositions that one can recognize that they are true from the symbol alone, and this fact contains in itself the whole philosophy of logic. And so too it is a very important fact that the truth or falsity of non-logical propositions *cannot* be recognized from propositions alone¹⁹.

At this stage, after returning to diagram 2, we can formulate a number of considerations:

– does diagram 2 concern *de dicto* or *de re* modalities? This question will obviously oblige us to look again at diagram 1, sooner or later. Let us not go beyond the boundaries of language for the moment: the diagram allows us to classify the various types of cognitive utterances in the different spaces;

– the area denoted by *P* contains utterances such as “It’s going to rain tomorrow”, i.e. empirical possibilities. And if it rains tomorrow, the utterance “It’s raining today” will enter the *A* area. On the other hand, tautologies, such as “it’s going to or not going to rain tomorrow”, will be hosted by the *N* area, which could also include scientific laws, not in the sense of factual statements, but in that of rules for the production of true utterances.

Are the questions we set aside in the process of finding answers? We appear to be in the face of two possible interpretations of the second diagram:

a) *P* stands for what is (merely) possible, *N* for the necessarily possible. This difference seems to correspond to Wittgenstein’s thesis: «Nothing in the province of logic can be merely possible. Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are facts»²⁰. Is Wittgenstein saying here that logical possibility is ‘necessarily possible’, in contrast with empirical possibility?

This difference seems convincing, from one point of view. Let us give another example: it is necessarily possible that a speck in the visual field have a colour, while it is ‘merely possible’ that the colour be red (rather than yellow etc.)²¹;

¹⁹ *Tractatus*, 6.113.

²⁰ *Tractatus*, 2.0121.

²¹ Cf. *Tractatus*, 2.0131.

b) nevertheless, doubts remain: the possibility that it rain tomorrow does not seem to differ, along a scale of the ‘necessarily possible’, from the possibility that it rain or not rain tomorrow. When saying that the possibility of rain tomorrow is ‘merely possible’ is the intention perhaps to suggest that this event could be impossible? Certainly not. Therefore it is necessarily possible that it rain tomorrow.

So diagram 2 could arguably be interpreted as follows: P is the necessarily possible (nP), and hosts utterances that can be true or false (“it’s going to rain tomorrow”, “it isn’t going to rain tomorrow” etc.), while N is the necessary, i.e. the set of utterances that are always true on the basis of their structure (tautologies)²².

6. We are beginning to understand the reasons for our dissatisfaction. In diagram 2 *necessity manages to escape the power of actuality but not rigidity*. The theories corresponding to this diagram, in either possible interpretation, have freed themselves from a posteriori, but not a priori rigidity. Our thesis is still valid: the theory of “classical” modalities is dominated by rigidity. If the possible appears to escape rigidity, this only takes place thanks to its ontological indeterminacy and inferiority. It is, nevertheless, an illusion: the possible condemned to the rigidity of the actual or that of the necessary is *already rigid*.

How can the classical theory be overcome? Does it not provide for all modalities and modes? Not at all. As we have seen, classical modalities are saturated with rigidity: *therefore rigidity is a modal category, albeit an implicit one*. If we take another look at Kant’s table of categories, we cannot avoid noting their articulation in opposite pairs: possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence and necessity/contingency. It is enough to extend this articulation to the implicit category, to give rise to a new pair: if the rigid is a modal category, the flexible will also be one. Thanks to the rigid/flexible distinction, the whole modal sphere can be newly built up.

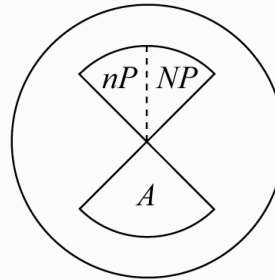
²² The latter interpretation seems preferable; if we take up interpretation (a), we would have to make room for tautologies, which, apart from being necessarily possible, are necessarily true, within N. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the divergence between the two interpretations will be considerably altered in comparison with diagram 3.

The direction to be followed is now clear: the concept of ‘flexible necessity’ needs to be tried out. We have identified two factors making necessity rigid: the filter of actuality and style of thought. So flexible necessity is to be sought in a direct combination between possibility and necessity, and in a non rigid, i.e. non separative style of thought. The $P - N$ combination does, however, seem ambiguous. The difference between the ‘necessarily possible’ and ‘necessary possibility’, which is immediately clear on the intuitive level, can now be specified: the necessarily possible is the rigidly possible, while a necessary possibility draws on the flexibility dimension. This dimension can only be explored by a logic which is not separative or disjunctive, but rather *conjunctive*.

Which field of phenomena finds the possibility of a correct, adequate and fruitful description in conjunctive logic? Before addressing this question it seems worthwhile reformulating the previous diagram, making the difference between the two conceptual fields visible:

Diagram 3

nP = necessarily possible
 NP = necessary possibilities
 A = actual



We shall call it a *divided necessity diagram*. From now onwards we shall use nP for the necessarily possible and NP for necessary possibilities. Note that nP and NP are not two mutually exclusive areas: a necessary possibility is *also* necessarily possible, otherwise it would be possible on some occasions and not on others. In the NP area, flexibility includes necessity, just as a dancer’s agility includes the rigidity of a skeleton. The two combination zones between possible and necessary thus differ in the different function of rigidity, which is dominant in nP , while, in NP , its function is ‘defensive’ towards the

impossible, i.e. it guarantees that the necessary possibilities always be possible²³.

We now need to test the heuristic value of this distinction. Which phenomena, or utterances (if we are to restrict ourselves to the linguistic field) are to be placed in *NP*? We cannot use Wittgenstein's examples: a speck must necessarily have a colour and this colour need not necessarily be yellow. Furthermore, a mountain chain will have gaps between one mountain and another: it is necessarily possible that a mountain chain be characterized by its valleys, but no necessity prescribes their possible shape.

No trace of necessary possibilities is to be found in these examples. So let us look at another example. In his analysis of *The Purloined Letter*, Jacques Lacan stated that a letter always reaches its destination²⁴. This utterance lends itself to an obvious, immediate interpretation. Lacan could be referring to the conclusion of the narrated event, i.e. the fact that the letter sent to the Queen, and cleverly obtained by Minister D, ends up in the hands of the person to whom it was addressed. If this route is highlighted, Poe's story seems to be dominated by a circular structure and a promise of restoration. Against this interpretation, attributed to Lacan, Derrida foregrounds the possibility of loss or destruction: «Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but it belongs to the structure of the letter to be capable, always, of not arriving»²⁵. In our terms: it is necessarily possible that a letter get lost, that it fail to arrive at its destination.

But Lacan is not denying this possibility. His argument should be understood differently, without losing sight of the double meaning of a letter as an "epistle, missive" and "signifier"²⁶. A letter always arriving at its destination means that the action, 'determinism' of signifier cannot be avoided. But, since the determinism of the signifier is not

²³ Diagram 3 could have been set out differently, with *NP* as a subset of *nP*. Furthermore, admitting that all possibilities (P) be necessarily possible (nP), the diagram would highlight the difference between rigid and flexible areas.

²⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Le facteur de la vérité*, in *The Postcard*, Eng. trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 444.

²⁶ Lacan's signifier is not the same as Saussure's. It is not one half of a sign. It is rather a semiotic function.

the same as physical determinism, and becomes part of flexible subjects, its action will be much more correctly described by modal rather than factual or behavioural language. What does the action of the signifier consist of? Addressing subjects, referring them to their possibilities: not to any possibilities, but rather their necessary or higher ones.

This determinism cannot be circumvented or suspended. This clearly does not mean that subjects be obliged to take up their necessary possibilities. However, if these are not taken up, they will be unfaithful to themselves. For example, Caesar could have crossed or not crossed the Rubicon. We know that he chose his higher possibilities. Kafka could or could not have written *The Trial*: by writing it he chose not to give up his vocation.

In Poe's story, all the characters are determined by the signifier, but each of them has his/her own 'nature', i.e. his/her own modal mixture. The triumph or defeat of each character is to be seen in relation to his/her own peculiar possibilities. These possibilities are implicit in the identity of subjects, but unlike those in a valley in a mountain chain or colour in a speck. This is the difference between Heidegger's *Dasein* and the intraworldly entity. So the NP area does not contain statements but *interpretations*, and an interpretation goes beyond the split between factual and logical, as thought by Wittgenstein (at least at an earlier stage). We can once again perceive the unsatisfactory nature of the traditional classification of utterances.

7. Let us develop this point further. An *interpretative* utterance refers to a text or identity of a subject differently from the way a statement refers to a fact. Interpretation is not merely a description, but neither is it imperative, interrogative (etc.) discourse. Should we not then take its not being included in the most common classification into account?

In Speech Act theory (and in Wittgenstein at his later stage) a statement is only one type of utterance, and does not deserve particular attention. But for knowledge theory as *adaequatio*, in all its variants, the decisive border remains the one separating declaratives (or statements) from non declaratives of various kinds. It is precisely this border that, with Nietzsche and Freud, comes under discussion. An interpretative truth differs from a factual one, though not being devoid of descriptive or explanatory characteristics. In what is this difference

grounded? Up to now, in our view, no satisfactory explanation has been provided.

Hermeneutics has contrasted facts and meanings, objects and texts. Insufficiently, if a vehicular conception of meaning is maintained, if meaning is conceived in the ‘thing’ sense, thus being exposed to the criticism of naturalized epistemology. Hermeneutics lacks true understanding of the link between meaning and the *modus* sphere. Furthermore: it is not that it is impossible to split up meaning into more elementary parts following an ‘object’ procedure, but, with this kind of analysis, defining componential semantics, the essence of the problem is lost. Neither the stylistic plurality of meaning (i.e. regimes) nor that of logic is understood. The problem of truth cannot be further developed.

This is probably why Heidegger distrusted hermeneutics²⁷. He was quite right: however fulsome the praise and however numerous the references, hermeneutics does not appear to have taken up the modal formulation of Heidegger’s thought.

The conception of truth as *aletheia* is not fulfilled in emphasis on opening. If the site of truth is not, as Heidegger maintained, the proposition, this does not mean that we must look for a more originative site: it is the plurality of modes of articulation, i.e. the semantic-factual split and meaning regimes, that is ‘more originative’. The great novelty emerging in Nietzsche and Freud, then in Heidegger, is that meaning does not consist of a content carried or transmitted (however it be interpreted), but is an articulating, forming, structuring activity. *Energheia* and not *ergon*. But this intuition becomes a theory, the theory of meaning regimes, only on condition that the meaning *modes* be thought.

8. At the outset of this paper we noted that metaphors, though presenting themselves in the form of statements or at least descriptive utterances, do not seem to provide the same kind of knowledge as utterances such as “snow is white” or “the cat is on the carpet”. Therefore the link between metaphor and knowledge remains obscure. The abil-

²⁷ «Hermeneutics is the concern of Gadamer» (letter from Martin Heidegger to Otto Pöggeler, 5 January 1973, quoted in Otto Pöggeler, *Heidegger und die hermeneutische Philosophie*, Freiburg-München, Alber, 1983, p. 395).

ity to redescribe an object, highlighted by Black, can certainly be compared with a new perceptive or semantic proposal, a new possibility; but a possibility is not yet knowledge. To be able to affirm the cognitive value of metaphors we need a different theory of knowledge from the empirical or realist one, a conception that is not based on things or facts. It is only in the field of modality (and we have already referred to this in section 2) that the problem of knowledge by means of metaphor can be really addressed.

The development of our argument leads to an initial conclusion: an utterance can only claim its truth *relatively* from the modal mixture where it is situated. This is a relational, not relativist view. The plurality of modal mixtures makes any claim to truth *which is not modally contextualized* illegitimate. “The cat is on the carpet” – as an utterance reflecting a fragment of day-to-day experience – is to be understood and evaluated within the actuality mixture. «I have become, it seems to me, the apex of an isosceles triangle, supported equally by twin deities, the wild god of memory and the lotus-goddess of the present» (Rushdie) is not an actual utterance. Like all genuine figural utterances, it is an *interpretative utterance* and is to be understood and evaluated within the divided necessity mixture. It should be noted that, while a (semantically diluted) factual utterance can be judged atomistically, i.e. in a micro context, a figural (semantically dense) one normally requires placement in a wider context, which tends to coincide with the whole text to which it belongs²⁸.

A new problem arises from this conclusion, however. While, from the strictly linguistic viewpoint, all metaphors turn out to be satisfactorily homogeneous, this is not the case from the cognitive one. A strong divergence emerges between the two viewpoints: affinity, even identity, in the semantic mechanism does not make an analogous affinity credible for the modal mechanism, i.e. membership of one of the various mixtures. Only genuine figural utterances, as we have just pointed out, belong to the *NP* mixture. We must therefore beware of grammar, of grammatical appearances – a precaution that both Nietzsche

²⁸ The problem of holism will not be treated here, neither will that of *semi-holism*. It is doubtful whether holism and atomism are in strict opposition; maybe the problem can be addressed with the criterion of degrees.

and Wittgenstein advocated – when analysis moves from the linguistic to the cognitive field.

How can a genuine figural utterance be recognized? Are we really sure about the difference we are claiming? Is it not true that no figural similarity can be identified with literal ones, i.e. those between objects or individuals belonging to the same species? One car looks like another one, like flowers. On the other hand, even the similarities encoded in catachrestic metaphors give the sensation of setting up similarity, of creating (or having created) it, rather than finding it.

The objection is partially well founded, but finds an answer by specifying the notion of ‘mixture’: it is dominance not the exclusive presence of a category or combination that differentiates one modal mixture from another. Let us return to the problem of identity. Defining his/her ‘being’ in relation to his/her necessary possibilities does not mean being (almost) excluded from actuality for a (real or fictional) individual. If this were the case, the most complex individualities would inevitably be almost angelic creatures, condemned to exile. This is the condition of a large number of creative artists, whose realm is not of this world²⁹. This is a historical condition of many modern artists, and in the past has not prevented, and does not, in itself, prevent thorough integration in society and immediate reception. Besides, the artist’s solitude during his/her life does not prevent the necessary possibilities, to be found in his/her works, from living in the «great time» as Bakhtin called it. For each of us, Nietzsche’s invitation, taken from Pindar, “Become what you are”, which we can transpose into “Give form to your necessary possibilities” does not imply rejecting actuality. These considerations should be extended to metaphors.

Even those metaphors less compromised with empirical similarities, even those metaphors whose beauty is more abstract, use materials from *Wirklichkeit*. This is all too evident. Nevertheless, it is worth distinguishing the various modal orientations and possible destinies of

²⁹ In Freud’s words, writing about Norbert Hanold, the main character in Jensen’s short story: «By such separation of imagination and intellectual capacity, he is destined to be a poet or a neurotic, and he belongs to that race of beings whose realm is not of this world» (*Der Wahn und die Träume in Wilhelm Jensens ‘Gradiva’*, 1906, Eng. trans., *Delusion and Dream in Wilhelm Jensen’s Gradiva*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1921, pp. 119-120).

figural utterances. Are the metaphors in the process of becoming algebra not irresistibly drawn or sucked back into the actuality mixture? The passage from "the world is a large animal, a living totality" to "the world is a machine" characterizes the birth of modern physics, with Galileo and Descartes. What remains, however, that is metaphorical in modern physics? Here Black was right. The metaphors starting out a research programme in the field of natural sciences play an ephemeral role and have an ephemeral life span.

Many literary metaphors are however characterized by an analogous actual orientation:

The light spread upwards from the glass roof making the theatre seem a festive ark, anchored among the hulks of houses, her frail cables of lanterns looping her to her moorings³⁰.

O., now in his seventies, his memory failing, his face as wrinkled as a half-closed palm³¹.

In these metaphors the non- or anti-actual power is not displayed in all its strength (albeit more decisively in the former case). Where does this sensation originate? Probably in the fact that between the terms of metaphorical relation, both of which are empirical, the contextual difference is not particularly strong. The Auster passage even reveals a unitary context, the human body. On the other hand, juxtaposition of objects from distant spheres, though equally empirical, can enhance the abstract working of the metaphor, masked by naming of concrete objects.

9. The need to describe the specificity of metaphors, i.e. metaphorical utterances, and the special place occupied by them, has led us to outline a new linguistic, ontological view: modality thought, a *modal revolution*.

Let us attempt to point out some research areas:

a) a new classification of propositions with cognitive value. The border between declarative and non declarative could be kept, on condition of breaking up the synonymous relationship between 'declarative' and 'statement', and certainly between 'declarative' and 'empiri-

³⁰ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 75.

³¹ Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, New York, Sun Press, 1982, p. 145.

cal statement'. Interpretative propositions (including figural ones) would thus be placed in the declarative area, albeit with full autonomy. Or else one could highlight the difference between statements and interpretations, since they presuppose two different modal mixtures. Naturally, the latter route seems preferable to us;

b) the problem of sense. Is a metaphorical utterance always provided with sense? Or is there a criterion for stating the lack of sense of particular metaphors? The sense criterion for figural utterances should not be identified with the empirical referent, since (genuine) figural utterances belong to the necessary possible mixture, which is not devoid of actuality, but in which the latter does not occupy a privileged position. Neither is this the case with the grammar of any natural language, in the rigid or semi-rigid rules of usage prescribing the boundaries of meaning in a language-game. Wittgenstein's later indications do not therefore seem adequate. In his *Philosophical Investigations* one can find the 'opposite possibility' test. For example, if someone states: "this line is two metres long", I can think that this statement is not true, but not that the line has no length³². In our terms, it is *necessarily possible* that the line have a given length.

Grammar, or grammar type rules, authorize us to see attributing sensations to inanimate objects as nonsensical: "This table has toothache" is thus a proposition to which the grammatical criterion of sense can be applied without hesitation. Semantic rules should allow us to recognize utterances such as "colorless green ideas sleep furiously" as nonsensical. Nevertheless, when commenting on Chomsky's famous example, Denis Bertrand pointed out a possible though hazardous isotypy³³. The fluidity and flexibility of the semantic dimension make the identification of a criterion of sense difficult and probably impossible. There are many metaphorical propositions which, at first sight, and in the absence of a plausible context, appear senseless. A redeeming action on the part of a context may, however, take place over time: "I have become the apex of an isosceles triangle" – this is an example of a metaphor which no longer necessarily seems nonsensical, thanks to one of Rushdie's characters;

³² Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 1953.

³³ Denis Bertrand, *Précis de sémiotique littéraire*, Paris, Nathan, 2000.

c) the unpredictable nature of isotopies, which metaphors can create, requires new descriptive and analytical tools. Registration of departures from a norm, irregularities and transgressions is not enough³⁴. This would imply the existence or legitimacy of a single logical style, i.e. the *separative* one, where meaning should always be determined or determinable (vagueness phenomena do not cause a logical catastrophe). Figural utterances originate in a *conjunctive* style of thought, which should not be seen merely as a set of transgressions or violations, albeit tolerated ones. From one point of view, it is true that the conjunctive style finds support in the separative so as to deny and reinvent it, while, from another point of view, one can argue that the conjunctive is more originative, or at least just as originative. The power of connectedness displayed in figures was, for Vico and Nietzsche, the return of energy, which grammar, with its rigid articulations, thought it had captured and domesticated.

Deciding that one style of thought is more originative than another one is not essential for our argument. What matters is that the essential contribution of figurativeness, its possible autonomy, and therefore the legitimacy of the type of logic we call *conjunctive*, be acknowledged. More precisely, a family of types of logic, further split into confusive and distinctive styles, is meant by this expression.

d) conjunctive logic is grounded in a fluid, clefting concept of 'identity'. *Identity* does not necessarily mean, as in separative logic, 'coincidence' (with itself). This coincidence can be seen as a real fallacy, to the extent to which it tends to exclude fluid, flexible identity. It should be clear that the *non coincidence* we are discussing is not the equivalent of a contradiction. It is not the violation of a principle, defined initially by Aristotle, which cannot be avoided by any rational discourse. If our argument is not immediately comprehensible – and there is nothing surprising about this – this is because a long, fallacious tradition has hidden the 'stylized' character of the principle of non contradiction, and the polysemy of opposite relations. That *A* coincide with *non-A* is possible, and legitimate at the rational level, if *A* and *non-A* are thought as correlational and not contradictory;

³⁴ The notion of 'category-mistake', taken from Ryle, is discussed by Ricoeur in *La métaphore vive*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1975 pp. 31 ff. (*The Rule of Metaphor*, Eng. trans. Robert Czerny *et al.*, London, Routledge, 1978, pp. 21 ff.).

e) for separative logic, a predicate can refer to a subject (an individual substance): for example, one can say that “Plato is an Athenian”; but an individual substance cannot be the predicate of another substance: for example, one cannot say that “Plato is Socrates”. But this thesis, which is among the most basic to separative logic, is not acceptable to conjunctive logic. It is quite legitimate, for a conjunctive style of thought, to state that Plato is Socrates. This statement becomes possible, thanks to a different concept of identity: identity as identification.

Psychoanalysis shows that this concept of identity is legitimate, even extremely fruitful, with an extraordinary heuristic thrust. For Freud, who, for the first time in a satisfactorily systematic way, set out the theory of identification in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*³⁵, identity of human beings is determined by the desire of being: a desire that takes us, from the outset, beyond our boundaries – which thus, from one point of view, have never existed. The relationship with otherness is constitutive. The child is his/her mother and father (two heterogeneous identifications) and then other people. He/she will identify positively with his/her models. Thus Plato will desire to be Socrates, and can be him.

Not entirely: as with metaphors, and what Lacan called the paternal metaphor, an intersection comes about between A and B, but not a complete superimposition. This happens with distinctive metaphors, while delirious identifications are confusive processes;

f) «Three metamorphoses of the spirit have I designated to you: how the spirit became a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child»³⁶. This is a process of identification described in its serial condition. What separative logic sees as unacceptable has taken place three times: a subject becomes the predicate of another subject (the verb *become* means that something identifies with something else and interiorizes it in its modelling force). This is what normally happens with metaphor³⁷.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, Eng. trans. James Strachey, London, International Psychoanalytical Press, 1922. Cf. particularly Chaps. 7 (distinction between three types of identification) and 8 (identification can concern the Ego or Ideal of the Ego).

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1883-85; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Eng. trans. Thomas Common, Ware, Wordsworth Classics, 1997, p. 22.

³⁷ The example could seem irrelevant, because it does not involve named indi-

One could attempt to translate figural relations into the separative style, thus returning them to the logic whose uniqueness and primacy they do not accept. One could say, for example, that the camel exemplifies the 'heaviness' predicate, or that the lexemes /spirit/ and /camel/ have their area of confluence or intersection in this semantic trait. These descriptions are not groundless, and confirmation can be found in them of the inadequacy of the strictly linguistic viewpoint.

The affinity between metaphor and the identification process should lead us back to the pluralism of modal mixtures: in every identification the subject chooses or does not choose its necessary possibilities. Identification does not come to an end in a moment or brief period: it is a process that is on occasion long, conflictual and troublesome³⁸. At this stage diagram 3 appears in a new light: as a set of polysemous distinctions, where *P*, for example, indicates various types of possibility, those of the intraworldly entity, but also those of *Dasein*. It is only in the case of *Dasein* that it makes sense to speak of necessary possibilities, i.e. possibilities to be acknowledged and elaborated by interpretation.

10. What can be learnt from metaphors, analyzed in the field of modalities is the plurality of mixtures, and the passage to a non referential theory of knowledge; the widening of classical modalities, to which can be added the categories of 'rigid/flexible' and the modes of meaning (confusive, separative and distinctive regimes); the need for a new logic, already set in motion by Heraclitus, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Lacan, in quite different versions, but close enough to allow one to speak of 'conjunctive logic': a type of logic that has never been able to describe itself, and which could receive very important stimuli from a good description; the confirmation of the concept of identity as identification, theorized by psychoanalysis, which probably has its best chance of elaboration in literature.

viduals. It is, nevertheless, interesting, because it highlights the serial process of identifications.

³⁸ There are also brief, contingent and intermittent identifications. These are often those concerning the Ego (for example, with a sports champion, whose actions provoke enthusiasm without any attempt at imitation).