

5. MORE TROPES (2/18)

We can see that in a lot of different ways metaphor shapes how we think about something.

If someone consciously uses a metaphor, it may be an attempt to influence our thinking, or it may be an attempt to understand something, to make sense of it through metaphor, or both.

If some field of action has set of characteristic metaphors, when we learn and accept those metaphors, they may shape our understandings and actions without our even being aware of it.

We have a reading by Carol Cohn on this point. About the tropes used by the people paid to think about strategic defense issues.

Q. What is the significance, according to C, of clean bombs and surgical strikes? euphemize, remove from reality.

Q. Do you see any similarity with Sontag's argument about cancer metaphors? Similar in that both arguing that figurative language is distorting understanding, but with Cohn, at least in first part of article, it is language's capacity to remove one from reality through euphemism and abstraction that is wrong, whereas for Sontag it is active intervention through tropes, the ability to actively distort, that she laments.

Q. Do you buy C's argument about sexual metaphors, 'More bang for the buck'? Counter-argument would be that the trope is really secondary and trivial. She anticipates this, says the sexuality so overwhelming that cannot dismiss.

Q. What is the significance of "patting" the bombs? Works both ways, both homoerotic, sexual, and domesticating, minimizing.

Q. What about the father trope? C. says more truthful about US domination than formal claims, justifications. Hugh Gusterson in our program has carried further, argues that our rhetoric about proliferation infantilizes 3d world nations, treats as children and loonies.

Q. What about language of male birth---do you buy her argument? In another context, some have said this is just language of scientific production, not limited to bombs, but does seem very persistent.

Q. Why did C. yield to the power of the language? Seductive, let you into the club, but also, if you didn't use it, then shows you are naive or nuclear virgin. Well known essay by Freeman Dyson, on nuclear issues. He leaned over backwards to be sympathetic to the anti-nuke people, but ultimately he ran them down for not knowing about throw-weight etc. Excluding anyone who doesn't buy in from having influence.

Cohn suggests that nuclear experts convince others and selves that they are considering the subject completely, but she argues that in fact considering from very narrow

perspective. Not just matter of tropes, but overall ability to create a sense of totality, true of all sorts of experts. Closed circuit of information and ideas. Late in Cold War, was a book on Soviet Military by Andrew Cockburn called *The Threat* (1983) Cockburn interviewed Russian Jews in Brooklyn who had been in military service in Soviet Union: they said Soviet army, navy in terrible shape. Naval maneuvers used by US intelligence to prove threat actually required whole fleet to be manned by officers, couldn't work otherwise. Soon proved to be true, when Soviet Union collapsed, but didn't go back and say, whoops, we exaggerated, rather just gave credit to Reagan.

Q. What does Cohn mean when she says (p.716) "learning the language is a transformative, rather than an additive, process."

Another kind of metaphor, a single substance, but very complex and significant relationship with national identity. The author is arguing for same degree power in metaphor as Cohn. Q. In article on rice in Japan, how does a food symbol also evoke aspects of the landscape and seasons? Q. How did the choice of rice as a symbol influence shape Japanese nationalism? Q. How did the sensory qualities of rice become important? Q. What kind of trope is rice in this case?

To choose a metaphor for something, one looks for features shared by the two parts or sides. By choosing one metaphor, we are in effect highlighting what we see as the important features of whatever we are looking at.

In many cases it is a genuine attempt to understand something; other times it is an attempt to persuade someone else; and often it is both at once.

History. In our readings we have a selection from a book called *Analogies at War*, about metaphorical thinking mostly among people in government in 1965 about the war in Vietnam.

Q. So what was the great historical analogy in the minds of President Johnson and Secretary Rusk? Munich, the appeasement of Hitler. Q. What did the Munich analogy say about the stakes of the war and the nature of the enemy? Q. How did people outside the government counter the analogy? Q. Anyone remember what analogies were more likely to be on the minds of the Kennedys?

In chapters that you didn't read, Khong discusses the force of the example of the Korean War, especially that in both cases you had a conflict between North and South, and in Korea, the North had invaded massively, US forces had suffered terribly but ultimately had driven them out of S. Korea.

George Ball and other doves invoked the battle of Dien Ben Phu and the disastrous French experience in Vietnam to suggest caution, not getting sucked in.

Same kinds of things go on with every major historical issue. Two of major debates in recent years were over confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas to be Justice of Supreme Court and the debate before first Gulf War on how to deal with Iraq.

With **Gulf War debate**, hawks called Saddam a Hitler, and invoked Munich. Doves mentioned Cuban Missile Crisis, in which Kennedy succeeded by choosing more moderate course instead of bombing and was successful; Kennedy imposed blockade, doves wanted to continue embargo of Iraq. Also we now know we came very close to nuclear war over Cuba, so comparison suggested hidden dangers of rash action.

Doves also mentioned World War I, because it was a supremely stupid war, killed millions and disrupted whole world, and many think we blundered into it. Both sides invoked Vietnam, but then they had very different understandings of lessons of Vietnam.

With **Thomas confirmation hearings**:

Republicans remembered rejection of Robert Bork, didn't want Thomas "borked".

Thomas himself invoked analogy with lynchings.

Supporters sentimentalized his life history, analogy with other heroes up from poverty and obscurity.

Comparison with Ted Kennedy's scandalous past. Some thought the analogy kept Kennedy from speaking out as forcefully as might have.

Analogy with the phony issue of the prisoner furlough that had been used by the Republicans to defeat Dukakis.

Analogy with previous controversies about court appointments, especially recent attempts to get antiabortion judges or Roosevelt's attempt to pack the Supreme Court.

Also metonymical use of history, what sequence of events fit hearings into: history of Anita Hill's actions, her relationship with Thomas.

Thinking in Time

Thinking with historical analogies is so common and so hard to avoid that book, *Thinking in Time*, written by historian and political scientist, Neustadt and May (1986) is devoted to teaching government people how to either avoid historical analogies or else to rethink them self-consciously. They show that explicit or implicit analogies have shaped many decisions.

-At start of Jimmy Carter's presidency, he was angry that he didn't get a honeymoon with congress, i.e. a few months in which they treated him gently and passed his programs. He generalized from two episodes in the presidencies of Johnson and Roosevelt. The authors show (1986:68-74) that the specific circumstances then were very different, that the analogy did not hold.

-With flu epidemic during Ford administration, he overreacted, ended up looking foolish, because he was thinking of the great flu pandemic of 1918-1919, which killed millions of

people (1986:48-57). But they may be too hard on Ford, because flu researchers today constantly worry about a repeat of the pandemic, think it is coming sooner or later.

Neustadt and May don't say analogies can be avoided altogether. They just teach readers how to use them more carefully, and also to think historically in other ways.

Scientific Metaphors

Metaphor especially likely to be used in making sense of something that invisible or hidden, like the mind or the nature of the universe, or else something that apparent but hard to conceptualize or characterize, like history or wine.

Notorious that wine tasters use all sorts of metaphors to convey the character of a wine, some of which sound silly to others.

Recent studies show that metaphors crucial in religion, natural science, social science.

Evolution.

We know that in elaborating his theory of evolution, Darwin used a variety of tropes, some conscious, others possibly unconscious.

Darwin studied development of new strains of animals by breeders, said natural selection similar to artificial selection.

Darwin also compared nature and natural selection to the workings of the capitalist market.

Also, recent scientific studies of long-term change in other areas provided a model for long term evolution of species: geology, which greatly interested Darwin, had demonstrated tremendous and very long-term modifications of planet. Historical linguistics (philology) had shown long-term changes in language, also demonstrated that different modern languages all derived from an ancient ancestor language. Ideas easily transferred to biological evolution.

Darwin embraced idea of impersonal natural selection, but others found it very hard to accept, always looked for direction, purpose, or control. So many put guiding hand or movement toward a goal or end (teleology) back into evolution. Couldn't break implicit metaphor with purposeful human action.

Metaphor also moved back the other way: neo-Darwinians said biological evolution also worked among human groups. Misunderstood survival of fittest to mean killing and driving out others rather than reproducing faster. Also assumption that winners better in ways other than just reproducing, which doesn't follow. Used to justify conquest, oppression, theft, selfishness of all sorts.

The mind.

Perhaps the ultimate black box. Many metaphors used to conceptualize.

Freud used several.

Id, ego, superego. Like separate beings or individuals within the mind. Id, all animal impulses, hairy brute; superego moralistic, chiding in somewhat wimpy way.

Also hydraulic, like great forces that can be channeled or diverted or dammed but not ignored.

Repression, like political repression.

Recently, proliferation of computer metaphors. Sherry Turkle, in MIT STS Program, has studied. Lots in everyday language: programmed a certain way or even hard-wired.

Society, politics

Sontag pointed out ways society and body compared.

She seems to think that these tropes are necessarily pernicious, authoritarian. Actually they are open-ended, flexible, though easy to make them authoritarian.

If society like body, then most important thing may be that has a head: justifies leadership, control.

Could also be class difference: the elite think like head, while lower classes just do, like body.

But there are other possibilities: Kuna make same comparison (word for chief also means head), but what they most emphasize is the multiplicity of body parts, compared to multiplicity of roles. They argue that all parts and all roles indispensable, even if some more important than others.

Social scientists picked up the body=society metaphor.

In trying to understand institutions like magic or jokes or witchcraft, said that each had a function, just as each organ has a function. One 19th century theorist, Herbert Spencer, took to an extreme, said nerves were like telegraph wires, etc.

Also argued that societies were discrete wholes, with close interconnections between different groups and individuals and institutions, just like the body. Said that society in balance or homeostasis. Even something like witchcraft or war had positive function. In contrast, many journalists and others who use the body metaphor suggest that a society or community can be sick, like a diseased body or organ. Very different implications found in metaphor. Not equilibrium but disequilibrium.

Metaphoric comparisons can go both ways. A number of *functionalists* in anthropology and sociology at Harvard were colleagues of a physiologist named Walter Cannon. They used his ideas on the body in analyzing society; he used social metaphors, such as “the wisdom of the body” borrowed from human action to study physiology.

Another common and often unrecognized metaphor is that nations are like individuals: they are said to plan, think, and have emotions just like individuals. This trope is so ingrained we don't even see it as a trope. Analyzed in book on the Cuban Missile Crisis by Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (1971)

Allison shows that most journalists and scholars studying the missile crisis tried to make sense of what Russia, Cuba, and the U.S. did as if the governments were strategizing individuals. This comparison can sometimes help make sense of things, especially if there is a close connection between, e.g. the first President Bush's reaction to insults by Noriega and his decision to invade Panama, or if a country's actions closely follow a President's understanding of situation.

But the trope can also mislead, if the outcome or result is actually the product of standard operating procedures, unthinking routines that guide action, or of political maneuvers *within* a government. In that case a nation or government is *not* like an individual.

E.g. historians and political scientists imputed complicated strategies on the part of the nations involved to explain why the Russians got missiles into Cuba without being detected but then set them up in a blatantly obvious way---assumption was that both moves were carefully planned: in fact, may have been simply because KGB got them into Cuba and the missile service set them up, both doing it in routine way they were used to.

Religion.

We understand ultimate questions in large part through metaphor

Q. Where do they see metaphor in, e.g. conception of deities? God as father, Jesus as shepherd. (Even if we feel that God really is the ultimate father, not just a figure of speech, we still understand him and his actions in part through analogies with human fathers---e.g. parable of prodigal son.)

Q. How do we understand what deities and other spirits do in terms of human intentions and plans and emotions? "I am a jealous God." "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." When misfortune strikes, Kuna half-jokingly say that God is irritated with you.

Kuna say spirits live in villages, attack and cause illness if irritated because humans felling trees have inadvertently brought down their invisible clotheslines. When many spirits threaten, go through ritual to get them drunk and gain control of them.

Great French social scientist, Emile Durkheim, in huge book called *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), argued that society was the model for all deities, in effect, that God was just an image, an unrecognized metaphor, for society.

Very few follow him all the way on this idea, but once you have it in mind, hard not to see that way we conceptualize heaven, spirits, etc. often mimics organization of society.

E.g. often noted that traditional Chinese spirit world sounds like a heavenly imperial bureaucracy.

In Catholicism, there is a multiplication of saints. Very often a person deals with saints rather than directly with God. In medieval society, this was like feudal hierarchy: serf doesn't deal with king but with lord of manor, who deals with his overlord, etc., all the way up to king. In more recent times, in many Mediterranean and Latin American countries, feudalism long gone but many things organized through patron-client relations, large number of bosses or godfathers or caciques. If you need something done, go to the boss. Saints similar: you ask favors from them, promise them candles etc.

Many spirits, like saints, are dealt with as one would a human, through gifts. 'If you cure my daughter, I will light candles/ build a chapel/ give up sin.'

Also saints tied to territorial divisions. Patron saint of town. Even Virgin is often Virgin of particular place.

Religious metaphors are not static, rather used creatively. Sermons are simply way of pointing out analogies: We are all doubters like Thomas. Women are/ should be like Virgin Mary/ Eve/ Lot's wife/ Rachel/ Mary Magdalene.