

2014

# Heidegger, metaphor, and the essence of language

Joel Meservy

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, joelmeservy@gmail.com*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Meservy, Joel, "Heidegger, metaphor, and the essence of language" (2014). *LSU Master's Theses*. 277.  
[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses/277](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/277)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

# HEIDEGGER, METAPHOR, AND THE ESSENCE OF LANGUAGE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

by  
Joel Meservy  
B.A., University of Tennessee, 2009  
May 2014

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This thesis was made possible only with the help and support of many people. I would first like to thank Anna Rose, who took care of me when I could not; Cliff and Deb Meservy, for their perennial encouragement and support; Anthony Chow, for stress management counseling; Thelonius, Bill, Penelope, and Quattro, for their comfort and calm; Eric Pannico and Jaideep Shah, for their feedback and comments; and the rest of my friends and family, for all the little things. Finally, I would like to thank the members of my committee, Greg Schufreider, François Raffoul, and Mary Sirridge, for committing time and resources to this project.

# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Aristotle and a Classic Account of Metaphor.....	5
1.2 Heidegger and the Right Concept of Language .....	7
CHAPTER 2: RICOEUR.....	8
2.1 Ricoeur, Metaphor, and the Emergence of Meaning .....	8
2.2 Ontological Implications of Ricoeur’s Metaphor .....	11
2.3 Ricoeur and Heidegger .....	13
CHAPTER 3: DERRIDA.....	18
3.1 Derrida, Metaphor, and Philosophy .....	19
3.2 Quasi-Metaphoricity and the Retrait.....	23
3.3 Derrida and Heidegger .....	25
CHAPTER 4: HEIDEGGER.....	29
4.1 Heidegger and Language.....	29
4.2 Heidegger and Metaphor .....	35
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	42
VITA.....	44

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I address the question of Heidegger's rejection of metaphor, alleging most of the commentary on this rejection has failed to confront its substance. In particular, I focus on two different interpretations, one given by Paul Ricoeur and the other by Jacques Derrida. Both of these accounts place Heidegger's rejection in a model of language structured by the sign relation; however, I contend Heidegger rejects metaphor precisely *in order to overcome this model of language*. Heidegger's few references to metaphor occur within attempts to rethink the very nature of our being-in-the-world and our relationship to language; that is, he hopes to think the co-belonging of language and body. As such, metaphor is not the best avenue to interpret Heidegger's peculiar language, particularly when such language occurs during the course of his thinking of the bodily articulation of speech.

Likewise, it is most appropriate to locate Heidegger's rejection of metaphor in the context of a thinking of the co-belonging of language and body. Neither Ricoeur nor Derrida take this into account, focusing instead on the status of Heidegger's language in general. But Heidegger does not claim that we are *never* to read *any* of his language as metaphorical or figurative, only not to do so when he is engaged in thinking the co-belonging of body and language (the essence of language). As such, it is impossible to make a blanket assertion regarding the status of the whole range of Heidegger's language.

Heidegger takes pains to make clear we are not to understand his statements regarding the relationship of body and language as metaphorical, since this would retain the very model of language and body he hopes to overcome and think beyond. Ultimately, we see that Heidegger's rejection of metaphor is linked to his attempt to *rethink the essence of language and the human being's relationship to it*; in the process, he provides a point of departure for a radical rethinking of human experience.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Heidegger's peculiar language – what are we to make of it? That is, how are we to read his occasionally cryptic remarks? When he writes, “language is the house of being” or “language is the flower of the mouth,” how are we to understand these phrases? Is he merely speaking metaphorically or figuratively? Is he indulging in tautologies or non-sensible statements? Is he exposing and illustrating the limits of what it is possible to say, or playing with the emergence of meaning in language? Or is he engaged in a project that forces him to properly name being, which is an impossible task?

All of these positions have been taken at one time or another and most of the debate has answered this question from the standpoint of metaphor; they claim Heidegger is employing metaphorical or figurative devices to the advantage of his text.<sup>1</sup> The most prominent contributors to this discussion have been Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida, and both of them consider Heidegger's peculiar language to be metaphorical, albeit in different ways.

But this reading ignores Heidegger's instruction not to read his language as metaphorical. The question then arises: why does Heidegger reject metaphor? Is it merely to complicate the reading of his text? Or is there another, less trivial reason?

Assuming that Heidegger has simply been profiting from metaphor's semantic fecundity - as does Ricoeur - is reasonable, as this aspect of metaphor has been the subject of philosophical discussion from the time of Aristotle. About 2000 years later, Nietzsche writes, “What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms...” thereby linking metaphor directly with the production of truth.<sup>2</sup> And other thinkers, such as Max Black and Paul Ricoeur, have noted the heuristic capacity of metaphor and even associated metaphor with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Hillis Miller writes, “Heidegger's trick is to affirm that analogies or figurative displacements are identities. He must forget, and lead us to forget, that they are figurative substitutions if he wants to claim he has purified language of all rhetoric or figuration and can write as an absolute literalist.” (J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*). Guiseppe Stellardi writes, “Heidegger's text is overrun with metaphor. Expelled, metaphor comes back, uninvited, all the time, which would explain the occasional reaction, at times almost violent, of the author and master.” And, less dramatically, “In Heidegger's text there is metaphor.” (Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor*, p. 133, 130) Paul Ricoeur writes, “In Heidegger himself the context considerably limits the import of this attack on metaphor, so that one may come to the conclusion that the constant use Heidegger makes of metaphor is finally more important than what he says in passing against metaphor.” (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 280) In regard to this aspect of Ricoeur's conclusion, Derrida writes, “I would quite willingly subscribe to this assertion.” (Derrida, “The Retrait of Metaphor,” *Psyche* p. 64) Also, see Casenave, Greisch, Lafont, Edwards.

<sup>2</sup>Nietzsche, Friedrich. “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” *The Portable Nietzsche* p. 46-47

creation of meaning in language.<sup>3</sup> There is a longstanding tradition linking metaphor with both the discovery of the world and conceptual production.

I contend, however, that metaphor is not the best point of departure from which to interpret Heidegger's peculiar language.<sup>4</sup> His language strikes us as strange, not because he is employing radical metaphors, but because of the difficulty of his project. In his mind, it is difficult to name the essence of language: he writes, "There is some evidence that the essential nature of language refuses to express itself in words – in the language... in which we use to make statements about language."<sup>5</sup> If we interpret his peculiar language as metaphorical, we pigeonhole it as merely figurative, a play on words, and thus shy away from the difficult task presented by it.

Since Aristotle, language has primarily been conceived of in terms of the sign relation; words have been taken as signs that correspond to things.<sup>6</sup> This model was applied, not only to words, but also to the bodily production of speech and to our model of perception general.<sup>7</sup> According to Aristotle, when we speak, we make vocal sounds that are the signs of our inner states. The sign relation structures this model; it posits, at the very basis of language, an opposition between sensibility and intelligibility that is instantiated by the difference between the physical sign and its intelligible meaning. Letters are the signs of sounds, and sounds are the signs of mental events. We can see, then, a sharp division between sensibility and intelligibility, a division that is structured by the sign relation.

For Heidegger, this opposition misconstrues the nature of the phenomena of language. It is not that this way of thinking of language is wrong, *per se*; rather, Heidegger simply believes this model inadequate for describing the breadth of the human being's relationship to language. In his mind, the sign relation obscures our fundamental experience with language. Consider, for example, the phrase "I love you." These words can be extremely powerful and have effects beyond the bare perception of linguistic data: they have a transformative capacity. They can cause your heart to race and your palms to sweat. How does a bald sign cause one to sweat? Is it correct to say the sign *causes* these bodily phenomena? Or does this way of construing the relationship between body and word distort the nature of the phenomenon? These effects on the body suggest that we (as humans) experience language in a way that cannot be accounted for by the sign relation. This indicates a radically different way of thinking about language, wherein language cannot be

---

<sup>3</sup> See Black, "Metaphor" and "Models and Metaphor."

<sup>4</sup> The astute reader will notice I have refrained from labeling Heidegger's language in terms of *metaphor*, instead referring to it as "peculiar."

<sup>5</sup> "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 81

<sup>6</sup> According to Aristotle, written words represent vocal sounds, which represent "what there is in the soul by way of passions." *On Interpretation*, Heidegger's translation, found in "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> This framework is common today, wherein the sense organs funnel raw abstract sense data to the brain, which then interprets the data and makes it intelligible.

thought apart from the body and being-in-the-world. Furthermore, Heidegger claims the sign relation underlies all traditional accounts of the human experience of the world; as such, the fundamental nature of our relationship to language has been obscured and concealed. Heidegger hopes to rethink language in such a way that the sensible/intelligible opposition and the sign relation are not injected into the fundamental levels of the analysis. This represents nothing less than an attempt to *fundamentally rethink the human experience of language and meaning*.

The extent to which this rethinking of language affects how we conceive of the human experience in the world can be seen in Heidegger's phenomenological analyses of hearing, which reveal sound and meaning to be unified and inseparable.<sup>8</sup> That is, his rethinking of language extends from mere linguistic analysis to a fundamental rethinking of the human experience in the world, to how we perceive and experience ourselves in the world. If Heidegger can show that the sensible/intelligible opposition and the sign relation are not found in the fundamental way we experience language, this gestures toward a way of regarding the human experience that is radically different from that of the tradition.

It is in the course of this rethinking of human experience as being-in-the-world that Heidegger rejects metaphor.<sup>9</sup> Metaphor, as we shall see, implies a sensible/intelligible distinction: it entails a sense experience that is only later made intelligible through recourse to metaphor. This separation of sensibility and intelligibility relies upon the sign relation for its cogency. If, however, Heidegger has demonstrated the unity of sound and meaning in his phenomenological analysis of hearing, then the metaphor is unsuited to describe our fundamental mode of being-in-the-world. means

The radical nature of Heidegger's project is made apparent by the widespread inability of commentators to think of language in general, and Heidegger's language in particular, non-metaphorically. Metaphor has long been ascribed a primary role in the discovery and uncovering of the world. When Heidegger tries to give an account of the bodily articulation of speech that does not employ a sensible/intelligible opposition or the sign relation, his language sounds peculiar: the commentator's quickly label his language metaphoric or figurative.

---

<sup>8</sup> A "phenomenological analysis" is a rigorous description of a phenomenon devoid of theoretical presuppositions. By focusing on pure description of phenomena, phenomenology hoped it could attend to beings as they are, not as they appear when saddled with erroneous theoretical assumptions. For example, in the phenomenological analysis of hearing, Heidegger hopes an attentive description of the phenomenon of hearing will disarticulate the sign relation model of hearing, thus pointing the way to thinking about the phenomenon that attends to the experience as it really unfolds. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Being-in-the-world" is a term used by Heidegger to indicate the manner in which humans are always in a world and among beings. In other words, a human is not understandable apart from the world in which it is. Characterizing humans in this way avoids the subject/object and inner/external oppositions that frequently had structured notions of the human being in philosophy since Descartes.



Heidegger thinks of language very broadly; it is more than just the set of words in the dictionary. Furthermore, he sees metaphor as embedded in and complicit with the sign relation. My contention is that the two most notable contributors who discuss Heidegger's language, Ricoeur and Derrida, fail to adequately locate Heidegger's few remarks pertaining explicitly to metaphor in the context in which they occur, i.e. a thinking of the relationship of being-in-the-world, originary understanding, and language.<sup>10</sup> This divergence forces their reading of his peculiar language into a framework structured by the sign relation. As such, they read his remarks on metaphor, as well as his particular style of language, in a watered-down manner. By retaining the notion of metaphoricity, they are barred from confronting the substance of Heidegger's analysis of language. I will then offer an account of Heidegger's views on the essence of language, and orient his rejection of metaphor toward this account.

Ultimately, we will see that Heidegger's rejection of metaphor is linked to his attempt to *rethink the essence of language and the human being's relationship to it*. Furthermore, in doing so, he is attempting to develop a new understanding of the human being's relationship to the world.<sup>11</sup> In Heidegger's mind, humans have a distinctive capacity for language: it reflects their unique relationship to being, inasmuch as they are the being that "discovers the world and Dasein itself."<sup>12</sup> Rethinking the nature of our relationship to language, then, means nothing less than rethinking *how human beings exist in the world*.

Chapter 1: Ricoeur approaches the question of Heidegger's relationship to metaphor through a larger project, namely a study of the creation of meaning in language. (In fact, this is the subtitle of his book *The Rule of Metaphor*). As such, a discussion of his views on language and disclosure will provide a helpful context for his views on metaphor, since he posits it as the basic mechanism of the creation of meaning in language. Next, the ontological implications of his theory of metaphor will be teased out, providing a background from which we can approach and evaluate his interpretation of Heidegger's relationship to metaphor. Ultimately, we

---

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger contends that, as an aspect of being-in-the-world, humans always have an understanding of where they are and what they are doing, broadly speaking. This understanding is anterior to conscious awareness; it structures how we think of ourselves and how we go about our lives, but is an understanding that is always operating prior to explicit awareness or reflection.

<sup>11</sup> This goal of rethinking human beings is reflected in early Heidegger's characterization of the human being as "Dasein." Dasein is a German word that literally means "being-there;" Heidegger uses it to capture the manner in which humans exist in the world among beings. Dasein is always already in a world it understands at a pre-reflective level. By using this term, Heidegger hopes to guide the reader away from importing traditional models of human existence into his thought. But this is not merely a matter of word choice; Heidegger claims this is essential to allow us to think the "relation of being to the essence of man." See "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'" *Pathmarks*, p. 283.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 209

will see that Ricoeur and Heidegger think of metaphor in different ways; Ricoeur sees metaphor as intrinsic to a thinking of the essence of language, while Heidegger claims metaphor merely obscures it. This difference shapes Ricoeur's reading of Heidegger's language, leading him away from pursuing a substantial aspect of Heidegger's project.

Chapter 2: Derrida places Heidegger's rejection of metaphor in the context of the displacement and deferral entailed by the attempt to name being. As such, he is confined to reading Heidegger's language in a framework structured by the sign relation, a limitation that prevents him from addressing Heidegger's larger concern with metaphor, namely, a thinking of the relation of *dasein's* originary openness to beings and being-in-the-world, upon which the sign relation model of language is made possible. The extent of this divergence will be laid out through a reading of Derrida's analysis of the implication of metaphor and philosophy, leading to an exegesis of his notion of "quasi-metaphoricity" that makes the distance between Heidegger and Derrida clear.

Chapter 3: Heidegger's rejection of metaphor should be understood in the context of his rethinking of the relation of bodily being-in-the-world, *dasein's* originary openness to beings, and the essence of language. Language calls beings to presence out of the originary openness to beings.<sup>13</sup> In his mind, metaphor prevents one from thinking the essence of language, as it implies a sensible/intelligible opposition (and therefore the sign relation) at the fundamental level of our originary openness to beings. Through the background of Heidegger's views on language, we can see that he rejects metaphor primarily because it bars his effort to think the relationship of the originary openness to beings and our bodily being-in-the-world. Ricoeur and Derrida, however, read Heidegger's text from the perspective of their own views on language, in which metaphor plays a substantial role. As such, they fail to address a significant aspect of Heidegger's thought.

A short review of a traditional concept of metaphor will provide a helpful background against which we may situate the rest of the paper. Similarly, since Heidegger's views of language will not be discussed at length until Chapter 4, a brief review of his views on the essence of language will provide a useful counterpoint that will guide the analysis and flesh out some of the differences between him, Ricoeur, and Derrida.

### 1.1 Aristotle and a Classic Account of Metaphor

As indicated above, Aristotle is the first thinker to produce a concept of metaphor; this notion is similar to a colloquial account of metaphor. His view

---

<sup>13</sup> "Originary openness to beings" indicates the distinctive relationship to beings that characterizes *Dasein*. *Dasein* is the being that can discover the world and use language: it is the being that can ask the question of the meaning of being. It can only do this, however, since it "surpasses" beings. In other words, *Dasein* is not held captive by a particular appearance of beings; beings can appear in different ways to *Dasein*. This implies that *Dasein* "surpasses" beings, inasmuch it is the being to which beings can appear in different ways, and allows *Dasein* to orient itself in relation to a world. See "On the Essence of Ground," *Pathmarks*, p. 108-109

centers on the *transfer of a name*, i.e. transferring a name that belongs to one thing onto something else.<sup>14</sup> For example, when we say, “love is war,” we are transferring the name of “war” onto that of “love”; this transferal reveals a resemblance between love and war. The metaphor helps us to see aspects of love that are warlike. In this sense, metaphor consists in finding resemblances between seemingly unlike things, and pointing these resemblances out through the transfer of a name.

In this framework, a metaphor is a word that replaces another, different word, and this reveals a resemblance between two unlike things. Metonymy, by way of contrast, replaces a word for the whole with a word that designates one of its parts: in “the sail broke the horizon”, the word “sail” replaces the idea “boat.” We understand the part “sail” implies the whole “boat.” There is already a relationship between the two words, and it forms the condition of possibility of the metonym. Metaphor, on the other hand, replaces one word with another, different word whose common meaning and associations are different. This different word connects to the word it replaces by means of a resemblance. When we say, for example, “love is war,” the word “war” is substituted for the ordinary word “love” and there is a transfer of meaning, from war to love. This metaphor is then founded upon a ground of resemblance.

Metaphor, so conceived, tends to be identified with style, with the value of “making a point well”; this is in accord with Aristotle’s treatment of it in *Poetics*. A listener, Aristotle claims, upon hearing and deciphering wordplay, feels a sense of satisfaction similar to the satisfaction of solving a puzzle. This pleasure, along with metaphor’s capacity for coloring and animating language, accounts for its use.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note, however, that while metaphor serves a rhetorical purpose, the ordinary meaning on which it is founded is always accessible if one replaces the metaphorical words with the ordinary ones it replaces. For Aristotle, metaphor is mostly related to stylistics.

But Aristotle also acknowledges what he sees as a certain value in metaphor, complementing those he calls a “master of metaphor.” Since a metaphor hinges on a previously unseen resemblance, it involves an “intuitive perception of dissimiliars”; a skill, writes Aristotle, which cannot be learned from others and is a sign of genius.<sup>16</sup> While metaphor is largely relegated to a stylistic turn, it is clear that Aristotle does esteem the skill involved in making quality metaphors.

The hallmarks of the concept of metaphor are evident in Aristotle’s description. Metaphor depends upon a resemblance; by comparing unlike things, it can reveal the world around us. By characterizing the apprehension of resemblance under the transfer of a name, the concept of metaphor is structured by the sign relation: it immediately confines our analysis of the emergence of meaning to this framework. The fundamental role attributed to the sign relation in metaphor persists, with a few alterations, up to the present day.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457b 7-9

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1405b 4-6, 1411b 24 – 1412a 20

<sup>16</sup> *Poetics*, 1459a 5-8; Aristotle also refers to this in *Rhetoric* 1405a 8-10.

## 1.2 Heidegger and the Right Concept of Language

As noted above, Heidegger has an unusual point of view with regard to language. Unlike most philosophers of language, Heidegger is not concerned with *language per se*; that is, he is not interested in the nature of verbal meaning, or how we use language in everyday situations. Nor is he interested only in words, understood as linguistic units. Instead, Heidegger is interested in the distinctive relationship to being that makes it possible for humans to use language, that is, to speak. It is important to note that, for Heidegger, speaking does not primarily mean to communicate using sound; even animals have the capacity to do this, and he is not interested in how animals communicate with each other. Heidegger believes humans have a distinctive relationship to language, one not reducible to communication, and his goal is to think the nature of this unique relationship.

In order to do this, we need “the right concept of language.”<sup>18</sup> We cannot think the essence of language if we employ a concept of language that is limited to models of communication or a simple sign system: Heidegger believes our relationship to language is richer than these could account for. As such, traditional models of language (which Heidegger declares are all structured by the sign relation) are not up to the task presented by his project.<sup>19</sup>

Language, according Heidegger, brings beings out into the open; it “shows” beings. But it does not create the being or beings; rather, it attends to how the beings come to presence of their own accord. But in showing beings, it also shapes the way in which beings come to presence. This is a drastically different model of language from the one implied by the sign relation, the model of language on which metaphor relies.

Furthermore, Heidegger’s notion of language implies a re-thinking of perception. If language is not to be understood under the rubric of the sign relation, then we can no longer think of perception as the adding on of an intelligible meaning onto abstract, non-meaningful sense data. As such, Heidegger’s thought gestures to a radical rethinking of the very way we experience our being-in-the-world. It is in order to facilitate this rethinking of bodily being-in-the-world that Heidegger instructs us not to read his peculiar language as metaphorical. When Ricoeur and Derrida place his rejection within other contexts, this aspect of his thought becomes lost.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ricoeur provides a detailed account of the historical development of the concept of metaphor all the way from Aristotle to Max Black and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If anything, these alterations have only granted metaphor a larger role to play in language; many theorists (such as Ricoeur) see metaphor as the engine that drives the emergence of meaning and our discovery of the world. See *The Rule of Metaphor*.

<sup>18</sup> “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 71

<sup>19</sup> “The Way to Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 114-115

## CHAPTER 2: RICOEUR

Ricoeur approaches the question of Heidegger's relationship to metaphor through a larger project, namely, a study of the emergence of meaning in language. Metaphor, on his account, is a fundamental element in this process: through it, we are able to discover the world and create new concepts. Metaphors are used to open up new conceptual networks, allowing for new ways of thinking about the world.

Likewise, Ricoeur understands the question of Heidegger's relationship to metaphor through his own view of metaphor's semantic fecundity, alleging Heidegger's peculiar language can be attributed to the strange metaphors he employs to enable us to think about the world in different ways. According to Ricoeur, this where the power of Heidegger's text lies: in its strange metaphors. Ricoeur paints Heidegger's rejection of metaphor as hubris, a vain attempt to consider himself the first thinker to overcome metaphysics.

By reading Heidegger's text through the lens of metaphor, Ricoeur is prevented from encountering Heidegger's rethinking of bodily being-in-the-world. Metaphor implies a view of language structured by the sensible/intelligible opposition and the sign relation: through these networks, it shapes how we conceive of phenomenal experience. Ricoeur, because of his views on the role metaphor plays in language, is barred from addressing this avenue of thought.

### 2.1 Ricoeur, Metaphor, and the Emergence of Meaning

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur contends the occurrence of language is the opening up of the possibility of signification and meaning. In other words, language is the medium through which meaning is created and extended. Metaphor helps us to discover the world by revealing connections and relations that had previously remained unseen. For Ricoeur, this opening up of signification and meaning in language depends on and begins with metaphor, inasmuch as it allows the speaker and the hearer to see previously unseen resemblances. The metaphorical discovery is initially subject to an unregulated plurality, and as such it remains unsuitable for use in fields that rely on stable, fixed concepts (such as the sciences, for example). As the metaphor is subject to philosophical scrutiny, however, this plurality becomes regulated, and a fixed, cogent concept or meaning results, a meaning that can be legitimately relied upon in speculative thought as an admissible concept.

Speaking of Ricoeur's take on metaphor in this way is somewhat pedantic, however; it makes something rather simple needlessly complex. His view descends from Aristotle's well-known formulation of metaphor as substitution and semantic transfer.<sup>20</sup> It is possible to think of Ricoeur's metaphor in these terms: Jane Doe has

---

<sup>20</sup> There are some notable differences between Aristotle's and Ricoeur's accounts, namely the scope of metaphor (from the level of the substitution word to the level of re-description of reality), the ontological implications of metaphorical truth, and the implications of these findings for philosophical discourse in general and ontology in particular. For a detailed discussion of these differences, see *The Rule of Metaphor*.

experience X that entails unanswered semantic demands (X=?): she is unable to understand the experience on its own terms. She realizes there is a resemblance between X and Y, and thinks of X in terms of Y (X=Y). Through the heuristic device of Y, Jane is able to begin to understand the properties of X (X=Y entails a semantic gain). Next, through logical devices (namely, the principle identity and the law of non-contradiction), X is analyzed and its own determinate qualities discerned.

In other words, Ricoeur claims an experience that lacks explanation demands a concept that can resolve the semantic demand. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, he posits, "We might say then that the semantic shock produces a conceptual need, but not as yet any knowledge by means of concepts."<sup>21</sup> Metaphor is employed to answer this need, providing a response to the semantic demand by way of a resemblance with a familiar phenomenon. Ricoeur writes, "New possibilities of signifying are opened up, supported by meanings that have already been established."<sup>22</sup> These new possibilities, however, remain in the realm of poetic discourse, which is marked by an unregulated polysemy of meanings. In other words, meaning in poetic discourse is poly-vocal and unregulated, i.e. marked by plurality and ambiguity. As such, this type of language is unsuitable for philosophical or scientific discourses, which require the consistency and stability of fixed concepts.

At this point, according to Ricoeur, philosophical discourse applies its tools and techniques to the metaphorical disclosure, analyzing and critiquing its semantic gain. The metaphorical disclosure is submitted to the law of identity, and its unique and persisting qualities discerned and identified. This allows a stable and fixed concept, unique unto itself, to be derived from the vague and unregulated semantic gain of the metaphorical disclosure and employed in scientific or speculative discourses.

Each of these more conceptually rigorous discourses has a different relation to metaphor befitting the object of its study. For example, the sciences can readily use metaphors as heuristic devices that, after appropriate refinement, can accurately disclose a physical state of affairs. As such, these "refined" metaphors are considered a legitimate and reliable aspect of scientific discourse.

On the other hand, speculative discourse and ontology have a unique and problematic relationship with metaphor that entails an ontological point of view that precludes Ricoeur from thinking metaphor in a manner consistent with Heidegger's ontological project.<sup>23</sup> This ontological divergence will be discussed at length in the next section.

---

<sup>21</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 296

<sup>22</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 298

<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur characterizes speculative thought as the "discourse that establishes the primary notions, the principles, that articulate primordially the space of a concept." (*The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 300) In other words, speculative discourse is a meta-conceptual discourse that establishes the relationships and limits of conceptual schemas. In this sense, speculative thought lays the ground on which concepts are founded.

To continue the previous example, we might say that, in a *scientific* discourse, Jane examines Y to elicit its unique qualities, which heretofore have remained undefined (Y=?). With the help of the law of identity, the character of Y is fixed, and Y becomes a stable, reliable concept (Y=Y). The use of a concept delineated and regulated in such a way is permissible within scientific discourse, unlike the vague and undefined semantic gain established through metaphor in poetic discourse.<sup>24</sup>

Metaphor, for Ricoeur, has a privileged status; it is the linguistic mechanism by which pre-linguistic meanings are conceptualized and enter into various discourses. Like Aristotle's theory of metaphor, Ricoeur's depends upon the notion of the disclosure of a previously unseen resemblance. This disclosure is initially pre-linguistic: one has an experience that cannot be comprehended on its own terms.<sup>25</sup> This unexplainable experience is then "translated" by metaphor; that is, the semantic exigencies are satisfied through the metaphorical comparison. Thus, one employs a type of predication, in that it searches for some way to satisfy the semantic exigencies put forth by the unexplainable experience.

For example, consider the metaphor "Achilles leapt on the foe as a lion."<sup>26</sup> In order to understand this metaphor, we at least need to (1) know something about lions and (2) realize that some fact about lions is being used to describe Achilles. In this case, we need to know that lions are commonly thought to be fierce, powerful and aggressive; we then apply this knowledge as a type of *predication* of the person of Achilles, and we come to understand that Achilles leapt on the foe as a lion, in a fierce, powerful, aggressive manner.

Predication is an important part of Ricoeur's analysis of metaphor. If we understand "Achilles leapt on the foe as a lion" to be a metaphor, then we understand that "lion" is a predicates some quality of "Achilles." As such, the metaphor compares two unlike things, drawing out a resemblance from heterogeneous realms. Predication serves to make this resemblance explicit, conjoining the two realms, and resulting in a semantic innovation, i.e. the emergence of a new meaning. This predication is of a peculiar kind, however; as a resemblance of two unlike things, it cannot be taken as a literal description of truth, strictly speaking. In a metaphor, we understand something only as something else (X=Y) Thus, it displays what Ricoeur calls *metaphorical truth* (being-as), which he portrays as a simultaneous abiding of "being" and "not being." It is through this notion of metaphorical truth that the difference between Ricoeur and Heidegger becomes

---

<sup>24</sup> See Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Study VII, #4 "Model and Metaphor" for an extended discussion of the collusion of metaphor and models within scientific discourse.

<sup>25</sup>Ricoeur characterizes this type of experience as a "semantic shock," i.e. an experience the nature of which one lacks the words to adequately communicated. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 296

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1406b 22-24. This is a classic simile that resurfaces frequently throughout the literature on metaphor. (*The Rule of Metaphor*, p 24. Ricoeur contends that a simile is but a lengthened metaphor [248]. There is some debate on this.)

clearest. Metaphor, for Ricoeur, is this emergence of meaning through semantic innovation that satisfies the demands of the semantic exigencies of an unexplainable experience.

In sum, Ricoeur's metaphor allows a previously unseen resemblance to come to light through the juxtaposition of heterogeneous concepts. This just-disclosed resemblance is a springboard that allows us to see other similarities and relationships, thus creating even more meaning. None of the semantic innovation disclosed by the metaphor is permissible within speculative discourse, however, until it has been submitted to the logical gaze of philosophy. Through the principle of identity and the law of non-contradiction, the semantic innovation is examined, explored, and clarified; thus emerges a stable, fixed concept appropriate for speculative discourse.

## 2.2 Ontological Implications of Ricoeur's Metaphor

Ricoeur characterizes his theory of metaphor as a "tensional" theory, wherein the meaning of a successful metaphor results from the interplay of various tensions within it. This tension occurs in three places: (1) within the statement (between tenor and vehicle, between focus and frame, between ordinary context and extraordinary context<sup>27</sup>), (2) between two interpretations (literal and metaphorical), and (3) within the copula (between "identity and difference in the interplay of resemblance").<sup>28</sup> Our focus will be on (3) and its implications for what Ricoeur terms "metaphorical truth".

When one encounters a successful metaphor, Ricoeur alleges, an unseen resemblance between two unlike things emerges and a new meaning (semantic innovation) is created. This semantic innovation depends upon the appearance of a resemblance between two different elements – a difference that continues to persist alongside the resemblance. This raises the question of the ontological status of the new meaning. In other words, if "X=Y", this has the strange consequence of implying an identity of *unlike* things which are understood by means of a resemblance.<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur calls this the "postulate of split reference."<sup>30</sup>

The "postulate of split reference" can be illustrated by distinguishing between the sense of *identification* and *understanding*. In a successful metaphor, one understands the semantic implications of "X=Y" while simultaneously oscillating between the ontological identifications "X is Y" and "X is not Y."<sup>31</sup> When one understands a metaphor, one comprehends the semantic innovation, the new

---

<sup>27</sup> This vocabulary (vehicle and tenor) was introduced by I.A. Richards. Tenor refers to the subject being described in the metaphor and vehicle refers to the subject whose attributes are borrowed. The other two sets of terms are different ways of naming this same relationship. See *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

<sup>28</sup> *Rule of Metaphor*, p. 247

<sup>29</sup> Heiden, Gert-Jan van der. *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language*, p. 142-144

<sup>30</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 304

<sup>31</sup> "Being as... means being and not being." *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 297



meaning that emerges. Identification, on the other hand, is the acknowledgement of the ontological tension entailed by a re-description of X in terms of its resemblance with Y. A metaphorical truth, by virtue of its reliance upon the tension between metaphorical and literal interpretations, is understood in one manner (as a semantic innovation and emergence of meaning) and identified in another (as X and Y simultaneously). When one understands the meaning of “love is war”, one still identifies the difference between them. Thus, in the metaphor, love is understood in terms of war, but still identified as a phenomenon distinct and different from war.

Ricoeur alleges that metaphor re-describes the world, and this re-description has deep ontological consequences, as it affects our very understanding of the verb *to be*.<sup>32</sup> For him, metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device, a simple play of words; it is the engine that drives the re-description of reality and the discovery of the world.<sup>33</sup> It allows new meanings to emerge, expanding what we know and can say about the world. Ricoeur thus designates a successful metaphor as having the ontological status of “metaphorical truth”, wherein a statement is considered to be true and untrue at the same time. In other words, the truth of X becomes “being” and “not being” simultaneously. This tension is captured by Ricoeur’s characterization of poetic language as containing the senses of both “to discover” and “create” at the same time. In a successful metaphor, we simultaneously discover and create the world in which we live; the metaphorical disclosure has the character of both “being” and “not being.”<sup>34</sup> In discovering something that is already true, we also create or re-describe reality.

While Ricoeur posits metaphor as the engine that creates meaning within language, he qualifies and distinguishes its relationship to various discourses. He must do this, in fact, if he is to protect the legitimacy of the notion of metaphorical truth. For certain types of thought (such as poetic thought) metaphorical truth does not pose a threat to its authority and validity. Poetry is not charged with describing the world in a philosophically rigorous manner. It is possible to learn about the world through poetry, Ricoeur claims, but the status of this knowledge is in question. It is of little consequence if a poet uses language in a strange and incomprehensible manner. However, for a discourse that aspires to truth (such as speculative thought) this poses a problem.<sup>35</sup> A philosopher may not employ vague,

---

<sup>32</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 248

<sup>33</sup> “The paradox of the poetic (language) can be summed up entirely in this, that the elevation of feeling to fiction is the condition of its mimetic use. Only a feeling transformed into myth can open up and discover the world.” *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 245. Also “It can be shown that... speculative discourse has its condition of *possibility* in the semantic dynamism of metaphorical utterance.” *Ibid.* p. 296 (italics in the original)

<sup>34</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 306

<sup>35</sup> Ricoeur characterizes speculative thought as the “discourse that establishes the primary notions...that articulate primordially the space of a concept.” (*The Rule of Metaphor*, p.300) Speculative thought “expresses the systematic character of the

undefined, logically inconsistent concepts, according to Ricoeur, as this contradicts the principles that underlie and structure a philosophical investigation. As such, metaphorical/poetic language must be submitted to logical analysis before its use will be admitted into speculative discourse.

At this point, the broader arc of Ricoeur's account of metaphor is beginning to become apparent. Metaphors respond to semantic exigencies, and the semantic innovation they entail becomes the fodder of speculative discourse, which uses philosophical-logical techniques to clarify the semantic innovation, leading to a rigorous concept. There is a strict separation, then, between poetic and speculative discourse; the semantic innovation provided by poetic language is clarified via the logic and conceptual rigor of philosophical discourse.<sup>36</sup> Ricoeur claims that speculative discourse has its condition of possibility in poetic language, but speculative discourse nonetheless is a discourse unto itself. When the semantic innovation of poetic language is clarified, the resulting concept is lifted from the realm of poetic discourse and placed into the realm of speculative discourse, which Ricoeur defines as "another zone of meaning" that is "marked by an irreducible difference" from poetic discourse.<sup>37</sup> While poetic and speculative discourses are implicated with each other, Ricoeur posits a strict separation of the two, and submits the semantic innovation of poetic language to the eminence of speculative discourse and its conceptual rigor.

### 2.3 Ricoeur and Heidegger

We are now in a position to analyze Ricoeur's interpretation of the status of the peculiar language of Heidegger's text. As noted above, Ricoeur takes issue with Heidegger's assertion that we are not to understand his texts from the standpoint of metaphor, alleging that the metaphorical power of Heidegger's text significantly outweighs his instructions on how we are to read his text.

Ricoeur takes the position that *all* philosophical thought *necessarily* engages in metaphysics and, as such, incorporates and utilizes one metaphor or another as its point of departure and principle of organization.<sup>38</sup> Metaphysical investigations employs metaphor in order to "draw out new meanings from some semantic impertinence and to bring to light new aspects of reality by means of a semantic innovation."<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, this metaphor is transcendent with respect to the system of thought it supports, invisible to the conceptual network to which it gives birth. In

---

conceptual..." thereby articulating the space in which a concept may legitimately operate.

<sup>36</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 313

<sup>37</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 296 Ricoeur claims speculative discourse "has its necessity in itself."

<sup>38</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 288-289, 293-295 As we shall see, this bears some similarities with Derrida's analysis of metaphor.

<sup>39</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 291

any case, it opens up and directs possibilities of meaning within a particular movement of thought.

Ricoeur treats Heidegger's language in the same way, alleging that the peculiar phrasings we encounter in his text are merely word figures that create semantic exigencies that demand to be resolved. Thus, for example, when Heidegger writes, "Dasein is the clearing," Ricoeur claims he is employing a metaphor that allows us to think the nature of human existence in a different set of conceptual relations than those entailed by the metaphor "man is a rational animal." By characterizing Dasein as clearing, new ways to conceptualize the human being are opened up. In this way, he asserts metaphysics "seizes" the metaphorical process and makes it work to its advantage and extension. By profiting from this operation, Ricoeur alleges that Heidegger's thought remains metaphysical.

As to Heidegger's claims to have escaped metaphysics, Ricoeur portrays this as pure hubris and self-aggrandizement, remarking "The unity of 'the' metaphysical is an after-the-fact construction of Heideggerian thought, intended to vindicate his own labor of thinking and to justify the renunciation of any thinking that is not a genuine overcoming of metaphysics."<sup>40</sup> By characterizing his own thought as non-metaphysical, Heidegger valorizes it and makes it seem exotic and unique, but - according to Ricoeur- there is no evidence on which we ought to grant this exception.

This follows from Ricoeur's placement of Heidegger within the tradition of speculative thought inasmuch as Heidegger engaged in the project of pursuing a "new experience" through the means of "a new thinking and a new language."<sup>41</sup> As we have seen from the discussion of Ricoeur's view of the role of metaphor in the emergence of meaning in language, he posits metaphor at the center of the creation of linguistic meaning and concepts. Furthermore, Ricoeur locates Heidegger's thought within this framework, against Heidegger's request.

So why should we read Heidegger any differently than does Ricoeur? Why should we simply take Heidegger at his word, blithely accepting his peculiar language as non-metaphorical? On any quick reading, it certainly does appear that Heidegger is employing and profiting from metaphor in the manner Ricoeur alleges.

To begin with, it would be intellectually dishonest not to *first* confront a thinker on the grounds they propose. To simply assume Heidegger is lying (for whatever reason) would be to close oneself off to the possibility of understanding the point he is trying to convey. In this case, Heidegger's rejections of metaphor occur in the midst of attempts to think the *pre-linguistic essence of language* and its relation to bodily being-in-the-world and the originary openness to beings. For Heidegger, a sensible/intelligible opposition, such as the one implied by metaphor,

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 311-312. This claim seems a bit ambitious: it is unclear that Heidegger believed in *the unity* of metaphysics, i.e. as metaphysics as a single, undivided movement. It would be fair to claim, however, that metaphysics is unified for Heidegger inasmuch as it is consistently marked by concealment.

<sup>41</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 311. One can detect a note of irony in Ricoeur's tone here.

does not mark the originary openness to beings; metaphor is therefore unfit to think this relation.

But this thought unfolds through language that easily be interpreted as metaphorical, despite Heidegger's explicit warning not to do so. However, to resolve the difficulty presented by Heidegger's project by simply denying the possibility of a non-metaphorical reading only serves to extinguish the line of thought before it is given a chance on its own terms; that is, it shuts down the possibility of thinking the extent and richness of Heidegger's notion of bodily being-in-the-world and the originary openness to beings. Ricoeur applies his own notion of metaphor and its role in the emergence of meaning in language to Heidegger's thought, thus precluding one from pursuing the actual project Heidegger is engaged in when rejecting metaphor, namely, an effort to rethink bodily being-in-the-world in a way that is not structured by a sensible/intelligible opposition. When one posits metaphor as the fundamental mechanism that generates meaning, one tacitly imports this separation into the very heart of language. For Heidegger, this move is unacceptable if one wishes to think the essence of language and our relationship to it.

This, however, is not to discredit the value of Ricoeur's analysis. On the contrary, one could provide an argument as to how Heidegger might readily concede to metaphor in general the role Ricoeur attributes to it. But this is beside the point, for metaphor, embedded as it is in the sensible/intelligible opposition, is unfit to think primordially the relationship of bodily being-in-the-world and the originary openness to beings. Heidegger is not interested in the creation of meaning solely within language, nor is he interested in the creation and clarification of concepts in speculative thought in the way Ricoeur is.<sup>42</sup> At the moments Heidegger makes his few explicit pronouncements on metaphor, he is engaged in an attempt to think the essence of language and its relation to the "bodily articulation of language," i.e. to the naming power of the word and its relation to the pre-cognitive/pre-linguistic originary disclosure of Dasein and its world.<sup>43</sup> The level of disclosure Heidegger hopes to think *lies prior to the level of signification and reference upon which the notion of metaphor depends*. As such, it is inappropriate to subsume Heidegger's thinking of the essence of language under the rubric of metaphor if one wants to be faithful to the intention of his thought.

There are three significant features of Ricoeur's analysis that Heidegger would claim preclude one from pursuing the task of thinking the essence of language. First, Ricoeur determines the truth disclosed by a metaphor as metaphorical truth: it is marked and catalyzed by the tension between "being" and "not being." Heidegger, on the other hand, is concerned with thinking aletheic

---

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur characterizes speculative thought as the "discourse that establishes the primary notions...that articulate primordially the space of a concept." (*The Rule of Metaphor*, p.300) In this way, he implies speculative thought underlies and founds conceptual thought.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Sounding/Silence*, p. 101-102 Smith compares the naming power of the word to the *aletheic* disclosure of the work of art.

disclosure; that is, a disclosure of a being as it is, not as mediated in terms of another being. Second, Ricoeur asserts that metaphor is the mechanism driving semantic innovation. This semantic innovation occurs in a founded mode of being, not in the pre-linguistic originary understanding that is the focus of Heidegger's thought at this juncture. Third, Ricoeur proposes that the relationship between poetry and philosophy is hierarchical in the sense that the semantic innovation disclosed by poetic language is submitted to the clarifying techniques and tools of logical discourse (principles of identity, non-contradiction, etc.). Only after a semantic innovation has been vetted by philosophical techniques is it admissible into conceptual discourse. While conceptual discourse depends upon the poetic metaphor and speculative thought, metaphor serves only as the raw material that drives the creation of legitimate meanings. Thus, Ricoeur submits poetic thought to the authority of philosophical thought. This is different from Heidegger's notion of the relationship between the poetry and thought, which he characterizes as a "co-belonging" and "neighborly-ness". Thus, they are separate, but still joined together in an equi-primordial relationship of equal importance.<sup>44</sup>

Of course, one could faithfully delve into Heidegger's thought and still disagree with him; one could object that Ricoeur does this very thing, and merely has a different stance on metaphor than Heidegger does. But both Heidegger and Ricoeur want to think the opening up of the possibility of meaning; and, like Heidegger, Ricoeur claims that poetic speech is the bringing to language of a more primordial disclosure.<sup>45</sup> As Ricoeur writes "the speculative is what allows us to say that 'to understand a (logical) expression is something other than 'finding images'.'"<sup>46</sup> With this, he indicates his awareness of the pre-linguistic originary openness. But Ricoeur wavers on this point: he notes this pre-linguistic realm, but nearly his entire analysis is guided by a linguistic-semantic notion of metaphor that is thoroughly rooted in the founded mode of a sensible/intelligible opposition. *As such, he is barred from thinking the bodily articulation of meaning apart from this opposition.* As we shall see, this attempt is at the crux of Heidegger's rejection of metaphor. For Ricoeur, language seems to be rooted in a pre-linguistic originary disclosure, but he never focuses on this level, and his analysis remains embedded in the sensible/intelligible opposition and processes of signification and reference throughout.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 101: "Their neighborhood (of poetry and thought) did not come to them by chance... This is why we must experience them within, and in terms of, their neighborhood."

<sup>45</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 304 "This knowledge is no longer intra-linguistic but *extra*-linguistic; it moves from being to being-said, at the very time that language itself moves from sense to reference." (emphasis added) Shortly thereafter: "Something must be for something to be said."

<sup>46</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 301

<sup>47</sup> It could be that Ricoeur's concern with maintaining the univocity (or at least a regulated polyvocality) in philosophical discourse prevents him from pursuing

Heidegger, on the other hand, hopes to think the essence of language as it is apart from signification understood as an effect following from the sensible/intelligible opposition. This effort is complicated by the fact that the reader encounters it in and through language, which tends to pull the reader toward a rhetorical-linguistic interpretation of Heidegger's language. As the subtitle of *The Rule of Metaphor* indicates (multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language), Ricoeur's focus is on the creation of meaning *in* language, rather than on pre-linguistic primordial disclosure, and he conceptualizes this disclosure within the framework of metaphor, preventing him from encountering Heidegger's thought on its intended ground.

Ricoeur characterizes metaphor as a heuristic device: it allows us to articulate a discovery of the world through the means of a resemblance. When we encounter a phenomenon we do not understand, we make sense of it through a resemblance to something we *do* understand. But by characterizing the emergence of meaning in this way, Ricoeur has imported the sensible/intelligible opposition into the core of his theory of language and our relationship to it.<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, on the other hand, *hopes to think bodily being-in-the-world in a manner prior to this opposition*. As his phenomenological analysis of hearing demonstrates, there is no fundamental opposition between sensibility and intelligibility: at the primordial level of being-in-the-world, they collapse into each other and cannot be distinguished. It is this primordial level of phenomenality that Heidegger hopes to think, and we are barred from it at the outset if we think of language only from within the framework of metaphor or another such sensible/intelligible opposition.

We have seen, then, that to interpret Heidegger's language as metaphorical, while an understandable move, blocks Ricoeur from confronting Heidegger's project (thinking the essence of language) on its own terms. Furthermore, thinking the essence of language from the standpoint of metaphor (as does Ricoeur) prevents one from addressing the possibility of a pre- or extra-linguistic notion of language and gaining a richer understanding of Heidegger's text.

---

Heidegger's suggestion; he suggests that he takes issue with Heidegger's emphasis on the poetic qualities of thought. See *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 311.

<sup>48</sup> In other words, he claims we first have a sensible experience that we subsequently make intelligible to ourselves via recourse to metaphor.

## CHAPTER 3: DERRIDA

Derrida approaches the question of Heidegger's relationship to metaphor during the course of an analysis of the implication of metaphor in philosophical discourse. Unlike Ricoeur, who will place metaphor in the service of philosophy, Derrida sees within philosophy an inherent metaphoricity that can never be fully exorcised or controlled. This intrinsic metaphoricity, however, also forms the condition of possibility of philosophical discourse, inasmuch as it founds and sustains a conceptual system. Through a critique of the limitations of the philosophical concept of metaphor, Derrida intends to illustrate philosophy's inability to master the metaphoricity of its own texts, thus implying the impossibility of a transparent and "proper" philosophical language.

As we shall see, Derrida's reading of Heidegger is shaped by the connection he posits between philosophy and metaphor.<sup>49</sup> By claiming philosophy (and language) is inherently metaphorical, he is compelled to characterize Heidegger's peculiar language as *quasi-metaphorical*; he locates it in relation to the withdrawal of being. In other words, although language is denied the possibility of naming being, it can trace the withdrawal of being through the analogous movement of the withdrawal of metaphor in a philosophical text. As a result, Derrida ties Heidegger's rejection of metaphor to the metaphorical displacement that occurs when metaphysics attempts to name being as a being. While an intriguing notion in itself, this reading ignores the context in which Heidegger's rejection of metaphor occurs: that is, within an attempt to think the relation of the originary openness to beings and being-in-the-world. This skews the direction of Derrida's reading of Heidegger's language away from the direction Heidegger intended. Addressing this divergence helps us to place Heidegger's rejection of metaphor in a context wherein his peculiar language can be thought in terms of the project he is pursuing.

Derrida discusses metaphor in two texts: "White Mythology" and "The Retrait of Metaphor." In "White Mythology", he addresses the relationship between metaphor and philosophy; in "The Retrait of Metaphor," he focuses on Heidegger's relationship to metaphor. A discussion of Derrida's view of the implication of metaphor in philosophy will serve as the point of departure from which we can contextualize his claims regarding the quasi-metaphorical status of Heidegger's language. The divergence between Heidegger and Derrida's accounts of metaphor will then be clear. Although Derrida's reading of Heidegger's language is more faithful to Heidegger's project than is Ricoeur's analysis, he also fails to address the context in which Heidegger rejects metaphor, and thus fails to grasp the full import of Heidegger's peculiar language.

---

<sup>49</sup> Derrida claims all language and philosophy is permeated with metaphor, writing, "What is going on *with* metaphor? Well, everything: there is nothing that does not go on with metaphor and through metaphor." ("The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche*, p. 50, italics in the original)

### 3.1 Derrida, Metaphor, and Philosophy

In "White Mythology," Derrida addresses the complex and problematic relationship between philosophy and metaphor. Traditionally, philosophers have treated metaphor to a systematic philosophical conceptualization, often emphasizing metaphor's disclosive capacity but simultaneously assimilating it within a regulated, controlled, univocal philosophical discourse. In these accounts, metaphor serves as the engine that drives the creation of stable, legitimate concepts. This, in fact, is precisely how Ricoeur treats metaphor in *The Rule of Metaphor*. Derrida questions the legitimacy of this operation, contending it reverses the priority of the relationship between metaphor and philosophy, thereby condemning philosophy to a "blind spot or a certain deafness" regarding the inherent metaphoricality of its own texts.<sup>50</sup> If philosophy is unable to identify and conceptualize the functioning of its own metaphors, it will be unable to present itself as an intellectual rigorous discourse with a legitimate claim to truth.

Derrida begins by analyzing a common account of the relationship between metaphor and philosophy.<sup>51</sup> According to this view, philosophical concepts arise by way of a sensible experience that is made intelligible and conceptualized by way of metaphor. These concepts then enter into common usage. Over time, however, their metaphorical origin is forgotten; in this forgotten-ness, they crystallize into ready-made concepts taken to represent abstract and universal ideas. Conceptual abstractions, so the theory goes, always hide a sensible figure at their center that animates them, giving their form and organizing their movement.<sup>52</sup> This sensible figure becomes effaced and withdraws over time, its metaphorical nature forgotten, but the effacement (forgetting) of the metaphorical origin results in a conceptual gain.

Nietzsche, writing in the traditional vein, claims, "What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms... a sum of human relations that have been embellished... and which after a long time seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people..."<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere in this essay, Nietzsche asserts that truths begin with a sensible experience, to which is then attached a word. This word, which is intended to represent a "unique and wholly individualized experience," gradually loses its unique qualities, as it is used to denote similar phenomena. In this way, the original experience becomes marred and lost from view. Consider a leaf, for example. We designate many different objects with the

---

<sup>50</sup> "White Mythology," *Margins*, p. 228 This position is not unique to Derrida or deconstruction; it is also the point of view assumed by Max Black in his essay "Metaphor" (1958). Black concludes it is impossible to derive a concept of metaphor that will enable one to consistently identify metaphors in a text.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida analyzes Anatole France's *The Garden of Epicurus* as well as Nietzsche's "Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense"; both texts propose this general account of metaphor and truth.

<sup>52</sup> "White Mythology," *Margins*, p. 210

<sup>53</sup> "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 46-47



word “leaf,” not only leaves of different species of tree, but also individual leaves of the same species. The word “leaf,” then, abstracts from a unique and individual sense experience to a generalized concept that lacks the luster of the original experience.

Nietzsche identifies a metaphorical operation in the conceptualization of the original sensible experience, inasmuch as the word is taken to *speak truly of the original experience*, which it of course cannot do. “Truths are illusions,” he writes, “about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.”<sup>54</sup> When the sensible experience is transferred into intelligible meaning, Nietzsche identifies this transfer as metaphorical in nature.

Let us review this account of metaphor in greater detail. Metaphysical concepts, it alleges, (1) begin as a sensible, physical disclosure; (2) this particular sensible disclosure is given a name; (3) the name, through repeated use, is colloquialized and turned into a concept; (4) this conceptualization becomes an intelligible abstraction divorced from the sensible experience of the original disclosure. This is a common critique of the presence and work of metaphor in philosophy, and it serves as Derrida’s point of departure for his analysis in “White Mythology.”

The traditional manner of addressing the subject of metaphor in philosophy is to propose a theory of the *concept* of metaphor: this theory would contain a mechanics of metaphor, describe its relationship to philosophy (a hierarchical relationship that submits metaphor to philosophical eminence), and establish a manner of distinguishing valid or fruitful metaphors from bad or harmful metaphors. In this way, philosophy would produce a well-defined, limited concept of metaphor that it could utilize in the pursuit of its own ends, namely the pursuit of truth. This theory of metaphor could then be used to analyze the metaphors animating various philosophies, illustrating how they shape and control the movement of a given discourse. In this way, the work of metaphor could be separated out from philosophy proper, its effects being thoroughly known and regulated; the integrity of philosophical discourse could then be maintained.

Derrida offers the philosophical metaphor of the sun, or “heliotropic metaphors,” as he calls them, as an example. Philosophical metaphors are caught in a circle: they are selected by a tacit philosophy, but they also give rise to a conceptual network that serves to express this philosophy. In this way, a particular philosophy provides the metaphors by which it organizes itself.<sup>55</sup> For example, Derrida claims the sun is often employed as a philosophical metaphor because “natural light... is never subject to the most radical doubt.”<sup>56</sup> Since light illuminates our world and allows us to see, it is sometimes taken as a metaphor for truth. In this

---

<sup>54</sup> *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, p. 47

<sup>55</sup> Derrida calls this “the circle of the heliotrope;” see “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 266.

<sup>56</sup> “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 267

way, the notion of light organizes the unfolding of some philosophies. Descartes, for example, employs the notion natural light as his point of departure for introducing clear and distinct ideas, which frees him from the threat of insurmountable hyperbolic doubt.<sup>57</sup> Derrida claims the metaphor of light structures and organizes the unfolding of Descartes philosophy.

In a manner that both performs and critiques this common account of metaphor, Derrida proposes we understand traditional conceptualizations of metaphor through the economic notion of *usury*. Usury, he alleges, nicely sums up the logic underlying traditional accounts of the concept of metaphor. These accounts hinge on the notions of profit and loss: profit, for the semantic innovation supplied by the metaphor, and loss for the withdrawal of metaphor.<sup>58</sup> Derrida selects the notion of usury because it implies the notions of both profit and loss, capturing the two most prominent features of metaphor. At the same time, he notes that usury is itself a “metaphor for metaphor”; that is, it is a metaphor that conceptualizes and explains how metaphors function in a text.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Derrida locates within the traditional account of metaphor an economic metaphor (that of usury) that is used to draw out and explain the work of metaphor in philosophy.

Usury, he writes, is an economic term that implies notions of loss and profit. The traditional account of metaphor (which is sometimes explained in terms of coinage and money, making Derrida’s choice of *usury* even more appropriate; see Nietzsche’s *Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* as well as Anatole France’s *The Garden of Epicurus*) posits both of these movements in metaphor: metaphor discloses the world in new ways, implying the surplus value of a profit, and the conceptualization and subsequent withdrawal of the metaphor entails a certain loss. Metaphor, as a traditional account goes, entails a conceptual gain (profit); this conceptual gain implies a withdrawal (loss) of its metaphorical quality as it is crystallized from the original sense experience into an intelligible concept. Thus, the economic schema of *usury* is a keen metaphor that reveals the inner workings of the traditional account of metaphor, which implies both of these aspects of metaphor.

Initially, a reader might believe Derrida is enacting the very movement he is criticizing, i.e. that he is analyzing and determining the action of metaphor in philosophical discourse by recourse to yet another metaphor (the metaphor of usury) the presence of which he is not aware of in his discourse. *But this is not the case*; Derrida is aware of the paradoxical nature of his analysis. But he pursues this

---

<sup>57</sup> Descartes mentions natural light in the third, fourth, and fifth *Meditations*, all in relation to questions of knowledge and certainty. For an interesting analysis of the role of light in *Meditations*, see Daniel, “Descartes Treatment of ‘lumen naturale’,” *Studentia Leibnitiana*, 1978 p. 92-100.

<sup>58</sup> By withdrawal of metaphor, we mean the tendency for common metaphors to become colloquialized, or to pass by unnoticed in a text or in speech. This aspect of metaphoricality, attributed to dead metaphor, frequently recurs in discussions of metaphor. Derrida sometimes calls this “effacement.”

<sup>59</sup> “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 265 “Text” should be understood here in a wide sense.

strategy in order to illustrate a larger point: theories of the concept of metaphor are *always* animated by yet another metaphor that structures and sustains the unfolding of the theory. In this way, traditional concepts of metaphor merely repeat the phenomenon they intend to explain; as such, they fail to adequately define a concept of metaphor. Derrida alleges this refolding of metaphoricity is endemic to the structure of the concept of metaphor and cannot be overcome, remarking, “the metaphorization of metaphor, its bottomless overdeterminability, seems to be inscribed in the structure of metaphor, but as its negativity.”<sup>60</sup>

Derrida does not propose the notion of *usury* as the ultimate conceptualization of metaphor; rather, he is drawing attention to a common *metaphor of metaphor* that has frequently animated and organized theories of metaphor throughout history. Moreover, these theories have been claimed to accurately and fully describe the workings of metaphor, but Derrida hopes to point out the circular nature of these definitions. If we must resort to metaphor in order to describe the inner mechanics of metaphor, then, he claims, we will never arrive at a final and absolute concept of metaphor. Instead, we will be confined to positing an endless chain of metaphors of metaphor. This state of affairs may be fine with Derrida, but it conflicts with the intentions of those who would propose a concept of metaphor, as it conflicts with their ultimate intention of strictly defining what a metaphor is and how it works.<sup>61</sup>

Rather than blithely continue this tradition, Derrida wants to identify the historic terrain on which the discussion of metaphor in philosophy occurred in order to better determine its underlying assumptions and conditions of possibility. It is important to note that he is not criticizing the efficacy of this notion of metaphor, only pointing out the assumptions and limitations entailed by such an account. Thus he is not guilty of offering us yet another analysis of metaphor made possible by a metaphoric detour.<sup>62</sup>

According to Derrida, it is impossible to categorically define and fix the concept of metaphor within philosophical discourse, *because philosophy itself is permeated by metaphoricity*.<sup>63</sup> While one can propose various accounts of metaphor, Derrida claims each of these will be founded upon a metaphor which structures and

---

<sup>60</sup> “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 243

<sup>61</sup> In regard to establishing a strictly delineated concept of metaphor, he remarks “Let us rather attempt to recognize in principle *the condition for the impossibility* of such a project.” (italics in the original) And shortly thereafter “(Metaphor) cannot dominate itself...Therefore it gets ‘carried away’ each time one of its products – here, the concept of metaphor – attempts to include under its own law the totality of the field to which it belongs.” “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 219

<sup>62</sup> “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 219

<sup>63</sup> Derrida alleges that metaphoricity permeates all arenas of thought, writing “Any statement concerning anything whatsoever that goes on, metaphor included, will not have been produced without metaphor.” (“The Retrait of Metaphor,” *Psyche*, p. 50) As we can see from this claim, Derrida assigns a wide role to metaphor.

organizes the movement of its discourse; this structural metaphor will be invisible to the account it sustains.<sup>64</sup> If one offers a concept of metaphor, it will depend on and profit from an unseen metaphor that animates it. A theory of this kind, that attempts to define and regulate metaphor within philosophical discourse, will always exclude its own organizing and transcendent metaphor. At least one metaphor will always be excluded and effaced, and it is from this exclusion that a surplus conceptual profit is extracted.<sup>65</sup> According to Derrida, this transcendent, organizing metaphor is not itself visible; it is only perceptible through “a certain deafness,” a “blind spot” it generates.

Metaphor, according to Derrida, enables, sustains, reproduces, and extends the conceptual network that implies a particular philosophy; but this philosophy is itself embedded in the selection of metaphors suitable for it. Derrida writes, “What is defined, therefore, is implied in the defining of the definition.”<sup>66</sup> It is important to keep in mind, however, that this sustaining metaphor remains, to a certain extent, hidden from this discourse. As such, philosophy is structurally prevented from both producing a fully regulated, transparent concept of metaphor and exorcizing its own metaphoricality. For Derrida, this structural blind spot implies a disarticulation of the metaphysical opposition of the proper/improper as well as what he will call in “The Retrait of Metaphor,” the *quasi-metaphorical* structure of metaphysics in which the folded, twisted structure of metaphysics and the withdrawal of being are traced by the displacing “re-trait” of metaphor. Ultimately, he will read Heidegger’s peculiar language through the lens of “quasi-metaphoricity.”

### 3.2 Quasi-Metaphoricity and the Retrait

In “The Retrait of Metaphor”, Derrida approaches the question of metaphor through the notion of withdrawal, articulating what van der Heiden calls the “logic of the *retrait/re-trait*.”<sup>67</sup> According to this logic, being itself can never be disclosed, strictly speaking; instead, a supplementary trait serves to disclose *only the withdrawal* of being. Derrida claims the qualities of withdrawal and displacement entailed by metaphor mirror the withdrawal of being that Heidegger regards as the hallmark of metaphysics, thereby motivating Heidegger’s rejection of the *concept* metaphor. Heidegger’s rejection of metaphoricity would then open up a space in which the withdrawal of being can be thought.

---

<sup>64</sup> Derrida remarks that a philosophical concept of metaphor implies “a philosophical discourse whose entire surface is worked by a metaphoricity.” “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 232

<sup>65</sup> Derrida writes “Always one more metaphor when metaphor withdraws/is retraced in opening out its limits.” “The Retrait of Metaphor,” *Psyche*, p. 71

<sup>66</sup> “White Mythology,” *Margins*, p. 230

<sup>67</sup> *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language*, p. 176

Let us analyze this claim in further detail.<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, in the few moments in which he explicitly refers to and discusses metaphor, consistently claims that the metaphorical exists only within the metaphysical. Derrida reads this claim in the following way: since being is not a being among beings, it cannot be named in a literal or proper way, as this would immediately determine it as a being among beings, obliterating the ontological difference that is integral to Heidegger's thought. As such, the withdrawal of being can be thought *only through a metaphorical or metonymical displacement*, wherein being is given a name. In this naming, however, being withdraws, replaced by a reference to beings. The withdrawal of being is mirrored, according to Derrida, by the withdrawal of metaphoricity that correlates with its conceptualization.

The withdrawal of metaphoricity, however, would *not* entail a return to a "proper" origin that names being literally. On the contrary, it would signal what Derrida calls a "refolding," a repetition of the supplementary trait of metaphor that traces the withdrawal of being. Since being cannot be properly named, we can only think its withdrawal, and this withdrawal is traced, first by the displacement of being with beings, and then by the effacement of the metaphor's metaphoricity. Metaphor remains, unnoticed, and likewise being remains undisclosed. Ultimately, in this account, both the withdrawal of being as well as the concept of metaphor would be thought metaphysically. Since the being of beings cannot be properly named, any name given to it has a metaphorical – and therefore metaphysical – provenance. In this sense, metaphor does not give anything to think on being; rather, it only gives a way of thinking the *withdrawal* of being. As such, thinking the withdrawal of being as well as of metaphor is possible only on the basis of thinking the ontic-ontological difference.

Typically, a metaphor will use a well-known thing to explicate an unknown or unfamiliar thing. Derrida, however, claims that quasi-metaphoricity reverses the usual direction of the metaphor.<sup>69</sup> In quasi-metaphoricity, a well-known thing is rendered unfamiliar, opening up a space for the thought to come. Consider, for example, the phrase "language is the house of being." Contained within the instruction not to understand the phrase metaphorically, Heidegger writes that we are not to interpret this phrase as implying a transfer of the image of the word "house" to "being." Instead, he claims, contemplating the essence of being will, in the future, give the possibility of thinking what "house" and "to dwell" are.<sup>70</sup> In other words, Heidegger instructs us to reverse the direction of the interpretation of the phrase. Instead of using the commonplace notion of house to better think the less well-known (to say the least) thought of being, the thinking of being will help us think the essence of "house" and "to dwell." But it is important to note that the thinking of being will not clarify any beings in particular – it will not result in a

---

<sup>68</sup> The following two paragraphs are drawn from "The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche*, p. 65-68.

<sup>69</sup> "The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche*, p. 69

<sup>70</sup> "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings*, p. 260

disclosure of new knowledge on the level of beings. Rather, it will point toward the unthought in thought, i.e. to the essence of thought as “to come.”

According to Derrida, quasi-metaphoricity allows Heidegger to think the logic of metaphysics by allowing him to think the forgetting and withdrawal of being. The reversal of the direction of metaphor indicates the withdrawal of being and gestures toward the essence of thought. But Derrida claims that quasi-metaphoricity is “no longer simply metaphoric.”<sup>71</sup> Instead, it states the non-literal condition of metaphoricity, that is, the re-folding of being that makes metaphysics possible.

The logic of the retrait is a common line of thinking in Derrida’s works. In “Différance” he writes, “Since the trace (trait) is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, refers itself, it properly has no site – erasure belongs to its structure” and shortly thereafter, “Thereby the text of metaphysics is comprehended.”<sup>72</sup> According to Derrida, it is impossible to name being, precisely because “there is no *name* for it at all.”<sup>73</sup> Since being is not a being among beings, it cannot appear – it is “structurally in withdrawal” and the writing of it succeeds in its intention only insofar as it traces the withdrawal of being.<sup>74</sup> The retrait, like *différance*, is nothing but the trace of the unfolding of the ontological difference, a perpetual deferral and differing of presence.

### 3.3 Derrida and Heidegger

Derrida is one of the few to take seriously Heidegger’s instruction not to understand his language as metaphorical, as a mere transferal of image. Even still, Derrida struggles with this directive, ultimately characterizing Heidegger’s peculiar language as quasi-metaphorical; that is, he claims it is neither literal *nor* figurative, but exhibits a re-folding of language that mirrors the withdrawal of being and allows us to think this withdrawal. Thus, Derrida locates his notion of quasi-metaphoricity within a framework of difference and deferral that he claims characterizes language and metaphysics. While intriguing in its own right, this perspective conflicts with that of Heidegger’s, who hopes not to think the disclosure of language only as an endless chain of linguistic substitutions, but as unconcealing, pre-linguistic, originary disclosure.

Both Derrida and Heidegger are concerned with thinking the withdrawal of being inasmuch as it engages in a play of concealedness and unconcealedness. But they have different views that shape the tenor of this thinking. Heidegger, broadly speaking, hopes the essence of concealment and withdrawal of being can be brought into unconcealment through disclosive saying. Derrida, on the other hand, claims the withdrawal of being can never be, strictly speaking, brought into

---

<sup>71</sup> “The Retrait of Metaphor,” *Psyche*, p. 70. And shortly thereafter, “Despite its resemblance or its movement, this phrasing is no longer proper or literal.”

<sup>72</sup> “Différance,” *Margins*, p. 24

<sup>73</sup> “Différance,” *Margins*, p. 26

<sup>74</sup> “The Retrait of Metaphor,” *Psyche*, p. 75

unconcealment/presence; instead, only the *withdrawal itself* can be thought, and this only on the basis of the supplement that merely traces the withdrawal. Furthermore, on his view, metaphor permeates language: nothing in language happens without metaphor.<sup>75</sup> As such, Derrida cannot help but diverge from Heidegger on the issue of metaphor, as their views on language and its limits are fundamentally different. Whereas metaphor plays a substantial role in Derrida's notion of language, Heidegger cannot have any traces of metaphor in his thinking of being, as this would imply the disclosure of a semblance.<sup>76</sup> Derrida will privilege displacement in his account of language, while Heidegger will privilege the possibility of an unconcealing disclosure. These viewpoints are distinctly different.

In any case, Derrida's proclivity for emphasizing the effects of displacement within a text precludes him from fully committing to Heidegger's instruction not to read his peculiar language as merely metaphorical. As a result, his reading of quasi-metaphoricity is a half measure that fails to address the core of Heidegger's project. Let's further explore this claim.

In the interest of a charitable reading of Derrida's interpretation, it is not clear that Heidegger would reject all aspects of Derrida's notion of quasi-metaphoricity entirely; he certainly would agree with the impossibility of a (proper or final) naming of being as well as the metaphoric-metonymical displacement effected by metaphysical theories. *But he would stridently disagree with Derrida's retention of any metaphoricity in the characterization of his own language.* As we shall see, the majority of Heidegger's infrequent remarks on metaphor take place during larger discussions in which Heidegger hopes to think the essence of language and its relation to the bodily articulation of speech, not the metaphoric-metonymical displacement of being.

It is odd that Derrida retains of any type of metaphoricity in his effort to understand Heidegger's rejection of metaphor, as this raises the question of the justification for this interpretive violence. In other words, quasi-metaphoricity, as a supplement that traces the withdrawal of being, would merely serve to conceal being; as such, it conflicts with Heidegger's larger project, i.e. to think the unconcealment of being as *aletheia*. For Heidegger, there can be no vestige of metaphor in thinking the essence of language, as this would determine it under the rubric of semblance and concealment.

Derrida contends that Heidegger does not reject metaphor *per se*, *but rather the traditional concept of metaphor*. By rejecting the concept of metaphor, Heidegger opens a space in which other traits of metaphoricity emerge, namely, the retrait of metaphor (quasi-metaphoricity). Quasi-metaphoricity then allows us to think the withdrawal of being and its relationship to metaphysics, language, and truth, through the analogous movement of the withdrawal of metaphor. Derrida contends

---

<sup>75</sup> "The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche*, p. 50

<sup>76</sup> In regards to the difference between Derrida and Heidegger on the importance of metaphor, Kockelmans wryly comments, "If (Heidegger) had shared the views of Derrida and Ricoeur, he would have devoted an entire lecture course to the problems involved." *Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, p. 294

that by withdrawing the concept of metaphor, Heidegger's language becomes uncanny and strange, compelling us to attempt to think the essence of language. Unlike traditional metaphor, which familiarizes the unfamiliar, quasi-metaphoricity distances that which is near and familiar (the common meanings of words).<sup>77</sup> In doing so, it gestures toward the nature of our relationship to language. Thus, while Derrida acknowledges it would be misleading to read Heidegger's text as employing metaphor traditionally construed, he also consistently maintains Heidegger is engaging in *some type of metaphoricity*, albeit one that mirrors, and thereby reveals, the refolded structure of metaphysics.

The substantive difference, then, between Heidegger's own understanding of his rejection of metaphor and Derrida's reading of it lies in the contextualization of the rejection. While Heidegger acknowledges the necessary co-implication of concealment and unconcealment, he hopes to think this co-implication as a letting-be of beings. This is illustrated in his phenomenological analysis of hearing and his thinking of the relation between bodily being-in-the-world and originary openness to beings. Derrida, on the other hand, sees the unfolding of language as dependent on the deferral and displacement of *différance* that characterizes language. As such, metaphor (as deferring displacement) is a necessary and inevitable part of *all* language. This view forces him to read Heidegger's language as *quasi-metaphorical*, a reading that conflicts with Heidegger's hope to think disclosure as *aletheia*.

The difference between *aletheia* and *différance* gestures toward the divergence of Derrida and Heidegger regarding the nature of disclosure and language. For Derrida, meaning is an effect of the differing and deferring play of *différance*, which stems from the intrinsic supplementarity of language. In the same way, quasi-metaphoricity is also marked by the addition of a supplement that results in perpetual postponement.

Heidegger, however, has a different view on language: he hopes to bring language to language as language, thus making it possible for us to undergo "an experience with language."<sup>78</sup> In other words, he hopes to think the originary openness to beings that he links to the distinctive human capacity for language.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, he hopes to think bodily being-in-the-world in relation to this originary openness to beings. This effort is further complicated when one notes that it takes place in language: this is what Heidegger means by "to speak about speech

---

<sup>77</sup> "The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche*, p. 69

<sup>78</sup> "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 57

<sup>79</sup> For Heidegger, only humans have the capacity for language. Animals can communicate in various ways, but they do not have language; they cannot speak. By portraying the human relationship to language in this way, Heidegger is trying to underscore the human being's openness to beings. That is, human beings are the beings who can surpass beings, i.e. are not held captive or transfixed by beings. For Heidegger, this capacity to surpass beings distinguishes Dasein (and its relationship to being) from animals.



*qua* speech.”<sup>80</sup> Heidegger hopes to bring language as such to presence, to bring the experience of language to language.<sup>81</sup>

The preceding claim indicates the richness and complexity of Heidegger’s thought on the relationship between language and pre-reflective originary understanding, a line of questioning that can be traced back to his earliest works through his phenomenological analyses of hearing.<sup>82</sup> It is in this line of thinking that most of Heidegger’s references to metaphor occur. As such, it is more appropriate to locate his rejection of metaphor within his re-thinking of being-in-the-world and the bodily articulation of speech as it relates to a pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic originary understanding. It is during the course of this re-thinking of body, sound, and sense that Heidegger rejects metaphor, as employing it would portray language in a manner that is founded on the sensible/intelligible opposition. Derrida’s notion of quasi-metaphoricity obscures this line of thought by casting it in the linguistic framework of the metaphorico-metonymical displacement of being. By re-injecting metaphor into Heidegger’s thought, we are turned away from thinking the relationship of originary openness to beings, bodily being-in-the-world, and language that Heidegger hopes to think.

---

<sup>80</sup> “The Way to Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 113

<sup>81</sup> “The Nature of Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 59

<sup>82</sup> For example, see *History of the Concept of Time*, sec. 28-d: “Discourse and Language.”

## CHAPTER 4: HEIDEGGER

Heidegger's views on metaphor and its relation to the essence of language are, admittedly, a little startling at first. On the one hand, the reader is exposed to a text that appears to be rife with metaphorical or figurative meanings, phrases such as "language is the house of being," "language is the flower of the mouth," or "thinking is a seeing and a hearing." On the other hand, however, Heidegger instructs the reader to take care not to read these phrases as metaphors.

This paradox is mitigated, though, when one takes into account what Heidegger hopes to achieve in his rethinking of language. Language, for Heidegger, is extended to include more than mere words, understood as a set of verbal symbols. Language, in this broad sense, extends to include non-verbal elements, for example, a wink, gesture, or vocal inflection and intonation. This line of thought problematizes a correspondence model of language and suggests a direction for a fundamental rethinking of language and our relation to it, one that is not delimited by the framework of the sign relation.

As we shall see, Heidegger's most extensive discussions of metaphor occur within this context, namely, a rethinking of our bodily experience. The sensible/intelligible opposition that metaphor entails precludes the possibility of thinking the originary openness to beings that makes language possible in the first place. Specifically, Heidegger's concern is twofold: he hopes to think (1) language *apart from* the sensible/intelligible opposition and (2) and the originary openness that makes language possible. Metaphor, in his view, implies a framework structured by the sensible/intelligible opposition, and thus is inappropriate for a thinking of the essence of language.

This will become clear through an analysis of Heidegger's view of the nature of language, *dasein's* originary openness to beings, and the coming to presence of beings within the open. This will provide a background in which we may contextualize his rejection of metaphor and situate his peculiar language. Finally, this will enable us to grasp the depth of difference between the approaches of Ricoeur, Derrida, and Heidegger.

### 4.1 Heidegger and Language

As noted above, Heidegger's concern in his thinking of language is twofold: he wants to (1) think language in a manner more fundamental than the one entailed by the sign relation framework, and (2) think the originary openness that makes language possible. Words, in the sense of standardized units of verbal meaning, play a derivative role in his thinking of language. Heidegger wants to think what makes it possible to speak in the first place, and this he attributes to a particular sort of openness to beings.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> By "speaking" Heidegger has a somewhat specialized meaning in mind. Rather than the rote use of verbal units (what Heidegger might call "employing" language), speaking implies a bringing to presence of beings that opens up a world. It is a type of speaking that Heidegger characterizes as poetic language. This capacity for

In order to do this, we cannot rely traditional notions of language; we need “the right concept of language.”<sup>84</sup> According to Heidegger, language has been traditionally understood within the framework of the sign relation. “Letters are the signs of sounds, the sounds are the signs of mental experiences, and these are the signs of things. The sign relation constitutes the struts of the structure.”<sup>85</sup> But for Heidegger, language is not primarily about sign relations. Nor is language to be viewed merely as a set of words (for example, those found in the dictionary). If we think of language only in these terms, Heidegger contends that we have not yet experienced “the real nature of sounds and tones of speech.”<sup>86</sup> Instead, language is a “showing”: it “makes something come to light, lets what has come to light to be perceived, and lets the perception be examined.”<sup>87</sup> According to Heidegger, the way language “shows” has been hijacked and monopolized by the sign relation. Because language shows, it has been understood to show in the same way that the sign relation does; *but Heidegger claims this relation does not speak to the essence of language.*

We can already see, then, that Heidegger’s view of language is quite different from that taken by what is commonly understood in the philosophy of language. His project is oriented in a totally different direction. While philosophy of language is concerned with the nature of linguistic meaning, the use of language, the relationship of language and reality, etc., Heidegger hopes to think what makes language possible, i.e. about the human beings relationship to language at its most fundamental level. Metaphor, as it implies a view of language structured by the sign relation, simply impedes this attempt; it is unable to disclose the essence of language. All philosophical concepts of metaphor arise from a rhetorical, semantic, or hermeneutic perspective; these all depend upon a view of language fundamentally structured by the sign relation. As such, metaphor prevents one from overcoming this limited, metaphysical notion of language. Heidegger does not want to think language in the rhetoric-linguistic form implied by metaphor (X=Y); he hopes to think language as the calling to presence of beings that opens up a world.

This train of thought persists throughout Heidegger’s corpus of thought, from *History of the Concept of Time* in the 1920’s to the essay “Language” from the 1950’s; it is a theme he returns to again and again. Yet there is a slight change of focus over time. Earlier in his career, he focuses on a thinking of language prior to the sign relation model, while later on he generally concentrates on the nature of the

---

language marks Dasein as having a distinctive relationship to being and to beings. See note 79.

<sup>84</sup> “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 71

<sup>85</sup> “The Nature of Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 97

<sup>86</sup> “The Nature of Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 98

<sup>87</sup> “The Way to Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 115

openness that makes language possible.<sup>88</sup> The persistence of this thinking attests to the difficulty of the thought: how is one to express, in words, the originary openness that makes language itself possible? How is language related to this openness? Can this openness be articulated through words, or is it by nature ineffable? The relationship of originary openness and language as a discursive whole is complex indeed.

Early on, Heidegger's concern with language revolves around an attempt to think a notion of language prior to the sign relation; he takes language to be much broader than the model of the sign would allow. In other words, if one assumes the basic unit of language to be a sign that corresponds to a signified, then one is limited to a very narrow conception of language that does not account for the range of phenomena associated with it. For example, there seem to be several phenomena associated with language and meaning that are not, strictly speaking, verbal: consider gestures and vocal inflection. The tone and pitch of a voice directly affect the meaning of the word; think of the many ways the word "no" can appear to a hearer. This problematizes thinking of the word "no" in a simple sign relation, as its meaning seems to be attached less to the sign, and more to vocal inflection and tone. Can one understand the meaning of the word "no" apart from tone, pitch, and other non- or extra-linguistic factors? But even this way of construing language is too weak for Heidegger; he would claim tone and pitch are part and parcel of meaning and could not be abstracted from it without "a very artificial and complicated frame of mind."<sup>89</sup>

Heidegger illustrates this claim with a phenomenological analysis of hearing. Specifically, his concern is to point out the intrinsic belonging together of bodily experience and significance, writing, "what we 'first' hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling."<sup>90</sup> We do not, in other words, first perceive raw unformed sense data, and then compare it with other sounds we have heard in the past in order to determine what it is that we are now hearing. On the contrary, sound and meaning are experienced as one and the same: they are inseparable from each other. *What we hear is, in the first place, meaningful.* According to Heidegger, we can only separate sound from meaning on the basis of this more fundamental experience.

Contained within this phenomenological analysis is a critique of the view of language as structured by the sign relation. If our fundamental experience of hearing indicates a unity of sound and meaning that can be separated only later by artificial and forced operations, then language cannot be founded on the sign relation, *as this does not occur in the fundamental experience of hearing.* As Smith

---

<sup>88</sup> It is important to note, however, that these two focuses are part of the same movement and should not be rigidly separated from each other. The originary openness to beings gives beings of which we can then speak.

<sup>89</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 207 Heidegger uses a very similar phrase in *History of the Concept of Time* (p. 266) and yet again in *What is Called Thinking?* (p. 129-130)

<sup>90</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 207

notes, Heidegger's concern here is with a sort of meaning that pervades verbal language, but is not reducible to it.<sup>91</sup> This is what Heidegger refers to as "discourse" in *Being and Time*, of which verbal language is just one aspect.<sup>92</sup> Discourse, at its base, includes much more than just words. As Heidegger notes, when we conceive of language as founded on the sign relation, we are forced to view sound separately from meaning: we treat meaning as if it were attached on to raw, abstract sense data.<sup>93</sup> Language, so conceived, implies a sensible/intelligible opposition (between sound and meaning), the very opposition that is put into question by his phenomenological analysis of hearing.

This notion of non- or extra-verbal language is illustrated by Heidegger's analysis of the gesture or hint. A gesture opens up a world: through it, beings come to presence in a certain way. This illustrates the co-belonging of bodily and linguistic openness to beings. For example, when a fellow motorist gives you "the finger," your surroundings tend to appear in a different light than they had just before. Perhaps, upon seeing it, you realize you had just cut someone off; or you might wonder what you did to deserve such an act. In any case, this gesture problematizes the sensible/intelligible separation posited at its basis, straddling both body and language in a way that cannot be reduced to either. While "the finger" has a meaning, its meaning cannot be thought apart from bodily phenomenon (unlike speech, which tends to be abstracted away from the body). In this way, a gesture reveals the necessary co-belonging of body and language.

A gesture does not reveal anything "unknown." Rather, with a gesture, one indicates one's engagement with beings that is implicitly guided by an originary understanding of beings. Only because we are ahead of ourselves in the world, i.e. have a pre-conscious awareness of what we are up to in our surroundings, can we understand the meaning of a gesture. With a gesture (a bodily movement), one opens up a world. This aspect of gesture (inseparability of body and meaning) indicates the nature of the relationship between it and the originary openness that makes language possible. A gesture calls beings to presence inasmuch as it lets them be. That is, a gesture reveals something that has already been disclosed within a particular open and understood at a pre-cognitive level; in disclosing what has already been understood, it calls beings to presence, letting them be.

The gesture, then, instantiates two qualities that cannot be accounted for by an account of language structured by the sign relation. In the first place, it is non-verbal; a gesture does not employ or rely upon words. It is intrinsically a bodily phenomenon. This points to a discursive milieu that is broader than can be accounted for in a signifier/signified model of language. In the second place, it calls beings into presence, taking what was only tacitly understood and bringing it explicitly to presence.

A gesture calls into question the sensible/intelligible opposition as well as the linguistic model of language as sign relation, since it is a non-verbal, physical act

---

<sup>91</sup> *Sounding/Silence*, p. 68

<sup>92</sup> *Being and Time*, p. 204

<sup>93</sup> *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 129-130

of meaning. In a gesture, meaning is inseparable from its bodily articulation – it defies the framework that would be imposed on it by the sign relation. For Heidegger, this constitutes a point of departure for a rethinking of bodily experience and meaning. In a gesture, meaning and language cannot be thought apart from bodily being-in-the-world, as in it the body alone calls beings into presence: no verbal language is employed. A gesture is not a sign that expresses an internal, purely intelligible state of affairs; unmediated by the sign relation, a gesture calls beings to presence. This indicates the implication of body in being-in-the-world; Heidegger calls this “bodying forth.”<sup>94</sup> But while the meaning of a gesture is inseparable from the body and its movement, Heidegger warns against reducing the essence of a gesture to these, maintaining that its essence is “hard to say.”<sup>95</sup> In any case, a gesture indicates the co-belonging of meaning and body in a way that cannot be appropriated by the sign relation model of language.

But such a model of language is insufficient, in Heidegger’s mind, in another way as well; it is unable to account for language’s relationship to the originary openness to beings. For Heidegger, language calls beings into presence from out of an originary openness to beings; language depends on this openness, which is characterized as the surpassing of beings. One can speak of beings only if those beings have already, in a certain sense, revealed themselves. As such, language is a “showing” inasmuch as it shows beings.<sup>96</sup> This showing depends upon a prior understanding of beings that is not explicitly thematized, but underlies and structures Dasein’s being in the world.<sup>97</sup> In other words, language always and only shows beings that have come to presence in some way, possibly in a disclosure anterior to explicit awareness. It does this by distinguishing beings, and separating them from each other, and in doing so articulating and opening a space in which beings are set into relation.

Heidegger captures this joining-separating nature of language with the word *Riss*. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* he characterizes *Riss* as “the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, *Riss* is the difference that joins two distinct but essentially implicated realms.<sup>99</sup> As this difference, it gathers

---

<sup>94</sup> Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 91

<sup>95</sup> “A Dialogue on Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p.18. This characterization of a gesture is given by the “Japanese” (Tomio Tezuka) rather than by the “Inquirer” (Heidegger), but Heidegger’s approval of it is apparent in the text.

<sup>96</sup> “The Way to Language,” *On the Way to Language*, p. 123 “The essential being of language is Saying as Showing.”

<sup>97</sup> “On the Essence of Ground,” *Pathmarks*, p. 104. “The understanding of being that guides and illuminates all comportment toward beings in neither a grasping of beings as such, *nor is it a conceptual comprehending* of what is thus grasped.” (emphasis added)

<sup>98</sup> “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 61

disparate elements around itself, joining them together yet maintaining their irresolvable difference. The work of art embodies this tension of the *Riss*, and it establishes the truth of the work, bringing beings to presence in a particular light. As Heidegger writes “the rift-design (*Riss*) is the drawing together, into a unity, of sketch and basic design, breach and outline.”<sup>100</sup> *Riss* brings distinct and different elements together, joining them *by virtue of this difference*.

In *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger characterizes this joining-separating of language as “calling into name.” In naming, “we call on what is present to arrive.”<sup>101</sup> That is, the use of language depends upon a prior disclosure of beings; it “calls” them to presence out of the open that frames them. This is not to be understood either as merely a reference to beings that are already present, or as a purely creative act that makes beings appear out of thin air. Rather, language is a way of attending to the disclosure of beings in such a way that it gives them to be thought. In this sense, it is as an “anticipatory reaching out” that shapes the open in which beings appear and can be encountered.<sup>102</sup> Thus, in revealing beings, language also affects the open in which beings appear; the two are intertwined in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship, shaping each other. Beings come to presence in the originary open: thus it is possible for language to show them. In showing them, language affects and engenders the originary open in which beings are disclosed. The sign relation, since it is limited to designating beings with labels, cannot account for this dynamic relation between originary openness to beings and language.

In any case, it is clear that Heidegger’s concerns with language diverge from those held by most rhetorical, semantic, and hermeneutic theoreticians. He is interested in two things as far as language is concerned: a thinking of it prior to the sign relation, and a thinking of the originary openness that makes language possible. An analysis of the intrinsic meaningfulness of bodily experience leads him to question and rethink the sensible/intelligible divide implied by the sign relation model of language. From this point of view, he characterizes language as a naming power, with the capacity to open up a world within which beings appear and are set into relation. This naming power calls beings to presence from the pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic understanding where they had lain unnoticed. This notion of language cannot be appropriated into a model of language structured by the sign relation without undermining the very concerns that guided the project from the start. Of course, Heidegger would not deny the correctness of these interpretations of language from a certain point of view, as long as one kept in mind the limits of such an endeavor, and their basic unsuitability and inability to disclose the happening of

---

<sup>99</sup> *Riss* is used to characterize the co-belonging of world and earth in “The Origin of the Work of Art” and poetry and thinking in “The Nature of Language.”

<sup>100</sup> “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 61

<sup>101</sup> *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 120

<sup>102</sup> *What is Called Thinking?*, p. 117

truth.<sup>103</sup> He would, however, deny their capacity to disclose the essence of language and its relation to originary openness, which occurs prior to the sensible/intelligible opposition and the sign relation model of language.

#### 4.2 Heidegger and Metaphor

As far as the commentary on Heidegger and metaphor is concerned, Heidegger explicitly mentions metaphor only four times throughout the entirety of his prolific career, but the placement of each succinct statement occurs within a common line of thought, that of undergoing an “experience with language.”<sup>104</sup> Each time, metaphor is claimed to interfere with the possibility of undergoing this experience. In a lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “Andenken,” he writes, “the key to all ‘poetics,’ the doctrine of ‘images’ in poetry, of ‘metaphor,’ cannot open any single door in the realm of Hölderlynian hymnal poetry.”<sup>105</sup> In a lecture on Hölderlin’s poem “Der Ister,” he writes “symbolic images... allegory, simile, and metaphor, example and insignia” are all metaphysical notions that are closed off to the happening of language disclosed in Hölderlin’s poetry.<sup>106</sup> The two more extensive references, which are the subject of much the commentary, are found in “The Nature of Language” and *The Principle of Reason* and run along similar lines.

One might take this to imply Heidegger’s lack of interest in questions of metaphor; but, on the contrary, metaphor lies at the center of his attempt to undergo an experience with language, albeit in a negative way. In other words, metaphor embodies a view of language that prevents us from “undergoing an experience with language.” All four references posit metaphor and symbolic images as belonging inherently to metaphysics. It is this aspect that most commentators on Heidegger and metaphor have focused on. But, as Smith points out, *Heidegger’s denunciations of metaphor take place within an attempt to think language’s capacity to name without relying on the sensible/intelligible opposition.*<sup>107</sup> In this sense, his criticism of metaphor develops his critique of the sign relation model of language and his re-thinking of bodily being-in-the-world. While Heidegger does assert that

---

<sup>103</sup> In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger writes, regarding the grounding of truth, “By contrast, science is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of a domain of truth already opened, specifically by apprehending and confirming that which shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within that field.” (“The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 60) Likewise, a sign relation model of language is well suited to analyze sign-referent relationships within language but unsuited to disclose the essence of language or the happening of truth.

<sup>104</sup> Of course with Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* now reaching 102 volumes, it is possible there are other references to metaphor waiting to be discovered.

<sup>105</sup> *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, p.40

<sup>106</sup> *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* p. 16-17

<sup>107</sup> *Sound/Silence*, p. 102



the metaphorical exists only within metaphysics, this is merely his point of departure from which he hopes to rethink the relationship of bodily being-in-the-world, language, and meaning. It is important for Heidegger to reject metaphor, inasmuch as it is intrinsically structured by the view of language he is trying to think beyond.

Let's explore the previous claim.

In both *The Principle of Reason* and "The Nature of Language," Heidegger's references to metaphor occur within analyses of hearing similar to those discussed above from *Being and Time*. Heidegger once again emphasizes the unity of sound and meaning, but this time he underscores just how this undermines the physiological explanations of hearing and the sign relation model. This leads him to wonder about the "real nature of language," writing, "It is much more important to consider whether... the physical element of language, its vocal and written character, is being adequately experienced."<sup>108</sup> Heidegger does not deny the efficacy of what he calls the "phonetic-acoustic-physiological explanation," but he claims these explanations do not disclose the essence of language or our relationship (as ones who speak) to language.<sup>109</sup>

This point of view is illustrated through Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of hearing. Merely physiological explanations of hearing, according to Heidegger, view the ear simply as an organ for receiving sonic sense data. In this schema, the ear funnels sense data into the brain, which then interprets it, attaching a meaning to the sound. Meaning is abstracted out of sound, implying a sensible/intelligible model of phenomenal experience and language. If, as Heidegger claims, sound and meaning cannot be thought apart from each other, then models of language that rely on either sensible/intelligible opposition or the sign relation are inappropriate for disclosing the essence of language. With these analyses, Heidegger gestures towards a rethinking of the phenomenality of body and meaning and their co-belonging.

Our experience of language is broader and richer than can be accounted for by the sensible/intelligible or sign relation models; Heidegger writes, "Whatever is heard by us never exhausts itself in what our ears... can pick up," and, "*We* hear, not the ear."<sup>110</sup> In other words, hearing is a much more complicated phenomenon than the sensible/intelligible model would allow. Thinking of the ear as an organ designed merely to register abstract sense data is insufficient for describing and understanding the experience of hearing that we actually have. Heidegger asserts that we have ears *because* we can hear, rather than the opposite.<sup>111</sup> Hearing, as Dasein hears, implies an intimate being-with beings, i.e. a manner of relating to beings that cannot be accounted for by a view of language implied by metaphor. What and how the ear perceives is determined by our pre-reflective understanding

---

<sup>108</sup> "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 96

<sup>109</sup> "The Way to Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 121-122

<sup>110</sup> *The Principle of Reason*, p. 47 (italics in the original)

<sup>111</sup> Smith makes this observation in *Sounding/Silence*, p. 115.

of our being in a world, indicating that the phenomenon of hearing should not be limited to the sense data the ear receives.

The ear cannot be separated from the body, nor can the body be separated from its embeddedness in the world (among beings). As such, what it means to hear must be thought apart from this separation. With this, he hopes to begin thinking the richness of meaningful bodily being-in-the-world, a thinking that exceeds the sensible/intelligible opposition and the sign relation model of language.

What we hear, we hear because we are already attuned to our environment and surroundings as being-in-the-world; it is because we are always already thrown into a world that we experience phenomena as meaningful in the first place. There is no separation of sense and intelligibility in Dasein's primordial being-in-the-world. Intelligibility is not added onto to bare sense data; we hear the jet passing overhead, or hear the siren of the ambulance in the first place, not after abstract calculations. This analysis of hearing implies dasein's always already being among beings as well as its always being ahead of itself in its world. Only because Dasein is already in a world and ahead of itself can it hear as it does; this accounts for the unity of sound and meaning. When Dasein hears and understands poetic language, it is because the word "sounds out" and calls beings to presence from the originary openness in which Dasein dwells, opening up a world.<sup>112</sup>

Interestingly, Heidegger extends this line of thought from hearing to seeing, writing "If human vision remained confined to what is piped in as sensations through the eye to the retina, then, for instance, the Greeks would never have been able to see Apollo in a statue of a young man..."<sup>113</sup> In other words, when we see, we do more than utilize organs for the reception of sense data. We see with and through our originary understanding, which includes and extends to much more than our conscious perceptions. When we see, how beings come to presence is drawn from our thrownness, our historical epoch, what we are "up to," our attunement to our environment, etc.; it is never the mere registering of abstract sense data, distilled from any world in which it would come to presence. With this line of thinking, Heidegger gestures to more fundamental way of conceiving of our embodied being-in-the-world, to what he calls "a more profoundly thought human being."<sup>114</sup> Presumably, the analysis of hearing and seeing can be extrapolated to include all modes of sense perception as well.

But Heidegger does not pursue this line of thought, claiming that it is "off the mark to insist that thinking and listening as bringing into view are only meant as a transposition of meaning... from the supposedly sensible into the non-sensible."<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> "The sound rings out in the resounding assembly call which, open to the Open, makes World appear in all things. The sounding of the voice is no longer of the order of the physical organs." "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 101

<sup>113</sup> *The Principle of Reason*, p. 47-48

<sup>114</sup> *The Principle of Reason*, p. 48

<sup>115</sup> *The Principle of Reason*, p. 48

Shortly thereafter, he notes, “The idea of transposing and of metaphor is based upon the distinguishing, if not the complete separation, of the sensible and nonsensible as two realms that subsist on their own.”<sup>116</sup> Using the notion of metaphor to understand language and our relationship to it necessarily imports a sensible/intelligible opposition into our thinking, and this prevents us from adequately thinking the phenomena of seeing and hearing, and bodily being-in-the-world in general. Although Heidegger does not pursue this question at length, it is a fairly radical line of thought, *a re-thinking of our basic experience of meaningful bodily being-in-the-world*, which seems to suggest interesting and perhaps compelling possibilities.

While his rejection of metaphor might also legitimately relate to other aspects of his thought, it seems primarily embedded within his thinking of the essence of language and Dasein’s distinctive relationship to the originary openness as it impacts the way we think of our basic experience in the world. In this light, it seems a shame that so much of the debate regarding Heidegger’s peculiar language has been done within the framework of metaphor and the sign relation, as this inevitably pulls the analysis in the very direction he is hoping to avoid. Metaphor is intrinsically intertwined with notions of the sign relation and the sensible/intelligible opposition. Neither of these concepts is suited to address the rich and complex relationship Heidegger claims we have with language. Of course, readers may read Heidegger’s text as they wish; but reading it as metaphorical precludes one from even considering the possibilities of the question he poses, that of a radical re-thinking of the relationship of physical phenomenality, meaning, and language. It is in order to open up this avenue of thought that Heidegger instructs his reader not to understand his peculiar language as metaphorical.

---

<sup>116</sup> *The Principle of Reason*, p. 48

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

We have seen, then, that Heidegger's interest in language, as well as the way he thinks of language, diverges sharply from traditional models of language. In fact, it is his hope to be able to think language apart from these models. Heidegger is less interested in words and conventional sign theories than he is in investigating the human being's distinctive relationship to language. In his mind, this relationship is not founded on either the sensible/intelligible opposition or the sign relation; these are not broad enough to account for our relationship to language, nor do they occur in our basic experiences. This is illustrated through his phenomenological analysis of hearing: Heidegger takes this to show the unity of sound and meaning, a unity that cannot be accounted for by the sensible/intelligible opposition or the sign relation. Meaning cannot be extracted from sound without engaging in abstract thought experiments. This unity indicates the beginnings of a rethinking of the relationship of bodily being-in-the-world, originary openness to beings, and meaning.

For Heidegger, metaphor disrupts this unity, as it involves the transfer of an image and therefore a division. When one says, "love is war," the idea of war is transferred onto that of love. This semantic transfer implied by metaphor makes it inappropriate for thinking the fundamental mode of our being-in-the-world.

When Ricoeur addresses Heidegger's rejection of metaphor, he does so from the perspective of the emergence of meaning within language. For Ricoeur, metaphor "translates" an unexplained phenomenon into something known. This makes it well suited to facilitate the emergence of meaning and the creation of concepts. In a sense, this is a legitimate way to think of metaphor's functioning, but it does not speak to the substance of Heidegger's concern with language. When one tries to think the fundamental nature of bodily being-in-the-world, metaphor only interferes, since it entails an opposition that does not occur at this basic level. It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that Heidegger would concede to metaphor its role in developing concepts. But he would stringently deny its ability to disclose the nature of our fundamental being-in-the-world. As such, Ricoeur's interpretation fails to confront the gist of Heidegger's rejection of metaphor.

Derrida approaches Heidegger's rejection from the standpoint of metaphor's implication in philosophy. Like Ricoeur, Derrida characterizes metaphor as a necessary aspect of language; unlike Ricoeur, Derrida doubts the metaphoricity of language can ever be fully determined or controlled. In any case, this also prevents him from addressing the substance of Heidegger's rejection of metaphor: instead of linking it to bodily being-in-the-world, he connects it to the metaphoricometonymical deferral of being, i.e. the withdrawal of being and the refolding structure of metaphysics.

When Derrida determines Heidegger's language as "quasi-metaphorical," he places Heidegger's rejection of metaphor within a framework structured by the sign relation. Of course, Derrida's analysis focuses on how this structure folds in on itself when it tries to name being, but this reading also fails to address the substance of Heidegger's rejection of metaphor.

Both Derrida and Ricoeur have interesting, and compelling, analyses of metaphor; *but they are still inappropriate for thinking the relation of bodily being-in-the-world, originary openness to beings, and meaning.* And it is in the attempt to think this relation that Heidegger rejects metaphor. If one finds Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of hearing compelling, it becomes clear how metaphor is unsuited to describe this phenomenon. While neither Derrida nor Ricoeur are necessarily "wrong" about metaphor, they simply fail to address the reason Heidegger rejects it in the first place.

Consider once more the phrase, "I love you." Potentially, this phrase can transform the body: the heart beats faster and palms sweat. It calls to presence a world in a way that indicates the inseparable connection of body and language. Upon hearing these words, one might blush: is blushing a bodily phenomenon or mental phenomenon? Heidegger contends it is neither: "blushing" defies both of these characterizations and challenges us to transform how we think of the nature of human existence. Language, then, appears to have an intrinsic connection to the body, so close that even to distinguish between them in this way serves to conceal the manner of their intimate co-belonging.

It is not at all clear that the sign relation model of language can account for language's relationship to body. We hear words that are meaningful in the first place, not meaningless sound; but the sign relation presupposes this divide between sensibility and intelligibility.<sup>117</sup> Metaphor has often been used to explain sense perception or the emergence of meaning; but since it presupposes a sign relation, and therefore a sensible/intelligible opposition, it is unfit for this purpose.<sup>118</sup>

Heidegger's language takes such a peculiar form because of the nature of his project. He claims both "the being of language nowhere brings itself to words as the language of being" and "the being of language puts itself into being nonetheless, in its own most appropriate manner." This paradoxical state of affairs results in what Heidegger calls the "the peculiar speech of language's being."<sup>119</sup> In other words, Heidegger acknowledges his project results in a strange way of speaking. But this strange way of speaking constitutes a challenge to thought: the challenge to think

---

<sup>117</sup> Heidegger writes, "Even in cases where speech is indistinct or in a foreign language, what we hear proximally is *unintelligible* words, and not a multiplicity of tone data." *Being and Time*, p. 207

<sup>118</sup> Heidegger is not the only one to critique a model of language structured by the sign relation; Deleuze undertakes a critique of what might be called "Chomsky-style linguistics," i.e. a model of language structured by the sign relation. For Deleuze, language is a collective act, articulated through the relationship of "machinic assemblages of bodies" and "collective assemblages of enunciation." It has direct effects on shaping the set of relations a person is immersed in and the possibilities open to that person. In any case, Deleuze also attempts to think language in a way that takes account of its co-belonging with the body. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, "Nov. 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics."

<sup>119</sup> "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, p. 81 (All three preceding quotations are found on the same page)

the relation of bodily being-in-the-world, originary openness to beings, and language. If we categorize his peculiar language as metaphorical, we sidestep the substance of this challenge and neglect a significant aspect of Heidegger's thought.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aristotle. "Poetics," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- . "Rhetoric," *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Différance," *Margins of Philosophy*. Ed. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982. 1-27.
- . "White Mythology," *Margins of Philosophy*. Ed. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982. 207-271.
- . "The Retrait of Metaphor," *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 48-80.
- France, Anatole. *The Garden of Epicurus*. Trans. Alfred Allinson. New York: Dodd, Meade, 1923.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.
- . *What Is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- . "Dialogue on Language," *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 1-54.
- . "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 57-108.
- . "The Way to Language," *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter Hertz. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 111-136.
- . "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Ed. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. 15-86.
- . *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Thomas Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- . *The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

- . *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*. Trans. Julia Davis and William McNeill. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- . "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?,'" *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 277-290.
- . "On the Essence of Ground," *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 97-135.
- . *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*. Trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- . *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*. Trans. Keith Hoeller. Amherst: Humanity Press, 2000.
- . "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. London: Routledge, 2010. 213-265.
- Heiden, Gert-Jan van der. *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language: Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Derrida on Disclosure and Displacement*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010.
- Kockelmans, Joseph. "Heidegger on Metaphor and Metaphysics." *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*. Ed. Christopher Macann. Vol. 3. London: Routledge, 1992. 293-320.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *Topographies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1982. 42-46.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*. Trans. Robert Czerny. London: Routledge, 1978.
- Smith, David Nowell. *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Stellardi, Giuseppe. *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought*. Amherst: Humanity Press, 2000.



## **VITA**

Joel Meservy was born in Royal Oak, Michigan, in 1984, and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Tennessee in 2009 and plans to receive his Master of Arts in Philosophy from Louisiana State University in spring 2014. When not reading Heidegger, he feels most “at home” in the kitchen.