

## Metaphor in Vico and Coseriu

### Abstract

In strict quantitative terms, metaphor does not occupy a privileged place in Coseriu's work, being effectively addressed in a single study, "La Creación metafórica en el lenguaje" – "Metaphorical Creation in Language" (1956). However, the way he outlines it reveals a highly complex theoretical model that betrays a deep understanding of the concept. The current research raises the question about the origins of Coseriu's ideas on metaphor. In his 1956 article, Coseriu makes explicit reference to Cassirer, but the way he conceives metaphor presents a series of striking similarities with the model outlined, a few centuries earlier, by Vico, in several works: *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione – On the Study Methods of Our Time* (1709), *De antiquissima italorum sapientia – On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* (1710), "Risposte" – "Responses" (1711–1712), and *Scienza Nuova – New Science* (1744). Although Coseriu does not mention Vico in his 1956 article, he often recognises him among the leading voices that inspired his views on language. There are references to Vico in many works, including *Forma y sustancia en los sonidos del lenguaje – Form and Substance in the Sounds of Language* (1954), *Sincronía, diacronía e historia – Synchrony, Diachrony, and History* (1958), "Sprache und Dichtung" – "Language and Poetry" (1963–1964), *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie – History of the Philosophy of Language* (1969/1972), "Von den *universali fantastici*" – *On the universali fantastici* (1995), and the two interviews conducted by Saramandu (1996) and Kabatek/Murguía (1997), respectively. There is significant work on metaphor in Vico, beginning with Di Cesare's 1986 trailblazing article and continuing with contributions by other well-read scholars (such as Danesi, Price, Valagussa, Trabant, and Verene). Valuable research has also been conducted on Coseriu's views on metaphor (mainly by Borcilă and Faur). However, no systematic dialogue between Coseriu and Vico on this specific issue (metaphor) has yet been initiated (although it is already implicit in Coseriu and has been, in some way, suggested by Borcilă and, indirectly, by Kabatek and Faur).

This contribution aims to fill the gap. It, therefore, provides an overview of how Vico and Coseriu conceive of metaphor and sketches the corresponding models of understanding. It then compares the two models, highlighting lines of continuity/discontinuity. By tracing the punctuated trajectory of the idea of metaphor from Vico to Coseriu, this study seeks to implicitly ‘recover’ an essential segment of the tradition of thought on this fascinating topic (metaphor). The research concludes by inviting reflections on how integrating Vico and Coseriu more systematically could shed new light on more recent theories. It may eventually open new avenues for the so-called “cognitive paradigm”, in a broad sense (as defined in contributions by Lakoff/Johnson, Fusaroli/Morgagni (eds), Zlatev/Jacobsson/Paju, and Zlatev). It could strengthen a line of inquiry opened, in one sense, by some scholars (such as Danesi, Gensini, and Trabant), who have linked this paradigm to Vico, and, in another sense, by other scholars (Faur and Faur/Zlatev), who are making an effective attempt to put the same paradigm in dialogue with Coseriu.

### **Keywords**

language as a creative cognitive activity, phantasy (imagination), etymology as archaeology of meaning, metaphor/ingenium, metaphorization *versus* demetaphorization

### **Riassunto**

In termini strettamente quantitativi, la metafora non occupa un luogo privilegiato nell’opera di Coseriu; a questo tema egli ha infatti dedicato espressamente un solo contributo, *La Creación metafórica en el lenguaje – La creazione metaforica nel linguaggio* (1956). Tuttavia, il modo in cui viene delineata rivela un modello teorico estremamente complesso che tradisce una profonda comprensione del concetto. La presente ricerca solleva la questione circa le origini delle idee di Coseriu sulla metafora. Nel suo articolo del 1956, Coseriu fa esplicito riferimento a Cassirer, ma il modo in cui concepisce la metafora presenta una serie di sorprendenti somiglianze con il modello delineato, qualche secolo prima, da Vico, in diverse opere: *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione – Il metodo degli studi del nostro tempo* (1709), *De antiquissima italorum sapientia – L’antichissima sapienza degli italici* (1710), le “Risposte” (1711–1712), e *Scienza Nuova* (1744). Sebbene Coseriu non menzioni Vico nell’articolo del 1956, lo riconosce spesso tra le voci che più hanno ispirato la sua visione del linguaggio. Ci sono riferimenti a Vico in tanti lavori di Coseriu, tra cui *Forma y sustancia en los sonidos del lenguaje – Forma e sostanza nei suoni del linguaggio* (1954), *Sincronía, diacronía e historia – Sincronia, diacronia e storia* (1958), *Sprache und Dichtung – Linguaggio e poesia* (1963–1964),

*Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie – Storia della filosofia del linguaggio* (1969/1972), *Von den universali fantastici – Sugli universali fantastici* (1995) e le due interviste condotte rispettivamente da Saramandu (1996) e Kabatek/Murguía (1997). Ci sono già lavori significativi sulla metafora in Vico, a partire dall'articolo pionieristico di Di Cesare del 1986 e proseguendo con i contributi di altri studiosi di chiara fama (tra cui Danesi, Price, Valagussa, Trabant e Verene). Rilevanti ricerche sono state condotte anche sulla visione di Coseriu sulla metafora (principalmente da Borcilă e Faur). Ma non è stato ancora aperto alcun dialogo sistematico tra Coseriu e Vico su questo specifico tema (la metafora) (sebbene già implicito in Coseriu e sia stato, in qualche modo, suggerito da Borcilă; indirettamente, anche da Kabatek e Faur).

Questo contributo intende colmare questa lacuna. Offre quindi una panoramica del modo in cui Vico e Coseriu concepiscono la metafora e ne delinea i corrispondenti modelli di comprensione. Confronta poi i due modelli, evidenziandone le linee di continuità/discontinuità. Ripercorrendo punto per punto la traiettoria dell'idea di metafora da Vico a Coseriu, questo studio mira implicitamente a 'recuperare' un segmento essenziale della tradizione di pensiero su questo affascinante tema (la metafora). La ricerca si conclude invitando a riflettere su come l'integrazione più sistematica di Vico e Coseriu potrebbe gettare nuova luce su teorie più recenti. Potrebbe eventualmente aprire nuove strade per il cosiddetto "paradigma cognitivo", in senso lato (come definito in lavori di Lakoff/Johnson, Fusaroli/Morgagni (a cura di), Zlatev/Jacobsson/Paju e Zlatev). Si rafforzerebbe così una linea di ricerca aperta, da un lato, da alcuni studiosi (come Danesi, Gensini e Trabant) che hanno collegato questo paradigma a Vico, e, dall'altro lato, da altri studiosi (Faur e Faur/Zlatev), che stanno facendo un tentativo efficace di mettere lo stesso paradigma in dialogo con Coseriu.

### **Parole chiave**

linguaggio come attività cognitiva creativa, fantasia (immaginazione), etimologia come archeologia del significato, metafora/ingegno, metaforizzare *versus* demetaforizzare

## 1. Introduction

The very fact that it has aroused the interest of leading philosophers, such as Aristotle, Vico or Nietzsche, is already proof that metaphor is something more than a rhetorical device (or a rhetorical figure in the broad sense), as well as not being a prerogative reserved only for poets (a literary device).

### 1.1. What does *metaphor* mean?

There are two primary ways to understand metaphor. The first sees it as an *ornatus* (ornament), be it a literary (poetic) figure, a fine rhetorical device, or a figure of speech more generally. The second links it to the creation/foundation of meaning and knowledge and thus sees it as a semantic-cognitive device. It is more of a methodological distinction; one acceptance does not exclude the other. Already Aristotle, who defined metaphor mainly as a poetic device, saw in it something more:<sup>1</sup>

It is a great matter to observe propriety in these several modes of expression, as also in compound words, strange (or rare) words, and so forth. But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances. (Aristotle 1922: § 1459a, 9., 87)<sup>2</sup>

An additional relevant differentiation concerns the nature of this device. In its most common sense, the metaphor is mainly perceived as a linguistic device. A second acceptance expands metaphor to thinking and action/activity. While particularly reinforced by Lakoff /Johnson (1981[1980]), this point was already present (in different and more profound ways) in other thinkers, such as Vico, Nietzsche (cf. Arduini/Fabbri 2008, Chap. 3, § 3.1., 33–35; cf. also Trabant 2019b), and Coseriu (cf. Borcilă 2002–2003; Faur 2013a,b, 2021), being implicitly assumed in the thought–language interdependence and in the conceiving of thought and language as activity.

Another interesting detail is that the way we usually employ the term today no longer resonates with its original meaning. Curiously enough, it is not common to find an explicit note

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<sup>1</sup> On Aristotle's views about metaphor, cf. also Mahon 1999 and O'Rourke 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gr.: “ἔστιν δὲ μέγα μὲν τὸ ἐκάστῳ τῶν εἰρημένων πρεπόντως χρῆσθαι καὶ διπλοῖς ὀνόμασι καὶ γλώτταις, πολὺ δὲ μέγιστον τὸ μεταφορικὸν εἶναι. μόνον γὰρ τοῦτο οὔτε παρ’ ἄλλου ἔστι λαβεῖν εὐφύιας τε σημείον ἔστι· τὸ γὰρ εὖ μεταφέρειν τὸ τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν ἔστιν” (Aristotle 1922: § 1459a, 9., 86). **NOTA BENE:** As a rule, I give the English version (be it an official or my own translation) in the body of the text, and the corresponding original in footnotes; except for the few cases when both the original text and the translation are part of the body of a note.

on this aspect [the original meaning of the term] in the studies about metaphor. There is a little hint in Trabandt (2019b: § 1.2., 9), who, talking about metaphor in Vico, notes: “This birth of human thought is a movement of transport, in Greek: *meta-phora*.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, *metaphor* sends back to the Gr. *μεταφορά* (*metaphorá*) < *μεταφέρω* (*metaphérō*) – “I transfer, apply” < *μετά* (*metá*) – “with, across, after”) + *φέρω* (*phérō*) – “I bear, carry.” Thus, as O’Rourke (2006: 155) justly observed, we use the term in a ‘metaphorical’ way.<sup>4</sup>

From antiquity to the present, the concept of metaphor has been the subject of numerous studies. However, over the past few decades, it has experienced a revival, leading to a boom in theories and perspectives. Despite the impressive number of works dedicated to this issue, some pieces are still missing from the puzzle; the puzzle of the thinking tradition on metaphor is far from complete. This research aims to integrate one more piece.

## 1.2. The aim of this study

One may argue that metaphor is not an essential concept in Coseriu, as he dedicates only one study to it: “La Creación metafórica en el lenguaje” – “Metaphorical Creation in Language” (1956). From a different perspective, one may counterargue that metaphor *is* one of the concepts Coseriu writes about. Although he does not develop a thorough theory of metaphor, Coseriu demonstrates a deep understanding of it. His ideas about metaphor are, of course, in line with his theory and philosophy of language. But they might have deeper roots in the philosophical tradition that shaped his thought.

In his 1956 article, Coseriu makes explicit reference to Cassirer; however, the way he conceives of metaphor strikingly resembles the concept of metaphor outlined, a few centuries earlier, by Vico, in several works: *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione – On the Study Methods*

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<sup>3</sup> It.: “Questo nascere del pensiero umano è un movimento di trasporto, in greco: *meta-phora*.”

<sup>4</sup> O’Rourke (2006: 155-156) reminds us that “‘Metaphor’ means literally ‘transfer’ or ‘transport.’ The word is used as such by Herodotus, who relates that the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus ‘re-moved all the dead that were buried within sight of the temple and carried them to another part of Delos.’ He also uses the word to describe the use of levers for the lifting of stone in the construction of pyramids. These are both strongly physical and visible uses of the term. The first, as it were, ‘metaphorical’ use of the word – as a noun – is found in the orator Isocrates, who describes the wealth of stylistic means enjoyed by poets, compared to the dearth of literary devices available to prose writers: ‘The poets are granted many methods of adorning their language, for besides // the use of normal words they can also employ foreign words, neologisms, and metaphors while prose writers are allowed none of these last three, but must severely restrict themselves to such terms alone as citizens use and such arguments as are precisely relevant to the subject matter.’ Metaphor was primarily understood by Isocrates, therefore, as a means of poetic adornment. While he was himself a master of metaphor, Plato does not name it as such. He uses ‘*μεταφέρειν*,’ meaning to ‘transfer’ an object from one place to another. Interestingly he employs the expression ‘*μεταφέρειν ὀνόματα*,’ meaning to ‘translate’ from one language into another. Aristotle was the first to offer a systematic study of the essential nature and structure of metaphor.”

of *Our Time* (1965[1709]), *De antiquissima italorum sapientia – On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* (1988[1710]), “Risposte” – “Responses” (1988[1711–1712]), and *Scienza Nuova – New Science* (1948[1744]).

Although Coseriu does not mention Vico in his 1956 study, he often acknowledges him as one of those who had a significant impact on his views on language. There are references to Vico in many works, including *Forma y sustancia en los sonidos del lenguaje – Form and Substance in the Sounds of Language* (1954: § 5.2., 39), *Sincronía, diacronía e historia – Synchrony, Diachrony, and History* (1978[1958]: VI, § 5.5.4.<sup>5</sup>, 237 and VII, § 2.3., 265), “Sprache und Dichtung” – “Language and Poetry” (2009[1963–1964]: 124), *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie – History of the Philosophy of Language* (2003[1969/1972]), “Von den *universali fantastici*” – “On the *universali fantastici*” (1995), and the two interviews (Saramandu 1996: 46, 97, 142; Kabatek/Murguía 1997: 197–198).

There is no direct reference in Coseriu 1979[1968], yet the connection to Croce and Vico is evident. As Kabatek noted,

“In several works, Coseriu refers to the relationship between language and poetry (as early as in [405] (2009), a text originating in 1964, and also very clearly in his ‘Theses on language and poetry’ first presented in 1968 at a symposium in Germany and then re-published several times in different languages). Poetry, taken in a broad sense to include literary prose, is said to be essentially identical to language. The idea of such an identification of poetry with language is adopted from Vico via Croce and can also be found in Humboldt.” (Kabatek 2023: 250)<sup>6</sup>

In “Sprache und Dichtung”, instead, when thematising the identity between language and poetry, Coseriu mentions Vico (besides other thinkers) explicitly, stating that “This view, moreover, recurs repeatedly among very different thinkers, namely among the most important representatives of the philosophy of language – for example, *G. B. Vico, Herder, Hegel, Humboldt, Croce, and Heidegger*”<sup>7</sup> (Coseriu 2009[1963–1964]: 124. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.). Moreover, he includes a chapter on Vico in his *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie* (Coseriu 2003[1969/1972]: Chap. 16) and discusses Vico’s views in a short article on *universali fantastici* (Coseriu 1995).

<sup>5</sup> [Sic! 5.4.4].

<sup>6</sup> The link between Coseriu and Vico was also highlighted in Borcilă 2002-2003: 65 and note 33; Faur 2021: 312; Kabatek 2023: 178, 180-183, 195, 250; Virban 2025a,b; indirectly, already in Virban 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Ger.: “Diese Auffassung kehrt im Übrigen immer wieder bei ganz verschiedenen Denkern, und zwar bei den wichtigsten Vertretern der Sprachphilosophie – so z.B. bei *G. B. Vico, bei Herder, Hegel, Humboldt, Croce, Heidegger.*”

There is already significant work on metaphor in Vico (Di Cesare 1986; Danesi 1993, 2001, 2004; Price 1994; Gensini 2004, 2014/2015, 2017; Valagussa 2014; Trabant 2019b; cf. Coseriu 1995; Di Cesare 1995; Verene 1995). Valuable research on metaphor in Coseriu has already been conducted as well (Borcilă 2002–2003; Faur 2013a,b, 2021; Faur/Zlatev 2025). Moreover, some scholars connected Lakoff and Johnson (and the cognitive paradigm more generally) to Vico (Danesi 2001; Gensini 2004, 2014/2015; Trabant 2019b: § 2., 10–11) or Coseriu (Faur 2013a,b, 2021; Faur/Zlatev 2025; already Borcilă 2002–2003, though mainly on a critical note).<sup>8</sup>

Yet, although some similarities between the ways the two thinkers conceive metaphor are implicit in Coseriu and indirectly have already been suggested by a few scholars (Borcilă 2002–2003: 65; cf. note 33; cf. Kabatek 2023: 250; a hint also in Faur 2021: 312), to the best of my knowledge, no systematic research has been conducted on this issue.<sup>9</sup>

This study aims to fill the gap. It, therefore, provides an overview of how Vico and Coseriu conceive of metaphor and sketches the corresponding models of understanding. It then compares the two models, highlighting lines of continuity/discontinuity. It concludes by inviting further reflections on how integrating Vico and Coseriu more systematically may eventually open new avenues for the cognitive paradigm.

## 2. Metaphor in Vico

As Di Cesare (1986: 325; cf. 326) rightly observed, in Vico, metaphor is “the key concept of his theory of language and knowledge” (My trans. – F.V.).<sup>10</sup> Although there is no specific study explicitly dedicated to it, metaphor is inherent in Vico’s thinking.

Vico’s work is an inquiry into the very possibility for man (human being) to have access to truth. He looks for the underlying principles of human wisdom and aims to reveal how the latter

<sup>8</sup> Beyond metaphor, on the connection between the cognitive paradigm and Vico and/or Coseriu, see also Sonesson 2021a,b, 2023; a relevant link between cognitive semiotics and Coseriu’s Integral Linguistics also in Zlatev 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Di Cesare (1986: 1., 325) mentions Coseriu among those who conducted research on Vico but makes no connection between Coseriu’s and Vico’s ideas about metaphor. In a note, Coseriu appears, by error, as the author of a book by Giuseppe Conte – *La metafora barocca. Saggio sulle poetiche del Seicento*, Milano: Murcia, 1972. (Di Cesare 1986: note 3, p. 326). Di Cesare might have meant Coseriu’s research on Vico in his *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie* (2003[1969/1972]: Chap. 16). Surprisingly enough, Trabant (2019b), who sheds light on similarities between Vico, on the one hand, and more recent scholars, such as Humboldt, Nietzsche, Jakobson, and Lakoff & Johnson, on the other hand, does not mention Coseriu. This is pretty curious, considering that Trabant has deep knowledge of both Coseriu (whose direct disciple he was) and Vico (on whom he wrote extensively – 2019a,b; 2013[1994]; cf. 1995 (Hrsg.) –, besides translating the first version of *New Science* [*Scienza Nuova Prima*] into German – Vico 2022[1725].

<sup>10</sup> It.: “il concetto chiave della sua teoria del linguaggio e della conoscenza.”

is created (produced). He believes that humans are developing their wisdom through language. Vico proceeds by steps. In *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, he sheds light on the limits of the scholarship of his time (with a focus on the Cartesian paradigm) and is in search of a way to overcome them. He identifies the solution with imagination. In *De antiquissima italorum sapientia*, he concentrates on the most ancient wisdom (*sapientia*) of the Italic people.<sup>11</sup> In an attempt to find out where this wisdom comes from, he investigates the origins of Latin words; hence, the relevance of etymology.<sup>12</sup> As Vico himself specifies, his way of conceiving etymology recalls that practised by Plato in *Cratylus*, while diverging from the rigid methods of the ‘grammarians’ (Vico 1988[1710]: “Prologue”, 39-40; cf. 1988[1711-1712]): [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] I., 157; for details, see 153-157). By origin, Vico refers to the way words were initially used, that is, to their original meaning. To understand the most ancient wisdom of the Italians requires unearthing the original meanings of their words, meanings that were no longer apparent, thus, a sort of archaeology of meanings/concepts – “I have tried to figure out the reasons that the concepts of these wise men became obscure and were lost to sight as their learned speech became current and was employed by the vulgar” (Vico 1988[1711-1712]): [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] I., 157).<sup>13</sup>

Here, Vico indirectly touches on an important aspect: how concepts may become obscure when assimilated into ordinary speech. Corroborating this with the assumption that original meanings are poetic (thus metaphorical), this observation might also be read as a note on demetaphorization (or ‘(re-)metaphorization’).

Then, in *Scienza Nuova*, Vico expands the horizon. His research is no longer about the origins of a particular language (Latin) and wisdom (of the Italic people). Here, it becomes an inquiry into the origins of human language and wisdom. To put it differently, it becomes an inquiry into the very possibility of a human being having access to truth. Ultimately, it comes down to the question of the foundation of meaning and knowledge (cf. Virban 2025a,b). And metaphor is becoming topical.

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<sup>11</sup> To distinguish ancient Italic people from those contemporary with him, Vico calls the first *Romans* or *Latins* – “the wise authors of the Latin language” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. I, II., 51), while the latter *Italians*.

<sup>12</sup> A similar stance is later present in Leopardi; see, in this sense, the excellent studies by Bianchi (2019a; 2019b: mainly Chap. 3, 3.1.). On metaphor in Vico and Leopardi, see Gensini 2017. On the connection between etymology and metaphor, cf. also Ginevra 2024.

<sup>13</sup> It. “Ma mi sono dato a contemplare le ragioni come i concetti de’ sapienti uomini si oscurassero e si perdessero di vista, divulgandosi ed impropriandosi dal volgo i loro dotti parlari” (Vico 1971[1711–1712]: [2<sup>nd</sup> Response], 149).

## 2.1. Verum–factum

The research on human knowledge prompts Vico to reflect on the distinction between divine and human knowledge and truth. In Vico, the golden principle of cognition (the possibility to have access to truth) is that of the convergence/coincidence between *verum* (truth) and *factum* (fact), between knowing and making; that is, *verum et factum convertuntur* – what Gauckroger (1986) called “the maker’s knowledge principle”; a formula recently repropounded by Esposito (2025). Introduced already in *De antiquissima* (1988[1710]: Ch. I, I. and II., 45-46, 48, 52, 65) and reinforced in his “Responses” (1988[1711-1712]: [1<sup>st</sup> Response] II., 122), this principle is further elaborated in *Diritto universale* [Universal Right], where, already in the “Prologue” (Vico 2000[1720-1722]): 7., 11), Vico insists on the difference between *verum* (the true) and *certum* (the certain), and, finally, in *Scienza nuova* (Vico 1948[1744]: § 331., 85).<sup>14</sup> In brief, God has access to the truth of the Universe because He made it. Man has access to the truth of the human universe (of his history and civilisation) because he has made it. Even if man does not have immediate access to the truth of things (as God does), he can, however, know the world.

But how can he do it? Through phantasy – this is Vico’s answer.

## 2.2. Phantasy (imagination)

In Vico, phantasy is a complex concept. At its core, he positions the ingenium, which he defines as a creative faculty peculiar to humans and in opposition to judgment. Phantasy is also connected to language and memory and, most importantly, to knowledge.

### 2.2.1. Ingenium – a creative faculty peculiar to man

In Vico, ingenium is a human faculty. He states that “The word *facultas* is a contraction from *facultas*, from which comes the later word *facilitas*, which signifies an unhindered and ready disposition for making (*facere*)” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, I., 93),<sup>15</sup> that is, the ability to do, to act. Therefore, “Undoubtedly, the imagination is a faculty, for we use it to feign images of

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Scienza nuova prima*: § 40; *apud* Soccio in: Vico 2000[1744]: 175.

<sup>15</sup> Lat., p. 113: “‘Facultas’ dicta quasi ‘facultas’, unde postea ‘facilitas’, quasi sit expedita, seu exprompta faciendi solertia.” / It., p. 112: “Il termine *facultas* è quasi la parola *facultas*, onde poi si ebbe *facilitas*, vocabolo adatto a significare la pronta immediata speditezza del fare.” NOTA BENE: In the case of Vico, for most relevant quotations, I give the official English translation in the body of the text, with the corresponding Lat. original text (followed by the It. official translation) for *De nostri temporis* and *De antiquissima*, and the original It. text for “Risposte” and *Scienza nuova*; with the exception of those few cases when both the original and the translation are integral part of the body of a note.

things” and “true intellect is a faculty by which we make something true when we understand it” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, I., 94).<sup>16</sup>

Proceeding again by analogy, Vico holds that: “just as man by activating his mind brings the modes and images of things into being and generates human truth, so God generates divine truths by exercising His intellect and makes a created truth” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, I., 94).<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, Vico says that for Latins, *ingenium* and *natura* had the same meaning and thinks that they might have identified the two terms because they felt that the *ingenium* was proper to human nature, while denied to brutes (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, IV., 97<sup>18</sup>; cf. 1988[1711-1711]: [1<sup>st</sup> Response] II., 127).

Already in *De nostri temporis*, in contrast to the rationalist approach, Vico proposes one that cultivates imagination and, thus, stimulates the *ingenium*; that is, a creative way to access truth and, therefore, produce new knowledge.

Our theory of physics (in the process of learning as well as when mastered) moves forward by a constant and gradual series of small, closely concatenated steps. Consequently, it is apt to smother the student’s specifically philosophic faculty, i.e., his capacity to perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar. It is this capacity which constitutes the source and principle of all ingenious, acute, and brilliant forms of expression. It should be emphasised that tenuity, subtlety, delicacy of thought, is not identical with acuity of ideas. That which is tenuous, delicately, refined, may be represented by a single line; ‘acute’ by two. Metaphor, the greatest and brightest ornament of forceful, distinguished speech, undoubtedly plays the first role in acute, figurative expression. (Vico 1965[1709]: IV., 24)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Lat., p. 113: “Phantasia certissima facultas est, quia dum ea utimur rerum imagines fingimus.” [...] “intellectus verus facultas est, quo, cum quid intelligimus, id verum facimus.” // It., p. 112: “La fantasia è una vera facoltà, perché mediante la sua attività ci rappresentiamo, costruendole, le immagini delle cose.” [...] “È facoltà il vero intelletto, perché compresa una verità noi stessi diventiamo creatori.”

<sup>17</sup> Lat., pp. 113-115: “quod quemadmodum homo // intendendo mentem modos rerum, earumque imagines, et verum humanum gignat, ita Deus intelligendo verum divinum generet, verum creatum faciat.” / It., p.114: “come l’uomo nell’atto del conoscere produce i modi delle cose e le loro immagini, generando la verità umana, così Dio dispiegando il suo intelletto genera il vero divino e produce la verità creata.”

<sup>18</sup> Lat., p. 117: “Ingenium propria hominis natura.” / It., p.: 116 “*Ingenium* è sinonimo di ‘natura’.”

<sup>19</sup> Lat.: “[...] cumque haec physica et cum discitur, et cum percepta est, perpetuo ex proximis proxima inferat; eam auditoribus facultatem occludit, quae philosophorum propria est, ut in rebus longe dissitis, ac diversis similes videant rationes: quod omnis acutae ornataeque dicendi formae fons et caput existimatur. Neque enim tenue idem est atque acutum: tenue enim una linea, acutum duabus constat. In acutis autem dictis principem obtinet locum metaphora, quae est omnis ornatae orationis maxime insigne decus et luculentissimum ornamentum” (1971[1709]: IV., 803). / It.: “poiché codesta sorte di fisica, sia quando la si insegna, fa sempre scaturire una proposizione da quella che immediatamente precede, essa limita negli ascoltatori quella facoltà, che, propria di filosofi, fa scorgere analogie tra cose di gran lunga disparate e differenti, ciò che è ritenuto principio e base di ogni fine e fiorita forma del dire. Non sono infatti la stessa cosa la sottigliezza e l’acutezza, giacché il sottile consta di una sola linea, l’acuto

Here he defines ingenium as “eam [...] facultatem [...] quae philosophorum propria est” [that faculty, that being peculiar to philosophers],<sup>20</sup> enabling one to see “the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar.” And this capacity is “the source and principle of all ingenious, acute, and brilliant forms of expression”, including metaphor, which is the brightest. I will return to this point later [see *infra*, 2.3.].

On a similar note, and with direct reference to *De nostri temporis*, in *De antiquissima*, besides arguing that the geometrical method is not suitable for the natural sciences (Physics), which require direct experimental demonstration, Vico suggests that the ingenium may, instead, play a role.

To that end, in my essay *On the Method of Studies of our Time* I argued that it is possible to avoid pitfalls of physics through the cultivation of *ingenium*. This may be surprising to anyone who is concerned with method. Since method inhibits intuitive wit while aiding facility, it dissolves curiosity while providing for truth. Geometry does not sharpen the wit when it is thought by method only, but when it is employed with creative wit upon diverse complicated, different, and disparate [problems]. (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 104)<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.2. Phantasy / ingenium / topics / inductive method *versus* intellect / judgement / criticism / deductive method

While the judgement is “the eye of intellect”, imagination is the eye of ingenium, “the eye of mother wit” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 104).<sup>22</sup> “Ingenium is the faculty that connects disparate and diverse things” and might be acute or obtuse, thus indicating a higher or lower

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di due e tra le molte acutezze il primo posto è tenuto dalla metafora, la più insigne finezza e l’ornamento più splendido di ogni parlare ornato” (1971[1709]: IV., 802).

<sup>20</sup> The English version “specifically philosophic faculty” does not render the precise nuance of the Latin original (facultatem [...] quae philosophorum propria est”; cf. also It. “facoltà, che, propria di filosofi”). It risks identifying ingenium with the philosophical faculty or reducing the latter to the first. Instead, what Vico meant, and as Di Cesare (1986: 327) pointed out, was to restore the dignity of ingenium, which is no longer relegated to the field of rhetoric but re-elevated to the rank of a spiritual faculty.

<sup>21</sup> Lat., p. 125: “Idque adeo in dissertatione *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, physicae incommoda ingenii cultu vitari posse innui; quod aliquis methodo occupatus forte miratus sit. Nam methodus ingeniis obstat, dum consulit facilitati; ed curiositatem dissolvit, dum providet veritati. Nec geometria acuit ingenium, cum methodo traditur, sed cum vi ingenii per diversa, per alia, multiiuga, disparata in usum deducitur.” / It., pp. 124-126: “Perciò nella mia dissertazione *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* sostenni che le difficoltà della fisica possono essere superate con l’educazione dell’ingegno, il che fece meravigliare qualcuno molto preso dal problema del metodo. Il metodo infatti, nel tempo stesso che giova alla facilità, è di ostacolo agli ingegni; esso distrugge la curiosità, credendo di poter prevedere la verità che si ricerca. Né la geometria aguzza l’ingegno quando è applicata metodicamente, // ma lo affina quando lo rafforza con l’esperienza di cose diverse, varie e disparate.”

<sup>22</sup> Lat., p. 125: “phantasia [...] est ingenii oculus, ut iudicium est oculus intellectus.” / It., p. 126: “la fantasia che è l’occhio del ingegno, come il giudizio è l’occhio dell’intelletto.”

ability to unite disparate things (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, IV., 96-97<sup>23</sup>; 1988[1711-1712]:[1<sup>st</sup> Response] II, 127).

Vico states that there are three faculties granted to man for knowing, *perception*, *judgement*, and *reason*, as regulated by *topics*, *criticism*, and *method*, respectively (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 98; cf. 1988[1711-1712]: [1<sup>st</sup> Response] II, 127; [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] III., 165, IV. 178-182). To Cicerone's precise geometrical method, Vico prefers the creative one of Demosthenes (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 99).

An essential distinction operated by Vico is that between *inventive* and *judging* activities, as corresponding to *ingenium* and *judgement*, respectively (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 101-102). He observes that children are more prone to invent (see similarities) because they have less prejudice:<sup>24</sup>

We see it in children, in whom nature is more integral and less corrupted by convictions and prejudices, that the first faculty to emerge is that of seeing similarities. For example, they call all men fathers and all women mothers and they make likeness: 'They build huts, hitch mice to little wagons, play odds and evens, and ride on a great hobby horse of a stick.' (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 102)<sup>25</sup>

According to Vico, there is a logical relation between the two (separated, diverse) elements united by *ingenium*, a third element "that the scholastics call the middle term, [and] the Italian school called *argumen* or *argumentum*," a term that is "derived from the same root as *argutus* (clear, bright, sharp) or from *acuminatus* (*sharpened*)" (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 102<sup>26</sup>; cf. 1988[1711-1711]: [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] IV, 178, 180).

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<sup>23</sup> Lat., p. 117: "'Ingenium' facultas est in unum dissita, diversa coniugendi: id 'acutum' Latini, 'obtusumve' dixerunt." / It., p. 116: "L'ingenium è la facoltà capace di congiungere in unità le cose separate e diverse. I latini lo distinguevano in *acutum* ed *obtusum*."

<sup>24</sup> Already in Vico 1965[1709]: III., 13: "Just as old age is powerful in reason, so is adolescence in imagination." Lat. 1971[1709]: III., 797: "Nam ut senectus ratione, ita adolescentia phantasia pollet." / It. 1971[1709]: III, 796: "Infatti, come nella vecchiaia prevale la ragione, nella gioventù prevale la fantasia."

<sup>25</sup> Lat., p. 123: "Nos quidem in pueris, in quibus natura integrior est et minus persuasionibus seu praeiudiciis corrupta, primam facultatem se exerere videmus, ut similia videant; unde omnes viros 'patres', foeminas omnes 'matres' appellant, et similia faciunt: *Aedificare casas, plostello adiungere mures, ludere par impar, equitare in harundine longa*." / It., p. 122: "Nei fanciulli, nei quali la natura è più integra e meno corrotta da persuasioni e pregiudizi, osserviamo manifestarsi prima la facoltà di vedere la somiglianza delle cose, donde accade che chiamano 'padre' tutti gli uomini e 'madre' tutte le donne; poi quella d'imitare le cose vedute: *aedificare casas, plostello adiungere mures, ludere par impar, equitare in harundine longa*."

<sup>26</sup> Lat., p. 123: "quod ratio, quae in Scholis 'medius terminus' dicitur, 'argumen' sive 'argumentum' appellarint. 'Argumen' autem inde unde et 'argutum', seu acuminatus." / It., p. 122: "Infatti la ragione, che nelle Scuole è detta *medius terminus*, termine medio, fu chiamata dai latini *argumen* o *argumentum*. Anche la parola *argutum*, cioè aguzzo e sottile, ebbe la stessa origine del termine *argumen*."

He defines topics as the art of eloquence. This acceptation implies the art of finding the middle term:

Traditional ‘topics’ is the art of finding ‘the medium term,’ i.e., the middle term: in the conventional language of scholasticism, ‘medium’ indicates what the Latins call *argumentum*. (Vico 1965[1709]: III, 15)<sup>27</sup>

[...] topics is the art that gives us the ‘middle term.’ But I say much more than this. It is the art by which truth is apprehended, because it is the art of seeing under all topical heads whatever there is in the matter at issue, which will enable us to distinguish well and have an adequate concept of it. (Vico 1988[1711-1712]: IV, 178)<sup>28</sup>

Through phantasy (the eye of ingenium), man may see this intermediary term; that is, what unites two separated, diverse things. It follows that “[...] wit is essential to invention because, in general, to find new things requires both the work and the activity of wit alone” (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 102<sup>29</sup>; cf. 1988[1711-1712]: [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] II., 162).

Vico speculates that the Latins might have preferred the inductive to the deductive method, hence the lack of praise for *sylogism* and *sorites* (Vico 1965[1709]: VI., 32; 1988[1710]: 102-103). He also holds that induction was the most ancient dialectical method, the last to use it being Socrates. As paradigmatic for the deductive method, instead, he mentioned Aristotle and Zeno, who excelled in employing the *sylogism* and the *sorites*, respectively. Vico sees both the *sylogism* and the *sorites* as non-creative:

The person who uses the *sylogism* brings no new element, since the conclusion is already implied in the initial proposition or assumption; analogously, those who employ the *sorites* merely unfolds the secondary truth which lies within the primary statement. (Vico 1965[1709]: VI., 32)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Lat. 1971[1709]: III, 799: “Deinde in topica, sive medii inveniendi doctrina exerciti (‘medium’ Scolastici dicunt, quod Latini ‘argumentum’ appellant.” // It. 1971[1709]: III, 798: “Perciò quelli che sono esercitati, nella topica, ossia di inventare il medio (ciò che i scolastici chiamano *medium* è per i latini l’*argumentum*).”

<sup>28</sup> It. 1971[1711-1712]: [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] III, 163: “la topica [...] è un’arte di ritrovare il mezzo termine. Ma dico di più: che questa è l’arte di apprendere vero, perché è l’arte di vedere tutti i luoghi topici nella cosa proposta quanto mai ci è per farlaci distinguere bene ed averne adeguato concetto.”

<sup>29</sup> Lat., p.: 123: “Unde ingenio ad inveniendum necesse est: cum ex genere nova invenire unius ingenii et opera et opus sit.” / It., p. 124: “È necessario quindi che l’ingegno sia la facoltà ricercatrice, perché generalmente è proprio di un ingegno scoprire cose nuove.”

<sup>30</sup> Lat., 1971[1709]: VI, 809: “Nam ut qui *sylogismo* contendit, nihil novi affert, quia in propositione vel assumptione complexio continetur; ita qui *sorte* confirmat, nihil aliud facit, quam explicat verum secundum, quod in primo latebat involutum.” It. 1971[1709]: VI, 808: “Come chi disputa con *silogismi* non porta nulla di nuovo, perché nella premessa è implicita la conseguenza, così chi argomenta con *sorte* esplica una seconda verità implicita nella prima.”

In truth, a man who uses the syllogistic argument does not so much compare diverse things as, // rather, unfold from the very heart of the genus something specific, which is already contained in it, and a man who uses the sorites weaves a chain linking each cause together with the next one. Those who excel in either mode are not joining two lines in an acute angle, but are extending a single line; each, therefore, seems to be more subtle than acute. The logician of sorites is more subtle than the logician of syllogism inasmuch as genera are more inclusive than the peculiar causes of each thing. (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 102-103)<sup>31</sup>

The creative faculty is natural in God (is proper to His nature) but is very rare in man. Ingenium was granted to man for knowing (for having access to truth), that is, for making the truth. God, speaking, makes the things (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VI, 110). From here, one may infer that man, speaking, remakes the things, re-composes/re-creates them from elements of words.

### 2.2.3. Phantasy and language

As already stated, man does not have direct access to the truth of things. The limit is inherent in his mind, which does not contain the elements that things are made from. However, man can re-create them (imagine them) through language – he creates elements of words to define them:

On this basis, even though it is denied to him to have hold of those elements of things from which the things themselves exist for certain, he can feign for himself the elements of words from which ideas are stimulated without controversy. And this, too, the wise authors of the Latin language perceived well enough. For we know that the Romans talked in such a way that they could speak indifferently of ‘what the name is’ (*quaestio nominis*) or of ‘what the definition is’ (*quaestio definitionis*). They considered that they were asking for a definition when they asked what response was stimulated generally in men’s minds when a word was uttered. (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. I, II., 51)<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Lat., p. 123: “Et vero qui syllogismo utitur, non tam diversa coniungit, quam speciem sub genere positam ex ipsius sinu generis explicat: qui utitur sorite, causas caussis, cuique proximam attexit: quorum qui alterutrum praestat, non tam duas lineas in angulum infra rectum coniungere, quam unam lineam producere; et non tam acutus, quam subtilis esse videatur; quamquam qui sorite quam qui syllogismo utitur, tanto subtilior est, quanto crassiora sunt genera quam cuiusque rei caussae peculiares. Soriti Stoicorum geometrica Renati methodus respondet.” / It., p. 124: “Ma chi adopera il sillogismo non tanto unisce cose diverse, quanto ricava piuttosto una specie insita nel genere dal seno del genere stesso; chi invece adotta il sorite congiunge le cause con le cause, attribuendo a ciascuna la propria. Però chi segue uno di questi due tipi di ragionamento dimostra di possedere un ingegno non tanto acuto quanto sottile; egli infatti più che congiungere due linee formando un angolo acuto, sembra che prolunghi un’unica linea. Comunque chi adopera il sorite è, rispetto a chi usa il sillogismo, tanto più sottile in quanto sono più grossolani i generi che non le cause particolari di ogni singola cosa. Il metodo geometrico di Descartes corrisponde al sorite degli Stoici.” In the last sentence, Vico associates Descartes’s geometrical method to the sorites of the Stoics.

<sup>32</sup> Lat., p. 69: “Atque hoc pacto, quando ei negatum est elementa rerum tenere, ex quibus res ipsae certo existant, elementa verborum sibi confingit, ex quibus ideae sine ulla controversia excitentur. Et id quoque sapientes Latinae linguae authores satis perspexerunt, cum Romanos ita locutos esse sciamus, ut ‘quaestionem nominis’ et

Man experiences the things and, through his ingenuity, forms an idea about them that he captures (expresses) in language he creates. Words are, in Vico's view, symbols and signs of ideas, while ideas are symbols and signs of things (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. I, I., p. 46). Thus, words are not labels for things, but terms that refer to classes of objects (ideas, concepts). Ideas are abstractions of the essence of things. As already stated, man does not know the things, since his mind does not possess the elements that compound them (the things). He proceeds by abstraction – he abstracts the truth from things through language. Names are definitions – they contain the essence, the idea. Thus, “man works in the world of abstractions in the same way that God works in the real world” (1988[1711-1712]: [2<sup>nd</sup> Response] I., 156)<sup>33</sup>.

How does phantasy connect to things? How can phantasy extract (abstract) essence (truth) from things? Vico relates phantasy to memory.

#### 2.2.4. Phantasy and memory

Vico states that “The Latins called the faculty that stores sense perceptions ‘memory’; when it recalls perceptions they called it ‘reminiscence’” (1988[1710]: Ch. VII, III., 95<sup>34</sup>; cf. 1988[1711-1712]: [1<sup>st</sup> Response] II., 126-127). Moreover, the same faculty comprises also the activity of producing images – “memory, which, although not exactly the same as imagination is almost identical with it” (Vico 1965[1709]: III, 14)<sup>35</sup>. Vico explains this point in further detail as follows:

But memory also signified the faculty that fashions images (which the // Greeks call *phantasy* and the Italians call *immaginativa*). For in ordinary Italian, *immaginare* is equivalent to the *memorare* of the Latins. Is this because we can feign only what we remember and can remember only what we perceive through the senses? Certainly no painter has ever painted any kind of plant or animal that nature has not produced. The hippogryphs and centaurs are true to nature but falsely mixed. Nor have poets thought up

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‘definitionis’ promiscue dicerent; e tunc quaerere definitionem putarent, cum quaerebant quid, verbo prolato, in communi hominum mente excitaretur.” / It., p. 68: “A questo modo, essendogli negato il possesso degli elementi dai quali le cose ricavano certamente l’esistenza, si creano elementi di parole, da cui scaturiscono idee incontrovertibili. Lo videro bene i sapienti autori latini, giacché sappiamo che i romani parlavano indifferentemente di *questioni di nomi e di definizioni*: pensavano di cercare una definizione quando cercavano che cosa fosse ciò che veniva comunemente suscitato nella mente umana da una sola parola pronunciata.”

<sup>33</sup> It. 1971[1711-1712]: [Seconda Risposta], I., 148: “che l’uom talmente opera nel mondo dell’astrazioni, quale opera Iddio nel mondo delle realitadi.”

<sup>34</sup> Lat., p. 115: “‘Memoria’ Latinis, quae in sua penu per sensus percepta condit, quae ‘reminiscentia’, dum promit, appellatur.” / It., p. 114: “I latini chiamavano una sola facoltà: *memoria* quando raccoglie come in un recipiente le percezioni acquisite per mezzo dei sensi; *reminiscentia*, quando esprime le già acquisite percezioni.”

<sup>35</sup> Lat. 1971[1709]: III, 797: “Et memoriam, quae cum phantasia, nisi eadem, certe pene eadem est.”// It. 1971[1709]: III, 796: “E la memoria, la quale se non è tutt’uno con la fantasia, certo è press’a poco la stessa cosa.”

any form of virtue that does not exist in human affairs. On the contrary; they elevate some form of courage chosen from reality beyond belief and mold their heroes on it. Therefore, the Greeks have handed down in their myths the tradition that the Muses, forms of imagination, were the daughters of Memory. (Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, III., 95-96)<sup>36</sup>

### 2.3. From a rhetorical device to a semantic-cognitive device

Vico does not always use the term metaphor; he does so a few times. He employs it in *De nostri temporis*, but neither in *De antiquissima* nor in “Risposte”; then he uses it again in *Scienza nuova*. He connects metaphor to a new method (a new way of thinking), to the origins of a particular language/wisdom and, finally, to the creation/foundation of meaning and knowledge.

#### 2.3.1. Ingenium/metaphor and creative thinking

It is already acknowledged (see, for instance, Di Cesare 1986: 326, Gensini 2017: 47, and Trabant 2019b: §2., 10-11) that Vico’s interest in metaphor transcends rhetoric (with which he was familiar and from which he departs), going towards a broader and more profound way of conceiving creativity and imagination. Interestingly enough, in *De nostri temporis*, he talks about metaphor in the section dedicated to physics:

Our theory of physics (in the process of learning as well as when mastered) moves forward by a constant and gradual series of small, closely concatenated steps. Consequently, it is apt to smother the student’s specifically philosophic faculty, i.e., his capacity to perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar. It is this capacity which constitutes the source and principle of all ingenious, acute, and brilliant forms of expression. It should be emphasised that tenuity, subtlety, delicacy of thought, is not identical with acuity of ideas. That which is tenuous, delicately, refined, may be represented by a single line; ‘acute’ by two. Metaphor, the greatest and brightest ornament of forceful,

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<sup>36</sup> Lat., pp. 115-117: “Sed et facultatem, qua imagines conformamus, et ‘phantasia’ Graecis, et nobis ‘*imaginativa*’ dicta est, significabat: nam quod nos vulgo ‘*imaginari*’, Latini ‘*memorare*’ dicunt. An quia fingere nobis non possumus nisi quae meminimus, nec meminimus nisi quae per sensus percipiamus? Certe nulli pictores, qui aliud plantae aut animantis genus, quod natura non tulerit, pinxerunt // unquam: nam isti hypogryphes et centauri sunt vera naturae falso mixta. Nec poëtae aliam virtutis formam, quae in rebus humanis non sit, excogitarunt; sed de medio lectam supra fidem extollunt, et ad eam suos heroes conformant. Quare musas Graeci, quae phantasiae virtutes sunt, Memoriae filias esse suis fabulis tradiderunt.” / It., pp. 114-116: “Ma per essi questa facoltà rappresentava anche l’attività produttrice di immagini, cioè la facoltà che i greci chiamavano fantasia e che noi chiamiamo immaginativa; infatti ciò che noi comunemente chiamiamo ‘immaginare’ era // detto dai latini *memorare*. Forse pensavano in tal modo per aver osservato che non possiamo immaginare che cose ricordate, e che ricordiamo solamente le cose che abbiamo percepite? Certamente nessun pittore ha mai dipinto un genere di piante o di animali che la natura non gli abbia mostrato: gli stessi ippogrifi ed i centauri non sono altro che immagini formate da elementi realmente esistenti misti ad elementi falsi. Né i poeti hanno giammai inventato una diversa forma di virtù che non si riscontri nei fatti umani; ma sceltane una tra tante, la spingono al di là del credibile, e ad essa conformano gli atti dei loro eroi. Per questa ragione i greci raccontano nei loro miti che le Muse, forme ideali della fantasia, sono figlie della Memoria.”

distinguished speech, undoubtedly plays the first role in acute, figurative expression. (Vico 1965[1709]: IV, 24<sup>37</sup>. Cf. 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 104)

It is a highly relevant passage. First, as Di Cesare (1986: § 5., 329) noted, this is the very first definition of metaphor offered by Vico. Second, the way Vico defines *ingenium* (and, implicitly, metaphor) as the capacity to “perceive the analogies existing between matters lying far apart and, apparently, most dissimilar” recalls that “eye for resemblances” that Aristotle talked about [see *supra*, 1.1.]. Third, it is here that Vico explicitly connects metaphor to *ingenium*: this capacity is “the source and principle of all ingenious, acute, and brilliant forms of expression.” He then distinguishes “tenuity, subtlety, delicacy of thought” from the “acuity of ideas.” Vico associates the first with a single line, while the other with two (an acute angle) (Cf. Vico 1988[1710]: Ch. VII, V., 102-103). And the highest form of acute, figurative expression is metaphor (cf. also Di Cesare 1986: §§ 3.-5., 327-330). The way metaphor is described – “the greatest and brightest ornament of forceful, distinguished speech” – recalls the rhetorical tradition. However, by stating that *ingenium* is a faculty peculiar to philosophers, Vico (re-)invests the metaphor with semantic and cognitive power. This explains why he discusses *ingenium* and phantasy (imagination) extensively in *De antiquissima* (a work on wisdom).

### 2.3.2. *Ingenium*/metaphor and the origins of language/wisdom

As anticipated, in *De antiquissima* and the “Risposte”, Vico does not employ the term (metaphor) as such. One may speculate that he had done so by purpose, to make clear that he meant phantasy/*ingenium* in a non-rhetorical way. Beyond terminology, by relating the origins of wisdom to phantasy/*ingenium*, Vico opens the way for *Scienza nuova*. He deepens many of the points already introduced in *De nostri temporis* and formulates the underlying principle of his new vision – the maker’s knowledge principle. One may say that, in *De antiquissima*, *ingenium* (and implicitly, metaphor) is already an instance of *verum–factum*. The frame of the debate is still regarding a particular language (Latin) and wisdom (that of the “wise authors of the Latin language”). However, already here, the way Vico talks about phantasy/*ingenium* reveals a vision that goes beyond this frame. Vico is already looking ahead. He already glimpses something universal.

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<sup>37</sup> Lat. / It., see *sopra* 2.2.1.

### 2.3.3. Ingenium/metaphor and the poetic foundation of meaning/knowledge

As mentioned, in *Scienza nuova*, Vico again employs the term *metaphor*. He discusses metaphor in *Logica poetica – Poetic Logic*, [Chapter 2]: “Corollari d’intorno a’ troppi, mostri e trasformazioni poetiche” [Corollaries concerning Poetic Tropes, Monsters and Metamorphoses<sup>38</sup>], where he notes:

All the first tropes are corollaries of this poetic logic. The most luminous and therefore the most necessary and frequent is metaphor. It is most praised when it gives sense and passion to insensate things, in accordance with the metaphysics above discussed, by which the first poets attributed to bodies the being of animate substances, with capacities measured by their own, namely sense and passion, and in this way made fables of them. Thus every metaphor so formed is a fable in brief. This gives a basis for judging the time when metaphors made their appearance in the languages. All the metaphors conveyed by likenesses taken from bodies to signify the operations of abstract minds must date from times when philosophies were taking shape. The proof of this is that in every language the terms needed for the refined arts and recondite sciences are of rustic origin. (Vico 1948[1744]: § 404, p. 116; cf. §§ 405, 406)<sup>39</sup>

Besides describing metaphor again as the brightest (“the most luminous”) among tropes, Vico adds a few more features. First, he defined metaphor as “the most necessary.” Second, he clearly states that, by giving “sense and passion to insensate things”, poets act “in accordance with the metaphysics above discussed.” Finally, he explicitly links metaphor to language and philosophy: “All the metaphors conveyed by likenesses taken from bodies to signify the operations of abstract minds must date from times when philosophies were taking shape.” Vico discusses several examples of metaphors and other tropes (metonymy and synecdoche) and concludes that:

From all this it follows that all the tropes (and they are all reducible to the four types above discussed)<sup>40</sup>, which have hitherto been considered ingenious inventions of writers, were necessary modes of expression

<sup>38</sup> *Metamorphosis* comes from Gr. μεταμόρφωσις (metamorphosis) – “transformation” or “change of form” < μεταμορφώω (metamorphōō) – “I transform” < μετά (meta-) – “change” and μορφή (morphē) – “form” or “shape”.

<sup>39</sup> It.: “Di questa logica poetica sono corollari tutti i primi troppi, de’ quali la più luminosa e, perché più luminosa, più necessaria e più spessa è la metafora, ch’allora è vieppiù lodata quando alle cose insensate ella dà senso e passione, per la metafisica sopra qui [402] ragionata: ch’i primi poeti dieder a’ corpi l’essere di sostanze animate, sol di tanto capaci di quanto essi, potevano, cioè di senso e di passione, e si ne fecero le favole; talché ogni metafora si fatta vien ad essere una picciola favoletta. Quindi se ne dà questa critica d’intorno al tempo che nacquero nelle lingue: che tutte le metafore portate con simiglianze prese da’ corpi a significare lavori di menti astratte debbon essere de’ tempi ne’ quali s’eran incominciate a dirozzar le filosofie. Lo che si dimostra da ciò: ch’in ogni lingua le voci ch’abbisognano all’arti colte ed alle scienze riposte hanno contadinesche le lor origini” (Vico 2000[1744]: § 404, p. 345; cf. §§ 405-406).

<sup>40</sup> That is, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and combination of synecdoche and metonymy (Vico 1948[1744]: §§ 405-407, pp. 116-118).

of all the first poetic nations, and had originally their full native propriety. But these expressions of the first nations later became figurative when, with the further development of the human mind, words were invented which signified abstract forms or genera comprising their species or relating parts with their wholes. (Vico 1948[1744]: § 409, p. 118)<sup>41</sup>

Besides tropes, there are also *poetic monsters* and *metamorphoses*:

Poetic monsters and metamorphoses arose from a necessity of this first human nature, its inability, as shown in the Axiom [209], to abstract forms or properties from subjects. By their logic they had to put subjects together in order to put their forms together, or to destroy a subject in order to separate its primary form from the contrary form which had been imposed upon it. Such a putting together of ideas created the poetic monsters.<sup>42</sup> (Vico 1948[1744]: §410, p. 118)<sup>43</sup>

Vico (1948[1744]: § 411, p. 118) specifies that “The distinguishing of ideas produced metamorphoses.”<sup>44</sup>

The fact that Vico discusses metaphor in the chapter on logic may appear, at first glance, strange. Croce (1922[1911]: 45-48) thinks that such a choice is confusing.<sup>45</sup> Trabant (2019b: § 1.2., 9), instead, argues that it makes sense to talk about metaphor in “‘Poetic Logic’ that is, as this title indicates, the book on *logos*, on language” (my trans. – F.V.).<sup>46</sup> Vico provides a very broad ‘etymology’ (a series of conjectures) for *λόγος*, stating that for ancient Greeks *λόγος*

<sup>41</sup> It.: “Per tutto ciò si è dimostrato che tutti i troppi (che tutti si riducono a questi quattro), i quali si sono finora creduti ingegnosi ritrovati degli scrittori, sono stati necessari modi di spiegarsi [di] tutte le prime nazioni poetiche, e nella lor origine aver avuto tutta la loro natia proprietà: ma, poi che, col più spiegarsi la mente umana, si ritrovarono le voci che significano forme astratte, o generi comprendenti le loro spezie, o componenti le parti co’ loro intieri, tai parlari delle prime nazioni sono divenuti trasporti” (2000 [1744]: § 409, p. 348).

<sup>42</sup> The example from Roman Law offered by Vico (1948[1744]: § 410, p. 118) is very suggestive: “In Roman law, as Antoine Favre observes in his *Iurisprudentiae papinianae scientia*, children born of prostitutes are called monsters because they have the nature of men together with the bestial characteristic of having been born of vagabonds or of casual unions. Of such sort we shall find those monsters to have been (children of noble women without benefit of solemn nuptials) whom the Law of the Twelve Tables commanded to be thrown into the Tiber.” It: “come in ragion romana, [...] si dicono ‘mostri’ i parti nati da meretrice, perc’hanno natura d’uomini, insieme, e proprietà di bestie d’esser nati da’ vagabondi o sieno incerti concubiti; i quali truoveremo esser i mostri i quali la legge delle XII Tavole (nati da donna onesta senza solennità delle nozze) comandava che si gittassero in Tevere” (2000[1744]: § 410, p. 348).

<sup>43</sup> It.: “I mostri e le trasformazioni poetiche provennero per necessità di tal prima natura umana, qual abbiamo dimostrato nelle *Dignità* (XLIX) che non potevan astrarre le forme o le proprietà da’ subbietti; onde con la lor logica dovettero comporre i subbietti per comporre esse forme, o distruggere un subbietto per dividere la di lui forma primiera dalla forma contraria introduttavi. Tal composizione d’idee fece i mostri poetici” (2000[1744]: § 410, p. 348).

<sup>44</sup> It.: “La distinzione dell’idee fece la metamorfosi” (2000[1744]: § 411, p. 348).

<sup>45</sup> He thinks that it would have been better for Vico to talk about phantasy in a separated section, eventually called Aesthetics. He, however, recalls that Baumgarten had considered Poetic Logic, besides other terms, as equivalent with Aesthetics.

<sup>46</sup> It.: “‘Logica poetica’ che è, come questo titolo indica, il libro sul *logos*, sul linguaggio”.

meant ‘idea’ and ‘language’, but originally also ‘fable’ and, then, other things, while also noting that it had additional or similar meanings in different languages (cultures):

The word logic comes from *logos*, whose first and proper meaning was *fabula*, ‘fable,’ carried over into Italian as *favella*, ‘speech.’ In Greek the fable was also called *mythos*, ‘myth,’ whence comes the Latin *mutus*, ‘mute.’ For speech was born in mute times as mental [or sign] language, which Strabo in a golden passage says existed before vocal or articulate [language]; whence *logos* means both ‘word’ and ‘idea.’ [...] *logos* or ‘word’ meant also ‘deed’ to the Hebrews and ‘thing’ to the Greeks. (Vico 1948[1744]: § 401, p. 114)<sup>47</sup>

My scope here is not to discuss these conjectures, but to shed light on the fact that these connections are all functional to Vico’s idea about a sort of ‘natural’ link between things, phantasy, language, and thought.

Although Vico does not always use this term (metaphor), he meant “it” also in his metaphysics and in all other branches of knowledge (that are all poetic). Vico sees poetics as the antechamber of *metafisica ragionata* (rational metaphysics), thus, a *metafisica fantastica* (imaginative metaphysics):

So that, as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by not understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit // omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them. (Vico 1948[1744]: § 405, pp. 116-117)<sup>48</sup> (Cf. Croce 1922[1911]: 55)

Another relevant assumption in Vico is that there is a universal dimension of human phantasy (or imagination) – men tend to perceive the world similarly. This assumption is the basis for the universal dimension of human civilisation (ideal eternal history), including language (universal mental language/vocabulary) and knowledge/wisdom (Vico 1948[1744]: § 35, p. 20, § 145, p. 57, §§ 161-162, p. 60, § 445, pp. 133-134).

<sup>47</sup> It. “‘Logica’ vien detta dalla voce λόγος, che prima e propriamente significò ‘favola’, che si trasportò\* in italiano ‘favella’ – e la favola da’ greci si disse anche μῦθος, onde vien a’ latini ‘mutus’, – la quale ne’ tempi mutoli nacque mentale, che in un luogo d’oro dice Strabone essere stata innanzi della vocale o sia dell’articolata onde λόγος significa e ‘idea’ e ‘parola’ [...] λόγος o ‘verbum’ significò anche ‘fatto’ agli ebrei, ed a’ greci significò anche ‘cosa’.” (2000[1744]: § 401, p. 343). \*It is worth noting that Vico employs the term *trasportare* [carry over into] with the meaning ‘tradurre’ [translate], just like Plato (cf. O’Rourke 2006: 156; cf. *supra*, 1.1).

<sup>48</sup> It.: “Perché come la metafisica ragionata insegna che ‘*homo intelligendo fit omnia*’, così questa metafisica fantastica dimostra che ‘*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*’; e forse con più di verità detto questo che quello, perché l’uomo con l’intendere spiega la sua mente e comprende esse cose, ma col non intendere egli di sé fa esse cose e, col trasformandosi, lo diventa” (2000[1744]: § 405, p. 346).

In brief, in *Scienza nuova*, Vico proposes the idea of a poetic foundation of meaning and knowledge (cf. Virban 2025a; cf. 2025b). In Vico's views, "Wisdom is the faculty which commands all the disciplines by which we acquire all the sciences and arts that make up humanity" (Vico 1948: § 364, p. 98).<sup>49</sup> And the first type of wisdom achieved by man is poetic – *sapienza poetica*. And this occurs in all fields of knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Here, metaphor reigns supreme.

#### 2.4. Model of understanding for metaphor in Vico

Stemming from Vico's ideas on metaphor, as overviewed in the above, one may sketch the following model of understanding.

- (1) Vico's idea of metaphor is aligned to [is informed by and informs] his new way of thinking [new science], which is shaped by the *verum–factum* principle and is essentially anti-Cartesian. So, metaphor is a key underlying principle of this new paradigm of thought created by Vico. In this paradigm, the so-called human sciences tradition also originates.
- (2) Language is a human faculty/activity.
- (3) Man can gain access to the truth of things through language; he creates elements of words. Thus, language is a human cognitive faculty/activity. Without going into too many details about Vico's conception of language, it is, however, worth highlighting the fact that he sees words as names for classes (ideas, concepts) and not as labels for things. Man abstracts the 'essence' of things and expresses it in language, that is, re-invents it in language.
- (4) He does so through phantasy (imagination)/ingenium. There is a deep relationship between memory, reminiscence, and phantasy (imagination): one cannot imagine what he did not perceive [and, therefore, remember]. Ingenium is also a form of knowing through (re-)creation. Thus, language is a creative human activity.
- (5) From this, one may infer the language–poetry identity; that is, that creation of meaning is a poetic activity.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> It.: "Ella è 'sapienza' la facultà che comanda a tutte le discipline, dalle quali s'apprendono tutte le scienze e l'arti che compiono l'umanità" (2000[1744]: § 364, p. 322).

<sup>50</sup> He looks closely at eleven fields: metaphysics, logics, moral, economics, politics, history, physics, cosmography, astronomy, chronology, and geography – all poetical.

<sup>51</sup> This supports Trabant's point, mentioned above [see *supra*, 2.3.3.], that is, that it makes sense for Vico to talk about metaphor in the chapter on Logic [that is, on language].

- (6) Metaphor is not the prerogative of poets; not a rhetorical device only, but a semantic cognitive device; employing his phantasy, man creates elements of words; ingenium/creative thinking may create scope per progress in all fields of human knowledge; ingenium is a faculty proper to philosophers; ingenium was granted to man to know (to have access to truth). Metaphor is an *acute* form of expression; it produces new meaning (unlike syllogism and sorites). Hence, Vico's preference for the Topics and the inductive method against Criticism and the deductive method. He associates the Cartesian method with the sorites of the Stoics. Metaphor (ingenium), instead, falls under Topics, which is the art of eloquence and the ability to see the medium term /argument.
- (7) Vico defines metaphor as the brightest expression of the human faculty (ingenium) to unite (bring together) diverse, separate, strange things.
- (8) Very young people [adolescents, children] are more inclined to use phantasy/imagination, that is, to see similarities between different things [produce metaphors], because they have fewer prejudices. To put it in Aristotle's terms, they have a better 'eye for resemblances.' This applies to humanity's childhood [human civilisation] too: the first men were poets. "Since the first men of the gentile world had the simplicity of children, who are truthful by nature, the first fables could not feign anything false; they must therefore have been, as they have been defined above, true narrations" (Vico 1948[1744]: § 408, p. 118).<sup>52</sup>
- (9) Metaphorization is inherent in human language/thought. Human knowledge is primarily (in a first instance) poetic – an imaginative metaphysics (*metafisica fantastica*), which is the antechamber of rational metaphysics (*metafisica ragionata*). Metaphors may also lose their symbolic power [demetaphorize].
- (10) Vico sees etymology [à la Plato] as a practice for unearthing the original meanings of words (a sort of archaeology of meanings/concepts).
- (11) While being mainly a linguistic device, in Vico metaphor seems to transcend language; as Trabant (2019b: 7[sic! 6], 7, 10, 11, 20) highlights, there is a "corpulentissima fantasia" [very full-body / very embodied phantasy].

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<sup>52</sup> It.: "che i primi uomini della gentilità essendo stati semplicissimi quanto i fanciuli, i quali per natura son veritieri, le prime favole non potevano fingere nulla di falso; per lo che dovettero necessariamente essere, quali sopra ci vennero diffinite, vere narrazioni" (2000[1744]: § 408, 347).

- (12) There is a universal dimension of human phantasy. This assumption is the basis for the universal dimension of human civilisation (universal history), including language (universal mental language) and knowledge (wisdom).

### 3. Metaphor in Coseriu

Although there is only one study with a focus on metaphor (Coseriu 1956), the idea of language as an essentially creative activity is transversal in Coseriu's work.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Coseriu's views on metaphor (and language), as expressed in his 1956 article, should be integrated, when necessary, with additional relevant points from his other works and connected to his overall theory, which positions itself within the broad Western European tradition and, more particularly, the human sciences paradigm.

#### 3.1. Language as cognitive creative activity

In his 1956 study "La creación metafórica en el lenguaje", Coseriu defines language in terms of *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*. In his views, the *genus proximum* of language consists in it being essentially a human activity – "Language is a human activity" (Coseriu 1956: § 4, p. 8; § 7, p. 14). An important detail highlighted by Coseriu is that language is not only an *activity*, but also a *faculty*; it is, at the same time, activity and faculty (that is, the ability to do, the capacity to make and the very making of language):

And, being an activity, it is implicitly a 'faculty': in fact, this last term, applied to language, does not refer to a distinct, prior, or subsequent ascertainment, but to the same ascertainment seen from another perspective, since it only indicates the very possibility of being of an activity that *is*, and that a faculty would not be such if it were not realised as an activity. That is to say, the two statements considered above ('language is a human activity', 'language is a human faculty') essentially mean the same thing. (Coseriu 1956: § 4., pp. 8-9. My trans. – F.V.)<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> For a comprehensive view on metaphor in Coseriu, see Willems/Faur 2025 in this volume [*Energeia X (2025)*].

<sup>54</sup> Spa.: "Y, siendo actividad, es implícitamente 'facultad': en efecto, este // último término, aplicado al lenguaje, no se refiere a una comprobación distinta, anterior o ulterior, sino a la misma comprobación vista bajo otro aspecto, puesto que sólo indica la posibilidad misma de ser de una actividad que *es* y *che* una facultad no sería tal si no se realizara como actividad. Es decir que los dos enunciados considerados ('el lenguaje es actividad humana', 'el lenguaje es facultad humana') significan en esencia lo mismo." NOTA BENE: All translations from Coseriu's texts into English are mine. I follow the same rule; that is, I give my translation in the body of the text, and Coseriu's original corresponding text in footnotes; except for a few cases when both the original and the translation are part of a note.

As for the *differentia specifica* [*¿qué actividad es el lenguaje? – Which kind of activity is language?*], in declared continuity with Cassirer, Coseriu conceives language as an essentially cognitive activity, a cognitive activity that realises itself through symbols or symbolic signs.

Now, Cassirer himself emphasises that language is a specific human being modality to be in contact with the world, that is, to know reality, *his* reality, into which the human being ‘translates,’ that is, classifies and clarifies, designates, and expresses, through *symbols*: symbols are, therefore, forms whose content is knowledge. That is to say that the adjective *symbolic* falls under a broader concept, namely the *cognitive*; that is, language is essentially a *cognitive activity: a cognitive activity that is carried out through symbols (or symbolic signs)*. It is a form of knowledge. And this is not only at the moment in which a symbolic sign is produced for the first time in history (a moment that implies the recognition of a class as such and its differentiation, through the name, from the other classes, which are distinguished in reality), but in all its moments. In fact, symbols are re-created in every concrete act of speaking and, on the other hand, every linguistic act presupposes, both in the speaker and in the listener, complex operations of a fundamentally cognitive nature: identifying a particular object as belonging to a class (recognising that an object falls under a concept) and understanding, through the name of the class, the same particular object, that is: a cognitive movement that goes from the object to the concept, in the speaker, and from the concept to the object, in the listener. (Coseriu 1956: § 5., 9. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.)<sup>55</sup>

The indissoluble relationship between science [knowledge] and language is one of the underlying principles of Coseriu’s theory.<sup>56</sup> He insists that “The relationship between science

<sup>55</sup> Spa.: “Ahora, el mismo Cassirer destaca que el lenguaje es una modalidad específica del hombre de tomar contacto con el mundo, o sea de conocer la realidad, *su* realidad, a la que el ser humano ‘traduce’, esto es, clasifica y aclara, designa y expresa, mediante *símbolos*: los símbolos son, por lo tanto, formas cuyo contenido es un conocimiento. Vale decir que el adjetivo *simbólico* cae bajo un concepto más amplio que es el de *cognoscitivo*, o sea que el lenguaje es esencialmente *actividad cognoscitiva*: una *actividad cognoscitiva che se realiza mediante símbolos* (o *signos simbólicos*). Es forma de conocimiento. Y esto no sólo en el momento en que un signo simbólico se produce por primera vez en la historia (momento que implica el reconocimiento de una clase como tal y su diferenciación, mediante el nombre, de las demás clases que se distinguen en la realidad), sino en todos sus momentos. En efecto, los símbolos se re-crean en todo acto concreto de hablar y, por otro lado, todo acto lingüístico presupone, tanto en el hablante como en el oyente, complejas operaciones de índole fundamentalmente cognoscitiva: individuar un objeto particular como perteneciente a una clase (reconocer que un objeto cae bajo un concepto) y entender, mediante el nombre de la clase, el mismo objeto particular, o sea: un movimiento cognoscitivo que va del objeto al concepto, en el hablante, y del concepto al objeto, en el oyente.”

<sup>56</sup> See also Coseriu’s reference to Aristotle’s distinction between *λόγος σηματικός* (*lógos semantikós*) and *λόγος ἀποφαντικός* (*lógos apophantikós*) (Coseriu 1977[1968/1966]: 16-17; cf. Saramandu 1996: 48) and Coseriu’s views on semantics, more generally (see, for instance, Coseriu 1990, 2000; cf. 1967). On this last aspect, cf. also Zlatev 2011, Sonesson 2021b, and Diodato 2021a,b. While shedding light on the inherent limits of the structural semantics model, Diodato (2021b: 395) acknowledges, however, the strength of Coseriu’s views: “Coseriu’s theory seems, instead, resistant to any kind of reductionism, offering an extensive account of *what language is*. Indeed, such an approach cannot straightforwardly solve the manifold theoretical and epistemological problems implied in the investigation of language and meaning – this is why, agreeing with Zlatev (2011), I am not simply longing for a regretful return to Coseriu’s structural semantics – yet it can bring back points of view which have been neglected in the last decades, reopening new path of philosophical inquiry.” From a slightly different perspective (yet related to the idea of language as precondition for science/knowledge) see also Coseriu’s note (in

and language is, therefore, a relationship of something secondary and conditioned with something primary and conditioning. [...] What is not possible without language is science, the episteme [...] science has its basis and its starting point in language” (Coseriu 1977[1968/1966]: 20-21. My trans. – F.V.).<sup>57</sup>

Ultimately, Coseriu states that language is essentially a creative activity; an activity of *creation* and *re-creation*, with the latter (*re-creation*) being defined as a particular form of creation.

The activity of imagination (phantasy), the *poetic* activity of man (in the etymological sense of the term), is noted in all speaking individuals (not only in ‘gods and heroes’) and in every linguistic act, in literary language as in the language of current use, in enunciative language as in emotive language. The philosopher and the scientist create their language, just as the orator and the poet do. (Coseriu 1956: § 8., 15. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.)<sup>58</sup>

The idea (of language as a creative activity) is another key principle in Coseriu.<sup>59</sup> Such a view derives from the conceiving of language as *energeia*, in direct Humboldtian descent (Coseriu 1978[1958]: II, § 1.1. 30-31, §§ 2.1.-2.2., 44-48; cf. Kabatek 2016: § 2.2., 47-48, 2023: 26; Virban 2022: § 2.1.1., 181-183), though with deeper roots in the ancient Greek tradition.<sup>60</sup> The conceiving of language as creative activity is also reinforced by the additional assumption

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continuity with Humboldt and Hjelmslev, but also with Vico, Husserl, and Cassirer) on the centrality of linguistics (Coseriu 1954: § 5.2., 39; cf. 1956: § 7., 13-14).

<sup>57</sup> It.: “La relazione tra scienza e linguaggio è, quindi, una relazione di qualcosa di secondario e condizionato con qualcosa di primario e condizionante. [...] Ciò che non è possibile senza il linguaggio è la scienza, la *epistème* // [...] la scienza ha nel linguaggio la sua base e il suo punto di partenza.”

<sup>58</sup> Spa.: “La actividad fantástica, la actividad *poética* del hombre (en el sentido etimológico del término), se nota en todos los individuos hablantes (no sólo en los ‘dioses y héroes’) y en todo acto lingüístico, en la lengua literaria como en la lengua de uso corriente, en el lenguaje enunciativo como en el lenguaje emotivo. El filósofo y el científico crean su lenguaje como el orador y el poeta.”

<sup>59</sup> Coseriu (1974[1972]: § 2.2.2.3., 52, note 15) lists *creativity* as one of the five universal features of speaking, [universals of language] besides *semanticity*, *alterity*, *historicity*, and *exteriority*.

<sup>60</sup> Coseriu himself states that “[...] hay que recordar que Humboldt, al distinguir entre *ἐνέργεια* y *ἔργον*, se basaba, precisamente, en Aristóteles. Por lo tanto, su *ἐνέργεια* (*Tätigkeit*) no debe concebirse en sentido vulgar, como una actividad cualquiera, como simple ‘acción’ (*Handlung*), sino que debe entenderse con referencia a la *ἐνέργεια* de Aristóteles (creador tanto del concepto como del término): actividad libre y finalista, que lleva en sí su fin y es realización del fin mismo, y que, además, es idealmente anterior a la ‘potencia’.” / “[...] it must be remembered that Humboldt, in distinguishing between *ἐνέργεια* and *ἔργον*, was based precisely on Aristotle. Therefore, his *ἐνέργεια* (*Tätigkeit*) should not be conceived in the vulgar sense, as any activity whatsoever, as simple ‘action’ (*Handlung*), but should be understood with reference to the *ἐνέργεια* of Aristotle (creator of both the concept and the term): free and finalistic activity, which carries its end within itself and is the realization of the end itself, and which, moreover, is ideally prior to ‘potency’” (Coseriu 1978[1958]: II, § 2.2., 46; cf. § 2.1. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.). The fact that Coseriu’s way of conceiving language was founded on the classical vision of language as free and creative activity (*ἐνέργεια*) was also highlighted by Bolognesi (2003: 49) and recently reinforced by Gobber 2025.

of a primary essential coincidence between language and poetry, present already in Aristotle (language is essentially and originally *lógos semantíkós*) and then in Vico, Hegel, Croce, and Heidegger (Coseriu (1977[1968/1966]: 16-17, 21; cf. Saramandu 1996: 46, 48; cf. Kabatek 2023: § 11.4, 250-251; cf. Virban 2025a). This assumption informs the frame for the next point.

### 3.2.Linguistic knowledge as metaphorical knowledge

Even more so, Coseriu clearly states that “linguistic knowledge is often a metaphorical knowledge, knowledge through images” (Coseriu 1956: § 9., 15).<sup>61</sup>

But what does metaphor mean in Coseriu? He defines it as follows:

[...] we call *metaphor*, which we do not understand here as a simple verbal transposition, as an ‘abbreviated comparison’, but as a unitary, spontaneous and immediate expression (that is, without any intervening ‘as’) of a vision, of a poetic intuition, which may imply a momentary identification of distinct objects (*head-gourd*), or a hyperbolization of a particular aspect of the object (as in the case of *medved’*, ‘the one who eats honey’, to designate the *bear*, in Slavic languages) and even an identification between opposites, logically ‘absurd’, but with evident ironic meaning and effect, in certain situations, as in the case of *the black-blond*, or of a *fat* man called *skinny*, or of an *old man* called *youngish*. (Coseriu 1956: § 9., 16. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E. C.)<sup>62</sup>

First, Coseriu conceives metaphor as a “verbal transposition,” the “unitary, spontaneous and immediate expression of a vision.” With this, he defines it as a linguistic device, that is, something pertaining to language. Second, it is the verbal transposition of a “vision,” of an “intuition.”<sup>63</sup> It follows that one simultaneously sees and expresses what one sees. Third, it is about a “poetic intuition” (one sees something new). Then, in the second part of the definition, Coseriu narrows down the field to exemplify the types of intuitions: “identification of two distinct objects,” “hyperbolization of a particular aspect of an object,” and “identification between opposites.”

<sup>61</sup> Spa: “el conocimiento lingüístico es muchas veces un *conocimiento metafórico*, un conocimiento mediante *imágenes*.”

<sup>62</sup> Spa.: “[...] llamamos *metáfora*, que no entendemos aquí como simple transposición verbal, como ‘comparación abreviada’, sino como expresión unitaria, espontánea e inmediata (es decir, sin ningún ‘como’ intermedio) de una visión, de una intuición poética, que puede implicar una identificación momentánea de objetos distintos (*cabezamate*), o una hiperbolización de un aspecto particular del objeto (como en el caso de *medved’*, ‘el que come miel’, para designar el *oso*, en lenguas eslavas) y hasta una identificación entre contrarios, lógicamente ‘absurda’, pero de significado y efecto irónicos evidentes, en situaciones determinadas, como en el caso del *negro-rubio*, o de un *gordo* llamado *flaco*, o de un viejo llamado *mocito*.”

<sup>63</sup> While it resounds with the entire tradition of human sciences, intuition in Coseriu is mainly rooted in Husserlian phenomenology (1954: 2.3.5.-2.3.6., 19-20, 4.2.1-4.2.4., 35-37, 5.7.1., 52; 7., 72-73; Coseriu 1978[1958]: VI, 1.3., pp. 180-182; cf. Saramandu 1996: 30; cf. also Virban 2003, 2015[2013], 2022[2021]; Willems 2020: 2).

Of relevance is also a note in “Determinación y entorno” [Determination and Surrounding Fields], in which Coseriu explains the relationship between *name* and *concept*<sup>64</sup> and insists on the fact that metaphor unites (assimilates) a ‘named’ with a diverse ‘denoted’. He also specifies the relevance of metaphor for the linguistics of speaking [*hablar*] and clarifies the relationship between *comparison* and *metaphor*, highlighting the primacy of the latter:

When a name is intentionally applied to denote an object that falls under a different concept than the one ‘named’ by the name itself, we say that we are dealing with a metaphor. Naturally, a metaphor is recognised as such to the extent that both values (the ‘named’ and the ‘denoted’) are perceived at the same time as diverse and as assimilated. The subject of metaphor, therefore, also belongs to the linguistics of speaking [lingüística del hablar]. For now, it is clear that a metaphor is not a ‘shortened comparison’;

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<sup>64</sup> As he clarified in “Determinación y entorno”, names refer to classes of objects: „La operación determinativa fundamental – e idealmente primaria – es, sin duda, la *actualización*. Los nombres que integran el saber lingüístico no son ‘actuales’, sino ‘virtuales’; no significan ‘objetos’, sino ‘conceptos’. En cuanto perteneciente al lenguaje *κατά δόξαν* un nombre *nombra* un // concepto (que es, precisamente, el significado virtual del nombre mismo) y sólo potencialmente *designa* a todos los objetos que caen bajo ese concepto. Solamente en el hablar un nombre puede *denotar* objetos). Dicho de otro modo, un nombre considerado fuera de la actividad lingüística es siempre nombre de una ‘esencia’, de un ‘ser’ o de una *identidad*, que puede ser identidad perteneciente a varios objetos (reales, posibles o eventuales), como en el caso de los nombres genéricos, o ‘identidad de un objeto consigo mismo’ (*identidad histórica*), como en el caso de los nombres propios; no se refiere a *ipsidades*), ya que para ello es necesario un acto concreto de referencia. Para transformar el saber lingüístico en hablar – para *decir* algo acerca de algo con los nombres – es, pues, necesario dirigir los signos respectivos hacia los objetos, transformando la designación potencial en designación real (*denotación*). Ahora, ‘actualizar’ un nombre es, precisamente, ese orientar un signo conceptual hacia al ámbito de los objetos. O, más estrictamente, la actualización es la operación mediante la que el significado nominal se trasfiere de la ‘esencia’ (identidad) a la ‘existencia’ (ipsidad), y por la cual el nombre de un ‘ser’ (por ej. *hombre*) se vuelve denotación de un ‘ente’ (por ej. *el hombre*), de un ‘existencial’ al que la identidad significada se atribuye por el acto mismo de la denotación). Se trata, pues, de la integración primaria entre un ‘conocer’ actual y un ‘saber’ anterior, que se manifiesta en la denotación de lo conocido con el nombre de lo sabido” (Coseriu 1955-1956 [1957]: 2.2.1., p. 35-36. Italics of E.C.). / ”The fundamental determining operation – and ideally primary – is, without a doubt, the *actualization*. The names that make up linguistic knowledge are not ‘actual’, but ‘virtual’; they do not mean ‘objects’, but ‘concepts.’ As pertaining to the language *κατά δόξαν*, a name *names* a concept (which is precisely the virtual meaning of the name itself) and only potentially *designates* all the objects that fall under that concept. Only in speaking can a name *denote* objects.) In other words, a name considered outside of linguistic activity is always a name of ‘an essence’, of a ‘being’ or of an *identity*, which can be an identity belonging to several objects (real, possible or eventual), as in the case of generic names, or the ‘identity of an object with itself’ (*historical identity*), as in the case of proper names, does not refer to *ipseities*) since a specific act of reference is necessary for this. To transform linguistic knowledge into speaking – to *say* something about something with the names – it is, thus, necessary to direct the respective signs towards the objects, transforming the potential designation into actual designation (*denotation*). Now, ‘actualizing’ a name is, precisely, that orienting of a conceptual sign towards the realm of objects. Or, more strictly, actualization is the operation by which nominal meaning is transferred from ‘essence’ (identity) to ‘existence’ (ipseity), and by which the name of a ‘being’ (e.g., *man*) becomes denotation of an ‘entity’ (e.g., *the man*), of an ‘existential’ to which the signified identity is attributed by the very act of denotation). It is, therefore, about the primary integration between an actual ‘knowing’ [*conocer*] and a previous ‘knowing’ [*saber*], which manifests itself in the denotation of the known [*conocido*] with the name of the known [*sabido*]” (My trans. – F.V.). Of relevance is also the point in note 23 (p. 36): “En una predicación del tipo ‘A es hombre (animal, poeta, niño, etc.)’, llamamos *ipsidad* el elemento A considerado independientemente de aquello que de él se predica (y que se halla implícito en el sujeto mismo), e *identidad* aquello que en cada caso se predica de A.” / “In a predication [statement] of the type ‘A is man (animal, poet, child, etc.)’, we call *ipseity* the element A considered independently of what is predicated about it (and which is implicit in the subject itself), and *identity* that which in each case is predicated (stated) about A” (My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.).

on the contrary, a comparison is an explicit [explained] metaphor. (Coseriu 1955-1956[1957]: 2.2.1., note 22, p. 36. My trans. – F.V.)<sup>65</sup>

In addition, in his “Zur Vorgeschichte der strukturellen Semantik: Heyses Analyse des Wortfeldes ‘Schall’” [On the Prehistory of Structural Semantics: Heyse’s Analysis of the Word Field ‘Sound’], Coseriu sees the impossibility to distinguish between metaphorical and non-metaphorical use as a limit (besides others) of J. J. Katz’s and J. A. Fodor’s semantic theory (Coseriu 1967: § 3., Note 3, p. 494).

### 3.3. Metaphorization

Metaphorization, demetaphorization, the reinterpretation of metaphors, and the creation of new metaphors are all inherent practices in the dynamic of language. And people (communities of speakers) may accept metaphors for several reasons. Moreover, metaphorization may have an infinite potential and a universal dimension.

#### 3.3.1. Metaphorization *versus* demetaphorization

Coseriu rightly observed that many metaphors become language, that is, they lose their quality of sign-image; though some may preserve it for a while. While some metaphors cease to be so (*demetaphorization* – the relationship with other signs is lost), others may be created in language (*metaphorization* – new relationships with other signs are made) (Coseriu 1956: § 10., 17). At points, the current value of a metaphor may not coincide with the history of metaphor; that is, with its etymology. According to Coseriu, this illustrates the Saussurean discrepancy between synchrony and diachrony, or between *norm* and *sentiment* (that is, how the speaker perceives and reinterprets the metaphor). The speaker may ignore the original value of a metaphor and invent another, an ‘alternative’ etymology: the so-called popular etymology (Coseriu 1956: § 10., 18-19). Hence, the need to distinguish between technical-objective etymology and etymology in a broader perspective. The latter considers not only the strict evolution of the words (in isolation) but sees them also connected to things, as well as to “the

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<sup>65</sup> Spa.: “Cuando un nombre se aplica intencionalmente para denotar un objeto que cae bajo otro concepto que el mismo que el ‘nombrado’ por el nombre mismo, decimos que nos hallamos frente a una metáfora. Naturalmente, una metáfora se reconoce como tal en la medida en que ambos valores (el ‘nombrado’ y el ‘denotado’) se perciben al mismo tiempo como diversos y como asimilados. También el tema de la metáfora pertenece, pues, a la lingüística del hablar. Por de pronto, resulta evidente que la metáfora no es una ‘comparación abreviada’; al contrario: la comparación es una metáfora explicitada.”

linguistic sentiment and the expressive value the speakers are investing them with” (Coseriu 1956: § 11., 21).<sup>66</sup> To a certain extent, the last type of etymology recalls Plato’s *Cratylus*. Children, as well as people who are learning a foreign language, – Coseriu observes – have a higher capacity of metaphorization, because they do not use language in an automatic way (not yet). Rules do not fully constrain them (they do not know them, not yet) and, thus, they are free to invent, imagine (Coseriu 1956: § 10., 17-18). They behave as Vico’s primitive men (*i primi uomini*), who were poets (cf. also Croce 1922[1911]: 54-55). They also remind Nietzsche’s “overjoyed hero,” who, overlooking the rules or rejecting them by purpose, follows his intuition and, thus, his natural drive to form metaphors (cf. Nietzsche 2006[1973]: 121-122). This drive, which often becomes manifest (is reactivated) in art, is, however, according to Nietzsche, a universal human faculty:

The drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself. This drive is not truly vanquished and scarcely subdued by the fact that a regular and rigid new world is constructed as its prison from its own ephemeral products, the concepts. It seeks a new realm and another channel for its activity, and it finds this in myth and in art generally. (Nietzsche 2006[1973]: 121)

Coseriu keeps the focus on metaphorization as inherent to language activity; that is, conceiving *metaphorical competence* as an integral part of *linguistic competence* (cf. Borcilă 2002-2003: 53). In a way that resounds with Aristotle’s views [see *supra*, 1.2.]<sup>67</sup>, Coseriu states that:

[...] in addition to the significant, morphological, and syntactical relationships, in addition to the relationships due to the practical and standard derivation and composition, there exist in language particular relationships between words due to subjective and metaphorical associations, established sporadically or constantly between the corresponding intuitions, or between the same symbols, for formal reasons. (Coseriu 1956: § 11, 22. My trans. – F.V.)<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Spa.: “con el sentimiento lingüístico y con el valor expresivo que los hablantes les atribuyen.”

<sup>67</sup> For a broader perspective on the link between creativity as a universal feature of language in Coseriu and Aristotle, see also Gobber 2025.

<sup>68</sup> Spa.: “[...] además de las relaciones significativas, morfológicas y sintácticas, además de las relaciones debidas a la efectiva y normal derivación y composición, existen en el lenguaje relaciones particulares entre las palabras debidas a asociaciones subjetivas y metafóricas, establecidas esporádica o constantemente entre las intuiciones correspondientes, o entre los mismos símbolos, por razones formales.”

### 3.3.2. Why is metaphor accepted?

Coseriu argues that the question of the foundation of metaphor (*why is metaphor created?*) is a pseudo-question (it is not a pertinent question)<sup>69</sup>:

But what are the reasons for metaphorical creation in language? Or better: can you investigate the inner reasons of linguistic creation? Evidently not, since creation, invention, is, by definition, inherent in language. No one can give the reasons for the capricious and unsuspecting movements of the creative human phantasy. (Coseriu 1956: § 12., 22. My trans. – F.V.)<sup>70</sup>

Instead, according to Coseriu, a pertinent question is why a metaphor is, more or less, accepted in a specific community. There are many reasons. Many are functional to the system itself, which may create new signs when the old ones are perceived as inexpressive or confusing. Another reason is *the linguistic taboo*, the need to avoid expressions perceived as too strong, impolite, or indecent. Additional reasons may include jokes, irony, humour, etc. (cf. Coseriu 1956: §§ 12.-13., 23-30).

### 3.3.3. Infinite potential and universal dimension

Moreover, at a deeper level, one may intuit “*infinitas creaciones metafóricas*” [infinite metaphorical creations] (Coseriu 1956: § 13., 28).

There is a more profound level, where metaphorical creation is functional to cognition; it is a fundamental human cognitive activity:

And much more profoundly, in the same distinction, classification and initial denomination of what is known, of what is presented as reality to the intuition of the man, creator of his specific world, as well as of his language (an activity that is placed as a mediating bridge between the conscience and the world), infinite metaphorical creations can be intuited. Man knows [*conoce*] and metaphorically designates phenomena and aspects of nature, plants and animals, his own products and activities, and the instruments that he makes for his work. (Coseriu 1956: § 13., 28. My trans. – F.V.)<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> This is in line with Coseriu’s point on the more general (pseudo-)question regarding the reason of language change and concerns the fundamental distinction between a causal and a finalist stance. The difference between the *creation/invention* of a metaphor and its *acceptance* reminds Coseriu’s essential distinction between *innovation* and *adoption*, as two sequences of language change (Coseriu 1978[1958]; 1988 [1983/1982]; cf. also Kabatek 2016 and Virban 2022[2020]).

<sup>70</sup> Spa.: “Pero ¿cuáles son las razones de la creación metafórica en el lenguaje? O mejor: ¿pueden investigarse las razones íntimas de la creación lingüística? Evidentemente no, puesto que la creación, la invención, es inherente al lenguaje por definición. No se pueden dar las razones de los movimientos caprichosos e insospechables de la fantasía humana creadora.”

<sup>71</sup> Spa.: “Y mucho más profundamente, en la misma distinción, clasificación y denominación inicial de lo conocible, de lo que se presenta como realidad a la intuición del hombre, creador de su mundo específico como

Not only are speakers creating metaphors in all languages, but, often, they may create similar metaphors; there might be a sort of universal dimension of human phantasy:

Now, linguistic knowledge is often *metaphorical knowledge*, a knowledge conveyed through *images*, which, // moreover, are so often oriented in the same direction that make us think seriously about a certain universal unity of human fantasy, above linguistic, ethnic or cultural differences. (Coseriu 1956: § 9., 15-16. My trans. – F.V. Italics of E.C.)<sup>72</sup>

Given the presence of some images in so many languages and dialects, Coseriu insists, “It would be very hard to think of the diffusion of a unique creation from a single center: we have to admit that several individuals, in various parts of the world, have had almost identical intuitions and have expressed them, each in their language, with analogous metaphors” (Coseriu 1956: § 13., 29-30. My trans. – F.V.).<sup>73</sup>

### 3.4. Model of understanding for metaphor in Coseriu

Based on the analysis of Coseriu’s views on metaphor presented in the previous sections and considering Coseriu’s entire Integral Linguistics paradigm, I outline below the corresponding model of understanding.

- (1) Coseriu positions himself within a broad, thought-provoking framework (paradigm) shaped by Aristotle, Vico, Hegel, Humboldt, Husserl, and other thinkers. The way he conceives language (and metaphor) is deeply rooted in the *human sciences* tradition. Coseriu adopts a finalist approach to metaphorization (in contrast to the causalist approach). *Why metaphors are created* is not a linguistic question [we should not put the question in causal terms; in the same way as we should not put the question about language change in causal terms]. *Why are metaphors accepted?* is a pertinent question, instead.
- (2) He defines language as a human activity/faculty (this is its *genus proximum*).

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de su lenguaje (actividad que se coloca como puente mediador entre la consciencia y el mundo), se intuyen infinitas creaciones metafóricas. El hombre conoce y designa metafóricamente fenómenos y aspectos de la naturaleza, plantas y animales, sus mismos productos y actividades y los instrumentos que se fabrica para su trabajo.”

<sup>72</sup> Spa.: “Ahora, el conocimiento lingüístico es muchas veces un *conocimiento metafórico*, un conocimiento mediante *imágenes*, las cuales, // además, se orientan tan a menudo en el mismo sentido que nos hacen pensar seriamente en cierta unidad universal de la fantasía humana, por encima de las diferencias idiomáticas, étnicas o culturales.”

<sup>73</sup> Spa.: “[...] resultaría muy // difícil pensar en la difusión de una creación única desde un único centro: tenemos que admitir que varios individuos, en varias partes del mundo, han tenido intuiciones casi idénticas y que las han expresado, cada uno en su lengua, con metáforas análogas.”

- (3) Language is a cognitive activity/faculty (*differentia specifica*). Moreover, language is a necessary condition for science/knowledge. It is worth highlighting that, in Coseriu, words [names] refer to concepts [classes of objects], and not to objects.
- (4) Language is essentially a creative activity – *ἐνέργεια*.
- (5) In continuity with Aristotle, Vico, Croce, Hegel, and Heidegger, Coseriu reasserts the original identity between language, as *λόγος σημαντικός* (*lógos semantikós*), and poetry (in its etymological sense).
- (6) Metaphor is not simply a rhetorical device or a poetic device alone, but essentially a meaning-creating and cognitive tool; thus, a semantic-cognitive device.
- (7) Coseriu defines metaphor as “a unitary, spontaneous, and immediate expression [...] of a vision, of a poetic intuition, which may imply a momentary identification of distinct objects [...], or a hyperbolization of a particular aspect of the object [...] and even an identification between opposites, logically ‘absurd’, but with evident ironic meaning and effect, in certain situations” (Coseriu 1956: § 9., 16).
- (8) Children and people learning a foreign language are more likely to produce metaphors.
- (9) *Metaphorization* and *demetaphorization* are inherent in the dynamic of human speaking/thinking. Metaphors may lose their symbolic power [demetaphorize] or may change their value. And new metaphors may always be created. Moreover, there may be “infinite metaphorical creations”. Thus, in Coseriu, metaphorization is present in all moments (not limited to the original creation of meaning).
- (10) Etymology [à la Plato] (as an archaeology of meanings/concepts that connects words to things and speakers’ sentiment) may unveil the meaning of a metaphorical expression.
- (11) In Coseriu, metaphor is a linguistic device.
- (12) Coseriu acknowledges a universal dimension of human phantasy.

Beyond these explicit considerations about metaphor, it is Coseriu’s entire theoretical paradigm (also known as Integral Linguistics) that opens ‘relevant’ avenues for the refoundation of metaphor. Even more so, the *metaphor* might be the stern test of this paradigm. As Borcilă (2002-2003: 47) holds, “The authentic scientific potential of integral linguistics can be brought to light, exponentially, at present, by revealing the underlying platform that this conception can provide for the systematic and rigorous foundation of the study of ‘metaphorical

creation in language.”<sup>74</sup> Coseriu does not develop a systematic theory on metaphor (cf. Borcilă 2002-2003: p. 47, note 2). Borcilă is the first to outline an Integral paradigm of metaphorology (“o platformă integrală a metaforologiei”). This is essentially linguistic, based on the *conceptual cognitive* and *conceptual creative* coordinates, and concerns all three levels of linguistic competence (*elocutional*, *idiomatic*, and *expressive*). Moreover, Borcilă insists that metaphorical competence is not only an organic part of linguistic competence but also its exponential strength (2002-2003: §§ 4.-5., 60-68).

In the 1956 study, Coseriu makes no explicit reference to Vico. He does so on several other occasions. He writes about Vico in his *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie – History of the Philosophy of Language* (Coseriu 2003 [1969/1972]: Chap. 16) and in a 1995 article “Von den *universali fantastici*” (Coseriu 1995). According to Coseriu (2003: 14), “Until Vico and until German Romanticism, the philosophy of language does not thematise language as such”<sup>75</sup> (cf. Kabatek 2023: § 8.3).<sup>76</sup> To Vico is also linked the beginning of the so-called human sciences tradition (as distinct from both the natural and the mathematical sciences) (details in Vîrban 2003). Coseriu positions himself within this tradition, stating that language is a cultural and historical object. In the 1997 interview conducted by Kabatek and Murguía, Coseriu makes a direct reference to Vico, stating that we have no certainty about natural facts: “no *certum* in the sense of Vico” (cf. Kabatek/Murguía 1997: 197-198)<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Ro.: “potențialul științific autentic al lingvisticii integrale poate fi pus în lumină, într-un mod exponențial, în momentul de față, prin relevarea platformei de principiu pe care această concepție o poate furniza pentru întemeierea sistematică și riguroasă a studiului ‘creației metaforice în limbaj’.”

<sup>75</sup> Ger.: “Bis Vico und bis zur deutschen Romantik thematisiert die Sprachphilosophie nicht die Sprache als solche.”

<sup>76</sup> Indeed, as Croce (1922[1911]: IV, 50) put it, “Quasi più miracoloso di questa concezione della poesia è che il Vico intravedesse la qualità genuina del linguaggio: problema non meglio risoluto e assai meno agitato e investigato dalla filosofia antica e nuova, fino a quel tempo.” / “Almost more miraculous than this conception of poetry is that Vico glimpsed the genuine quality of language: a problem not better resolved and much less thematized and investigated by ancient and new philosophy, up to that time” (My trans. – F.V.).

<sup>77</sup> I am very grateful to the editors of the volume (Elena Faur and Ciprian Speranza), for having invited [“pushed”] me to contribute to this volume, and to the entire Energiea team (Johanes Kabatek, Cristina Bleorțu et al.), for an exemplary editorial and publishing assistance. In addition, I’m very thankful to the two anonymous reviewers for their beautiful words in praise of my work and for their valuable observations. I owe a debt of gratitude to my dearest friend, Fernando Orlandi, who put at my disposal the resources of the Biblioteca-Archivio del CSSEO and his own library, thus facilitating access to most of Vico’s works.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

A close examination of Vico's and Coseriu's ideas about metaphor yields two complex models of understanding [see *infra*, 4.1. and 4.2, respectively]. I repropose them in a simplified version below.

### 4.1.Vico's model

Vico's model may be further simplified as follows:

- (1) general frame: *verum–factum* (*new science* – incipient human sciences paradigm);
- (2) language as a human faculty/activity;
- (3) language as a cognitive human faculty/activity (man has access to truth through language, re-creates things through elements of words);
- (4) language as a creative faculty/activity (man can recreate things in language employing his phantasy);
- (5) language – poetry identity (in terms of meaning-creation);
- (6) metaphor/ingenium as a semantic-cognitive device (beyond rhetoric);
- (7) metaphor/ingenium is defined as uniting separate, diverse, absurd things;
- (8) children/adolescents are more inclined to use phantasy;
- (9) metaphorization is inherent in human language and thinking: it is connected to the original foundation of meaning/knowledge; hence Vico's idea of *metafisica fantastica* as the antechamber of *metafisica ragionata*;
- (10) etymology [à la Plato] as a practice to recover the original meaning;
- (11) although mainly a linguistic device, metaphor may transcend language;
- (12) the assumption of a universal dimension of human imagination as a basis for the universal dimension of human civilisation, including language and knowledge (wisdom).

### 4.2.Coseriu's model

In its turn, Coseriu's model can be synthesised as follows:

- (1) general frame: within the human sciences paradigms, initiated by Vico and further developed by other thinkers (Paul, Windelband, Rickert, Cassirer, Husserl and his disciples, among others);
- (2) language as a human activity/faculty (the *genus proximus* of language);
- (3) language as a cognitive activity (*differentia specifica*);

- (4) language as a creative activity – *ἐνέργεια*;
- (5) language (as *λόγος σημαντικός*) is identical with poetry;
- (6) metaphor beyond rhetoric – a semantic-cognitive device;
- (7) metaphor as expression of an immediate intuition/vision of a unity between diverse, separate, opposite things;
- (8) children and those who learn a foreign language are more inclined to metaphORIZATION;
- (9) metaphORIZATION is inherent in human language/thinking; in all moments (not limited to the original creation of meaning);
- (10) etymology [à la Plato] as a practice linked to metaphORIZATION (to unveil words' links to things and speakers' sentiment);
- (11) metaphor is a linguistic device;
- (12) there might be a universal dimension of human phantasy (which makes conceptual thinking possible).

#### 4.3. Vico's and Coseriu's models in the mirror

The analysis I undertook in the above [see *supra*, 2. and 3.; cf. the synthesis in 4.1-4.2.] brought to the fore a series of similarities between Coseriu's and Vico's models. A closer look at the two models, presented in the mirror below, provides striking evidence.

##### Vico's Model

- (1) frame: *verum-factum* (new science – incipient human sciences paradigm)
- (2) language – human faculty/activity
- (3) language – human cognitive faculty/activity
- (4) language as creative faculty/activity (man can recreate things in language employing his phantasy)
- (5) language – poetry identity (in terms of meaning-creation)

##### Coseriu's Model

- (1) frame: human sciences tradition (initiated by Vico/developed by other thinkers)
- (2) genus proximus of language – human activity/faculty
- (3) *differenzia specifica* of language – cognitive activity
- (4) language creative activity – *ἐνέργεια*
- (5) language (as *λόγος σημαντικός*) is identical with poetry

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|--|--|
| (6) metaphor/ingenium – semantic-cognitive device (beyond rhetoric)  | (6) metaphor – semantic-cognitive device (beyond rhetoric)   |
| (7) metaphor/ingenium is defined as uniting separate, diverse, absurd things   | (7) metaphor – expression of an immediate intuition/vision of a unity between diverse, separate, opposite things             |
| (8) children/adolescents – more inclined to use phantasy   | (8) children/those who learn a foreign language – more inclined to metaphorization   |
| (9) metaphorization – inherent in human language and thinking; seems to be relegated to the original foundation of meaning/knowledge; <i>metafisica fantastica</i> as the antechamber of <i>metafisica ragionata</i> | (9) metaphorization – inherent in human language/thinking; in all moments (not limited to the original creation of meaning)  |
| (10) etymology [à la Plato] – practice to recover the original meaning [original metaphor]   | (10) etymology [à la Plato] – practice linked to metaphorization: unveils how words relate to things and speakers' sentiment |
| (11) metaphor – linguistic device, but may transcend language  | (11) metaphor – linguistic device  |
| (12) a universal dimension of human phantasy – assumption at the basis of a universal dimension of human language/knowledge  | (12) a universal dimension of human phantasy may exist   |

The similarities are so evident that they require no further comment. There are many different nuances, but the general framework and underlying principles remain the same. One

may say that Coseriu's wisdom on metaphor was shaped, directly or indirectly (through Croce<sup>78</sup>), by Vico.

The two main differences concern points (9) and (11). In the first case (9), while Vico seems to relegate metaphorization to the original foundation of meaning/knowledge, Coseriu sees it as inherent to human thinking/language in all moments. In the second case (11), Coseriu views metaphor as a linguistic device, whereas, in Vico, metaphor appears to transcend language. One may infer that these two thinkers had highly pertinent intuitions that led to a complex and highly valuable model of understanding for metaphor, which might be called the Vichian-Coserian model. One can assimilate ideas from other thinkers, such as Nietzsche, into this model.

#### 4.4.A proto-paradigm of conceptual metaphor?

The main framework for the current debates about metaphor was initially shaped by Lakoff's and Johnson's (1981[1980]) conceptual metaphor theory. As Trabant already noted, some of the principles put forth by this theory<sup>79</sup> resonate with Vico's views. Observing that "contemporary philosophy rediscovered the cognitive centrality of the metaphor", Trabant clearly states that "Vico has not been considered a 'precursor' of this philosophy, simply

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<sup>78</sup> And, in addition, through Pagliaro. A new insight on the impact of the Italian scholarship legacy on Coseriu was recently offered by Gobber 2025, who particularly highlighted the role of Pagliaro and Pisani. Indeed, in his "Von den *universali fantastici*", Coseriu states that "Unter der vielen Interpretationen, die von den *universali fantastici* gegeben wurden, werde ich mich nur auf zwei beziehen, auf die von Benedetto Croce und auf die von Antonino Pagliaro." / "Among the many interpretations provided about the *universali fantastici*, I will refer only to two: those of Benedetto Croce and Antonino Pagliaro" (Coseriu 1995: 73). See Croce 1922[1911], in particular IV: "La forma fantastica del conoscere (La poesia e il linguaggio)", 45-61. About *universali fantastici* in Vico, Croce notes: "i fantasmi della poesia, individuati, singolarizzati, le sentenze di essa sempre corpulente, si falsificarono in universali fantastici, che sarebbero qualcosa di mezzo tra l'intuizione, che è individualizzante, e il concetto, che universalizza. [...] Il concetto di universale fantastico come anteriore all'universale ragionato concentra in sé la duplice contraddizione della dottrina; perché all'elemento fantastico dovrebbe essere congiunto in quella formazione mentale l'elemento dell'universalità, il quale, per sé preso, sarebbe poi un vero e proprio universale, ragionato e non fantastico: donde una *petitio principii*, per la quale la genesi degli universali ragionati, che dovrebbe essere spiegata, viene presupposta" (p. 58). / "the phantoms of poetry, individuated, singularized, its ever-corpulent sentences, falsified themselves into fantastic universals, which would be something halfway between intuition, which is individualizing, and the concept, which universalizes. [...] The concept of the fantastic universal as prior to the reasoned universal concentrates in itself the double contradiction of the doctrine; because the fantastic element should be joined in that mental formation by the element of universality, which, taken in itself, would then be a true universal, reasoned and not fantastic: hence a *petitio principii*, by which the genesis of reasoned universals, which should be explained, is presupposed" (My trans. – F.V.). See also Pagliaro 1961; cf. 1999 (and Coseriu's preface to it). On Pagliaro's studies on Vico, see also the synthesis in Battistini 1977. On *universali fantastici* in Vico, see also Di Cesare 1995, Verene 1995, and Cacciatore et al. (a cura di) 2004.

<sup>79</sup> The conceiving of the metaphor as a meaning-creating device, moving far beyond the rhetorical tradition, and a few other similarities, such as a certain unconscious dimension and the description of metaphor as an embodied thought produced by the "corpulentissima fantasia" [very full-body phantasy]. On this last point, besides Lakoff / Johnson 1981[1980], Trabant considers also Lakoff / Johnson 1999.

because the Americans mentioned above have not read Vico (or any other anti-Cartesian philosopher of the past)” and adds “But the surprising or not surprising parallelism demonstrates the modernity of the old Neapolitan” (Trabant 2019b: §2., 10, 11)<sup>80</sup>; hence the conclusion:

But the parallel also demonstrates a profound difference: that one can gain insights into the nature of the human mind not only through modern experimental psychology, but also through reading old books, epic poems, and cultural testimonies – that is, through what Vico calls ‘philology’. (Trabant 2019b: § 2., 11)<sup>81</sup>

This is what Vico and Coseriu did.

For truth’s sake, one should admit that conceptual metaphor theory cannot be reduced to Lakoff and Johnson (even less so to their 1980 work). One should also consider more recent contributions (such as Fusaroli/Morgagni (a cura di) 2013, Zlatev/Jacobsson/Paju 2021, Zlatev 2024). Moreover, some valuable studies link Vico to the cognitive paradigm (Danesi, 2001; Gensini, 2004, 2014/2015).

Paraphrasing Trabant, one may also say that “Coseriu has not been considered a ‘precursor’ of the conceptual metaphor theory simply because the Americans mentioned above did not read Coseriu.” In some views, Coseriu’s Integral Linguistics paradigm may contain a model superior to that proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (Borcilă 2002-2003: 65 and note 33). According to Borcilă, the cognitive paradigm overlooks the essential linguistic dimension of metaphorization and, thus, risks ending up in a blind alley of a new form of empiricism. A dialogic stance is adopted, instead, in Faur (2021) and Faur/Zlatev (2025). Faur (2021: 311-312) argues that “[...] Coseriu’s Integral Linguistics is in some aspects convergent with the central position attributed to // the metaphorical process within a largely ‘cognitively’ oriented trend in present-day metaphor studies.” She demonstrates that a dialogue between the Integral theory of metaphor (as shaped by Coseriu’s Integral Linguistics and its further development) and the wider Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT and related trends) is not only possible but also mutually enlightening (cf. also Faur/Zlatev 2025). Faur also adds that “At the same time, Coseriu’s principled position – as already advanced in his article ‘La creación metafórica en el

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<sup>80</sup> It.: “la filosofia attuale ha riscoperto la centralità conoscitiva della metafora;” “Vico non è considerato un ‘precursore’ di questa filosofia, semplicemente per il fatto che i suddetti americani non hanno letto Vico (o qualsiasi altro filosofo anti-cartesiano del passato);” “Ma il – sorprendente o non sorprendente – parallelismo dimostra la modernità del vecchio napoletano.”

<sup>81</sup> It.: “Ma il parallelismo dimostra anche una profonda differenza: che si può arrivare a delle conoscenze sulla natura della mente umana non solo attraverso la psicologia sperimentale moderna, ma anche attraverso la lettura di vecchi libri, poemi epici, testimonianze culturali, cioè attraverso quello che Vico chiama ‘filologia’.”

lenguaje’ as early as 1956 – presents itself as being based on a distinctive theoretical perspective, which is grounded in the major European tradition in philosophy of language and culture (Aristotle, Vico, Hegel, Humboldt<sup>82</sup>)” (Faur 2021: 312). Indeed, it is in these deep philosophical roots that lies the strength of the Integral model of understanding for metaphor, as well as the strength of the Integral Linguistics paradigm more generally.

In continuity with Trabant (and to some extent to Borcilă and Faur), I hazard to argue that, to a certain extent, the wider Vichian–Coserian paradigm (as mainly shaped by Vico and Coseriu, but to which one may assimilate ideas by other thinkers, such as Nietzsche, for instance), contains the underlying principles of a proto-conceptual metaphor theory. One may hold that the newest wisdom of contemporary scholarship on metaphor is (often without knowing) ‘in debt’ with Vico’s model and to other developments, directly (Coseriu) or indirectly (Nietzsche<sup>83</sup>) related to it. While acknowledging the relevance of many theories, I think that the model articulated by Coseriu is the one that honours and develops Vico’s legacy at best (while also assimilating other views) – mainly through the creation of an unprecedented systematic theory of language (Integral Linguistics) and, implicitly, laying the more or less explicit foundation for a very pertinent model of understanding for metaphor, a point already acknowledged by Borcilă (2002-2003) and further reinforced by Faur (2013a,b, 2021).

My intuition is that recovering and creatively assimilating the wider Vichian–Coserian paradigm might bring about a true Renaissance in metaphorical studies, precisely as the recovery of the ancient Greek and Roman traditions brought about the Florentine/Italian Renaissance. And I would add that this was the way both Vico and Coseriu proceeded.

But this is too complex a line of inquiry to be developed here. It transcends the purpose of my current study and requires additional substantial research.

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<sup>82</sup> And, I would add, Husserl.

<sup>83</sup> Nietzsche’s “Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn” [On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense] is perhaps one of the most beautiful texts ever written about metaphor (Nietzsche 2000[1973]; for an English version, see Nietzsche 2006[1973]). Some similarities between Nietzsche and Vico have been already highlighted (see, for instance, Price 1994; cf. Arduini/Fabbri 2008: Chap. 3, § 3.1., 33-35 and Trabant 2019b: §§ 5.1.-5.2., 16-18). The link between Nietzsche’s and Vico’s ideas about metaphor, and Nietzsche’s own views in themselves, should be, however, investigated in more depth.

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