METAPHOR AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY: EVIDENCE FROM THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL

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The link between metaphor and myth which is suggested in the title of my paper reminds one of their relationship as explored by Derrida in "La metaphore blanche" (1971). His criticism of metaphor as supporting a belief in universal analogy and in the myth of metaphysical truth caused a series of replies from scholars believing in the creative and subversive power of metaphor. The comprehensive study of Ricoeur, "La metaphore vive", published in 1975, was a suggestion to consider metaphors just in the opposite way. Ricoeur, in fact, claimed for poetic metaphors the possibility of escaping from the constraints of metaphysical thinking. In his investigations, which eventually lead to Heidegger's last writings on poetry, Ricoeur even tried to reverse the verdict of Derrida against metaphorical discourse in According to Ricoeur, the tension between difference philosophy. and resemblance in a creative metaphor attacks the "analogia entis" because it produces a tensional relationship between "essentia et accidentia". Such a metaphorical relationship is based on a tension between several discourses carrying different visions of the world, which of course, after Ricoeur, can at least undermine the myth of the universal analogy. The implications of Ricoeur's theory concerning the discursive tension in metaphors are more interesting than his own conclusions: Ricoeur privileges the mimetic function of metaphors, presuming the any kind of creativity finally leads to a model. The "epoche", which suspends reference (1975) and feeling (1980) within the sign is considered in his theory only as a condition for modeling the word, neglecting the possibility for metaphorical discourse to maintain the process of signifying in a state of indeterminancy, so that reference cannot be successfully accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to emphasize on the discursive nature of the metaphorical process itself, attempting a reading of Ricoeur's proposition along the line of its implications against "White Mythology". This will lead to a distinction between Western metaphor and myth. Seen as a tensional process, metaphors become unlike the holistic analogies of myth. They are, in fact, two different operations of mind and knowledge based on a different relationship between world and language: thus, although metaphors basically represent reality, because of the incompatibility of tenor and vehicle, this representation is mediated, and the mediation can be put in evidence by the discourse. In contrast, mythic discourse not only represents the world as an organic unity of analogies, but it also can use a considerable amount of discursive suggestions to let the reader feel himself as a part of this cosmic unity.

## Western metaphor and myth: Two opposite ways of knowledge

Metaphorical tensions, if they are maintained on the syntagmatic plane of a text, can attack the unity of the signified which sustains the truth of the text: different visions of the world implied by different metaphorical models can be kept in contrast to each other, within the text, by an internal discourse which does not overdetermine the process of signifying. First, however, a few preliminary remarks might be necessary concerning Besides the definition of my understanding of discourse<sup>2</sup>. discourse as an ideological phenomenon by French criticism, I try to take into account the internal dimension of discourse, by which texts organize the semantic universe established metaphorically. "Internal discourse" is the path for writing to accomplish the act of reference, so that a metaphor can be simply assumed or confirmed or reconstructed as a new vision (Ricoeur). But, I would like to add, a metaphorical model can be also undermined, leading in certain cases to a deconstruction of the referential Besides the plane of reference, this understanding of premises. discourse implies that, in the act of reference, several dimensions of human being, which are not only cognitive but also existential, occur and are intertwined. I mean by that not the intervention of "l'imaginaire" in the Lacanian sense, but a kind of semiotic behavior which is not determined or polarized in any direction<sup>3</sup>.

The discursive tensions in metaphor, as I tried to illustrate above, can lead to an "undecidable enigma", which means a similar status as allegory has for scholars who follow Paul de Man's view of allegory<sup>4</sup>. In this case, there is not a priori reason to privilege one of these terms--metaphor or allegory. In contrast, I do support the distinction between metaphor and myth to indicate two extremely opposite discourses and semiotic behaviors: metaphor carries a referential quest, but the resemblance between vehicle and tenor, a resemblance which is merely partial, maintains the enigma, whereas myth develops a strong system of analogy which and on the state of t Address of the state Address of the state pretends to be a guarantee of reality<sup>5</sup>. This means, of course, that metaphorical discourse emphasizes the difference between terms, whereas mythical discourse stresses their similarity. metaphor can become part of a mythical process when the difference between the two components (vehicle and tenor) is discursively The similarity between them is then presented as effaced. identity which finally generates the feeling of a magic identity between sign and world. In my investigations of novels of the 19th century (1985), I found examples for classic metaphorical (Balzac) and mythical discourse (Zola). The early twentieth century operates with these models as a background against which art should intervene. Metaphors are, of course, preferred by modernist epoch (Borso-Borgarello 1985a). On the other hand, the postmodernist aim of intertexuality denounces traditional Western myths and modern mythology in the sense of Barthes (1970), as a constraining representation of subject. "Le nouveau roma" attacks, for instance, the mythic unity of knowledge of the world and replaces it with the suggestion of a fragmentary experience. Summing up, it seems to me that different visions of metaphor and myth represent the range of extreme positions between which Western epistemology has moved. The last representation in this history of Western epistemes is the "postmodernist enigma", be it called metaphor or allegory. This is part of the representation of the epistemological subject, which, after the crisis of the turn of the century, found a new image in avoiding identity and unity, in refusing any "centrism", any "transcendental signified", after having discovered the pleasure of maintaining the desire of the enigma--maybe the "jouissance barthesienne". Derrida is fascinating because of his aim not to fall in the trap of a determined result of the quest.

But, that the deconstructionalist proposal is pertinent only within the context of Western epistemology is meanwhile claimed by deconstructionists too (Spivak 1985). Nevertheless, the contribution of deconstruction has been to open Western philosophy and criticism to the problem of otherness in a basically new way, that is, actually not making of otherness the object of knowledge, This but by destroying any other object than the quest itself. path of quest, as well as any kind of internal dynamism or dialogue or attack trying to cope with "-centrisms" is still part of Western representation of subject and object. That quest should be reviewed going down a path which carries otherness in itself and provides us with the distorted vision of a shifted Western culture. By that I mean, for instance. the shift of Western culture such as it occurs in Latin-american literature. I am not looking at the exoticism of other cultures and I do not propose another romantic view of the quest, as Latin-american studies about myth and magic mostly do. In fact, similar to its application in Western literature, myth is considered also in non-Western mythic literature as a kind of reversed or negated rationality. This premise is still based on Western thinking. I attempt, in contrast, to consider Latin America as a culture which is akin to Western and unlike to it at the same time.

## Metaphor and myth in Latin America: the encounter with the other

My tentative quest in reading Latin-american literature focuses on the possibility to learn to look at the duality or ambiguity not with the objective of knowledge by synthesis or reversement, but to stay between the two faces of a mirror, to avoid penetrating the mirror<sup>6</sup>. This means, to learn traveling between two poles of knowledge--subject/object--and not to attempt the break-through to the other side, in order to grasp the object Thinking of the of the quest and destroy its otherness. simultaneous existence of identity and otherness can be the way to deconstruct Western premises, or to escape its rules, but maybe more, to learn about and to accept others. Although, in starting by this proposal, my aim is close to the deconstructionist quest, I attempt to follow another path, by reading Latin-american literature. There are several reasons for looking at this literature as a "force", at least on the first glance, in the sense of the Derridian "trace" and "difference". I mean by that the "force" Derrida had in mind when he started criticizing structuralism. "Trace", according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her "Preface of Grammatology", is the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the Trace is, hence, the mark of the absence of a presence, sign. that is the "lack at the origin as condition of thought and experience" (1976: xvii). Latin-american culture has this status of sign as force. A sign, which is modulated by its clash with the other cultures which it carries in itself. Its representation of reality is originated by the other culture. In looking to the other and being different, they maintain for the sign at least the simultaneity of a duality. This lack of origin does not allow for the sign to establish an original structure which can attain a The lack of origin, at least of the invented history of an unique origin, is the common character of different regions of Latin America. "Mestizaje" is the usual concept for indicating this phenomenon, which, besides several, mostly cumulative attempts to define the duality of Latin-american nature, still remains an enigma. Thinking of Mexico, "mestizaje" is, for instance, the continuous clash of several cultures: Mexicans are Spaniard, felt attracted by French art, and they are carrying Indian traditions<sup>7</sup>. Argentineans, who did not confront themselves with non Western cultures, are European, but in a shifted way. They are carrying western culture, but without a center, without their own origin. This historical and ideological situation, of course, also concerns literature. This explains the reason for authors like

Borges and Cortazar to be naively "deconstructionist"<sup>8</sup>: they emphasized Western epistemological models, they played with the Western library of myth and metaphors in a labyrinthine way. A closer look at their relationship with Western myth and metaphor might be explanatory: influenced by French Surrealism, Borges and Cortazar, in fact, were interested in metaphor and in the significant place metaphor occupied within the framework of Western epistemological models.

Borges' passion for the metaliterary discourse as a part of his fictional discourse focuses on metaphor in several stories. His theory of metaphor, which he wrote at the age of 20 under the influence of Nietzsche and Mauthners, is, at the same time, a nihilistic criticism of language and the belief in the renewing power of poetry. His writing is, on the contrary, a denial of this understanding of metaphor, suggesting to consider metaphor as a intertextual procedure for constructing reality in a fictional way ("La Metafora" 1936). In "El Zahir" (Ficciones 1949) he plays with the Western metaphor of the coin as model for language". A narrator, who is oscillating at the border of insanity, tries to reconstruct the metaphoric value of "El Zahir", a coin he got in Not only the Western, but at the same time the exchange. cabalistic tradition is included. First of all, the Zahir is the other side of "Aleph", which is the beginning of alphabet and, for the Cabal, the origin of language and knowledge. The labyrinth of meanings in which the narrator is projected is a deconstruction of epistemological models, which the narrator finally finds condensed in the library. At the same time, the internal discourse of this short story is the attempt to go the path of metaphor not as "passe-par-tout-sign" or as a "carry-through-sign" according to the etymology of metaphor, but as signifying medium which is neither the canny of symbols nor the uncanny of the enigma: "El Zahir is the shadow of the Rose and the tearing of the Veil" ("El Zahir es la sombra de la Rosa y la rasgadura del Velo" [84]). In order to stay within the two sides of the enigma, the narrator retraces the same path on different planes: in the plot, returning to the point of origin, when he found the coin, which was determined by fortune, as well as returning by his discourse to the epistemological models applied to the Zahir in different steps. These models are metaphorical and mythical, be it German mythology (Nibelungen) or modern myths like the fashion of Teodolina at the very beginning of the story. By this path, the discourse constructs a tension with respect to the own comments of the narrator, who appears to be a follower of a romantic "analogia entis" and of the subjective will of Schopenhauer. А deconstructionist reading of Borges has nevertheless a crux: it is difficult to find the navel of the duplicity, of a simply contradiction: each statement is, in fact. located in a net of contradictions and moves between folds of the discourse which generates an inner and outer labyrinth. Even the deconstruction

of the author looking for a representation as subversive subject is condemned to fail, since the discourse oscillates between a parodistic and serious pole, which are present--or absent--at the same time. There is no origin in the quest of the narrator, with except the mere fortune: it is by accident that the discovery of the meaning of the Zahir occurs. Once again, it is a meaning which is underscored as no original truth or transcendental and unique signified, but the variability and transience of the fictional models.

One certainly can see the analogy of the aim of Derrida with the writings of Borges. But is a deconstructionist reading of such texts a gain? The attempt of a deconstructionist reading is it not rather forcing the text through this mirror it wants to Is it not rather binding a discursive maintain in between? I would like to focus on this question context it does not have? by some considerations about Cortazar. In "Deshoras", the last short story collection of this author, once again he returns to the theme of the youth, its representation and its memory. It is in the framework of his whole writing that Cortazar retraces the theme of his youth, looking for a representation of the other and the self--past and present, history and myth, the variability of the subject, a.s.o. Some changes in recurring procedures, for instance in the place taken by metaphors in his writing, show the development of his relationship towards Western epistemological In "Bestiario" the author uses metaphors in a very models. surrealistic way, whereas in following short stories he deconstructs the idealistic premises of acquiring knowledge by artistic invention, seeming incapable to appropriate the other even by way of a metaphorical representation<sup>10</sup>. In "Deshoras" this appropriation is overtly refused: the subject of writing is split and it does not hide itself behind another protagonists as in previous stories. On the contrary, the narrator reverses the relationship of knowledge between the subject and the "other". In fact, the knowing subject--the writer--becomes the object of the remembering narrator. An object, which can not be attained by knowledge: The protagonist is a writer searching for the representation of a youthful love which did not happen. He writes the dream of a fulfilled love--he invents the object--as if it would have been a reality. But the narrator points out by an evident shift in the verbal person (from third to first person) and by an allusion to the situation at the desk in a nightly writing that this "other", this love story of his youth, was not truth. Nevertheless, it was a different act of love that occurred this night, in which this other, for which he had looked for a long time, took on a transient reality. The encounter with the otherness was possible not through a representation--metaphorical or other--but through an act of love in which the other could be felt as part of the self. There is no subject/object

relationship, nor appropriation, but the acceptance of the otherness in a loving act.

Cortazar and Borges participate in Western thinking. After having moved to Argentina, Western tradition contained a double origin at the very beginning. In this sense, Argentineans authors stay in dialogue with Western epistemology. But, it seems to me that, because of this shift, their dialogue follows another path and that their writing suggests more than a deconstructionist reading, which still keeps too much in mind the "-centrism" of Western culture. And, it would be once again an act of appropriation to use them as the reflecting mirror of deconstructionism.

Other Latin-american authors have been stressed by critics interpreting their exoticism as "magic realism". Gabriel Garcia Marquez as taken as example for Columbia and Juan Rulfo for The so called "magic realism" (Flores 1982: 10) is Mexico. characterized by the reevaluation of the "hinterland", which means non-Western tradition, such as a mythic view of the world and the magic enchantment of the american "naturaleza" in both meanings of this spanish word "temperament and nature". These authors are less the concern of poststructuralist critics, than of those critics who look at exoticism as an alternative to Western rationality--a view, in fact, which is even more logocentric. For this, it is evident that mythical discourse predominates, although metaphors are present in novels of both authors. On the other hand, the intertextual allusions to Western myth as well as indian magic beliefs by Rulfo and Garcia Marquez are broken and mannered, so that a naive mythical reading appears inadequate.

In reading a short story of Juan Rulfo, "Luvina", I will try an act of love to this otherness Rulfo presents, following the suggestion I drew from my reading of Cortazar. The plot of this story is reduced to a protagonist--maybe a teacher--who tells of his failure in bringing progress to a "pueblo" which is deeply lost in the southern mountains of Mexico. After his return, the protagonist attempts to describe, to somebody listening to him, the stony land of Luvina and a similar stony population consisting of women and old men. According to the traditional rules of telling and introducing the environment, at the very beginning of the description, the narrator (or the protagonist) uses metaphors. But, very soon, it becomes evident that metaphors, such as the first metaphor of illness (plague of stone) does not represent the world of Luvina, leading to its knowledge. On the contrary, the modeling relation between metaphorical sign and reference is not recovered anymore in the following description. What is recovered is rather a minimal particle of sensual presence the image of "plague" releases. A chain of such sensual elements jumps during the reading from the other--from Luvina--to this side of the mirror, carrying a taste of sadness which seems to be attached at the skin, reinforced by acoustic impressions and, of course, by

visual impulses. During the reading, this sensual atmosphere lets the presence of a silence be felt, lets this "soledad" be tasted which is the only referent the narrator tells about. This atmosphere has a body and a life: it is cyclic, has no time segments, it underlies the low of natural forces, mostly the wind which is personified. The whole sensorial skill as well as the behavior of space, time and persons are part of a mythic unity. Within this frame, metaphors contribute to specify the myth as a myth of the origin before the beginning of history, an origin which is a threshold between not-yet-born life and death, since it includes life before birth (women bearing children who go away) and death (old men, the only male population of the pueblo). The atmosphere of Luvina is a transient state between myth and history, a state without origin. The mythical presentation of this atmosphere is not rhetorically forced, like, for instance, in the mythical discourse of classic French novels (Zola). But, although the rhetorical gesture is poor, the power of this scenario is considerable. A simple and lapidary discourse tries to let one think and feel a nonexistent origin, a state on the threshold, before the beginning of change and of time, whereas the same telling person carries the ideological premises of Western civilization, which means the belief in the necessity of progress. Both are convincing: the rational necessity for Mexico to escape the static condition of myth and the necessity to feel human life as a part of cosmic unity in this uniformity of space and time. Because of that coexistence of both realities, no predominating perspective, no voice occupies the place of the discourse. Furthermore, the discourse carries the deconstruction of Western premises also towards non-Western thinking: it deconstructs the It lets the force be felt of this Western premises about myth. other which is absent in Western representation of history; it is a force which would be destroyed by Western thought concerning myth: the discourse introduces, in fact, an ironic distance towards all quotations of mythic beliefs as well as of rational The text deconstructs the Western belief in myth, showing that its knowledge is only possible by following the arguments. foreign perspective of the teacher, whereas for the otherness of Luvina, whose impression remains powerful, no way of appropriation exists, not even the abstract thinking of absence, trace, or difference.

## Conclusion: the acceptance of the "other"

We recognize the discourse of some Latin-american novels as mythic in the sense of specific rules we assign to the myth. But, if we accept to switch from the position of knowing subject to one of "mythical impressed" object, this concept can be related to such literature only as a metaphoric enigma. In this sense, the Latin-american mythical discourse confers a semiotic skill which (a) A set of the set of t set of the set

is different from the European one: from the very beginning of Western mythology, myth is a means for the subject to know the Going the mythic path, the western subject aspires to the world. totality of knowledge, whether it reflects the cosmic order or projects, in idealistic way, an analogical order into the world. In both cases, myth is basically related to the subject of knowledge. On the contrary, the mythical discourse in Latinamerican literature is not a movement of the subject towards the world in order to know its principles, but the supremacy of the otherness towards the subject. Nevertheless, only from a Western perspective can this behavior be seen as a specific kind of approach to the world which we call "mythic" (Cassirer). Furthermore, in Latin-american novels, the mythical discourse generates tensions which, simultaneously, induce a critical consciousness. The mythical reading becomes hereby a response by a subject which, semiotically open, chooses to let the otherness act upon itself, thus becoming the object: we can learn to accept the position of being an object in the dialogue we keep with the unknown in any kind of cultural or social relationship. On the other hand, Latin-american culture and literature as sign-force avoids this mythic skill to attain a stable, an institutional discourse, generating a system of meaning which could bind the signifying process or establish a static semiotic skill. In Latin-american literature, myth maintains the status of sign, reminding of the "other" as a different "subject", which can be felt present but cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge.

## NOTES:

1. Concluding my comparative investigations of French novels, I underscored this possibility with respect to the contemporary novel, for which the mimetic emphasis of Ricoeur appears inadequate (1985: 203, 254). In fact, the "indeterminancy" of metaphorical discourse in the novel of the 20th century seems to dissemination" (1972), whereas Ricoeur's understanding of than to the following postmodernist experiments in art and literature (see also Mecke 1986: 45).

2. I consider metaphor as an operation of discourse, which is not only related to text-external ideological frames, but also has specific text internal propertites (1985: 34, 226). Different metaphorical discourses in novels of Balzac and Zola have, for instance, different "modeling" or "creative" power, according to the discursive tensions within the text. 3. See the concept of "sympraxis", developed by R. Kloepfer on the basis of the "energetic" and "emotive" interpretant of Peirce (1985). We applied this concept in comparative investigations of French novels from the XVIIth to the XXth century within the framework of a project on narratology ("Semiotische Tiefe", at the University of Mannhein, sponsored by the German Research Council (DFG)).

4. I make reference to allegory in the sense of an ironic, tropological disposition of discourse itself. See the polemics between tautegoricall symbol or myth (Coleridge) and allegory (Paul de Man), in Bloomfield 1981.

5. The concept of mythical discourse which has a different status than myth itself. In fact, myth is virtually enigmatic and open as well as metaphor, since myth and metaphor are both originated by the aim to approach the world, being first a holistic vision and second a fragmentary perspective. Only in their development as <u>discourse</u>, analogies or the incompatibility between tenor and vehicle became a distinguishing property. After philosophical discourse was created, myth was considered as a guarantor of a prephilosophical, cosmic truth (Blumenberg, 1983:292), based on the belief in the identity between sign and world (Cassirer 1922-29). Metaphors, are, on the contrary, linked with the origin of the epistemological quest in philosophy (Blumenberg, 1983: 292).

6. This is, for example, the suggestion in Cortazar's playing with the metaphor of the mirror representing knowledge by the visual path, such as rational speculation or art representation (e.g. in the short story "Axelotle").

7. see Octavio Paz' essays on Mexican culture (e.g. 1982); also Carlos Fuentes (1973).

8. The analogy of Derrida's quest with Borges' writings is, by the way, accepted even by those Latinamerican critics (Rodriguez Monegal, 1985: 127-128) who tried to ignore deconstructionism, repecting the naivety of the above authors postmodernist tendencies of criticism.

9. see Weinrich's study on the metaphor of the coin (1958), one of the oldest metaphoric fields in Western culture.

10. see my comparative analysis of "Bestiario", "A1 final del juego" and "Deshoras" (1986).

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338

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