

Metaphor as *Lexis*: Ricœur on Derrida on Aristotle

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Abstract

Both Derrida and Ricœur address philosophy's relation to metaphor, and both take Aristotle as their starting points. However, though Ricœur's *The Rule of Metaphor* is largely a response to Derrida's "White Mythology," Ricœur seems to pass right over Derrida's critically important interpretation of Aristotle. In this essay, I dispel concerns that Ricœur may have been intellectually irresponsible in his engagement with Derrida on this point, and I demonstrate how Study 1 makes better sense as a detailed response to Derrida.

Keywords: Metaphor; Syntax; Meaning; Reference; Lexis.

Résumé

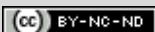
Derrida et Ricœur abordent tous deux la relation de la philosophie à la métaphore et ils prennent tous deux Aristote comme point de départ. Toutefois, alors que *La Métaphore vive* de Ricœur constitue largement une réponse à "La mythologie blanche" de Derrida, Ricœur semble complètement passer outre l'importance de l'interprétation critique d'Aristote développée par Derrida. Malgré ces apparences, je soutiens au contraire dans cet essai que Ricœur ne néglige pas l'interprétation derridienne d'Aristote mais qu'il engage une discussion détaillée avec elle. Je montre que l'interprétation ricœurienne d'Aristote développée dans la Première étude de *La Métaphore vive* n'a de sens que si elle est comprise comme une réponse à l'interprétation derridienne d'Aristote dans "La Mythologie blanche."

Mots-clés: Métaphore; Syntaxe; Signification; Référence; Lexis.

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Metaphor as *Lexis*: Ricœur on Derrida on Aristotle

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*Comment le rendre sensible,
sinon par métaphore?*
Derrida, "La Mythologie Blanche," 249

Aristotle and his account of metaphor play a foundational role in Ricœur's *The Rule of Metaphor*.^{*} However, Ricœur seems to ignore the fact that another prominent work on metaphor takes Aristotle's account as similarly foundational: Derrida's "White Mythology." This is troublesome because *The Rule of Metaphor* otherwise is genuinely and openly engaged with "White Mythology."¹ However, despite appearances to the contrary, I argue that Ricœur does not overlook or dismiss Derrida's Aristotle interpretation, but offers a detailed engagement with it. In fact, Ricœur's account is far from being a superficial treatment or a missed opportunity for engagement with Derrida on this point, and I will show how Ricœur's interpretation of Aristotle makes sense only if understood as a response to Derrida's own interpretation of Aristotle in "White Mythology."

The Project of "White Mythology"

In "White Mythology," Derrida demonstrates the necessity of dismantling the various metaphysical oppositions that underlie the concept of metaphor. His project is to take apart these oppositions (such as metaphor vs. concept, figurative vs. literal, philosophy vs. rhetoric, and sensible vs. intelligible) with the ultimate goal to "reinscribe [them]...otherwise."²

Derrida sees the necessity for and the first movements of such a project already in Aristotle's definition of metaphor in the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. As part of Aristotle's system, metaphor belongs somewhere. It has a position prepared for it – a way it fits into Aristotle's web (or chain) of concepts. Consequently, even before Aristotle defines metaphor, it is already grounded and conceptually determined. And the way that Aristotle locates metaphor is as an element of *lexis* (which is can be translated variously as "style," "statement," "diction," "elocution," "speech act," etc.).

In order to understand why this is significant, Derrida notes how Aristotle contrasts *lexis* with *dianoia* (translated as "thought," "meaning," "mind," etc.): *dianoia* is what is manifest, but it is "not made manifest by itself";³ it is not itself a phenomenon; it does not do the appearing. Rather, it is *lexis* that issues this appearing and makes *dianoia* manifest, and as an element of *lexis*, metaphor "make[s] manifest, by means of a statement, a given thought [*dianoia*] that of itself remains inapparent, hidden, or latent."⁴

However, metaphor is not presented as such by philosophy. That is, if thinkers did understand metaphor as an element of *lexis*, then they should characterize it in terms of *lexis*' characteristic movement (appearing or manifestation as opposed to "what appears" or "the manifest"). But philosophers follow Aristotle in casting metaphor as a concept – as characterized by *dianoia*: that is, they do describe metaphor as a movement or a transfer – but as a transfer of *sense*.⁵

This speaking of metaphor in terms of its *dianoia*-aspect is played out, even in Aristotle, by privileging the noun. For Aristotle, as for Derrida, "noun" (*onoma* in Greek) is not intended simply as a grammatical category. Rather, it indicates any sound that has meaning or that has an immediate relationship to its object. For Derrida, nouns have a "unity of meaning" and a "complete and independent signification."⁶ Indeed, even verbs, adjectives, and adverbs can become nouns in this sense – they are nominalizable (or objectifiable).⁷

However, delimiting metaphor in this way excludes precisely what it requires to be what it is. In other words, *dianoia* could not be *dianoia* by itself without *lexis* to make it manifest: again, *dianoia* "is not made manifest by itself."⁸ But words which are most properly lexical, such as "syntax-words," are excluded; that is, there is no proper place in metaphor for asemantic sounds.⁹ These elements of language (*e.g.*, particles, prepositions, conjunctions, and so on – or "syncategorematic" terms)¹⁰ have no meaning in themselves, but only signify when they are in a relationship with other words.

For Derrida's Aristotle, *lexis*, as the site of metaphor, is a place of tension between the semantic and the syntactic. For, instead of contributing to the systematic wholeness sought by philosophical discourse, metaphor "risks disrupting the semantic plenitude to which it should belong."¹¹ When one creates a metaphor, the customary link between a word and a thing is broken, reference is severed, and the metaphor exposes the "wandering of the semantic."¹² This is a moment where the concept is no longer able to contain its content – there is a "syntactic resistance"¹³ that prohibits the concept from dominating the underlying "tropic movements."¹⁴ When this happens in metaphor, when the concept loses its grip, we glimpse the movement of *lexis*. In this space, where "meaning has appeared, but when truth might still be missed,"¹⁵ we catch sight of the aspect of language that is hidden from semantics, but which undergirds and makes semantics possible – *lexis*.

Nevertheless, this moment is traditionally described as a temporary aberration, a negligible gap that fits neatly into the metaphorical movement towards completed meaning. This is because the temporary absence of a referent for a metaphor is quickly recovered and meaning is restored.¹⁶ Metaphor is allowed in the philosophical text only insofar as it promises this return to such a literality of the concept.¹⁷ In other words, metaphor becomes, essentially, a cognitive recuperation or reassertion – a return to the same. The Aristotelian metaphorical concept contains an essentially tacit recognition of the potential loss, but the accent and the *telos* of the definition are on recuperation.

So, even though metaphor is dominated by definitions, by the systems of concepts to which those definitions belong – and, in short, by *dianoia* – it is also essentially syntactic or lexical.¹⁸ However, although this syntactic-aspect makes metaphor possible, it is excluded or repressed in our accounts of metaphor. The movement of *lexis* (separation, displacement, dissemination) is dominated and checked by the "*dianoetic*" concept of metaphor. In a telling paraphrase of one of

Aristotle's own metaphors, Derrida describes how metaphor would of itself move like a ship, but concepts ultimately drop the anchor.¹⁹

Does Ricœur Ignore Derrida's Interpretation?

Ricœur's own treatment of Aristotle in *The Rule of Metaphor* seems to skip right over Derrida's interpretation. Although both thinkers follow Aristotle by locating the discussion of metaphor in *lexis*, Derrida understands *lexis* as the aspect of language that is distinguished from thought, meaning, and the semantic, while Ricœur's interpretation of *lexis* centers on its problematic link to single-word tropes; Ricœur's account seems to have nothing to do with Derrida's. And while Derrida is concerned with the exclusion of the syncategorematic, Ricœur is concerned with the quasi-historical assertion about how a focus on the noun led subsequent rhetoricians to obsess over classification and taxonomy at the loss of two-thirds of the discipline (argumentation and composition).²⁰ According to Ricœur, on the one hand Aristotle's privileging of the noun sets in motion the fate of a discipline, and on the other it leads us to misunderstand the actual function of metaphor (which cannot be understood only in terms of single-word substitutions). In short, Ricœur's own powerful interpretation seems to be entirely independent of Derrida.

Furthermore, it is not until the eighth study in *The Rule of Metaphor* that Ricœur engages Derrida directly. In fact, most scholarship that addresses the interaction between Derrida and Ricœur on metaphor follows Derrida's own response (in "Le retrait de la métaphore") – it locates the interaction in Study 8.²¹ This is justified not only by Ricœur's explicit engagement with Derrida in Study 8, but also by Ricœur's extensive engagement with other thinkers in the preceding studies, accompanied by a paucity of remarks on Derrida in those studies.

To make matters worse, *The Rule of Metaphor* is generally perceived as a failed engagement with Derrida. For instance, Ricœur is accused of failing to engage Derrida's most important arguments,²² of taking Derrida's ideas out of context,²³ and of (perhaps even deliberately) missing Derrida's point.²⁴ Through this lack of extended or explicit attribution of his ideas to Derrida, Ricœur's intellectual responsibility is seriously called into question. And because Derrida's "White Mythology" is widely recognized not only as important for the philosophy of metaphor, but also as a significant expression of Derrida's own philosophical project, Ricœur's alleged cherry-picking could reflect negatively on both his major interaction with Derridean thought and on his great synthesis of ideas in *The Rule of Metaphor*.

Indications of Ricœur's Response

Understanding *The Rule of Metaphor* in this way is a mistake. I will argue that, though Ricœur rarely *says* that he is engaging Derrida, he here *shows* himself to be giving a thorough response to the challenges raised by Derrida in "White Mythology." I will argue that Ricœur's own position in Study 1 makes much more sense – and perhaps that it only makes sense – as a response to "White Mythology."

The first, and perhaps the most telling, indication that Derrida's influence on *The Rule of Metaphor* is more engaged is Ricœur's early admission that "There is no non-metaphorical

standpoint from which one could look upon metaphor [...]. In many respects, the continuation of this study will be a prolonged battle with this paradox."²⁵ The "paradox" referred to here is Derrida's paradox from "White Mythology," and Ricœur acknowledges its provenance (though only in his endnotes). And, although by "study" Ricœur presumably means Study 1, the claim that he will be trying to understand this paradox is obviously true of the entire project of *The Rule of Metaphor*. Study 8 in particular works to resolve this paradox through a discussion of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, by delineating the proper domains of different spheres of discourse, and by establishing the special, self-reflexive, status of speculative discourse.

Another early indication that Derrida is a pervasive influence (and that he will be dealt with summarily) comes half-way through Study 1, where Ricœur briefly mentions Derrida (as one who basically adopts Heidegger's position): "Following Heidegger and Derrida, one might be tempted to detect here some shameful traces of Platonism..."²⁶ Ricœur quickly passes over this brief mention and again consigns discussion to the back of the book in several long endnotes. Derrida's name is then entirely absented from the text until three hundred pages later in Study 8.

Explaining the *Lexis*-Connection

Ricœur's engagement with Derrida indeed lies largely beneath the surface of the text. Not only does he relegate most of it to endnotes (a practice slightly less dramatic in the French, which uses footnotes), but he does not make important connections himself, thus requiring a dedicated exegete to demonstrate just how he is responding to Derrida. This section will provide such an exegesis. By focusing on Ricœur's exposition of *lexis*, it will show that though Ricœur's account seems unrelated to Derrida's, it is actually a detailed response.

At a general level, it is conspicuous that both thinkers choose Aristotle as their point of departure. However, Derrida is not the first thinker to cite Aristotle as the grandfather of the contemporary concept of metaphor, and this hardly seems like enough of a reason to regard Ricœur's account as somehow connected. Indeed, while Derrida (because of his concern with the status of the *concept* of metaphor) focuses on Aristotle as the first to inscribe the concept into a conceptual network or system, Ricœur (because of his concern with the state of the discipline of rhetoric as a whole) focuses on Aristotle as the first to conceptualize the whole field of rhetoric.²⁷ The approaches do not seem to make contact.

Nevertheless, even here – or especially here – Ricœur is concerned with laying the foundation for his response to Derrida: his formulation is a strategic move. To see how this is so, let us look backward from Ricœur's eventual aim (accounting for Derrida's syntactic resistance while maintaining a properly semantic domain for philosophical discourse). To accomplish this aim, Ricœur needs to demonstrate that there are different modes of discourse that have their own domains of signification. That is, Ricœur must functionally separate philosophical discourse (which is concerned with truth) from rhetorical and poetic discourse (which are concerned with power and catharsis, respectively). This separation undercuts Derrida's challenge regarding philosophy's concept-domination; instead of dominating, philosophy is only one form of discourse with its own sphere of concern. So, whereas Derrida chooses Aristotle as the first to conceptualize metaphor (to inscribe it in a determinate system, etc.), Ricœur re-interprets Aristotle precisely on

this point: though various discourses do intersect in their employment of metaphor, the device is employed for different purposes in different discourses – it is not always a *philosopheme*.

Furthermore, because of his dedication to providing a philosophical investigation of metaphor in light of Derrida's paradox (*i.e.*, that there is no non-metaphorical standpoint from which to evaluate metaphor), Ricœur cannot simply offer an argument about Derrida's *theory* of metaphor or of *lexis*. In other words, he recognizes that the paradox precludes such a frontal approach, so he works indirectly – he must first *show* that the “philosophical” standpoint that Derrida challenges is not as he claims it to be (that is, neither encompassing nor extra-metaphorical). Because Derrida bases this challenge on Aristotle's “philosophical” conceptualization of metaphor, Ricœur responds by showing how Aristotelian metaphor is not conceptualized the same way in different spheres of discourse. By doing this, Ricœur again undercuts Derrida's challenge and lays an alternative foundation for his own approach (one that is open to the intersection between different modes of discourse).

Not only does Ricœur re-evaluate Derrida's grounds in choosing Aristotle as a starting-point, but he questions Derrida's specific concern with Aristotelian *lexis*. However, again, though both Derrida and Ricœur center their respective analyses on Aristotelian *lexis*, it is not immediately apparent that their accounts are connected. Indeed, a superficial reading could conclude that Ricœur is entirely ignorant of Derrida's central distinction between *lexis* and *dianoia*. For, while Ricœur does engage *lexis*, he does so initially not with reference to Aristotle at all, but in terms of its Latin incarnation – as “*elocutio*.” Only later does he introduce the Greek term, but again more with reference to the rhetorical tradition than to its function: “*lexis* is the means by which metaphor is inserted, albeit in different ways, into the two treatises under consideration [*i.e.*, Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*].”²⁸ This historical sort of claim seems far afield from any engagement with Derrida's deconstruction of the *lexis-dianoia* opposition.

Nevertheless, this emphasis on history of rhetoric and on the double status of metaphor as both rhetorical and poetic is not independent of Derrida, but rather serves as a step in Ricœur's ultimate response to Derrida. In order to counter Derrida's paradox, as mentioned above, Ricœur must functionally separate philosophical discourse from other discourses that engage metaphor. By addressing *lexis* in this historical way, Ricœur shows (albeit indirectly) how Derrida comingles the functions of very different modes of discourse.²⁹ Indeed, the move to distinguish the *lexis* of the *Poetics* from the *lexis* of the *Rhetoric* is at least motivated by, and at most makes no sense in isolation from, some target – someone who conflates these two spheres. This is Derrida.

Indeed, much of Study 1 is devoted to carefully delineating Aristotelian *lexis*, again, in order to guard against conflation. For instance, Ricœur discerns three distinct definitions of *lexis* in the *Poetics*: (1) Composition of poetic verses, 1449b39, (2) Interpretation by way of words, 1450b14, and (3) manifestation of thought in language, 1456b8. Of course, Ricœur makes this distinction in order to carefully situate Aristotle's definitions of metaphor. But the overall reason for doing so seems to be in response to someone who might confuse these various definitions. Because Ricœur surely recognized that Derrida was so insistent on only the third of the above characterizations of *lexis*, his distinction also demonstrates how Aristotle offers alternatives to Derrida's reading. Furthermore, Ricœur makes this threefold division in order to situate Aristotle's definition of metaphor specifically in the *Poetics*; given Ricœur's veiled response to Derrida, this also serves to indicate how Derrida did not recognize that even this threefold definition is a matter of poetics

(and that *lexis* is inscribed differently into the *Rhetoric*). In short, Ricœur's target – someone who failed to appreciate the various aspects of *lexis* – is Derrida.

This becomes more explicit in Ricœur's only mention of Derrida in connection with *lexis* – at the end of the 68th endnote to Study 1:

In this regard, Derrida observes: "If there were no difference between *dianoia* and *lexis* there would be no room for tragedy [...] The difference is not restricted to the possibility that a character may think one thing and say another. He exists and acts in the tragedy only on condition that he speak." ("White Mythology," 32)

Ricœur's note here mixes approval with disapproval. Indeed, Ricœur is clearly impressed, and he approvingly paraphrases the idea in the same note: "what 'thought' still lacks in order to become *poem* is the 'appearing'." However, the rest of note 68 is dedicated to shedding doubt on the status of the text upon which Derrida's interpretation rests.

Furthermore, Ricœur relegates Derrida's insight to the footnotes while citing Aristotle's language in the main text: "What, indeed, would be the good of the speaker, if things appeared in the required light even apart from anything he says?" (1456b8). Ricœur did not simply read the same Aristotle passage independently; he is clearly concerned with turning Derrida's reading to a different use. This is most evident as he then redefines *lexis* as "that which exteriorizes and makes explicit the internal order of *muthos*."³⁰ Ricœur identifies *lexis* not as disruptive of *dianoia*, but as a creative part of discourse – as a part of *muthos* (a plot or, more indicative of Ricœur's project, a *narrative*).

A Critical Divergence: Words or Nouns?

Ricœur's response to Derrida is perhaps nowhere clearer than in another aspect of Aristotle's analysis that both authors address: why does Aristotle focus his definition of metaphor on the noun? Again, despite the fact that both identify problems that result from Aristotle's assertion regarding nouns, their respective answers seem totally unconnected. Derrida centers on Aristotle's idea that nouns are *meaningful in themselves* (or at least give the illusion of such) and uses this to decry the objectification, (mis)representation, and exclusion involved in nominalization. On the other hand, Ricœur focuses on Aristotle's idea that nouns are *single words* and uses this to show the problem with the subsequent tradition: the idea led the discipline into a fixation with taxonomy (tropes or word-based figures of speech).³¹ Furthermore, as Ricœur points out, Aristotle's definition frames metaphor as a question of *word-meaning* – in a problematic isolation from the sentence and from discourse.

While it might seem that different language-games are going on here, it is not the case that Derrida is concerned with nouns and Ricœur with words, *simpliciter*. Besides the fact that Derrida already spoke of the single-word-problem,³² and given both Ricœur's careful reading and their marked similarity of focus, Ricœur is responding to Derrida on this point, as well. In Study 1, Ricœur acknowledges Derrida's interpretation of word-privilege – again, however, without mentioning Derrida by name – as leading to a sort of objectification (for example, when he describes the negative results as substitution, definition, and classification). However, Ricœur dismisses this

interpretation as a “purely internal critique of the privileged status of the noun.”³³ Ricœur then points out that metaphor is defined not only by its relation to the *noun*, but also in terms of its *movement* and shows how this movement is not ultimately destructive of meaning, but – in its impertinence – is creative.³⁴

This is further confirmed by another way in which Ricœur distinguishes the role of *lexis* in the *Rhetoric* from its role in the *Poetics*. He points out that, in the latter, *lexis* is concerned with quasi-grammatical divisions (article, noun, verb, etc.) – what Aristotle calls *mere*. But in the *Rhetoric*, *lexis* is concerned with illocutionary acts (statement, prayer, question, etc.) – what Aristotle calls *schemata*. There are at least two interlocking criticisms of Derrida intended by Ricœur’s distinctions here. The first criticism concerns Ricœur’s distinction between *mere* (parts of speech) and *schemata* (modes of speech). Ricœur makes this distinction in order to suggest that Derrida’s concern with the noun (a *meros*) is quite improperly confused with assertion, which is an illocutionary act (a *schema*). And Ricœur, with Aristotle, denies that the latter is relevant to metaphor.³⁵ In short, Ricœur shows how Derrida conflates category with act.³⁶

Second, whereas Derrida identifies the asemantic *meros* with syntax-words (non-noun parts of speech), Ricœur shows how, for Aristotle, the asemantic *meros* is really the syllable or phoneme (linguistic units *below the level of the word*). Again, it makes little sense that Ricœur would take the trouble to make this very specific distinction regarding the asemantic *meros* if not to respond to a misinterpretation. And indeed, by making this distinction, Ricœur undercuts Derrida’s interpretation of the asemantic *meros*: It is not the case that the noun is challenged by non-noun parts of language – these non-nouns are not what Aristotle has in mind by “asemantic *meros*.” Rather, the meaningless parts of language serve to question where meaning might properly be said to reside in language. Indeed, like Derrida, Ricœur wants to supplant the noun. But, *in response to Derrida*, Ricœur supplants it *in the opposite direction*: “It remains to be seen whether [...] a latent theory of metaphor at the level of discourse might not cause the breakdown of the explicit theory of metaphor at the level of the noun.”³⁷ Dependence on the noun is not subverted by another part of speech (like, *e.g.*, a syncategorematic term), but, surprisingly, by the sentence or by discourse.

Ricœur responds to Derrida on this specific point in order to combat Derrida’s more general challenge to the hermeneutic project: the possible deferral or loss of meaning due to metaphor’s syntactic resistance. When Ricœur challenges the semantic propriety of the noun from a different direction (from sub-noun units instead of from non-noun units), Ricœur turns Derrida’s Aristotle interpretation from destruction to creation. That is, as will be seen more fully later in Study 8, metaphor involves a predicative impertinence and split-reference. These aspects of metaphor, which function at the level of the sentence and of discourse, generate meaning (that is, meaning is not the property of a word in isolation from a sentence or discourse). Metaphor works by extending old sedimented words into a new sphere of discourse and thereby creates something new. In this process, the privileging of the noun is a problem not because it would dominate other aspects of language but because it is not properly the semantic unit in the first place. Ricœur thus questions Aristotle’s emphasis on metaphors-as-nouns by showing how the noun is not necessarily *the* semantic element of *lexis*. Instead, *logos* (which is also an element of *lexis*), because it has a unity in itself that is not dependent on the noun, can be seen as more properly the carrier of the “semantic kernel.”³⁸

Furthermore, Ricœur uses this insight to address Derrida's syncategorematic-challenge directly (though still without mentioning him by name): "these [*syncategoremata*] are the parts of speech that connect the noun to discourse and subsequently could displace the center of gravity of the theory of metaphor from the noun to the sentence to discourse."³⁹ In other words, the lexical elements of language do indeed disrupt the totalization of the noun, but the significance of this is not that the noun threatens to lose its claim to meaning (as Derrida would assert), but that the noun is displaced as the carrier of meaning (by the sentence).

Metaphor's Sense and Reference

There is one final aspect of Aristotle's idea regarding nouns that brings Derrida and Ricœur into stark and decisive relief: the question of what metaphors mean and refer to. As Ricœur points out, Aristotle's definition of metaphor as a noun or name is only part of the definition – metaphor is, more completely, a "transfer of names."⁴⁰ For Derrida, this is primarily a transfer of *meaning*. Ricœur agrees with Derrida that this transfer, this *epiphora onomatos*, is indeed metaphor's structure. But he gives the structure an entirely different interpretation: For Ricœur, this transfer is a transgression, "a deviation in relation to the pre-existing logical order as a dis-ordering in a scheme of classification. This transgression is interesting only because it creates meaning."⁴¹ In other words, it is not interesting because it threatens to lose meaning, as Derrida claims. Ricœur even formulates his response to Derrida's challenge in quasi-Derridean language: "the category-mistake is the de-constructive intermediary phase between description and redescription."⁴²

Furthermore, even Ricœur's focus on this term, *epiphora*, evidences his response to Derrida: Ricœur implies that since Aristotle already gave us a metaphor for metaphor – *epiphora* – we have no need of Derrida's *usure*. According to Ricœur, "we are anticipating the subsequent theory in saying that the word metaphor itself is metaphorical because it is borrowed from an order other than that of language."⁴³ Although he doesn't mention Derrida, this is, of course, a direct response to Derrida's challenge that the definition of metaphor is worked over by a metaphoric.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, precisely at this point, Ricœur *seems* to fail to recognize the gravity of Derrida's ideas. Both thinkers would certainly agree that some sort of redescription, or reinscription, happens. They both agree that the transference occurs over a gap and that it goes "beyond the limits imposed by the noun."⁴⁵ For Derrida the gap threatens meaning – but does Ricœur account for why metaphor doesn't ultimately go astray and find no meaningful redescription?

Ricœur's answer lies in his theory of metaphor's poetic creation – of mimesis.⁴⁶ While Derrida thinks the concept of mimesis confirms his point (it commits us to a metaphysics of truth, a sort of Platonism governed by the value of truth), Ricœur objects, showing how mimesis actually secures metaphor from dissemination.⁴⁷ For, mimesis does mind a sort of gap (an unbounded creative aspect), but it is also rooted in its special sense and reference. Metaphor is securely meaningful because it finds a new semantic pertinence; when an old word is extended into a new domain, it redescribes reality. Similarly, mimesis always secures a reference. This happens because, though metaphor may lack a literal referent, there is always a "second-degree" or "split" reference. And if metaphor is "abstracted from this referential function, metaphor plays itself out in

substitution and dissipates itself in ornamentation; allowed to run free, it loses itself in language games"⁴⁸ – or, we might say, in dissemination *à la Derrida*.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Ricœur's account of metaphor, then, does not merely gloss over Derridean challenges. Already in Study 1, Ricœur attempts to account for Derrida's main concerns regarding syntactic resistance. Through his reading of Aristotle, Ricœur seeks to avoid a central concern from "White Mythology": an exclusion of the syncategorematic aspect of *lexis*. Indeed, in doing this, Ricœur's efforts might even qualify as Derridean: Ricœur tries to deconstruct Aristotle's theory by finding an implicit sentence-level-semantics that underlies Aristotle's explicit word-level-model. Then, Ricœur attempts to reinscribe the decentered privilege of the word in a different way.

Ricœur's engagement with the Derridean paradox in *The Rule of Metaphor* is not partial or accidental, but, rather, the paradox motivates each conceptual move Ricœur makes, from the very first moments of his Aristotle interpretation. Indeed, Ricœur's account shows itself to be incomplete without a certain *supplement* of its own – a response to Derrida.⁵⁰

- * This paper received the Best Graduate Student Paper Award at the 2017 meeting of the Society for Ricœur Studies.
- ¹ In fact, as Amalric notes, his engagement in Study 8 is uncharacteristically direct. Jean-Luc Amalric, *Ricœur, Derrida: l'enjeu de la métaphore* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006).
- ² Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 215.
- ³ Derrida, "White Mythology," 232.
- ⁴ Derrida, "White Mythology," 233. In fact, when Derrida distinguishes what is said (*dianoia*) from how it is said (*lexis*), calling the latter the "act of language itself" ("White Mythology," 230), he seems to have in mind Plato's use of the distinction in *Republic* 3.392c. Jean-Claude Monod quite helpfully relates Derrida's account of metaphor as *lexis* in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis: a metaphoricity that operates below the surface of thought. Jean-Claude Monod, "La mise en question contemporaine du paradigme aristotélicien – et ses limites," *Archives de Philosophie* 70.4 (2007), 535-58. However, Derrida may have had in mind something much more like Heideggerian *Lichtung* or *Ereignis*.
- ⁵ It is actually defined by Aristotle as "a transfer of names," which, as we shall see, amounts to the same thing for Derrida. See also Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457b6ff.
- ⁶ Derrida, "White Mythology," 233.
- ⁷ Furthermore, these are what Husserl called *categorematic* terms. I invoke Derrida's mention of Husserl here because by this point, if not already when Derrida speaks of Aristotle's concern for "la chose meme" ("La Mythologie Blanche," 295), Derrida's Aristotle sounds suspiciously like Husserl.
- ⁸ Derrida, "White Mythology," 232.
- ⁹ For *Derrida*, these are not the wind in the trees or the noise made by a waterfall. Rather, asemantic sounds are the sounds which, although they aren't semantic by themselves, are of the nature that they are capable of being combined into semantic formations – syntax-terms. In other words, they make meaning possible. But, although they are the conditions for meaning, they are themselves only conditionally recognized from the perspective of a meaningful sound. Hence the designation, "a-semantic."
- ¹⁰ To clarify how grammatical distinctions do not have the same valence as the concepts attempted here, Derrida claims that the verb "to be" is syncategorematic, but that the verb phrase "to be running" is categorematic because the latter is "dominated by the substantive idea" ("White Mythology," 236). But of course, we must take care not to understand Derrida as adopting one side of a philosophical opposition. I think using the language of Husserl here is meant to warn us of this. (Indeed, to further suggest this danger: Husserl's "syncategorematic" is adopted from scholastic logic – as a word that

cannot be the subject or predicate of an assertion.) Furthermore, like the privative “a-semantic” terminology (see n6), “syn-categorematic” relies on the categorematic for its identity.

¹¹ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 241.

¹² Derrida, “White Mythology,” 241.

¹³ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 268.

¹⁴ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 229.

¹⁵ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 241.

¹⁶ This is why metaphor is pleasurable: “The pleasure, here, comes from a syllogism – to be completed” (Derrida, “White Mythology,” 239n43). Derrida cites Aristotle to show how the objects in themselves do not give us pleasure; rather, it is learning (coming to know the meaning of the elliptical syllogism) that brings the pleasure of metaphor.

¹⁷ For a good *exposé* of this, see Bernard Harrison, “‘White Mythology’ Revisited: Derrida and His Critics on Reason and Rhetoric,” *Critical Inquiry* 25.3 (1999), 513.

¹⁸ It is “structurally impossible for metaphor to escape syntax” – this syntactic aspect always resists the tendency toward semantic totality. Rodolphe Gasché, “On ‘Tropic’ Movements and Syntactic Resistance in Derrida’s White Mythology,” *International Yearbook for Hermeneutics* 13 (2014), 9.

¹⁹ See Derrida, “La Mythologie blanche,” 288.

²⁰ If anything, Ricœur seems more motivated in this by I. A. Richards’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (and not by Derrida).

²¹ In fact, as far as I know, nobody has done otherwise. In fact, all scholars I am aware of link “White Mythology” not with *The Rule of Metaphor*, but explicitly with Study 8 of *The Rule of Metaphor*. See, for example, Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance: The Difference Between the Thought of Ricœur and Derrida* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 5, 24, 29f., etc.

²² “Ricœur never addresses Derrida’s deployment of usure,” according to Leonard Lawlor in “Dialectic and Iterability: The Confrontation between Paul Ricœur and Jacques Derrida,” *Philosophy Today* 32.3 (1988), 185. See Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance*, 43f., though it is important to note that Lawlor also notes where Ricœur is not fair to Derrida (*e.g.*, 47).

²³ This is the essence of Derrida’s own rejoinder in “Le retrait de la métaphore,” and many scholars seem content to grant this point to Derrida.

²⁴ “Ricœur, however, utilizes the exact notions Derridean metaphoricity questions, the Aristotelian analogy of being and the Hegelian *aufhebung*. Thus Ricœur’s reading fails to recognize ‘White Mythology’s’ implications,” Leonard Lawlor, “A Little Daylight: A Reading of Derrida’s ‘White Mythology,’” *Man and World* 24 (1991), 285. Cf. Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance*, 6 and Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 316. Of

course, even these scholars mitigate their criticisms by recognizing that these misunderstandings amount to what Amalric, in *Ricœur, Derrida: l'enjeu de la métaphore*, calls "demi-malentendus."

- ²⁵ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 18.
- ²⁶ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 38.
- ²⁷ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 9. Interestingly, Ricœur starts to sound a lot like the Derrida of *The Origin of Geometry* in his desire to understand the conditions necessary for the current historical/conceptual state of rhetoric and metaphor.
- ²⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 13.
- ²⁹ Although he does not say so, perhaps Ricœur wishes to be charitable to Derrida on this point when he claims that, unlike philosophy, the discipline of rhetoric is "torn apart by the internal contradiction within the very project of persuasion" (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 32). That is, rhetorical discourse has to deal with both proof and persuasion – both logic and violence.
- ³⁰ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 37.
- ³¹ For a good treatment of the difference between Derrida and Ricœur on this question more generally, see Amalric, *Ricœur, Derrida: l'enjeu de la métaphore*, and Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, 294.
- ³² Derrida, "White Mythology," 234.
- ³³ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 16.
- ³⁴ "The first characteristic is that metaphor is something that happens to the noun [...]. The second characteristic is that metaphor is defined in terms of movement," *The Rule of Metaphor*, 17.
- ³⁵ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 13.
- ³⁶ It may be argued that Ricœur is here trying to show how this division of *lexis* is similar to the division between logical analysis and speech act theory or pragmatics (see *The Rule of Metaphor*, 14) – a distinction relevant later in *The Rule of Metaphor*. Nevertheless, Ricœur's interpretation at this point does not do much for his later discussion of Anglo-American linguistic philosophy, but it makes more sense as laying the ground for his criticism of Derrida.
- ³⁷ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 14.
- ³⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 15.
- ³⁹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 15, emphasis added.
- ⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457b9–16 and 20–22.
- ⁴¹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 21.

- ⁴² Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 21 – with a hint, say, of Max Black.
- ⁴³ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 17.
- ⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this is not the strongest observation, for none of Derrida's arguments really depends on the fact that μετα-φερειν or επι-φερειν are themselves metaphors for movement.
- ⁴⁵ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 17. In other words, even Ricœur rejects the "continuist hypothesis" so criticized by Derrida, and both thinkers are in opposition to a "metaphysical *hubris* of totalization" (Lawlor, "Dialectic and Iterability," 191). For Ricœur, dialectic does discover the universal and seek to establish it, but Ricœur always recognizes, perhaps unlike Hegel, that this dialectic is always incomplete – there is never totalization of the universal. Among other factors, an essential human finitude prohibits our spheres of interpretation from totally coinciding.
- ⁴⁶ For the development and completion of this idea, see Ricœur's *Time and Narrative*.
- ⁴⁷ Ricœur rightly objects to this characterization of mimesis. For, Derrida indeed makes a hasty historical move here. What Derrida says may be true of a crude Platonism, but it is certainly not true of Plato, and is most certainly not true of Aristotle. Derrida's account imports a certain metaphysics onto an Aristotelian concept which is actually quite radically different. This same objection (to both "White Mythology" and "Le Double Séance") has been made by others. For a good survey of these, see Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), 374-6.
- ⁴⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 40.
- ⁴⁹ Ricœur admits his debt to Derrida for the insistence that mimesis is always an imitation of *nature* (*i.e.*, he is indebted for another aspect of his interpretation of Aristotle, see *The Rule of Metaphor*, 333n83). But Ricœur interprets Aristotle's "nature" not as another term in the service of a Platonic metaphysics of truth, but instead, he takes it to mean that "no discourse ever suspends our belonging to a world" (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 43). In other words, in contrast to Derrida's account, all mimesis is bound by being-in-the-world.
- ⁵⁰ I am grateful for the recommendations provided by an anonymous reviewer. This paper is also indebted to the suggestions I received at the 2017 Society for Ricœur Studies conference, most notably the thoughtful comments of George Taylor. His principal suggestion, that my theses might also be said of Gadamer, should be noted. Indeed, the parallel is striking: Ricœur's philosophy (and quite certainly Ricœur's theory of metaphor) is largely indebted to Gadamer; in *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricœur alludes once to Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" and he briefly mentions Gadamer's "metaphoric" twice. What is more, Gadamer's role in *The Rule of Metaphor* is elliptical and must be extracted through one's own reading. However, despite such parallels, there is an important distinction: Gadamer does not give a direct interpretation of Aristotle's position on metaphor, as does Derrida. Nor does he make such interpretation central to his theory of metaphor, as does Derrida. Indeed, in attempting to explain Ricœur's account of metaphor, I maintain that there is no semi-silent influence as conspicuous as Derrida. But of course, as throughout his oeuvre, Ricœur engages in such a complex synthesis of thinkers that one cannot hope to disentangle all of the threads at once.