

INTRODUCTION

...[T]he human conceptual system is
metaphorically structured and defined.
—George Lakoff and Mark Johnson¹

This dissertation presents, describes, investigates, performs and embodies an original theory of trope in art. My proposition is that the formal, technical and stylistic aspects of creators' styles concretely embody content in new, yet culturally and historically antithetical ways. One central trope of form is sought and discovered by creators. This tool allows them to express their desires, both those willed and those discovered within the trope. The term *metaphor(m)* used in the title is a pun. Puns can be particularly slippery when used in theories. However, this one works so well I consider it, only partially tongue-in-cheek, to belong to me as a trademark: Metaphor(m)TM, as can be seen throughout this dissertation on the paintings which begin each chapter.² This word describes and embodies the core of my theory — that such tropes in the hands of artists and authors are both metaphoric and meta-form.

My claim is that a vocabulary of "foundational cognitive metaphors" is at work in the formal, technical, and stylistic aspects of the works of artists and other creators. One central trope is brought into being through a figurative vision of one or more aspects of the form, most often by way of what George Lakoff and Mark Turner refer to as "image mapping" or

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 6.

² This is not because of a wish to discourage anyone else from using this theory or term, if they are so inclined. In fact I rather encourage it. However, a trademark allows control of how it is used, if need be. Additionally, most powerful terms in our postmodern culture seem to have that small *tm* after them. I have joined the club. Finally, this little symbol pleasingly fits the comic/show-card style of the *Covers* paintings at the start of each chapter.

"image schemes."³ This central trope may be located in construction, composition, paint handling, color, dialogue, syntax, or other qualities of the aesthetic object. It can be a complex comprised of various metaphors, metonymies and other figurative forms. These may be intricate, extended, elaborated, composed, questioned, and/or otherwise manipulated.

Due to cognitive science there have been major breakthroughs in understanding tropes. This began in earnest approximately twenty years ago, yet has been most impressive over the last decade. Especially in the last few years, major cross-disciplinary communication has been cultivated concerning the connection between "poetics" and thought in general. Many approaches, including the one presented here, are inspired by and profoundly indebted to the continuing work on conceptual metaphor by George Lakoff, Mark Turner and Mark Johnson. Such a large portion of research is grounded in cognitive psychology and science that some even call this new outlook on the mind a "cognitive revolution." It is important to know, though, that the man who has inspired many of us, Lakoff, has a background in linguistics and logic. There are other contributors to the study, analysis and application of trope to thought including scientists from other fields, literary and cultural theorists, philosophers (especially from aesthetics and the philosophy of mind), artificial intelligence and computer experts, scholars of religion, scholars of literature, and even a few creative artists and authors. The discovery animating all of this is that trope is the basis of thought, thus language is one instance of it, not the other way round. This new concentration on the human power of cognitive imagination strengthens some old contentions of artists and inspires new observations, such as the theory in this dissertation.

³ "Foundational metaphors," "image-mapping" and "image schemes" are important in all the publications of George Lakoff and his co-scholars. Foundation metaphors were brought to the attention of a wide public first through the book *Metaphors We Live By*. The best short descriptions of image-mapping and image schemes are in Lakoff and Mark Turner's *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

The personal and cultural process lying at the heart of the discovery of creators' individual metaphor(m)s is the antithetical struggle they enter into with their precursors. This is the "agon," a battle based in love and fear, so well described by Harold Bloom. His inspired concept of misreading, or *misprision* as he calls it, borrowing a wonderful word from Shakespeare, offers the important clarification of *why* the invention of a metaphor(m) takes place. His "agonistic" revisionism, cognitive metaphor, and the theory of central trope will be shown to interlock with reciprocal rapport.⁴

The postmodern flowering—even, until recently, overwhelming hegemony—of literary theory, or critical theory as it is more broadly termed, has both bolstered and limited contemporary discourse on the arts. It is thus a necessity to address such postmodernist metacriticism in this paper. Likewise, philosophy has experienced a surprising growth in the stature of aesthetics, once the barely tolerated foster child of metaphysics, to a position of vital importance in the discipline. How insights gleaned from this field bear on the theory of central trope will also be canvassed. I seek to integrate certain aspects of important theories from both these camps into my notion, when they either parallel or contribute to it. Major literary-critical thinkers and aestheticians have indeed made very discerning insights and speculations, which have direct pertinence for my theory. By looking for useful tools in both areas, I will be avoiding the still almost war-like divisions between the two fields. Whereas it would be hoped that all could learn from one another, there may be even a three-pronged separation emerging: literary criticism vs. aesthetics vs. cognitive metaphor. We must get beyond such partisan thought, fostered by petty jealousies between academic disciplines, old rivalries between schools of thought, and simple nationalism. The theory of metaphor(m),

⁴ Harold Bloom introduced and developed this exciting contention in his trilogy of books on the subject: *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; Oxford University Press Paperbacks, 1980), *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; Oxford University Press Paperbacks, 1983).

while simple in many ways, is integrative and cross-disciplinary in its search for the actuality of the various dialectics of the creative act. I occasionally focus on my disagreements with specific theorists in order to clarify the thought process in my own presentation here. This should not mask the huge debt I owe to all the philosophers and thinkers I mention. I see theorization at its best as a polyphonic dialogue, often even an argument. I may have the tendency to appear polemical, but I genuinely desire heartfelt discussion.

Therefore, in the following chapters, Metaphor(m) will be seeking "similar souls," but also countering opponents. A particular strength of my theory is that Formalism is subsumed and transumed in it, rather than denied or faithfully obeyed. My theory allows the incorporation of certain positive aspects of what has been called (artworld) Formalism or (literary-world) New Criticism and Structuralism, while in effect standing them on their heads, showing form to be a function of achieved content. Such object-obsessed hypothesizing is shown to be a useful, but not exclusive, tool. In another vein, the theory of central trope is an attempt to create a pugnacious logic of critical poststructuralist interpretation, which is however purged of post-deconstructivist nihilism.

A general comment on terminology is in order. The term *trope* is used in this paper when figurative language in general is meant. *Metaphor* is one usual term for the idea which is discussed here. Unfortunately, though, this word is used in two distinct applications, one general and one particular. Confusion often results from this failure to distinguish the species from the genus. *Metaphor* may mean alternately either figurative expression itself, the genus — therefore identical with *figurative language* or *trope* — or that particular instance thereof, the species, usually described as follows.

A figure of speech, an implied analogy in which one thing is imaginatively compared to or identified with another, dissimilar thing. In metaphor, the qualities of something are ascribed to something else, qualities that it ordinarily does not possess.⁵

That is the famous description of metaphor as a "comparison without a *like* or *as*," which is always taught in high school and secondary school literature classes. "*Achilles is a lion.*" Useful terminology does not allow a thing to be a species of itself. Other terms bring other difficulties, all probably reflecting the various underlying philosophies of the animal under study. Various general terms include *trope*, *figure* and *figurative language*. The latter two would cause a problem when the theory is applied to visual art as well as literature. Anything containing the word *language* is not interdisciplinary enough and *figure* in visual art is widely used to mean the human form (e. g. "figure painting"). These terms are inadequate in reference to literature anyway. They clearly reinforce views of the subject opposite to those espoused in this paper. Connotations such as figure skating or ornateness come to mind, declaring metaphor to be no more than decorative fancy. There are linked terms such as *scheme*, *conceit*, *symbol*, *rhetoric*, *poesy*, *poetics*, *analogy*, etc. Yet each expresses a particular idea somewhat askew of the intentions here. It will be shown that some of these terms describe ideas which are corollaries or particular instances of metaphor(m). In short, the problems with the term reflect old, deficient and competing theories of the thing itself. *Trope* is difficult because it is derived from *turning*, which might suggest that analogies of any sort are decorative twists on normal "transparent" speech. However, it seems that *trope* and its concomitant adjectives *tropological* or *tropaic* are the most promising. Turning can be envisioned in other, more evocative images and analogies. Therefore it will serve as the general term, *metaphor* will be chiefly used in its specific application ("no *like* or *as*" species), occasionally substituting for the general, along with the other terms mentioned, where this

⁵ Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Lincolnwood, Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1996), p. 131.

occurs in common use and for stylistic variety. It is included in the title for the word play as noted, and because it remains an important keyword in any literature search of poetics. In addition, cognitive science now envisions metaphor as the broad basis of thought itself.

Linking striven-for content, discovered form, antithetical historical and critical cultural awareness, metaphor(m) is proposed as a general theory of trope in the arts. This is primarily a theory aimed at visual art, especially painting, but cross-disciplinary in implication, making suggestions about application to other art forms. For the sake of economy in argument and my own strengths, art forms other than painting will be touched on only in passing. It is hoped, however, that an interdisciplinary understanding of this theory will encourage readers to envision its potential usefulness in other arts and genres.

The theory of central trope is applied in this paper specifically through discussions of several visual artists (Vincent van Gogh, Charles Boetschi, Leonard Bullock, among others); authors (including Ernest Hemingway); of a single painting (*Color Unit 24.1* by Charles Boetschi); and a variety of other visual artworks, electronic media, literary works, and comics. I additionally apply the theory to models of the art history time-line, to the extended text concept in media, to a tropaic re-envisioning of Harold Bloom's theory of revisionism and to my own development as an artist. Finally, I attempt to embody my theory within the form, structure and details of the dissertation itself.

This is the most exciting aspect of this dissertation for me. It is a direct result of the amazing creative encouragement I received from my professor, Dr Philip Ursprung at the University of Zurich and my reader, Dr Andreas Langlotz of the University of Basel and the University of Lausanne. They suggested the performative application of my theory to the text, to my own work and to the conception of the dissertation as a whole. Concrete results of this

notion will be seen in several aspects of the dissertation eg.: the *Covers* paintings beginning each chapter; the comic sequences adding a personal dimension, commenting on and ending each chapter; Chapter Three, which is entirely in a pictorial, extended comic form; the extended metaphors or conceits guiding each chapter's composition — some of which are the relics of actual use; and Chapter Five, which is a painting-installation created by me to embody and visually discuss my own metaphor(m) within a work of my own. In that chapter, the installation is in fact the chapter. The text is a contemplation of the artwork, making it oddly both secondary and primary (from the artist's mouth). This entire dissertation will exist, upon completion, as both a book and an exhibition, with the assistance of Markus Landert, the Director of the Art Museum of Thurgovia.

Both my professors noted that the chapters could be assembled in several orders than that with which they appear here: each with a different effect upon the perceptions of readers, although the texts would stay the same. Professor Langlotz in particular feels that he most appreciates *Chapter Five, My Metaphor(m)*, as the culmination of my work, rather than as one interspersed, embodied example. However, he feels it works as it is situated as well. This reminded me of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*. In the *Epilogue*, this author suggests that he would like the book "to be read in one order, but eventually thought of in another." He has joined chapters into groups which he labels "Books." These he feels should be read in the order numbered and printed, but thought of in the sequence "books three, one, two, four."⁶ In this spirit, I will suggest an alternative ordering of my dissertation chapters, while leaving them as they stand. An order which places the emphasis upon my own art would be: Introduction, Prelude, Chapters One, Two, Four, Seven, Eight, Nine, Six, Three, Five, Conclusion.

⁶ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (London: Paladin, Grafton Books, 1989), p.483.

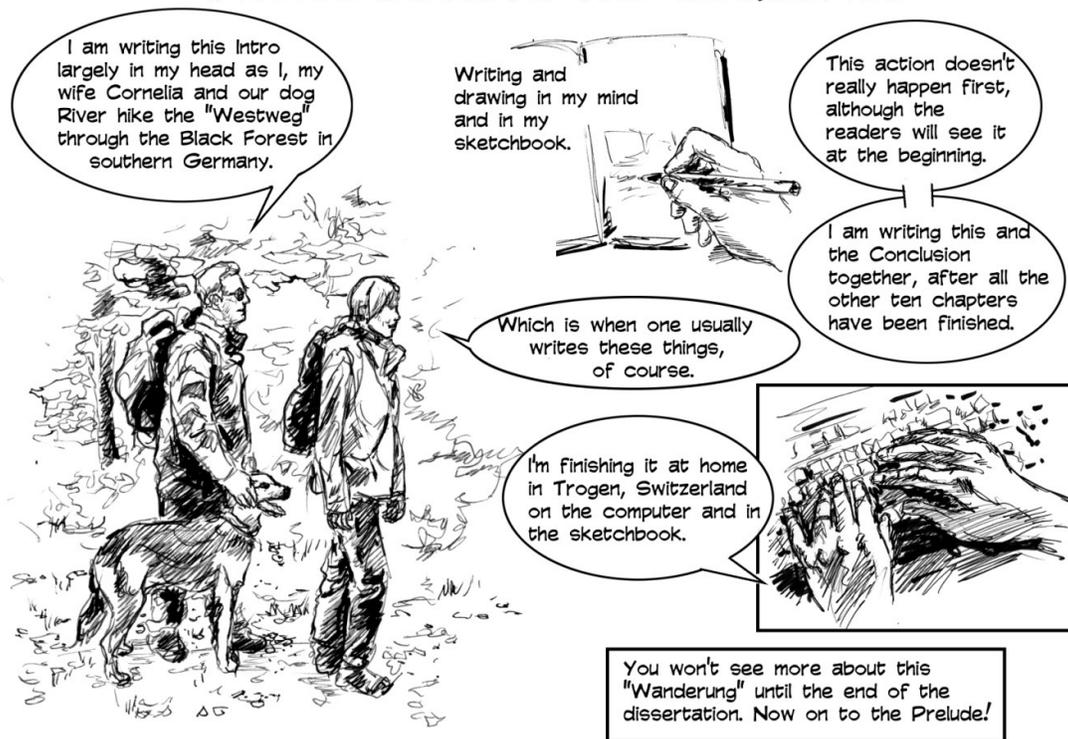
Why have I spent so much time on this dissertation? Over the 12 years since I first had the initial inkling of desire to write it, *Metaphor(m), A Theory of Central Trope* has become my chief artistic creation, although in that time I did more than 50 art shows of paintings and installations, both group and solo, as well as taught, wrote articles and reviews, blogged and gave speeches. These exhibitions, publications and presentations were in galleries, museums and Kunsthallen all over the world, but *Metaphor(m)* dominated my thoughts since I first brainstormed it in discussion with Daniel F. Ammann in Switzerland. It has colored all of the other art and teaching I have done. Especially while learning Latin as a part of my studies, but also due to the length of time I took to accomplish this dissertation, I have been confronted by others with the question as to why I would want to write such an extensive work. Most frequently, I have answered that it is my own, though radically different, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Wassily Kandinsky's personal book of theory.⁷ This is approximately true, although a bit disingenuous, for as compared to Kandinsky I am more philosophical and not at all esoteric in thought. It might be more appropriate to say that in my own thoughts it is my mixed and cross-media, personal, equivalent of Tintoretto's *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, or at least the prolegomena to one.

A shorter answer to the question: Beyond the pure joy of using difficult reasoning to discover and formulate a serious new perception of art, the aim of this dissertation and theory, like that of many others, is to serve as a truth and corrective to certain deficiencies of the current theoretical landscape in which I am an artist —hopefully, in the minds of others, thus my webs presence and lectures, yet chiefly in my own mind. As Lakoff has pointed out, "Philosophy matters. It matters more than most people realize, because philosophical ideas

⁷ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. (Original published 1914 in German as *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*), trans. by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977).

that have developed over the centuries enter our culture in the form of a world view and affect us in thousands of ways."⁸ Most of all I am concerned with understanding works of art and the creative thought processes embodied in them. I have a daily practice of making art for some 40 years, thus am invested in the phenomenological reality of artistic agency. If this or any other theoretical analysis of art is worthy of serious consideration, it is in its usefulness for a fuller understanding and criticism of the works before us.

INTRODUCTION: THE SEQUENCE



⁸ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things : What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 157.