I Why Metaphors? Introducing the Focus, Goals, and Outline

In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*, which of course provides one of the key texts and inspirations for this volume, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson observe that “the people who get to impose their metaphors on the culture get to define what we consider to be true [...]” 1 Anyone who doubts that they are right only has to look at a random selection of examples to realize to what extent metaphors have indeed served ‘to define what we consider to be true’ and to shape our views of culture and our theories. No matter what the domain is, we apparently cannot do without metaphors: Whether it is our notions of communication (see Martin Zierold’s contribution to this volume), research and knowledge (Herbert Grubes), the ways we conceive of literary creativity (Hubert Zapf), culture or cultural transference (Greta Olson), history (see Demandt), political power (see Rigotti) and the state (see Peil), or computers, their defects (e.g. ‘viruses’) and the internet: We always resort to metaphors whenever we try to make sense of complex phenomena.

Though the ubiquity and pervasive importance of metaphors in culture and society at large which provides the point of departure for both this introduction and the volume in general may be hard to deny or ignore, one might still ask the question of ‘why metaphors’ or ‘why metaphors again’? The answer is that despite a plethora of contributions to the burgeoning fields of metaphor theory, metaphorology, and contemporary metaphor studies in general, there is still a number of areas that have not yet received the degree of attention they arguably deserve. As the programmatic title “Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory” already indicates, this volume focuses on the cultural, epistemological, and political work that metaphors do, concentrating on the complex ways in which metaphors shape both our views of cultural phenomena and our theories. Metaphors are not only “the understanding of something in one conceptual domain […] by conceptual

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projection from something in a different conceptual domain,\textsuperscript{2} but they also serve as subtle epistemological, conceptual, and cultural tools that are imbued with a wide range of cognitive, emotional, and ideological connotations.

Using these preliminary observations as a point of departure, the articles in this volume explore how metaphors structure not only what we perceive and experience in our everyday realities,\textsuperscript{3} but how they also provide the tools in terms of which we conceptualize, structure, and understand culture, cultural change, and even our theories. As Herbert Grubes shows in his article, metaphors like ‘mirror,’ ‘anatomy,’ and ‘enquiry’ are very interesting metaphoric cases in point insofar as they have profoundly shaped our understanding of research and knowledge.

Serving as a means of structuring, narrativizing, and naturalizing cultural phenomena and transformations, metaphors can be conceived of as important sense—and indeed worldmaking devices. Metaphors not only serve to structure how we understand cultural transformations, but they also project “mininarrations”\textsuperscript{4} onto them, thereby providing ideologically charged plots and explanations of cultural and historical changes rather than neutral descriptions thereof. It is arguably “the metaphorical concepts we live by,”\textsuperscript{5} to use Lakoff and Johnson’s felicitous formulation, that provide the key to understanding the topic at hand, i.e. “Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory.” If one accepts Lakoff and Johnson’s view “that most of our conceptual system is metaphorically structured,”\textsuperscript{6} then one might even go so far as to argue that metaphors and narratives are the most powerful tools we have for making sense of cultural transformations, being endowed as they are with the power of reason and the power of evaluation.

This volume focuses on the role of metaphors for exploring ways of worldmaking. When Nelson Goodman coined the term ‘ways of worldmaking,’ he was mainly concerned with the claim that the world we know is always already made from other worlds. According to Goodman, there is no such thing as a given world – the only thing we can ever have access to are culturally shaped world models. Recent years have seen an increasing interest across all disciplines in the question of exactly how worlds are made and how the relation between worldmaking and orders of knowledge can be

\textsuperscript{3} See Lakoff and Johnson.
\textsuperscript{5} Lakoff and Johnson 22.
\textsuperscript{6} Lakoff and Johnson 106.
described. Useful concepts for exploring this question, which have come to
the forefront of research, are the notion of narrative, archives, and media.
What has received much less attention, however, is the prominent role that
metaphors play in the ways in which we construe the world.

Exploring a wide range of examples from the Middle Ages through the
Enlightenment to modernity, postmodernity, and contemporary media soci-
ety, the articles in this volume provide fascinating casestudies of how meta-
phors not only serve to shape prevailing views of culture and theory, but are
also, at the same time, shaped by the cultures and theories from which they
originate. On the one hand, metaphors project structures onto cultural phe-
nomena which defy direct observation and serve to make sense of them.
They thus play a central role in shaping both culture and theory. On the other
hand, metaphors are also shaped by both everyday cultural notions and by
theories. As Zoltán Kövecses has convincingly shown in a number of publica-
tions, metaphors not only reflect prevailing cultural models, but they also
shape and even constitute cultural models. Kövecses is also the first theorist
to explore the various dimensions of metaphor variation across and within
culture.

By focussing on this reciprocal relationship between metaphor and cul-
ture, the articles also explore the functions that metaphors serve to fulfill
within cultures and theories. Despite the productiveness of the metaphor
industry, both the cultural implications and ideological functions of meta-
phors and the constitutive rather than just reflective role of metaphors in
determining the perception of culture and theories have not yet been suffi-
ciently explored. This volume tries to redress the balance by examining in
detail the relationships between metaphors and culture and between meta-
phors and theory. As a number of scholars have shown, metaphors have
played a much more important role in the history of science and in theories
than is commonly assumed.

8 See e.g. Zoltán Kövecses, “Does Metaphor Reflect or Constitute Cultural Models?” eds.
Raymond W. Gibbs and Gerald J. Steen, Metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999) 167-88. See also Kövecses’ seminal books listed in the Works Cited.

9 See Zoltán Kövecses, Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation (Cambridge: Cam-
bridge UP, 2005); Zoltán Kövecses, Language, Mind, and Culture: A Practical Introduction
(Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), see especially chapter 10, “Metaphor Variation Across and
Within Cultures.”

10 See e.g. Bernard Debatin, “Der metaphorische Code der Wissenschaft: Zur Bedeutung
der Metapher in der Erkenntnis- und Theoriebildung,” European Journal for Semiotic Stu-
dies 2 (1980): 793-820; Evelyn Fox Keller, Das Leben neu denken: Metaphern der Biologie im
20. Jahrhundert (München: Kunstmann, 1998); Petra Drewer, Die kognitive Metapher als
Werkzeug des Denkens: Zur Rolle der Analogie bei der Gewinnung und Vermittlung wissen-
schaftlicher Erkenntnis (Tübingen: Narr, 2003); Gerd Mattenkottl, “Metaphern in der Wis-
senschaftssprache,” Bühnen des Wissens: Interferenzen zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft,
One of the main reasons for the great interest that metaphors hold for the cultural historian and for anyone interested in cultural theory is that they show how cultures and theories are understood by the contemporaries. As Rüdiger Zill, following Hans Blumenberg, has emphasized, metaphors provide insight into the ‘substructures of thinking,’ into what has been dubbed the ‘history of mentalities,’ i.e. habits of mind or structures of ideas and attitudes.

Providing a preliminary introduction to some of the theoretical underpinnings, the second part of this introduction will give a brief outline of cognitive metaphor theory and of the central role metaphors have played in shaping culture and theories. The third part will then give a brief account of the more recent historical study of key metaphors and consider its consequences for metaphor theory. In the final section an attempt will be made to assess the importance of metaphoric projections for the study of culture and theory in the context of the history of mentalities, suggesting that such a metaphorological approach can open up productive new possibilities for the analysis of the reciprocal relationships between metaphors and culture and between metaphors and theories.

II Theoretical Premises: On the Role and Functions of Metaphors in Culture and Theory

Since cognitive metaphor theory is arguably of central relevance for any attempt to gain insight into the complex relationship between metaphors and culture, a brief summary of some of its premises and insights may provide a

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convenient point of departure. It is arguably no coincidence that most of the
terms that we have at our disposal for talking about such abstract and elusive
phenomena as history, time, the state, human creativity, communication,
emotion, research, or the world at large tend to be metaphoric. The main
reason why we tend to resort to metaphors whenever we try to conceptualize
abstract entities and complex processes is not hard to determine:

Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not
clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get
a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms
(spatial orientations, objects, etc.). This need leads to metaphorical definition in
our conceptual system.¹³

There is apparently a great need for metaphors in our conceptual system
because so many cultural phenomena are not only fairly abstract and difficult
to grasp, but they also defy direct observation or experience. Resorting to
metaphors is thus one way of coping with and making sense of cultural phe-
nomena. In order to see in detail what is involved in metaphoric projections
and the knowledge they generate, we must first have a clearer idea of some
of the theoretical underpinnings of cognitive metaphor theory and of the
constitutive rather than just reflective or rhetorical role metaphors play in
cultures as well as in many of our theories.

One might as well begin by pointing out that metaphors pervade both our
culture and our theories. The reason for this widespread tendency to talk
about complex cultural changes and phenomena in metaphoric terms is not
hard to determine. Resorting to metaphors has always been one way of con-
ceptualizing something that defied direct observation and experience. Like
other abstract political entities which tend to be conceptualized metaphori-
cally, e.g. history, government, and the state,¹⁴ cultural changes are often a
highly elusive phenomenon of considerable abstractness and heterogeneity,
being anything but clearly delineated in people’s experience.¹⁵ The same

¹³ Lakoff and Johnson 115.
¹⁴ See the encyclopedic monographs by Alexander Demandt, Metaphern für Geschichte: Sprachbilder und Gleichnisse im historisch-politischen Denken (München: Beck, 1978); Diet-
mar Peil, Untersuchungen zur Staats- und Herrschaftsmetaphorik in literarischen Zeugnissen
von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart (München: Fink, 1983); Herfried Münkler, Politische Bil-
der, Politik der Metaphern (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994) and Francesca Rigotti, Die Macht
¹⁵ See MacKenzie, who emphasizes that the empire was “at least four separate entities. It
was the territories of settlement [...]. It was India [...]. It was a string of islands and stag-
ing posts, a combination of seventeenth-century sugar colonies and the spoils of wars
with European rivals, China, and other non-European cultures. And finally, Empire
was the ‘dependent’ territories acquired largely in the last decades of the nineteenth
century.” John M. McKenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Opinion,
holds true for the far-reaching cultural and economic transformations that have occurred in the wake of 9/11 which the great majority of people do not experience in any direct fashion and which therefore have to be comprehended indirectly, via metaphor:16 “we tend to structure the less concrete and inherently vaguer concepts [...] in terms of more concrete concepts, which are more clearly delineated in our experience.”17 Metaphors allow people to understand the somewhat abstract and elusive domains of politics and economics in terms of much more concrete and familiar domains of experience like illness.

Moreover, metaphors for cultural phenomena are themselves subject to both cultural variation and historical change. There is arguably more than just fashion in the changing use of metaphors, however. Just as metaphors have an underlying logic in their own right, the changing preference for certain dominant metaphors (what Blumenberg has called ‘Leitmetaphern’) also – at least for those who have the privilege of the benefit of hindsight – displays a certain degree of logic. The images that form the source domain of such metaphors do not arise out of nowhere and do not by mere chance suddenly become favoured suppliers of schemas to be mapped onto important target domains. It shows that their choice is linked to changes of culture at large and in particular in technology, social formations, and practices. This aspect has so far not received sufficient attention and needs to be studied in detail to learn more about the interdependence between cultural changes and the changes of central metaphors.

What metaphors that shape culture and theory have in common is not only that they serve to structure how we understand and interpret the respective target domain, but also that they do this cultural work in a more or less systematic way, foregrounding particular aspects while masking others. By virtue of their more or less coherent entailments, metaphorical concepts provide a systematic way of talking about and making sense of cultural phenomena. Lakoff and Johnson (chapter 2) have emphasized what they call the “systematicity of metaphorical concepts”18 and have spelled out its implications: “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept [...], a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.”19 Metaphors “form coherent systems in terms of which we conceptualize our experience”20 – and cultural phenomena

16 Lakoff and Johnson 85.
17 Lakoff and Johnson 112.
18 Lakoff and Johnson 7.
19 Lakoff and Johnson 10.
20 Lakoff and Johnson 41.
and theories, one might add. Highlighting certain aspects while hiding or even repressing others, metaphors serve as both sense-making devices and as "'strategies of containment’ whereby they are able to project the illusion that their readings are somehow complete and self-sufficient."\(^{21}\)

Far from being mere poetical or rhetorical embellishments, metaphors arguably play an essential and constitutive role in shaping the structure(s) of both cultural phenomena and theories. One might even go so far as to argue that they create the very realities they purport merely to describe: \(^{22}\) “changes in our conceptual systems do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions.”\(^{23}\) Offering ways of organizing complex experiences and cultural processes into structured wholes, \(^{24}\) metaphorical concepts like evolution, improvement, or progress “not only provide coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others,”\(^{25}\) they are also capable of giving people a new understanding of the respective target domain, playing “a very significant role in determining what is real for us.”\(^{26}\) As the articles in this volume serve to show, metaphors are never a completely disinterested or neutral way of viewing reality, but always function as important structuring and sense-making devices that serve to structure, explain, and evaluate cultural phenomena.

Although it is well-known by now that metaphors are not restricted to poetry or literature, the study of metaphors used to belong to the domain of literary studies, which regarded metaphors as a purely literary phenomenon. The interest that linguists have displayed in metaphors and the rise of cognitive metaphor theory, however, have ushered in new phases in the study of metaphors, which have in recent years become a subject of interdisciplinary interest. In their concise introduction to what is a particularly useful and rich collection of articles on recent approaches to metaphor, Monika Fludernik, Donald C. Freeman, and Margaret H. Freeman (1999) provide a very good overview of the several sea changes that metaphor theory has undergone in the course of the 20th century. These changes have not only alerted us to the ubiquity and pervasive importance of metaphors in culture at large, but they have also highlighted “the intrinsic linkage between linguistic processes in general and the more specifically literary instances of them.”\(^{27}\) Moreover, according to cognitive metaphor theory,

\(^{22}\) Lakoff and Johnson 145, 156.
\(^{23}\) Lakoff and Johnson 145-46.
\(^{24}\) Lakoff and Johnson 81.
\(^{25}\) Lakoff and Johnson 139.
\(^{26}\) Lakoff and Johnson 146.
Language is generated as a result of general cognitive processes which [...] are characterized by specific principles that constrain mappings across mental spaces. Cognitive metaphor theory is therefore a radical version of constructivism and subsumes linguistic expression under more general conceptual and behavioural parameters.28

Working with the processual meta-metaphor of mapping, cognitive approaches attempt to explore how a source domain is mapped or projected onto a given target domain. Cognitive metaphor theory has alerted us both to the ubiquity of metaphors and to the central role they play in our conceptual systems, affecting as they do the ways in which we perceive, think, and act.

Cognitive metaphor theory conceptualizes what is involved in the complex processes of metaphoric projection in terms of ‘blending’ or ‘conceptual integration.’29 Foregrounding the mapping process and exploring how the source domain is mapped onto the target domain, cognitive approaches characterize metaphoric blending processes as a ‘mechanism of creativity.’30

Image-schematic projection creates a new virtual realm, the blend, which is no longer subordinate to either the source (vehicle) or the tenor (target) but instead creates emergent structure that exists neither in the source nor the target domains.31

This model not only takes into consideration the fact that people draw on their pre-existing cultural knowledge when they use or process metaphors, but it also demonstrates that metaphoric projection is anything but a one-sided, uni-directional affair. On the contrary, what is involved is a process of mutual integration of two distinct conceptual domains. In the present case, both the personal sphere of illness and the political and economic sphere of wide-ranging changes and transformations are projected into the blended space, which, while bringing together salient features of the two knowledge domains involved, “exactly resembles none of them [...]”. This selective borrowing, or rather, projection, is not merely compositional – instead, there is

28 Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 393, 385.
29 It is, of course, beyond the scope of the present paper to present a detailed account of cognitive metaphor theory or of the conceptual integration network theory. For a brief introduction, see Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 387-92, Turner and Fauconnier; for comprehensive accounts, see Gilles Fauconnier, Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); Gilles Fauconnier, Mappings in Thought and Language (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997); Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, “Conceptual Integration Networks,” Cognitive Science 22 (1998): 133-87; Mark Turner, Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism (Chicago/ London: U of Chicago P, 1996).
30 See Turner and Fauconnier.
31 Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 387.
new meaning in the blend that is not a composition of meanings that can be found in the inputs.”

Another thing that cognitive metaphor theory has taught us is that metaphoric projections involve much more than just feature mappings, i.e. individual correspondences between the source domain and the target domain: “It has long been recognized that metaphor often involves more than simple feature correspondences, that the correspondences between target and source can be systematic.” One reason for the great attraction that metaphors of crises and catastrophes had for the language of popular imperialism may be that they not only tend to map multiple features, but also preserve the relations and hierarchies, between those features. Moreover, family metaphors entail a wide range of cultural implications, including ethical norms and values.

Acknowledging the great importance of such a cognitive turn in the theory of metaphors, we will argue that metaphors should first and foremost be conceptualized as a cultural phenomenon. We would thus like to call for a “second fundamental paradigm shift, one toward greater historicity and cultural awareness” and make some modest proposals for historicizing cognitive metaphor theory and for exploring metaphors as a culturally determined attempt to account for complex cultural and theoretical transformations. Even though the cultural genesis and variability of conceptual metaphors has in general been recognized, most theorists, viewing mapping primarily as a cognitive phenomenon, have not bothered to explore the cultural implications and ideological functions that may be involved in metaphorical projections. In a pioneering article, Philip Eubanks has provided important steps towards closing the gap between cognitive approaches and the cultural underpinnings of conceptual metaphors: “Because metaphors are always uttered by historically and culturally situated speakers, metaphoric mappings are subordinate to the speakers’ political, philosophical, social, and individual commitments.”

32 Turner and Fauconnier 398.
33 Eubanks 429-30.
36 See e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 142, 146.
37 Eubanks 419.
One might go even further than that and suggest that, since metaphors are deeply entrenched in the cultural discourses of their age, the study of metaphors can give us insight into those habits and structures of thought, feeling, and ideas that Foucault christened the episteme and that is the object of the history of mentalities. Moreover, metaphor studies would arguably stand to gain by cross-disciplinary interaction between cognitive linguistics, literary theory, and cultural history. Cognitive metaphor theory, literary studies, and cultural history, despite their contrary theoretical and methodological assumptions, are not as incompatible as is suggested by the fact that their respective practitioners tend to ignore each other’s work. The findings of cognitive linguistics or cognitive metaphor theory, literary theory, and cultural history can illuminate each other’s understanding of the use and functions of metaphors. Such an alliance could open up productive new possibilities for the analysis of both the relationship between metaphors and their cultural contexts, and the cultural implications and functions of metaphors. In addition, such an alliance promises to throw new light on the actual use and functions of metaphors. Or to put it in a nutshell, the more conscious of conceptual metaphors literary and cultural history becomes and the more historically and culturally orientated cognitive metaphor theory becomes, the better for both.

III Metaphors Shaping Culture and Theory: A Selective Historical Overview

For all it is worth, cognitive metaphor theory remains largely fictitious as long as it is not linked to empirical evidence, in this case actual examples of metaphors placed in their textual and cultural context, and all such examples will be historical, no matter whether encountered yesterday or found in source material several centuries old. Led by our own needs, we may well be most interested in the metaphors that shape the culture we live in and the kind of theory we presently hold to be the most powerful, but to investigate these tends to be rather difficult because – as George Lakoff and Mark Turner have pointed out – it are precisely such “basic” metaphors “whose use is conventional, unconscious, automatic, and typically unnoticed.” Regarding the metaphors underlying our most deeply entrenched convictions we are in the same helpless position as we are in regarding the mythical part of our world view, or, as Roland Barthes has demonstrated, as “users” of a myth we

38 Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 388.
39 See Hunt, who argues that “the more cultural historical studies become and the more historical cultural studies become, the better for both.” Lynn Hunt, The New Cultural History (Berkley: U of California P, 1989) 22.
40 Lakoff and Turner 80.
have no Archimedean point from which to study that myth as “mythologists” as long as we are inside that myth.\textsuperscript{41} In order to be able to investigate how and to which extent “basic” or central metaphors are not only created by but also shape culture and theory we therefore better choose examples which allow for the amount of distance that is necessary for a somewhat sober analysis. Such a distance can, of course, also be guaranteed on a synchronic level by reverting to examples from a quite different, foreign culture but in this volume we decided to focus on casestudies from the history of our own Western culture because they may still tell us something about our present cultural condition.

The study of metaphors that held a certain position in Western culture is, of course, not altogether new. It was begun in a more serious way by Ernst Robert Curtius in terms of an investigation of “historical metaphors” of which he gave an impressive example in his history of the book as metaphor and symbol,\textsuperscript{42} was further developed in studies like M. H. Abrams’ \textit{The Mirror and the Lamp} (1953) and supplied with a sophisticated theoretical foundation by Hans Blumenberg in his \textit{Paradigmen einer Metaphorologie} (1960). Blumenberg’s aim was to free at least some metaphors from their traditional assessment of being merely intermediate stages in the progress from \textit{mythos} to \textit{logos}, stages which had to give way to more concise concepts – an aim he reached by showing that even in philosophical language there are metaphors that are “absolute” in the sense that they can never be replaced by concepts. On the other hand, such “absolute metaphors” nevertheless have a history because they can be substituted by other metaphors and what “metaphorology” investigates is the “substructure of thought” that gives testimony of “the courage with which the spirit is ahead of itself in its images and how it projects its history in this courage to work by conjecture.”\textsuperscript{43} What will become apparent in the case histories is that metaphors of this kind are not only results but also constitutive elements of our worldmaking, our notion of what are legitimate ways to truth, and our philosophical reflection on both, so that their history is a genuine part of cultural history, the history of science and learning, as well as the history of philosophical thought.

At the same time such metaphors are only one determinant among others of the world view, knowledge structure, and theory dominant during a particular period in a particular region, and they therefore have to be investigated in that wider context if we want to get beyond a description of their mere factuality or seeming contingency. That one can indeed get beyond this

\textsuperscript{42} Ernst Robert Curtius, \textit{Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter} (Bern: Francke, 1948) chapter 16.
stage regarding the interdependence between central metaphors and culture (or theory respectively), is borne by more than a few contributions to this volume. As already mentioned earlier, it shows that the changes of central metaphors are closely linked to cultural changes.

What is further revealed by the supplied case histories is that the theoretical distinction Lakoff and Turner make between “image metaphors” that “map rich mental images onto other rich mental images” and “conceptual metaphors” that merely map the conceptual structures taken from “image-schemas” onto other conceptual structures, is not sufficient to describe what actually happens in the case of metaphors shaping culture and theory. For it shows that the metaphors that gained a central position generally have a source domain that consists of a “rich mental image” from which not one but several “image-schemas” or conceptual structures can be derived and mapped onto other target concepts, which means that the image serving as source domain can be made to function in several ways. Take as an example the modern and postmodern career of the ‘net’ of which a more detailed account is given in this volume by Alexander Friedrich. In the traditional discourse of religion we will find it used as an instrument to slyly catch a victim and we have to watch out that the devil will not catch us in his net just as a spider catches a fly. For the circus artists on the flying trapeze, however, the net spread out beneath them is meant to be life-saving, just as the social net will be for those who cannot sustain themselves. With the advent of electricity, the net has also come to indicate that the electrical current can be transported to any number of destinations, spread out so to say – in an inverse relation to a river net consisting of many brooks and rivulets all flowing into the same stream. Then with the telephone, the net came to signify an interconnection of a host of participants in such a way that messages could travel in either direction, and subsequently it became invisible not only with radio and television but also with radio telephone and finally the internet. In all these cases the source domain is the image of a concrete net, yet the image-schemas or conceptual structures derived from it and subsequently mapped onto other target domains are quite different. It is not hard to see that it is exactly this feature that has made it possible for the ‘net’ to gain such an important position in more recent culture.

This shows that a closer examination of the role of metaphors that have gained such a position in the culture or theory of the past or more recent times is not only illustrative. It confirms our view that the many case studies included in this volume are important because they may well instigate a revision and further development of metaphor theory.
IV Why Metaphors Matter: On the Value of Metaphor Theory for the Study of Culture

We should like to conclude by providing a brief assessment of the value that a cultural and historical analysis of metaphors may have for the study of culture, the history of mentalities, and for theories of culture. A reconsidered notion of metaphors which takes into consideration their cultural implications and historical contexts can indeed “help to explain the cultural motivations of metaphoric mappings” and to “develop a richer account of conceptual metaphor as a cultural phenomenon.” In contrast to the primarily synchronic and ahistorical account of conceptual metaphors which has so far predominated in cognitive metaphor theory, a historicized and cultural approach to metaphors can throw new light on “how [...] metaphors operate concretely in the communicative world,” revealing “not just mental processes but also something of our culture.” As the articles in this volume will hopefully serve to show, metaphors are very much a cultural and historical phenomenon, since they are inflected by the cultural, political, and social discourses of the period they originate from as well as by theoretical and ideological commitments of the people who use them.

Moreover, a cultural investigation of the nature and functions of metaphors belies the idea that metaphors are merely ornamental or literary devices rather than inferential, creative, and constitutive ones. While purporting merely to represent their respective target domains, metaphors arguably shape the prevailing view of cultural phenomena and of theories. One might even go so far as to argue that they serve to construct cultural models and theories. They not only popularize certain values, biases, and epistemological habits, they also provide agreed-upon codes of understanding and cultural traditions of looking at the world, forging a widespread consensus by drawing upon culturally rooted views and values.

Working simultaneously on different cognitive, emotional, ethical, normative, and ideological levels, metaphors of crises and catastrophes should thus be seen as a productive medium or ‘mechanism of creativity’ that has played an active role in the generation of both many theories and the cultural fictions that we live, think, and feel by. Metaphors have also served as means of structuring, narrativizing, and naturalizing cultural transformations which defy direct observation and experience. Shaping habits of thought, popular feeling, and people’s views of the present and the past, metaphors have

44 Eubanks 421.
45 Eubanks 420.
46 See Lakoff and Johnson; Lakoff and Turner.
47 Eubanks 421.
48 See Turner and Fauconnier.
played, and continue to play, an important part in shaping mentalities and worldviews because they have served to organize the conceptual and emotional realities and conditioned the way in which people perceive, emotionally experience, and evaluate cultural phenomena.

If Umberto Eco’s hypothesis that the “success of a metaphor is a function of the socio-cultural format of the interpreting subjects’ encyclopedia”\(^\text{49}\) is valid, then it is anything but a coincidence which metaphors gain particular popularity in a given culture. For the history of mentalities, the cultural historian and the history of science, metaphors prove to be a very fertile source of evidence. They are of real interest to the cultural historian because they shed light on how cultural phenomena and transformations are perceived, understood, and discursively constructed, how they are given shape and meaning. The significance of metaphors for the history of mentalities and of science is in the light they throw on the habits of thought, the attitudes, and the values that inform a given culture. Moreover, they also illuminate how societies collectively deal with and account for culture and how interpretive communities (\textit{sensu} Stanley Fish) conceive of their objects, methods, and theories. The articles in this volume support the hypothesis that metaphors embody what Elizabeth Ermarth in a different context has called “the collective awareness of a culture.”\(^\text{50}\) By giving shape and meaning to cultural transformations, metaphors can even construct an important “article of collective cultural faith.”\(^\text{51}\)

In sum, we hope that this volume will serve to show that anyone interested in the study of culture and in the underlying assumptions and structures of theories would profit a great deal from taking the study of metaphors into consideration, just as the study of literature and culture might in turn profit from taking into account research in cognitive metaphor theory, Hans Blumenberg’s metaphorology, and other branches of metaphor studies. Taking a fresh look at the insights of cognitive metaphor theory and historicizing the models and categories it has developed could be an important force in the current attempts to enrich the linguistic and literary study of metaphors in the framework of cultural history and to explore the role that metaphors play as cognitive instruments which impose structures and stories onto cultures and theories. In order to reassess the changing cultural functions that metaphors have fulfilled, it is worth looking more closely at the role of such discursive processes as metaphoric mappings in determining the perception and construction of cultural phenomena and theories.


\(^{50}\) Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, \textit{The English Novel in History} 1840-1895 (London/New York: Routledge, 1997) 89.

\(^{51}\) Ermarth 122.
Cultural historians and theorists would therefore arguably be well advised to intrepidly rush in where linguists, literary critics, and most traditional historians usually fear to tread. Whether or not they would be fools in doing so may be an open question, but the fascinating area where language, literature, culture, and the history of mentalities meet is simply too important to be neglected, and cultural studies and the German variant of the study of culture known as 'Kulturwissenschaft(en)' can only continue to ignore this crucial interface at their own peril. These concluding suggestions are not, however, meant to be the last word on any of these complex issues, but rather should be seen as modest proposals for a reconceptualization of the central role that metaphors have always played and continue to play in man’s attempt at world-making and in shaping our cultures and theories.

Works Cited


Metaphors as a Way of Worldmaking


