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Speaking Images. Chomsky and Ricœur on Linguistic Creativity

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Abstract:

Linguistic creativity is the ability to understand indefinitely many previously unencountered sentences. In this paper, I compare Chomsky's and Ricœur's contrasting conceptions of this ability, in particular, their divergent views of nonsense. With nonsense, it seems as if syntax is outrunning semantics. Chomsky took this to show that syntax is autonomous of semantics. I propose a reading of Ricœur's work on metaphor whereby Chomsky's thesis is modified so that syntax and semantics are declared to be ultimately co-extensive notions.

Keywords: Linguistic Creativity, Imagination, and Metaphor.

Résumé:

La créativité langagière est la capacité de comprendre indéfiniment beaucoup de phrases que nous n'avons pas rencontrées au préalable. Dans cet article, je compare les approches contrastées de cette capacité que proposent Chomsky et Ricœur, en insistant en particulier sur leurs conceptions divergentes du non-sens. Avec le non-sens, il semble que la syntaxe dépasse la sémantique. Chomsky s'en empare pour montrer que la syntaxe est autonome par rapport à la sémantique. Je propose une lecture de l'œuvre de Ricœur sur la métaphore qui me conduit à modifier la thèse de Chomsky en montrant que la syntaxe et la sémantique sont à titre ultime des notions coextensives.

Mots-clés: Créativité langagière, Imagination, Métaphore.

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1. Introduction

> Let me start with an important quote by Paul Ricœur:
> Our images are spoken before they are seen.[1]

At first blush, this rather startling remark might seem to be either a metaphorical flourish or a category mistake that pairs incompatible sensorial modes while also reversing the natural order of things. Surely, the obvious complaint would go, Ricœur is getting things back to front here, for images must be seen before they can be spoken. In any case, how could images be "spoken"? What could *that* possibly mean? This reaction undoubtedly has initial plausibility. In this paper, however, I want to defend the implausible, literal reading. I want to take Ricœur at his word. I want to claim that the quote wears its content right on its sleeve. Truly, images first appear to us in language, and only later in vision. We think otherwise because, as Ricœur would say, we tend to confuse productive and reproductive imagination, because we ignore the constitutive role of images as the privileged source of new ways of seeing, and instead take imagination to be wholly parasitic on previous sensorial impressions. Against that confusion, I shall argue, again following Ricœur, that productive imagination has epistemological and metaphysical priority over reproductive imagination. More specifically, I shall interpret Ricœur's claim as saying that productive imagination has its origin in syntax, that syntax is the proper home of spoken images. To anticipate, a spoken image presents to us a novel seeing-as, a novel way of seeing a thing as a thing of a certain sort, a way of bringing a thing under a specific, but still to be determined concept. Syntax is the home of speaking images because it is syntax that first gives hospitality to concepts, to what makes seeing-as possible.[2] To say that images are first spoken is thus to say that syntax presents fresh concepts to us in the form of verbal images before we have made our own the new ways of seeing determined by those concepts, before we have mastered, or indeed understood, the conditions of applicability attached to the concepts expressed by the novel combination of words that make up a verbal image. On the reading I propose, then, Ricœur holds that syntax already deploys concepts before we can grasp them, with semantics catching up only later. In the beginning was the word as pure syntax. Meaning always arrives second, for to speak, or to hear, is not yet to see-as.

I shall next argue that the reading I propose brings the full force of Ricœur's radical conception of linguistic creativity into view, a conception inextricably connected to his views about imaginative creativity, that is, productive imagination. Crucially, I shall attribute to Ricœur a priority of syntax thesis cashed out as a bolder version of the autonomy of syntax thesis made famous by Chomsky. Its boldness is due to the fact that, unlike Chomsky, Ricœur allows syntax to expand the boundaries of conceptual space. Whereas for Chomsky novel combinations of syntactic strings may give rise to nonsense, thus marking the points at which semantics, and our

concepts, give out, for Ricœur syntax pushes the boundaries of meaningfulness further and further out, but it never quite outruns semantics. The temporary gaps between syntax and semantics are filled in and made good by *la métaphore vive*, a phenomenon triggered by the spoken image. It is metaphor's ability to make sense out of nonsense through the redrawing of extant conceptual-semantic fields that secures new spaces for semantics by making the spoken images visible to us. In short, semantics catches up with syntax on the back of metaphor. The overall picture that I propose, then, is that the spoken image, as presented by syntax, is the precursor to metaphor. In turn, metaphor is the instrument whereby the possibilities first mapped out by syntax are incorporated into the semantics, that is, into the range of ways of seeing-as directly available to speakers.

The plan for the paper is as follows. After a brief discussion of Chomsky's conception of linguistic creativity in § 2, I shall devote § 3 to mustering some textual evidence that I think supports the attribution of the priority of syntax thesis to Ricœur. In § 4, I shall raise a problem for Ricœur, an antimony that is triggered by the very radicalness of his conception of linguistic creativity. I shall argue that Ricœur's distinctive view of metaphor gives rise to paradox, since it entails that metaphor cannot but live between languages, that while metaphor broaches fresh paths through the space of meaningfulness, it does not and cannot itself inhabit any location within that space. If so, it then becomes unclear how metaphor could engender new meanings from within a language by means of a clash between the existing semantic categories of that language, as Ricœur claims that it does. In § 5, I propose a solution whereby we take metaphor to temporarily suspend the particularised referential powers of language, while leaving intact the general, non-context-specific features of those powers. The upshot is that the space of meaningfulness inhabited by metaphor is supra-linguistic and maximally reflective in an appropriately Ricœurian fashion. Metaphor, then, momentarily takes us outside language, so as to expand it further from a privileged meaning-determining "pictorial level."[3]

2. Chomsky and the Autonomy of Syntax Thesis

It is standardly taken to be a constitutive fact about language that even moderately competent speakers are endowed with unbound powers of linguistic creativity, that they can, more or less immediately, understand and produce an indefinite number of novel sentences, sentences that they have never heard or produced before.[4] Naturally enough, we expect an empirically adequate linguistic theory to explain how this is possible—the range of sentences we can effortlessly understand is infinite and we are, after all, finite beings.[5] The explanatory problem is pressing, and indeed, according to Chomsky, accounting for "the creative aspect of language use" is "[t]he primary question for linguistic theory."[6] The standard answer to the puzzle is that we are in a position to work out the meaning of previously unencountered sentences in virtue of our (tacit) knowledge of the lexical axioms (the axioms fixing the meaning for the items in the lexicon) and of the rules for the syntactic combination of those items. A little more formally, the standard answer is that linguistic understanding is closed under the compositional operations that generate the meanings of sentences from those of their constituents, i.e., that those operations never take us beyond what we can understand.[7]

This picture of linguistic creativity is attractive and it accords well with our pre-theoretical intuitions. Chomksy, however, noted a fly in the ointment.[8] There are sentences that, while grammatically well-formed, are opaque to our understanding, sentences such that the syntax seems to outrun the semantics.[9] If so, linguistic understanding is not closed under composition, since syntax may at times take us outside the space of meaningfulness. To make the issue vivid, Chomsky gave a now famous instance of this phenomenon:

> (CS) Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.[10]

CS is syntactically grammatical. It is however a particularly extreme case of semantic deviancy, since none of the successive pairings of its constituent words are deemed to be semantically acceptable (if something is green it is not colourless, ideas cannot be green, nor can they sleep, and so on). Although our judgment is that the internal syntactic arrangement of the sentence is unimpeachable, we just cannot make any sense of the meaning CS expresses. For Chomsky, this neatly highlights another characteristic aspect of our linguistic creativity:

> Normal mastery of a language involves not only the ability to understand immediately an indefinite number of entirely new sentences, but also the ability to identify deviant sentences and, on occasion, to impose an interpretation on them.

Crucially, he also added:

> The distinction [between normal and deviant sentences] can clearly be both stated and motivated *on syntactic grounds*.[11]

Presently, I shall take issue with this further claim. For now, let me note that in the case of CS the deviancy is so severe that the sentence appears strongly impervious to interpretation:[12]

> Any speaker of English will recognize at once that [CS] is an absurd English sentence.[13]

Chomsky used CS as part of his master argument for the autonomy of syntax thesis, the thesis whereby the language faculty is said to be autonomous of other faculties in the mind and able to generate "abstract structures" independent of and prior to semantics.[14] One immediate consequence of the thesis is that the class of semantically well-formed strings is a proper part of the class of syntactically well-formed strings.[15] Chomsky is aware that an empirically adequate linguistic theory must predict which syntactically well-formed strings will not be assigned a meaning by the semantics, that it must explain why and how our syntactic creativity exceeds our semantic creativity.[16] The story that Chomsky tells to explain the failure of semantic closure is that the deviancy of CS can (and must) be explained in terms of the violation of selectional restrictions (a subclass of the subcategorization rules that determine which kind of arguments verbs can take, which adjectives may modify which nouns).[17] Lexical items, that is, are said to come with syntactic features that select arguments on the basis of these features. And so, e.g. 'sleep' will come with an ANIMATE feature marked positive and therefore will only take subjects that are themselves marked positive for that feature (sentences which violate this restriction will not be passed on to the semantics module).

Chomsky's main claim, then, is that syntax can control subcategorization principles in abstraction from semantics, that the compositional operations are primed by the syntactic ones. I think the claim, as formulated by Chomsky, is false. There is however a true, and, as I said, bolder claim in the vicinity that I shall unpack in § 5. The task for the rest of this section is to substantiate the charge that syntax is not autonomous in Chomsky's sense.

I'll start by examining Chomsky's own response to CS. His explanation of the syntactic grammaticality of CS is that "ideal listeners" will try to assign an interpretation to it "on the basis of analogy to nondeviant cases."[18] Chomsky helpfully provides an instance of what he takes to be a nondeviant sentence of "normal English" that analogically guides speakers as they attempt to make sense of CS:

(1) Revolutionary new ideas appear infrequently.[19]

Chomsky's claim, however, is rather puzzling. (1) may be a "normal" — better: a normalized — sentence of English as of 1955. But in fact, it is a sentence that, by Chomsky's own lights, violates several obvious categorial restrictions. For a start, 'revolutionary', strictly speaking, means the opposite of what it is commonly taken to mean. It indicates a regular, utterly predictable trajectory along a fixed orbit; it does not mean, in its original astronomical meaning, groundbreaking, epoch-making, norm-deviating and so forth. These are derived meanings acquired at a later stage in the natural history of that word, a history for which Chomsky shows scant interest, if any at all.[20] An even cursory look at that history will reveal that the term 'revolution' was first introduced in the 14th century solely to denote a property of the motion of celestial bodies. Its applicability was then extended to political upheavals in the mid-15th century. Only much later did it apply to abstract terms such as ideas.[21] And the same, *mutatis mutandis*, is true of 'appear'. Abstract notions such as ideas are by definition not part of the phenomenal realm, they do not belong to the realm of that which appears in our experience.[22] In other words, (1) is, at a minimum, a heavily metaphorical sentence. But in fact, it is highly plausible that it would have been classed as highly deviant and even outright nonsensical back in, say, 1355.

If this is right, it is unclear that the claim that it is syntax—rather than current usage—that fixes what counts as a legitimate meaning-combination is justified. In particular, it is unclear that purely "syntactic grounds" can force the stipulation that while 'appear' can take 'ideas' as subject, 'sleep' cannot. If the reply is that only things falling under the category ANIMATE can sleep, a moment's reflection will show that that category is largely a non-invariant artefact of one's conceptual scheme, demonstrably subject to historical change, and obviously impossible to ground in "hard-wired" structures in our mind, as exemplified in syntax. It also seems that these considerations, if sound, will readily generalise across the entire language.

The lesson, it seems to me, is that we need a different story about the relation between syntax, semantics and conceptual structure than the one told by Chomsky. On his view, language learners absorb conceptual strictures, as encased in the syntax, far too quickly for those strictures to be acquired through experience.[23] Chomsky therefore takes our linguistic competence to be informed and guided "by a rich and invariant conceptual system, which is prior to any experience," a system that, Chomsky argues, has been handed out to us "from the original hand of nature."[24] Chomsky's argument, however, moves far too quickly from the premise that

concepts are something that we "possess and use without thought or awareness" to the conclusion that immediacy of use rules out the possibility that concepts might be historically inflected.[25] Given that immediacy, Chomsky concludes that the conceptual framework is "a common human property,"[26] without taking note of the fact that the contrast, as of 1955, between the apparent immediacy of e.g. 'revolutionary ideas' and the perceived deviancy of 'green ideas' is itself a historically determined feature. And because it is so determined, it follows that 1955-immediacy cannot play the justificatory role that Chomsky needs for his absolutist, hand-of-nature claim to go through and for his claim that purely syntactic grounds can explain the phenomenon of grammatical nonsense.

If my discussion has been along the right lines, Chomsky's conception of nonsense is not wholly on target. Chomsky is surely right that syntax carves up a path that semantics must follow.[27] But syntactic categories are not set by the hand of nature. Above all, syntactic categories do not provide a comfortable home for our linguistic competence, a home where sentences come with interpretations pre-packed into them. On the contrary, the correct view of the issue, as I shall propose later, is that syntactic categories ceaselessly challenge us towards new conceptual structures, new semantic fields, towards new ways of understanding, towards new ways of being in the world, new ways of thinking of objects. As it happens, this contrasting conception of syntactic categories is, I think, the one properly attributable to Ricœur. Let me now turn to his view of linguistic creativity, a view that, I think, gets us much closer to the heart of the matter.

3. The Many Languages of Ricœur

To properly frame what I have called Ricœur's priority of syntax thesis, it will be helpful to start by reviewing some of the key features of his conception of language. First, Ricœur draws a sharp distinction between language *qua* discourse (L-discourse) and language *qua* system (L-system), between language *qua* eventuated, actualised discourse, language as interpreted text, and language as a formal object abstracted from use.[28] In sharp contrast to Chomsky, Ricœur assigns ontological priority to L-discourse.[29] Only discourse is real; language *qua* system is virtual, derivative, and secondary. Languages are therefore individuated in terms of (classes of) meaning-events and not in terms of (classes of) abstract encodings. Languages are eventuated in time, whereas systems reside outside of time and hence have no genuine claim to existence.

To master a language, on this view, is to master L-discourse rather than L-system—since one can only master what exists. Furthermore, to master L-discourse is to understand it; and to understand L-discourse is to be able to understand a text within that discourse, it is to understand the content of that text, a content that however goes beyond traditional conceptions of meaning:

> [T]he reference of the text [...] is the kind of world opened up by the deep semantics of the text. [...] What has to be understood [...] is what points towards a possible world, [...] the world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text. [...] The text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orientating oneself within it. The dimensions of this world are properly opened up by and disclosed by the text.[30]

For Ricœur, then, meanings are not inert contents; they are, rather, world-disclosing, action-guiding contents, in that they make available ways of being in the world.[31] Accordingly, to be masters of a language is to understand (and to make one's own) a way of being in the world. It is thus precisely to the extent that L-discourse has ontological priority over L-system that the world-disclosing properties of expressions have metaphysical precedence over their syntactico-semantic properties—although the latter properties have epistemological priority since they provide access to the former. It follows, and this will play an important part in our discussion in § 5, that the representational-referential properties of language can at most be temporarily suspended, since it is in virtue of mastering those properties that one also acquires a way of being in the world.[32] If those properties were wholly suspended, language would cease to be language. It also follows that the primary function of language is, rather than mere communication, that of making us what we are, since language, in disclosing a world, thereby discloses and determines the interpreter of that world, that is, the speaking self.[33]

Accordingly, and again in contrast to Chomsky, on Ricœur's account we have an immediate and satisfying explanation of why speakers do not have to interpret non-deviant sentences. Speakers experience no such need because they "feel at home" there (as Wittgenstein aptly put it),[34] because speakers are at ease in the language to which those sentences belong, in the house of the specific modes of being that the language determines and that they, *qua* speakers, inhabit. They recognise themselves in those ways of being in the world. And they have no need to interpret the sentences in their habitual L-discourse, because they have already self-interpreted themselves as the speakers (and readers) of those texts. Conversely, from Ricœur's perspective the problem raised by the Chomsky sentence is that speakers are unable to grasp what kind of being would have a use for that sentence. Learning a language is thus primarily a question of finding out, who we are through finding out which language we actually speak. We do so by learning ways of seeing the world, ways of seeing-as, since to be the particular self one is, is to see-as in a particular way. As it happens, the two key notions in this process of language-mastery are those of spoken images and of metaphor. In the next two sub-sections, I say a little more about each notion.

3.1. From Speaking Images to Metaphor

As anticipated in the introduction, spoken images are verbal images, or, as Ricœur calls them, *bound images*, linguistically controlled images, images that originate from and are grounded in language.[35] The notion of spoken image plays two main roles in Ricœur's conception. First, it vindicates the primacy of the productive, non-derivative side of imagination.[36] Secondly, it grounds productive imagination in the productive aspects of language. One quote for all:

> There is no function of imagination [...] that is not said or about-to-be said in language [...] Imagination never resides in the unsaid.[37]

The spoken image, then, is an image that is spoken but not yet said, because a successful saying also requires what Austin called *uptake*.[38] In the absence of uptake, by either speaker or hearer, the spoken image remains an image that is only about to be said. Otherwise put, a successful saying requires that the image be grasped in propositional terms, as a seeing-as that

brings an object under a recognized concept.[39] To say, and to recognize what is said, is therefore a question of communicating (respectively, grasping) a specific mode of seeing-as.

Though unsaid, a spoken image however remains at all times language-bound. Imaginative and linguistic productivity are thus one and the same.[40] It follows that no explanation of linguistic productivity is complete unless it also addresses imaginative productivity. Just as importantly, it follows that we must take seeing-as, that which spoken images make available, to be constitutive of the speaking being, since it is the range of modes of seeing-as available to us that shapes and determines the sort of being that we are.[41] If so, in explaining spoken images, their genesis, and their consequences, we also, and thereby, explain deep facts about the constitution of speaking beings, that is, of our selves.

Similarly, since it is speaking images that enable us to project and discover novel analogies in the realm of meaningfulness,[42] and therefore new ways of being in the world, it is speaking images that reveal the essence of language at the very moment in which they force it to undergo change, at the moment when its semantic categories are put under pressure by the syntax.[43] Once a new determination of the semantic categories has been reached, once the images have been seen, once they have become part of the things we say, a new language will be determined, since L-discourse is constituted by its semantic categories, by the ways in which its texts are structured and interpreted.[44] Since applicability conditions for predicates determine modes of being, and since one cannot adopt incompatible ways of being, languages and modes of being are thus in a 1-1 correspondence.[45] It follows that the universe of Ricœurian languages is splendidly plenitudinous. There are as many languages as there are speaking images. Syntactic pressure on the semantics will, in each case, give rise to a new language.[46]

A rather pressing question now arises, one that Ricœur himself asked: "If an image is not derived from perception, how can it be derived from language?"[47] My answer is simple: a spoken image is *announced* in language, precisely because it is spoken *through* it. I'll say more about this simple answer in the concluding section. Here, I want to stress that spoken images are not just announced, but that they are also themselves announcers of something else, since, as we've just seen, spoken images are the epiphanies of yet to be disclosed meanings.[48] In order to understand the phenomenon of spoken images, then, we must not just trace their origins, but their consequences too. In particular, we must investigate how spoken images are related to that other, and much more familiar, key Ricœurian notion, namely, metaphor. Much of what I said so far might have given the impression that I take spoken images to be metaphors. This is not so. Spoken images are not yet metaphors, precisely because they are neither seen nor said, but only about to be said (and seen). By contrast, metaphors, live metaphors, are not only images that have been said (and not just spoken); they are images that have also been seen. Let me turn, then, to a brief sketch of Ricœur's celebrated conception of metaphor.

3.2. Ricœur on Metaphor

For Ricœur, metaphor, far from being a merely peripheral phenomenon, is in fact the central and philosophically most significant linguistic phenomenon, precisely because it is the point at which language opens up new semantic possibilities through the coming to salience of new similarities:

> [H]ow do we make sense with nonsense? [...] The creative moment of metaphor is concentrated on [a] grasping of resemblances, in the perception of analogies. [...] In novel metaphors the similarity is itself the fruit of metaphor. [...] The visionary grasping of resemblance is at the same time a verbal invention.[49]

The verbal invention of Ricœurian metaphor is a "semantic innovation" that triggers "an emergent meaning," a "metamorphosis of both language and reality";[50] it is the dialectical *locus* for the "interplay between an anterior situation which appears suddenly undone" and the "strategy which reorganises the residues left over from the anterior structuration."[51]

In virtue of its heavy-duty restructuring tasks with respect to the profile of semantic categories, metaphor is thus not a merely "bizarre form of predication."[52] It is rather the place where the very idea of predication is questioned, reshaped, recalibrated, reinvented, the place, where the world of language *qua* potential discourse explodes that of actualised human discourse, where new meanings are generated and old ones are tweaked. [53]

Patently, on Ricœur's view conceptual change is indivisible from discursive, purely verbal invention. Equally, the apparent, or temporary, misalignment between syntax and semantics (the fact that syntax has devised strings that challenge extant semantic categories) is what gives rise both to speaking images and to the attendant need for speakers to catch up and grasp the novel language that is being generated there and then by those epiphanic images that are heard while still unseen. As I already stressed, the generating powers of metaphor are not just episodic, since for Ricœur metaphor truly is "at the origin of all semantic fields," it is the privileged *locus*-event for the unleashing of the unbounded "creative use of polysemy," for the coming to semantic salience of the "possibilities of indefinite invention."[54]

With all of this in mind, we can now revisit our opening quote and say that speaking images show that "the 'world' of the text may explode the world of the *author*."[55] Language, that is, creates and occupies for us the as yet unreached *there*, the location in the space of meaningfulness that we shall eventually inhabit once the full power of the image spoken by the text has finally been seen, once the image has been said, once it has become a metaphor.

The privileged meaning-creating role of metaphor can now be appreciated more fully. For while language in general contains and preserves "the signs of humanity" that are therein deposited, so that proper interpretation of extant texts is a matter of receiving from them an "enlarged self,"[56] in the case of metaphor the broader self thus received is a wholly unprecedented self, a pristine disposition towards the world that language, all by itself, makes available to us through the syntactically-driven epiphany of speaking images. It then follows, given its status as the privileged producer of images, that metaphor must be taken to be the ἀρχή of successive L-discourses, as well as the archive, in Derrida's sense,[57] of past and future languages in the chain of ever-expanding discourses, the place where the order of words and of worlds is stored, where all possible structurings of semantic fields are encased. Indeed, metaphor and speaking images show the deep sense in which Ricœur's claim that "a human being is fundamentally and in the first place a being ahead of itself" is true.[58] It is language *qua* metaphor that takes our being ahead of itself, that represents its possibilities before we can occupy and embody them. And it is speaking images that provide guidance in that process of self-

expansion.[59] Or rather: speaking images merely *present* those possibilities, while metaphor genuinely *represents* them.

If my gloss is correct, this is the full sense in which the text speaks those possibilities well before we can see that they are possibilities, and what kind of possibilities they actually are.[60] Ricœur's version of the autonomy of syntax thesis, then, must be seen as a thesis concerning the epistemological priority of syntax over semantics. Syntax and semantics are, however, of a piece, metaphysically speaking. Ultimately, the space of meaningfulness is coextensive with the space of syntax.[61] It is closed not just under the compositional operations, but under the syntactic operations too—as shown by the fact that spoken images are spoken, that they are always given linguistic shape.

We have seen that metaphor forces our language to expand. I now want to propose that we take this idea seriously, that we take Ricœurian metaphor to constitute and inhabit the links in the chain of ever expanding languages.[62] These links mark the nodes where new regions of meaningfulness are inscribed in and annexed to settled discourse.

In characterising the peculiar semantic and meta-semantic status of Ricœurian metaphor in these terms I must now stress that Ricœur insists that L-discourse never loses sight of its referential function, that "there is no discourse so fictional that it does not connect up with reality."[63] Even when L-discourse appears to leave its referential duties behind, Ricœur argues that we enter a second-order of reference, an order that is in fact deeper than the everyday first-order level of engagement with things.[64] At the second-order level, language reflects on and probes its first-order level referential capacities.

I think we should take Ricœur's claim a step further and say that metaphor gives rise to a third-order level of reference, an order, or rather, *the* order that disciplines the possibilities of lower-level reference. Metaphor, that is, opens up new ways of referential engagement with the world, indeed, new ways of thinking of reference. This is so because metaphor has the "ability to engender conceptual diversity, [...] an unlimited number of potential interpretations." Metaphor extends the ways words can be interpreted; it multiplies their ontological hooks onto objects in the world. And it is thanks to its power over concepts that metaphor can force us to "perceive new connections among things,"[65] and that it can extend the network of referential relations between language and world, first through the medium of syntax, and then through a regrouping of the semantics. As for the relation between spoken images and metaphor, to repeat: in epistemic terms, spoken images precede metaphor, they precede the regrouping of the semantics, indeed, they precede the very idea that semantics *could* be regrouped.[66] In speaking images, we contemplate the epiphany of the possibility of a new meaning. It is the task of metaphor to make that possibility fully salient, to make available to us the newly determined mode of seeing-as thereby determined.

This, then, is Ricœur's richly insightful conception of metaphor. I'm now going to argue, however, that a deep paradox lies at the very heart of that conception.

4. The Antinomy of Metaphor

The burden of this section is to show that while metaphor may well be the home *of* language it is itself without a home *in* any language.[67] It is Ricœur himself that tells us that metaphor is "a semantic innovation which has no status in an already established language."[68] Metaphor, we're told, "only exists in the moment of invention." Before the invention, there is no new language yet. After the invention, the old language must be forgotten, since the removal of the semantic shock by the successful metaphor entails the erasure of the previous semantic categories. During the invention, neither language can exist (in the moment of invention the old and new categories are merged and therefore annihilated), but both languages must exist too (or else there would be nothing that is being merged)—e.g. for 'time is a beggar' to count as a metaphor, it must both be possible and impossible for highly abstract entities to go around begging, and speakers must be able to grasp both of these facts simultaneously.[69] Metaphor must thus be able to see both new and settled semantic categories so as to trigger the conceptual tension that alone can produce the new semantic categories:

> It is essential to the structure of metaphor that the old and the new are present together in the metaphorical twist.[70]

But those categories cannot obtain at one and the same time:

> [Metaphor] is a calculated error, which brings together things that do not go together.[71]

And yet we must also be somehow able to simultaneously grasp incompatible semantic categories:

> When we receive a metaphorical statement as meaningful, we perceive both the literal meaning which is bound by the semantic incongruity and the new meaning which makes sense in the present context.[72]

This alienated, institutionally fractured status of metaphor is indeed constitutive of its meaning-generating role. Metaphor can bring into being new ways of seeing reality only in the presence of a conceptual tension with respect to settled semantic categories.[73] It is through that tension that metaphor distanciates the predicate from the subject.[74] And it is through that tension that metaphor allows the "assimilation of hitherto separated semantic fields."[75] But it is also because of that tension that metaphor cannot be "fully integrated in a meaningful context" until new events enable the space of meaningfulness to readjust itself.[76] As soon as those events occur, the newly created space of meaningfulness will have no space for the metaphor. A successful metaphor, that is, destroys its own grounds, since, as we saw already, by removing the semantic shock it also removes the old language, but in turn that shock constitutively depends on the existence of the very language that metaphor must instead destroy in order to come into being.[77]

The antinomy of metaphor thus arises because if metaphor sits outside the old language, it cannot engender the required categorial clash. But if it sits inside the old language, it cannot see into the new language, for if it did, the categorial tension could not arise in the first place (it would *already* be defused). Conversely, if metaphor sits in the new language, the categorial

tension is, necessarily, a forgotten one. Indeed, the tension has itself become unthinkable (as witnessed by the phenomenon of dead metaphors), with the memory of the semantic clash vanished beyond retrieval.

In short, if the proper analysis of metaphor consists in an answer to the question of how metaphor can make sense out of nonsense, we need a language where one and the same meaning-combination is both sense and nonsense, where "sameness and difference are not merely mixed, but remain opposed,"[78] a language where metaphor is both the enigma and the solution to the enigma.[79] We need a language that "raises above itself."[80] But, it seems, there can be no such language.[81]

I think this pushes us towards seeing metaphor as a kind of linguistic χώρα, an area outside the town of language, the *non*-home, or the *borrowed home* of meaningfulness, home to every language and at home in none, the anachrony of language where the narrative powers of language step outside time, where in an extremal form of *Verfremdung*, languages, and subjects, are placed outside themselves, observing their own laws and their reciprocal relations of expansion.[82]

4.1. Metaphor as Deferance

In the final section, I will come back to the idea of metaphor as the exiled origin of meaningfulness. To prepare the ground for that, I first want to propose that we take metaphor, and meaning more generally, to be *deferance*, a notion that, I think, is the proper and richer rendering of Derridean *différance*, incorporating not just cross-contextual difference and temporal deferral but also linguistic deference, in Putnam's sense, that is, deference to the linguistic authority of the experts in one's community, including one's future, and more competent, selves.[83] Deferance, that is, is meaning as standing deference to future uses of the word, to future linguistic norms, to future languages, to future modes of being.[84] Deferance, and meaning, is thus *différance* plus normative deference in the just rehearsed sense.[85]

Under this proposal, metaphor is the engine of meaningfulness, it is the in-between-languages workshop where new semantic categories are first intuited and forged. And those categories and the subcategorization principles that they engender are adopted from a position of standing deference to the normative authority of future meaning-fixing expansions and to the agents thereby configured.[86] The cost, it seems, is the antinomy of a linguistic device, metaphor, that cannot live in any language, a device that has to be deeply metalinguistic, or rather, *supra*-linguistic, because it cannot inhabit any language at all, it can only "appear" to speakers in the fleeting moment in which they move from one L-discourse to another, it is a device that can only inhabit, ephemerally, a language-less dimension, the dimension in which speaking images reside.

4.2. A Natural Response

Before I put forward my own solution to the antinomy, let me briefly consider one fairly natural objection. The objection is that antinomies are to be embraced, not eliminated, that they are not symptoms of any sort of pathology but on the contrary a sign of robust, indeed perfectly rude health. We could, for instance, happily invoke, as Ricœur himself does, the usual Hegelian *Aufhebung* strategy and say that metaphor acts as the "suppression-preservation" of old and new semantic categories.[87] Still along similar lines, we could also think, with Derrida this time, that

the inscription borne by metaphor is one that can succeed only by being effaced in the very act of inscription, that there can be a kind of contradictory coherence in the idea of a centre of meaningfulness that is not itself a centre, that, in short, what we really have here is a contradiction without contradiction.[88] If we are impressed by these suggestions we might well think that a palimpsest model whereby we can grasp two languages or two reading-modes at once is neither inconceivable nor contradictory.[89]

While I can certainly sympathise with the general thrust of this response, I do not think it gets us out of the woods just yet. The fact is, Ricœur himself tells us that metaphor "self-destruct[s] in a significant contradiction."[90] And the point here is that the self-destruction is and must be transformation too. It is a self-destruction that must make room for a clash of interpretations grounded in two distinct, incompatible languages in order to achieve the required expansion of semantic categories. Without the distinctness of the two languages and their incompatibility, there can be no expansion. And surely, it is not just objects that are incompatible; event and processes can be so too.[91] In particular, even if we think of concepts as event- like, as open-textured *à la* Waismann,[92] we still face the same problem. The trouble is that on Ricœur's account metaphor requires *incompatible* features of a concept-object pair or of a corresponding process to trigger the semantic shock. If we dilute away the incompatibility, we deprive metaphor of its constitutive force. Metaphor needs fixity of semantic categories to come into being. As soon as those categories are relaxed, metaphor, and the language determined by those categories, will disappear. But with that non-renounceable tension on board, metaphor immediately becomes homeless, since there cannot be a language that is simultaneously enforcing contradictory semantic categories or an event that subsumes and absorbs contradictory events.[93]

A final point of dissatisfaction with this line of response is that we are under a theoretical need to understand, and not just to describe, how this elusive link across distinct languages and reading-modes actually works. What we want, that is, is an explanation of what is going on with metaphor.[94] Appeal to "dynamic objects" or to processes provides no satisfactory theoretical explanation, unless we get a detailed story about how the transition we are trying to understand actually works.[95] Quietist responses of the sort just sketched would at best provide a mere description of the surface events without giving any insight into the workings of language and thought at their most excitingly creative.

In the next section I want to sketch the outlines of a story about the ways in which metaphor and syntax interact.

5. Solving the Antinomy

> Language takes precedence. Not only before meaning. Also before the self.
> Walter Benjamin[96]

What, then, is linguistic creativity? What are the specific conditions under which something new is produced *sub specie metaphorae*? Our problem was that in the moment in which metaphor projects our understanding forward, in the moment in which we are divining the new meaning, we are necessarily trapped within the link joining one language to another. When we

inhabit the link, we are no longer in the old language, and not yet in the new one. We are outside the chain, indeed, outside all chains, and hence we are not in a determinate mode of being. However, grasping a text, making sense of and with nonsense, is necessarily an activity that is always situated, always grounded in a specific mode of understanding:

> Understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being. [...] To understand a text [...] is not to find a lifeless sense that is contained therein, but to unfold the possibility of being indicated by the text.[97]

Understanding is a projection of being, and Ricœur is quite sensitive to the conceptual dangers here, since he grants that we speak "paradoxically" if we take, as we must, that projection to be taking place "within a prior being-thrown." The projector, that is, must already be in the projected space while also still occupying the projecting location. Hence, the subject (and the language) are both the source and the target of the projecting act.

The Ricœurian conception of linguistic creativity thus requires the persistence of that which it destroys in the very act of metamorphosis. Clearly, the problem we need to address concerns the conceptual coherence of the privileged epistemic space from which the projection to new modes of being is effected, a space that lives, as it were, between the ruins of language.[98] Otherwise put:

> [T]he essential question is not to recover, behind the text, the lost intention, but to unfold, in front of the text, the 'world' it opens up and discloses.[99]

But what mode of being could possibly place us in front of the text if metaphor constitutively shatters language, if, in the moment when metaphor is genuinely present to us, we have neither language nor mode of being available to us to provide a vantage point from which to observe the emergence of the new meaning that will eventually reduce "the shock engendered by two incompatible ideas"?[100]

It seems to me that Ricœur faces a hard dilemma here. For either he gives up his distinctive claim that language creates worlds, modes of being, horizons, or he gives up his theory of metaphor which requires (temporarily) fixed categories to give rise to semantic shock and to the temporary irruption of nonsense into our language. Neither horn seems desirable, but neither horn seems avoidable either.[101] Metaphor, Ricœur tells us, is not polysemy.[102] In other words: it is not a palimpsest. But if so, it is then unclear *a)* how Ricœur can go on to saying that in metaphorical statements "'same' and 'different' are not just mixed together, they also remain opposed,"[103] since that would grant that metaphor is polysemy after all, and *b)* whether Ricœur can still insist that L-discourse discloses and determines *specific* ways of being. Surely, the (Ricœurian) move "from text to action" holds for metaphor if it holds anywhere: and how, then, could we simultaneously act from within two contradictory modes of being? Surely, linguistic category mistakes do not have executable counterparts in the realm of action.

Ironically, the problem for Ricœur stems from his highly dynamic conception of language, from his insistence that language cannot ever be treated as a fixed, closed L-system. Without a closed L-system to act on, however, metaphor loses its meaning-generating powers. The crucial point here is that although metaphor maps to an unlimited number of possibilities,

the mapping is normatively constrained (not just any old possibility will do). What we are after, then, is a conception of metaphor that allows us to capture the idea that the acts of deferance that structure the chain of languages are "neither fallen from the sky nor inscribed once and for all in a closed system,"[104] that they are neither arbitrary, nor fixed by an artificially regimented L-system. The question, that is, is whether we could find a space between metaphor and nonsense, a space where the normatively constrained emergence of new domains of meaningfulness can coherently be apprehended and described. Otherwise put, the question before us is: what are the rules of metaphor that are in force during the operations of live metaphor?

I think we have no option here but to take metaphor to be a supra-linguistic act. Metaphor is an act of inscription on a language but it is not an act carried out from within any language properly so called. It is, rather, a supralinguistic event taking place within something which is not a language, but only a proper part of one, just as Ricœur himself suggests.[105] When we confront metaphor, we are forced to exit our language, we are in effect doing metatheory, or rather, supra-theory, we are suspended between languages, we are extraordinary agents, because speaking images force us to be extraordinary speakers, speakers of a language that does not determine a mode of being, not a sublunary at least.

This is, I think, fully in line with Ricœur's notion of the *ontological vehemence* of metaphor.[106] Metaphor determines what there is, what objects are recognised as being part of the domain, what predicates they can fall under; it determines the boundary of the nameable within that language. It thus sets the ontology underlying the language and thereby determines what kind of agent the language configures. We could say, as Ricœur does, that metaphor belongs to discourse.[107] But if it does, it belongs to a very special kind of discourse, a meta-discourse that regulates the chain of languages, a discourse where language is maximally reflective.[108] However, that privileged kind of discourse is not, *contra* Ricœur, "installed in being."[109] It is, rather, a discourse which is autonomous with respect to being. It is, in fact, a discourse that, truly, installs being, in that it is the discourse that evaluates the ontological categories through which we see the world.[110]

The way out of the dilemma, then, is simply to grant metaphorical discourse autonomy from specific forms of being. And this is the sense in which Chomsky was right.[111] The language faculty does indeed output highly abstract representations. But that doesn't mean that the representations are abstract in the sense of being altogether devoid of referential powers (as we saw, a most un-Ricœurian thought), or that syntax is autonomous with respect to semantics but a slave to conceptual structure.[112] Rather, the abstract quality of language in its metaphorical mode derives from the fact that language in general configures ways of being in the world that are both highly specific and highly abstract. They are highly specific because they delineate precise agential attitudes. But they are also highly abstract because they go beyond the singularities of particularised embeddings—they merely delineate, just as Ricœur says, "the free play of possibilities," not of actualities.[113]

Patently, actualisation requires embedment in a specific environment. And the marvel of metaphor consists precisely in its ability to temporarily remove us from our particular embedment, in its ability to show the capacity of language to root and uproot itself from singularities.[114] The metaphor-determined ways of being are thus, when they first appear, appropriately schematic, but, for all their schematicity, they do not cease to be modes of being.

It's just that, when images speak, the contribution from the embedding environment is suspended, bracketed away.[115] That suspension, in fact, is the only way in which those images can eventually become visible. But it is a suspension only in the sense in which a schema suspends the referential powers of its instances. As Ricœur tells us, "treated as a schema, the image presents a verbal dimension, [...] the gathering point [...] of emerging meanings."[116] This is the sense in which metaphor, *qua* seen image, is but a "redefining of what is already defined, a reinterpretation of what is already interpreted."[117]

The reflective ascent that metaphor forces on us, then, is not, *contra* Ricœur, a way of "locking language up inside itself."[118] Rather, it is a way of opening up a language to the chain of languages of which it is part by temporarily suspending the contribution *from* the environment (rather than the referential connections *to* it). The temporary suspension of that external contribution is achieved by retreating to the logical fragment of the language, a fragment that is insensitive to any external contribution, a fragment where syntax has become abstractly bare, merely mapping ranges of unactualised meaning-possibilities. From that retreat, one can safely evaluate and indeed appreciate the competing semantic categories that determine the individual L-discourses that form the chain.

There is then a further sense in which syntax is autonomous.[119] The syntax that generates reflective discourse is autonomous with respect to the syntax that generates fully engaged discourse. In this reflective role, language, thus generated, is none other than what Ricœur so happily called "*langage en fête*,"[120] a language that, unlike Wittgenstein's, is not on holiday from its daily duties and thereby blunted in its communicative powers.[121] On the contrary, it is a maximally communicative language, a language in celebration, in self-celebration, in fact.[122] And it is the very disengagement from a specific being-determining function that grants it the transversal sight able to survey the entire space of meaningfulness.[123]

Accordingly, it is syntax in its trans-semantic role that rubs language down to its minimal, normatively-constrained logical core, that lets us hear "the primitive rumbles of logic," as Mallarmé so aptly put it. And it is "the distant stammering" of the bare, abandoned words, in their trans-referential state of suspension, of words that "light each other up all by themselves," that constitutes the genuine autonomous state of syntax.[124]

This "irreducible excess of syntax,"[125] however, is not an excess of abstraction, of extremal non-referentiality, as Chomsky would have it. It is, rather, a genuinely pre- and para-semantic excess, it is an excess of *in nuce* signification. The barer the syntax, the more exuberant the semantic possibilities that it raises to salience, that is.

All that needs saying to resolve the antinomy of metaphor, then, is that language-*qua*-bare-syntax discloses conceptual space while remaining autonomous with respect to conceptual structure because what syntax maps are the possibilities determined by indefinitely many conceptual structures, because syntax is the archive of meaning that stands before the (deferential) archivist.[126] And the unrehearsed steps that we, *qua* archivists of meaning, take into the yet-to-be-normalised space of meaningfulness are, one and all, taken in the reflective space between nonsense and metaphor where unseen images speak, a space that has been opened up for us by Ricœur, and by no other thinker.[127]

1 Paul Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse and Action" (1976), in Paul Ricœur, *From Discourse to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (London: Continuum, 2008), 167.

2 Throughout, I assume, with Kant, that it is concepts that make seeing-as possible. I remain neutral, however, as to whether the conceptual and the propositional are co-extensional notions. For a recent, Heidegger-related claim that they are not, see Sacha Golob, *Heidegger on Concepts, Freedom and Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

3 Paul Ricœur, "Image and Language in Psychoanalysis," in Paul Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, vol. 1 of *Writings and Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 118.

4 See e.g. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations. Vol. 2*, (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 200), 70; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1961), § 4.024, § 4.03; Gottlob Frege, *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 79; "Logic in Mathematics," in *Posthumous Writings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 210, 225; Bertrand Russell "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Robert C. Marsh (London: Routledge, 1956), 193; Noam Chomsky, *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory* (New York and London: Springer/Plenum Press, 1975), 131; *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965), 6, 161-162; *Cartesian Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 59; Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning" (1967), in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); James Pustejovsky, *The Generative Lexicon* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 1; Zoltan Gendler Szabó, *Problems of Compositionality* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 80; James McGilvray, "Chomsky on the Creative Aspects of Language use and Its Implications for Lexical Semantics Studies," in *The Language of Word Meaning*, eds. Pierret Bouillon and Federica Busa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6; Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig, *Meaning, Truth, Language and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7; Paul Pietroski, *Events and Semantic Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13-14; Andrea Moro, *The Boundaries of Babel* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 40; Norbert Hornstein, *A Theory of Syntax. Minimal Operations and Universal Grammar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1. For a lonely voice of dissent, see Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), ch. 9; See Crispin Wright, "Understanding Novel Utterances," *The Times Literary Supplement* (1985): 46 for a response.

5 As Gareth Evans points out, "Semantic Theory and Tacit Knowledge," in *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 326-327, the finite/infinite contrast is a red herring. The creativity phenomenon arises even with a finite, and highly restricted, range of expressions. The mystery is how we understand any sentence we have never heard before, no matter how small the language.

6 Chomsky, *Linguistic Theory*, 6, 293; *Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 88. See also *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1964), 7-8; *Cartesian Linguistics*, 59-62; "A Note on the Creative Aspect of Language Use," *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 118; "Bare Phrase Structure," in *Government Binding Theory and the Minimalist Program*, ed. Gert Webelhuth (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 386.

[7] See Jerrold Katz and Jerry Fodor, "The Structure of a Semantic Theory," Language 39 (1963), § 2; Wilfrid Hodges, "Compositionality is Not the Problem," *Logic and Logical Philosophy* 6 (1998), 16; "A Context Principle," in *Intensionality*, ed. Reinhard Kahle (Wellesley, MA: Association for Symbolic Logic, 2005), 42-43; Dag Westerståhl, "On the Compositional Extension Problem," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 33.

[8] He wasn't the first, of course. See Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, §§ 12-13, and Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. Alfred Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 67-68. For an insightful discussion of nonsense, see Cora Diamond, "What Nonsense Might Be," in *The Realistic Spirit* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). A recent book-length treatment is Ofra Magidor, *Category Mistakes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[9] Throughout, I shall assume, as Chomsky does, that syntax and semantics are features of our biological make-up. Our formal efforts are intended to model those psychological features.

[10] Chomsky, *Linguistic Theory*, 145-146; *Syntactic Structures* (Paris: Mouton de Gruyter, 1957), 15; *Current Issues*, 7, fn. 2; *Aspects*, 149. CS was deployed for two purposes: as a counterexample to statistical approaches to grammaticality (CS, at that time, was as statistically improbable as the syntactically deviant 'furiously sleep ideas green colourless'); and as a way of arguing for the autonomy of syntax thesis (see *Syntactic Structures*, 17).

[11] Chomsky, *Current Issues*, 7-8, my emphasis. Characteristically, elsewhere Chomsky somewhat qualifies the claim: "it should not be taken for granted, necessarily, that syntactic and semantic considerations can be sharply distinguished," *Aspects*, 77. For all that, Chomsky never reneged the principle that "only a purely formal basis can provide a firm and productive foundation for the construction of grammatical theory" and that "only imperfect correspondences hold between formal and semantic features in language," *Syntactic Structures*, 100-101. A further concern of Chomsky's, *Current Issues*, 7; *Aspects*, 76, 149, is that while we may identify robust linguistic universals at the level of syntax, the prospects for isolating semantic universals are instead dim.

[12] There was a flurry of early responses to CS where objectors rushed to provide contexts that would make CS interpretable. This badly misses Chomsky's point, which was that we can draw a distinction between sentences that impose an interpretation on us and those that require that we impose one on them instead. See *Current Issues*, 7; *Aspects*, 76, 149.

[13] *Linguistic Theory*, 145, my emphases. Chomsky grants that grammaticalness is a matter of degree, as reflected in our judgements. See *Linguistic Theory*, 131; *Syntactic Structures*, 35-36, fn. 2; *Aspects*, 77-78; "Replies," in *Chomsky and His Critics*, eds. Louise Antony and Norbert Hornstein (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 288.

[14] Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*, reprinted as *On Language* (New York and London: The New Press, 1975), 43.

[15] Chomsky, *Linguistic Theory*, 147. See Juan Uriagereka, *Syntactic Anchors. On Semantic Structuring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), § 2.4, for a recent discussion. Chomsky makes clear that the core of the autonomy thesis is that "the mechanisms of syntax [...] function independently of the other components of the grammar, which are interpretive components," *Language and Responsibility* (New York: The New Press, 1979), 138-145. I largely accept this claim. My gripe is with Chomsky's further claim that it is syntax that fixes subcategorization principles. In § 5, I return to Chomsky's other, non-equivalent statement of the autonomy thesis that "the language faculty constructs an abstract formal skeleton invested with meaning by interpretive rules," *Reflections*, 55.

[16] Chomsky, *Linguistic Theory*, ch. V.

[17] Chomsky, *Aspects*, 78, 120, 149.

[18] Chomsky, *Aspects*, 78; *Syntactic Structures*, 15. In *Language and Problems of Knowledge. The Managua Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 24-26, however, Chomsky criticises uses of analogy in linguistic theory.

[19] Chomsky, *Linguistic Theory*, 146.

[20] Chomsky oscillates between saying that concepts are "available before experience with language," *Language and Problems*, 28, and that concepts "change constantly as the theoretical matrix change," *Language and Responsibility*, 171. In general, however, Chomsky thinks that "variability of semantic fields" (i.e. of conceptual structure) belongs to matters that are "computationally irrelevant," "Bare Phrase Structure," 389.

[21] According to the OED, one of the earliest such uses is due to Burke in 1796 but the 'revolutionary ideas' pairing is first due to G.B. Shaw in 1919. Tracing earliest occurrences of a particular usage is a dangerous game to play, but all I need is the undoubted gap between the astronomical use and its (mis-)application to abstract ideas (and similarly for 'appear'). For early examples of the "abstract" use of 'revolutionary', see Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[22] The point generalises to other cases discussed by Chomsky such as 'Sincerity admires John' and 'Golf plays John', *Aspects*, 149. Both sentences can easily be given not just interpretations (Chomsky countenanced that circumstance) but can also be taken to be part of "normal" English given enough currency within a specific conceptual scheme. The Medieval anthropomorphisation of virtues made Sincerity a perfectly suitable entity to figure as the subject of a verb such as 'admire'; an admiring "new-age" coach may well confide to a friend that John is not just very good at golf, he's become so good that golf plays John and not vice-versa. These cases seem to me perfectly good, and open to immediate acceptance by speakers familiar with their changed grammatical status. In this respect, the discussion of the history of the 'seeing-is-knowing' metaphor in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 85, is illuminating.

[23] Chomsky, *Current Issues*, 112.

[24] This Hume-inspired claim is in *Language and Problems*, 28, 32, 34. In *Aspects*, 160, *Current Issues*, 60, fn. 1, *Language and Mind*, 106-110, Chomsky states that we need "language-independent constraints on semantic features" drawn from the "system of possible concepts." In *Cartesian Linguistics*, 76, he takes the "limitless possibilities of thought and imagination" to be reflected "in the creative aspects of language use." This suggests a certain indecision regarding the question at the centre of this paper. Is our conceptual system fixed by the hand of nature or limitless, according to Chomsky? I'm not sure there's a stable answer to be evinced from his work.

[25] Chomsky, *Language and Problems*, 31.

[26] Chomsky, *Language and Problems*, 32.

[27] Juan Uriagereka, *Derivations. Exploring the Dynamics of Syntax* (London: Routledge, 2002); Chomsky, Language and Mind, 15.

[28] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press, 1976), 2.

[29] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 27. By contrast, Chomsky tells us that "grammars have [...] real existence, [...] there is something in your brain that corresponds to the grammar [...] there is nothing in the real world corresponding to language [*qua* Ricœurian L-discourse]," *The Generative Enterprise* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1982), 107.

[30] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87-88.

[31] Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 143; *Interpretation Theory*, 36-37, 60, 68, 87-88; "Existence and Hermeneutics," in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (London: Continuum, 1989), 11; "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," in *Conflict of Interpretations*, 258; "Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds," in Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur. The Owl of Minerva* (New York: Fordham Press, 2004), 124-125. Note that L-discourse is a collection of texts, where the notion of text also includes speech acts of various kinds. To be master of a language is to be able to understand its texts.

[32] Ricœur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics*, vol. 2 of *Writing and Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 64.

[33] Chomsky does not agree that communication is the basic function of language, nor that language has any central function at all. See "Explaining Language Use," *Philosophical Topics* 20 (1992): 215; *Rules and Representations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 230. He would thus not accept the claim in the text either. Moreover, it seems likely that Chomsky would find Ricœur's externalist notion of L-discourse "highly problematic and unintelligible." The fact remains that his own strictly internalist account of language makes no room for a proper account of linguistic creativity and language change.

[34] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), § 234.

[35] The terminology comes from Marcus Hester. See Ricœur, "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality," *Man and World* 12 (1979): 133; "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1979), 150; *The Rule of Metaphor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1977), 250. The Bachelard-inspired notion of spoken image has received relatively little critical attention (an exception is George Taylor, "The Phenomenological Contributions of Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination," *Social Imaginaries* 1 (2015)). It is however an absolutely central and recurring feature of Ricœur's conception of language. See e.g. "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," in *Philosophical Anthropology*, vol. 3 of *Writing and Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 110; *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008), 15-16; *Rule of Metaphor*, 235; "Imagination in Discourse," 167, 170; "Image and Language," 108; "Function of Fiction," 129, 132, 134.

[36] "Function of Fiction," 127.

[37] Ricœur, "The Creativity of Language," in Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur*, 134.

[38] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 117. A spoken image is thus a not-yet successful speech-act, an act without uptake, an act that, like the text, "interprets before having been interpreted," Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred. Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 161. A seeing-as is instead a full-blooded act. See *Rule of Metaphor*, 252. Proper sayings (proper conveyances of seeing-as modes), inasmuch as they are acts, in turn structure and connect our actions. See *History and Truth* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 204. Rather curiously, in *Freud*, 27, Ricœur seems to take the said as prior to the spoken (the contrast is that between *parler* and *dire*). I think it's more accurate to instead take an act of saying to be an act in which a propositional content has been actually passed on from speaker to hearer. By contrast, I can speak without saying anything (without any transfer of information). Any time I say something, however, I may properly be said to have spoken.

[39] If you think the conceptual and the propositional are not co-extensive, you may deny that seeing-as requires grasp of a proposition. In that case, uptake will only require grasp of a concept.

[40] In "Function of Fiction," 127, Ricœur is more cautious: "The "productive" aspects of imagination [...] appear to be linked to some "productive" aspects of language." It seems to me, however, that Ricœur has established more than a mere link. I would therefore insist on a bold identity claim: imaginative productivity just is linguistic productivity. For a contrary reading, see Saulius Geniusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination," *Humanities Studies* 38 (2015), 232-235. Ricœur is however unequivocal: "we see images *only insofar as* we first hear them," "Imagination in Discourse," 170, my emphasis. Epistemologically, then, linguistic imagination necessarily precedes visual imagination. Metaphysically speaking, they are instead on a par.

[41] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 254.

[42] Ricœur, "Creativity in Language. Word, Polysemy, Metaphor," *Philosophy Today* 17 (1973), 107-108.

[43] I take it that Heidegger's remark, in *On the Way to Language* (New York: HarperOne, 1971), 59, that the essence of language is revealed when it fails us (when words fail us), and Barthes's technical notion of stammering, in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 78, aim to capture, *mutatis mutandis*, the same phenomenon I'm focusing on in this paper, the moment when language stops us, and itself, in our tracks.

[44] Here I am taking the notion of language change rather strictly. The notion can either be taken to refer to changes within a language or to changes that give rise to new languages. I read it in the latter way. For some contrasting approaches on this issue, see Ian Roberts and Anna Roussou, *Syntactic Change. A Minimalist Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Laurel Brinton and Elizabeth Traugott, *Lexicalization and Language Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Traugott and Richard Dasher *Regularity in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Regine Eckardt, *Meaning Change in Grammaticalization. An Enquiry into Semantic Reanalysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[45] Thus, if we identified language with L-system, we would in fact destroy what is essential to language, since the event-like, agent-perspective-generating constitutive features of language do not survive their presumed hypostatisation into a formal object that abstracts away from precisely those features. See Ricœur, "Structure, Word, Event," in *Conflict of Interpretations*, 82-83.

[46] Speakers who do not share the same mode of being, speakers who do not speak the same language, will communicate with each other as long as the two languages have sufficient overlap.

[47] Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse," 121.

[48] The announced/announcer duality explains the spoken/speaking duality with respect to images.

[49] Ricœur, "Creativity in Language," 107.

[50] Ricœur, "Creativity in Language," 111.

[51] Ricœur, "Hermeneutical Function," 137.

[52] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 69.

[53] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 52; "Creativity in Language," 109; "Hermeneutical Function," 139.

[54] Ricœur, "Creativity in Language," 107-109.

[55] Ricœur, "Hermeneutical Function," 139.

[56] Ricœur, "Hermeneutical Function," 143.

[57] Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[58] Ricœur, "Narrative: Its Place in Psychoanalysis," in *On Psychoanalysis*, 209. The claim is of course already in Heidegger, e.g. *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010). But the linguistic, text-based aspects of this claim are not as salient in Heidegger as they are in Ricœur. On this point, see Ricœur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 43.

[59] In at least two senses of 'self'!

[60] "Creativity in Language," 107; *Interpretation Theory*, 36.

[61] Note that, as an anonymous referee for this journal pointed out, Ricœur's notion of compositionality is holistic, since for him the meaning of a sentence (and therefore of a text) is determined by factors other than its immediate constituent meanings. See for example Ricœur, "Religious Language," 38: "a text is always something more than the summation of its partial meanings." The main point I'm making still holds, however. Syntax never outruns interpretation.

[62] On the link-status of metaphor, the discussion in Derrida, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other. Volume I* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 65, is quite relevant. For his part, Ricœur is clearly committed to the unbound nature of the expansion: "Discourse is this power of indefinitely extending the battlefront of the expressed at the expense of the unexpressed," "Creativity in Language," 100; "A significant trait of living language [...] is the power always to push the frontier or non-sense further back. [...] the power to create new contextual meanings seems to be truly limitless," *Rule of Metaphor*, 111.

[63] Ricœur, "Hermeneutical Function," 141.

[64] Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse," 170.

[65] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 64, 67.

[66] By contrast, from an ontological point of view, speaking images are indistinguishable from metaphors. We could also say that with spoken images there is a thought that has been interiorised but not yet recognised as the thought it is. To adapt Ricœur, "Metaphorical Process," 156, it has merely been *felt*. In this regard, speaking images precede the three steps in the philosophy of imagination discussed in Ricœur, "Metaphorical Process," 147. They are, in fact, the prelude to imagination.

[67] Ricœur, "Function of Fiction," 131, briefly discusses the antinomy and labels it as such. He doesn't press the point as far as he should have, though.

[68] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 52, 63-64.

[69] Note that the speaking image 'time is a beggar' just is the minimal proposition homophonically expressed by the sentence. The corresponding live metaphor provides a way to *really* see time as a beggar. Both the speaking image and the live metaphor express a multitude of propositions, exactly as per e.g. the speech-act pluralism in Herman Cappelen and Ernest Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). A conventionalised metaphor has selected one particular proposition as its settled meaning. A dead metaphor has forgotten that it ever was an image, either spoken or seen.

[70] Ricœur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in *From Text to Action*, 110.

[71] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 51. Ricœur, "Function of Fiction," 131, seems to embrace the "paradoxical character" of metaphor, claiming that the "previous incompatibility" survives "through the new compatibility," and that this survival gives rise to a "new sort of tension." In my view, talk of survival is a mistake.

[72] Ricœur, "Task of Hermeneutics," 110.

[73] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 68.

[74] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 56.

[75] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 57.

[76] Ricœur, "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," in *On Psychoanalysis*, 21.

[77] As Ricœur puts it, metaphor "*abolishes* the logical distance between *previously* remote semantic fields," "Function of Fiction," 130, my emphases. As soon as it does so, however, it also ceases to be live. Actually, here Ricœur misspeaks, because if metaphor abolished that distance, then the semantic clash wouldn't arise.

[78] Ricœur, "Creativity in Language," 108.

[79] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 254.

[80] Ricœur, "Central Problem," 64. In short, the antinomy arises because of "the conflict between "proximity" and "distance" ," Ricœur, "Function of Fiction," 131.

[81] In saying this, I'm denying that we can make proper sense of the idea that "[r]estructuring [...] does not eliminate the previous categorization, but rather holds it in tension with a new categorization" suggested in Leonard Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance. The Difference Between the Thought of Ricœur and Derrida* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 67. This idea requires that, *per impossibile*, we grasp and implement in one and the same act the duck/rabbit *Gestalt*-switch between the two contradictory categorization principles.

[82] I borrow the very apt 'borrowed home' label from Du Marsais via Derrida, *Retrait*, 61, and the anachrony label from Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 94. ÀĄ

[83] Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of Meaning," in *Mathematics, Matter and Method. Philosophical Papers, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 227-228.

[84] Deferance is a *future perfect* notion of the sort discussed in Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Psyche. Vol. II* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 150, and in Alain Badiou's notion of the event, *Being and Event* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

[85] I formulated this notion before coming across the insightful discussion in Thomas Baldwin, "Death and Meaning—Some Questions for Derrida," in *Arguing with Derrida*, ed. Simon Glendinning (Oxford:

Blackwell, 2001), where the notion of deferance is briefly proposed in exactly the terms I'd developed independently.

[86] For simplicity's sake, I'm here assuming that meaning always expands and never contracts, that successive languages in the chain enlarge, rather than restrict, the semantic fields.

[87] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 345.

[88] Derrida, *Retrait*, 75. I'm also adapting suggestions from Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Dissemination* (London: Continuum, 1981), 352, and "Semiology and Grammatology," in *Positions* (London: Continuum, 1981), 24. Lawlor, *Imagination and Chance*, 16, glosses the close of *Speech and Phenomena* as defending the idea that in every use of language one in fact produces a new language while still being able to understand the previous one.

[89] In this regard, Derrida, "Form and Meaning. A Note on the Phenomenology of Language," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), is highly relevant.

[90] Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 50.

[91] Here one might again appeal to Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit situation and take the two incompatible semantic categories as superimposed. After all, Ricœur himself, "Function of Fiction," 131, spoke of metaphor as "a pertinence within impertinence." Two remarks: it is impossible to grasp both figures at once; secondly, as reported in Taylor, "Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination," *Journal of French Philosophy* 16 (2006), 95-96, Ricœur discussed the situation in his unpublished *Lectures on Imagination* and dismissed it as a case of purely reproductive, rather than productive imagination.

[92] Friedrich Waismann, "Verifiability," in *Logic and Language*, ed. Anthony Flew (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951), 119-123.

[93] Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume III* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 220, insists that the tension is constitutive of these phenomena. I agree. But the difficulty is that the relata to which the tension applies cannot come into being within the framework that Ricœur has sketched. I'm trying to set this right in the next section

[94] Ricœur himself is very clear on this: "the decisive problem [...] is the transition from literal incongruence to metaphorical congruence between two semantic fields," "Metaphorical Process," 147. Dabney Townsend, "Metaphor, Hermeneutics, and Situations," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, ed. Lewis Hahn (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1995), 197, complains that Ricœur does not specify the mechanisms whereby metaphor achieves its semantic aims. My concern is instead whether, given Ricœur's account, metaphor can even make a start on its task of recalibrating the semantic fields of a given language.

[95] We could insist that all modes of being are indeterminate, fluid, intrinsically dynamic. The problem, as I stress in the text, is that metaphor requires fixity of categories (and thereby of modes of being) in

order to create the semantic shock. I'm grateful to Todd Mei for urging me to address this objection to my account.

[96] Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism," in *Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Shocken Books, 1978), 179.

[97] Ricœur, "Tasks of Hermeneutics," 64. Here and elsewhere (e.g. "Religious Language," 43), Ricœur explicitly traces this conception of projection back to Heidegger. For his part, e.g. "Letter on "Humanism" ," in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 269, Heidegger is quite clear that language provides our ἦθος, our abode, the constituting space of our identity.

[98] I borrow the ruins metaphor from Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 233; "Imagination in Discourse," 168; "Metaphorical Process," 153; "Function of Fiction," 130; "On Interpretation," in *From Text to Action*, 9.

[99] Ricœur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in *From Text to Action*, 33, my emphasis.

[100] Ricœur, "Task of Hermeneutics," 111; *Interpretation Theory*, 51.

[101] In *Time and Narrative III*, 220, Ricœur examines a similar dilemma at the heart of Gadamer's hermeneutics, that of having to choose between "uncrossable distance or annulled distance." If I'm right, the dilemma Ricœur confronts is one whereby it doesn't even make sense to speak of distance because we cannot determine what the relata of that relation are.

[102] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 200.

[103] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 232.

[104] Derrida, "Semiology," 24.

[105] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 359.

[106] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 354.

[107] Ricœur, "Task of Hermeneutics," 109.

[108] Fully in line with the remark in Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 359, that language "possesses the *reflective* capacity to place itself at a distance and to consider itself." In this section, I try to spell out exactly what that capacity consists in.

[109] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 359.

[110] To adapt Derrida, *Retrait*, 55, we could say that metaphor is not a transfer from the sensible to the intelligible but from one form of intelligibility to another.

[111] Chomsky, *Reflections*, 43.

[112] In this last respect, Chomsky's autonomy thesis hadn't gone far enough. To be clear about this: Chomsky, *Reflections*, 138-139, is right to say that we could not learn "disembodied meaning[s]," meanings not embedded in any language. But that syntax is the home of meaning, of productively

conceived spoken images does not however entail that syntactic form is "established on [semantically] independent grounds" or that "the elements of syntax are not established on a semantics basis." It is precisely the highly general representational richness of syntax that makes it semantically grounded. Chomsky, I think, confuses ontological and epistemological issues here. Syntax is epistemically prior, but ontologically speaking it already contains all semantic interpretations of its strings. And it is those interpretations that give syntax its specific structure. Clearly, this way of putting things neatly mirrors Ricœur's claim that L-discourse has priority over L-system.

[113] Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse," 170.

[114] This, I think, is the sense in which Ricœur, "Metaphorical Process," 153-154, speaks of referential suspension in metaphor.

[115] That is exactly the sense in which "icon is to language what schema is to concept," Ricœur, "Function of Fiction," 132. And this is also the sense in which the Kantian streak in Ricœur comes to the surface here: in spoken images, as in reflective judgement, it is epistemically indeterminate which concept is being deployed.

[116] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 235.

[117] Ricœur, "Creativity of Language," 133.

[118] Ricœur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 360.

[119] Note that the sense of syntax involved here goes even wider than Chomsky's already comprehensive sense, since Ricoeurian syntax is also a text-generating device.

[120] Ricœur, "Structure, Word," 93.

[121] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), § 38, § 194.

[122] As Ricœur, "Metaphorical Process," 153, makes clear, by celebrating itself, language celebrates the world and, most importantly, the subject, the discerner of possibilities.Ā

[123] Is there a "revenge" paradox lurking in the vicinity? Isn't the metaphorical mode of being a mode of being nevertheless and thus in tension with the non-specificity of metaphor? I don't think so, because we are using the minimal, invariant core of language as a mirror through which to contemplate the metaphorical mode. That core, precisely because of its disconnection from a specific embedment, is no more than a supra-mode of being. Its ontological clutch is not fully engaged, that is.

[124] Stephan Mallarmé, "The Mystery of Letters" from *Divagations*. See Derrida, "The Double Session," in *Dissemination*, 194, for a brilliant discussion. Of note here is Mallarmé's insistence that his work was that of a scrupulous "syntaxer," unravelling content that was already there, in the very shape and placement of his sentences.

[125] Derrida, "Double Session," 230.

[126] In all senses of 'before'.

[127] In his eulogy of Artaud, Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), got very close but not, I think, as close as Ricœur did to the heart of the matter. Somehow, the best way for me to make sense of the proper role of metaphor and of speaking images is to recall something that Wayne Shorter once said: "The six years I was with Miles [Davis], we never had a rehearsal. How do you rehearse the unknown?." Quite.