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# Metafore, approcci teorici ed epistemologici

prima parte



# Metaphors and Styles of Thought

## Beyond “Semi-Cognitive” Sciences (and the “Dismal Theory” of Lakoff and Johnson)

Giovanni Bottioli

The mechanism of thought on which metaphors hinge has not been adequately elucidated to date, nor can it be unless metaphors are analysed on the basis of the style of thought which differentiates them, however akin they may be. This is the thesis I will seek to maintain.

Consequently, ‘styles of thought’ is the strategically decisive concept. To understand it, we need to relinquish our hold on the option between style as an individual expression and style as an ensemble of features characterising a current, an era etc. Declaring that ‘there is no thought without style’ implies focusing on a question which has been significantly explored and interpreted by continental European philosophers in the last two centuries. Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger have rejected the dogma of what I will name *zero-stylism*, that is the conviction according to which there exists only one logically founded and correct mode of thinking. These thinkers each propose varying yet supportive perspectives: intellect (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*) for Hegel, Socratic and tragic knowledge for Nietzsche, and calculating and meditating thought for Heidegger.

It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish two styles, or rather two families, of thought. The *separative* style employs terms with rigid or semi-rigid borders, whose identity is autonomous; while the *conjunctive* style defines identity only in relations of overcoming, which may be reciprocal. Consider, for example, the difference between ‘this bottle and this glass’ and ‘Tristan and Isolde’: two radically different uses and meanings of ‘and’ from a logical point of view. In the first case, there is no overcoming; on the contrary, in every version of the myth of Tristan and Isolde, love creates an unbreakable bond, and makes it impossible for one to survive the loss of the beloved.

Are metaphors then forms of conjunctive thought? It certainly seems to be so: hence, the peculiarity of their logical functioning needs to be acknowledged and evaluated. Only then can we grasp the shortcoming of cognitivist theories; how can they claim to describe the true functioning of metaphors while relying on a separative style?

As we shall see, the cognitivists favour the things having distinct boundaries and entrust a servile role to the metaphor, in other words that of introducing clear and sturdy frontiers where they are missing. This thesis is refuted by literature as it creates metaphors above all to dissolve rigid boundaries that already exist.

At this point, we need to take another decisive step forward, for we can no longer speak of metaphors in general terms, without distinguishing the following two possibilities:

- a. rigidly articulated *stereotyped metaphors* ('love is a journey', etc) which aim at actuality with a familiarising purpose;
- b. semantically dense and *estranging metaphors* that aim towards a possibility (and accommodate interpretation).

This is the difference between metaphors by which *we live a rigidified life* and metaphors by which *we live a fluid life*. This difference stems from and validates the conflict between styles of thought. Simultaneously, it also proves that cognitive sciences should be called 'semi-cognitive' in view of the partiality inherent in their style of logic.

## 1. From "Zero-stylism" to Styles of Thought: A Brief Introduction

Since metaphor is a mechanism of thought, the question "what does thinking mean?" should be taken into consideration for theory of tropes, too. Unless we address this question, any definition of metaphor (and other fundamental semantic mechanisms) can be neither precise nor adequate. This is the thesis I will seek to prove, having to display and discuss it in a rather schematic manner for the obvious shortage of time.

Yet, is it necessary to raise such a question? Not everyone thinks so; as a matter of fact, only few philosophers of the so-called continental-European philosophy – such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger – have deemed it unavoidable. One could also object saying that analytical philosophy and cognitive sciences have been inquiring the process of thought for decades,

which can hardly be denied. How does then my inquiry differ, and what is the particular difference in various conceptions of philosophy where, as known, dialogue all too often proves impossible?

The difference consists in holding or refuting a superstition, an established dogma impossible to attack because of the definite article employed in the expressions “the thought” and “the language”. Common sense sides with the definite article: whoever bears no doubt as regards its legitimacy, be it a philosopher or a linguist, will inadvertently be unable to call into question the dogma that I would name “mono-stylism”, or rather “zero-stylism”, in other words the conviction which states there is one mode of thinking alone. This has evidently not thwarted the progress of formal logic and science concerning everyday language, with all its ambiguities and vague features, and everyday thought, so prone to making mistakes. “Zero-stylism”, however, means a different thing, that is “thought without style”. This implies the existence of varying logic, such as postclassical logic, modal logic, para-consistent logic etc; but such differences do not impair the unity of thought, its “stylistic” identity. Therefore, thought can be manifold without becoming pluri-stylistic.

In what sense am I using style? Certainly, in a sense that differs from its common usage and the sense Gottlob Frege intended when he remarked “elegance we can leave to tailors and cobblers”. Once again, we need to stir up and reject the certainties embedded in common sense, certainties unfortunately shared by those who believe that there is one possible logic only. For reasons which I will suggest presently, we need to acknowledge and state an unbreakable bond between style and thought – even if, as noted above, we still live in superstitious times, we are still superstitious, and we still believe in the effect produced by the unary sense of the definite article.

I may seem to be heading in a nebulous direction with its target lost at a remote distance, had the path not been trodden partially by some significant thinkers. To the ones mentioned earlier we could add other names (for example, Freud and Bakhtin)<sup>1</sup>. The thesis to be developed is the following: “There is no thought without style”. The concept that calls for urgent precision is “styles of thought”.

To make some headway in this direction, we also need to abandon almost entirely all that resides in the area of stylistics (hence Spitzer, Auerbach etc), and the alternative between style as an individual expression

1. I will return to Freud a little later. As far as Bakhtin is concerned, it is important to remember the fundamental distinction between characters that coincide with themselves (those of Racine) and characters that do not (that is to say, “overcoming” in my terminology: those of Dostoevsky). So, for Bakhtin, there are two modes of identity and to understand them different logical styles are required.

and style as an ensemble of features that characterise a literary current, an author and the like. These are notions that denote a mistakenly impoverished idea of language vis-à-vis mental processes. Leaving aside few exceptions such as Pascal (*esprit de géométrie, esprit de finesse*), we can state that the difference between styles of thought is a thesis clearly articulated in German idealism solely. This is how Hegel (1830, parag. 79-81) states the difference between intellect (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*): intellect produces and employs rigid resolutions, that is concepts that correspond with the requisite Frege (1891, p. 33) was to define as concepts in need of “sharp delimitations”. In my view, it would not be far-fetched to conclude that Hegel is here describing a “mode of functioning” of the intellect, I would call a “separative” or disjunctive logic. Such designations should not lead to equivocation: the logic of “good divisions” no doubt offers possible links, but they give rise to relations which fail to impair the identity of a term. They allow no overcoming, on the contrary impede it. According to separative logic style, identity is the relation an entity can have with itself alone.

I will try to clarify this fundamental point by using two examples, in which the conjunction “and” assumes two totally different meanings from the point of view of logic: what difference is there between the conjunction “and” in “this bottle and this glass” and the one in “Tristan and Isolde”? In the first case, the conjunction indicates a link (presumably of proximity in space) between two objects, each of which is identical to itself: a bottle is a bottle and a glass is a glass. In the second case, the conjunction indicates a link which can be expressed in various ways, but which Freud defined best of all by using the concept of “identification”. Love is not only the investment of libidinal energy in an object (in common terms, the desire to have), but also “identification” with the beloved (in common terms, the desire to be)<sup>2</sup>.

In its different forms, identification is a process of overcoming, which is not necessarily reciprocal. One can identify with a “model” (as Don Quixote does with Amadís de Gaula) or with an “object” (as Werther with Charlotte). Freud points to the greatest evidence of identification, with regard to love relationships, in unrequited /unhappy love, driven to that extreme and pathological condition of melancholy. It is the identification with the beloved that makes the wounds of the melancholic incurable: by losing that person, he or she has lost a part of

2. See Freud (1921), especially Chapter 8, *Being in Love and Hypnosis*.



him or herself. From this ensues the terrifying void and the suffering of the melancholic<sup>3</sup>.

In the case of requited love, the identification is reciprocal – and absolute: so complete, in fact, that it leads to the death of the person who has lost his or her beloved. In the various versions of the myth of Tristan and Isolde, as in other stories about absolute love, the passion appears to be an unbreakable bond, and as such it is “conjunctive”: the separative barrier has been abolished and the lovers do nothing but repeat it: “Ne vus sanz mei, ne jeo sanz vus”<sup>4</sup>. Yet – be careful – this bond is not simply an interdependence: in fact, non-overcoming interdependences exist<sup>5</sup>. In this case, instead, the (reciprocal) limit-surpassing process is such as to justify the assertion “Tristan and Isolde are the same person”.

In what sense though? Once again, we should avoid any misunderstandings that could arise from the extremely concise nature of this statement. Tristan and Isolde obviously remain *numerically* distinct, as Don Quixote remains numerically distinct from Amadís de Gaula: but the process of identification (with a model as in the case of the Spanish hidalgo, with an object as in the case of the two famous lovers) has radically transformed their being, and determines their emotions, their behaviour and their destinies<sup>6</sup>.

From a logical (as well as ontological) point of view, identification is a conjunctive relation. Without an adequate theory of relationships, identification remains an incomprehensible process – and, in fact, it is ignored by the separative philosophies (which include the so-called “analytic philosophy”)<sup>7</sup>.

3. To become fully acquainted with Freud’s understanding, in its scope and complexity, it is essential to read *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917).

4. “without me you cannot survive, nor I without you” (Marie de France, *Chevrefoil*, in *Lais* [1160-1175]).

5. For example, the relationship between master and servant. The master does not exist without the servant, nor the servant without the master. However, this does not imply an overcoming (an identification): it does certainly remain a possibility though. One example is given in the film by Tarantino, *Django unchained* (2012) (the black servant played by Samuel Jackson).

6. In the narrow outlook of the theories of identity, based on separative logic, philosophers limit themselves to this distinction: “There are two kinds of sameness, or identity. I and my Replica are *qualitatively* identical, or exactly alike. But we may not be *numerically* identical, or one and the same person. Similarly, two white billiard balls are not numerically but may be qualitatively identical. If I paint one of these balls red, it will cease to be qualitatively identical with itself as it was. But the red ball that I later see and the white ball that I have painted red are numerically identical. They are one and the same ball” (Parfit 1984, p. 201).

7. Without an adequate theory of relationships, the textual analysis becomes powerless when dealing with texts in which the “desire to be” dominates. However, it should be observed that the desire to be must not be simplistically reduced to the “mimetic desire” as occurs in Girard’s conception. In any case,