

METAPHOR AND IDEOLOGY

It would be appropriate at the beginning of this part of the conference on the metaphor, to cite Aristotle's *Poetics*: »Metaphor is the application to one thing of a name belonging to another thing; the transference may be from the genus to the species, from the species to the genus, or from one species to another, or it may be a matter of analogy.«<sup>1</sup> This definition remains the basis of all modern definitions of the metaphor, even when applied to non-verbal areas, as it will be shown by our colleague Charles Forceville. Nevertheless, the original areas of the metaphor remain literature and rhetorics, and those forms of discourse which are connected with them. As such, metaphor is also undoubtedly a subject for aesthetics, and the paper by Heinz Paetzold will stress some of the essential aspects of this theme. Other contributions, including mine, move in the more general area. In this general sense and speaking in general terms, the notion of the metaphor is probably carried through best by the adverb »as« — although some have objections to such a statement, Božidar Kante for example. It is perhaps interesting to note that F. E. Sparshott has named this »as«, the limits of the metaphor. By using metaphorical transpositions, he comes to the conclusion that »beginning with the dictum that everything is what it is and not another thing, we have come close to affirming that nothing is what it is and everything is something else.«<sup>2</sup> At the end of this colloquium, we shall perhaps come to the same conclusion.

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In my paper, I would like to say something about the relationship between metaphor and ideology, and especially about the role of metaphor in ideological discourse. I would like to start from the famous opening sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*, which became later on, especially with its »spectre« a much used and easily recognized call for revolutionary action.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle: »On the Art of Poetry«, in: Aristotle, Horace, Longines: *Classical Literary Criticism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1965. p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> F. E. Sparshott: »„As“, or The Limits of the Metaphor«, *New Literary History*, Vol. VI, No. 1, The Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va., Autumn 1974, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, Stalin, in December 1901 in Tiflis, writes about »the spectre of a people's revolution«. — Cited in Isaac Deutscher: *Stalin*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1966, p. 62.

»A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of Communism.«<sup>4</sup> In this case the metaphor is really, as Paul Ricoeur defines it, »in the service of the poetic function; (the metaphor) is that strategy of discourse by which language gets rid of its function of direct description, so that it could reach the mythical level on which its function of discovery is liberated.«<sup>5</sup>

In the cited case from *The Communist Manifesto*, the metaphor is obvious and simple: it cannot be elaborated much and also, it cannot be exploited much ideologically. We know that *The Manifesto* was supposed to appeal to workers and to the general public, that it did not have or pretend to have the status of scientific or theoretical treatise<sup>6</sup> and that it served its aim extremely well in the next hundred years. *The Manifesto*, with its opening sentence, does not hide anything. It states in partially poetic language its aims and political program etc., and uses metaphors of such a poetic nature as the cited example in a direct and open manner only, without hiding or covering up their references. The meaning of the »spectre« is explained immediately: communism. Can we thus really call it an example of ideological use of metaphor as we perhaps implied earlier? We can reply not only that it all depends upon how we define ideology, but most of all it depends upon the context. I shall elaborate the first point very quickly and shall not go into detail. Following Claude Lefort,<sup>7</sup> I shall say that ideology represents social imaginary in capitalism, which is today the predominant social formation, and that the ideological discourse forms a crease (*le repli*) upon the original instituting discourse and tries to hide its partiality, its partial interest, its covering up of distortions and fallacies. In this way it can represent a part of every discourse. This ideological crease can also change, obtain new meanings etc., and lose old ones.

So what has all this to do with the opening sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*? At first glance, not much. The opening sentence is almost as well-known as *The Manifesto* itself, which is sometimes — and the opening sentence proves this point — also considered a literary and not just political work. But that is all. Although we could say that today it is possible to describe *The Manifesto* as an ideological program — if we bear in mind Karl Mannheim's distinction between utopia and ideology — we could of course also say that the opening metaphor is just one of the many metaphors used in different political and ideological programs and in this respect not much different from them. Perhaps we could also say that it could be a special case, insofar as we consider its fame and thus its symbolic value.

Before we continue with this discussion about the spectre of communism, let us turn to another metaphor, very dear to political discourse and arising from the same or similar program and tradition as the spectre metaphor. It also comes from *The Manifesto*, but it became, due to its applicability, much more commonly used in the political discourse of the left. The phrase, »The proletariat have nothing to lose but their chains«, really goes back to Marat.<sup>8</sup> Similar slave metaphors form the core of leftist and populist imagery of the

<sup>4</sup> K. Marx-F. Engels: *Werke*, Vol. 4, Berlin 1977, p. 461.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ricoeur: *La métaphore vive*, Seuil, Paris 1975, p. 311.

<sup>6</sup> »*The Communist Manifesto* is essentially a call to action. As such, it commits itself, in the main, to what one might call a Dives and Lazarus view — or better, perhaps: a Master-Slave view — of modern society: the opposition of two classes, haves and have-nots, bourgeoisie and proletariat.« — S. S. Prawer: *Karl Marx and World Literature*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford 1976, p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Claude Lefort: *Les formes de l'histoire*, Gallimard, Paris 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. S. Prawer: *op. cit.*, 148.

last hundred years. Can we say that we can find ideological discourse here? Insofar as such phrases are uttered because of their symbolic value, for example, in a song sung with a political motive, it is clear that the metaphorical and the not-true meaning of the text is obvious to everybody, and that a song with such a text acquires a symbolic value, arising from past or present political struggles, something similar to carrying flags or banners, which today nowhere have the essential (and not only symbolic) value which they had in primitive societies. But consider these phrases in the context of a political speech, where words like slaves, slavery, chains etc. are today nothing more than metaphors. But as such, and bearing in mind the fact that metaphors serve a poetic function, what happens to such metaphors? First of all, today they appear used up. For participants of this colloquium coming abroad, it should be explained that not so long ago they could also be heard in our country.

So what does it mean that they appear used up? It does not mean only what Victor Shklovski meant when he said that words have become common and that, »their inner (picturesque) and outer (sound) form ceased to be experienced.«<sup>9</sup> It means much more. Since political discourse is not just any discourse, but a discourse aimed at mobilizing a certain public, it must achieve a certain intended reaction or effect. If not, it is bad rhetoric. Using imagery that is not only used up, but obsolete, achieves the opposite effect of the desired one. By this fact — but not by it alone — something else becomes obvious also: that such a discourse has become obsolete too, and thus that it cannot achieve the desired effect, because social reality has changed so much that, except for a small percentage of the population, such a discourse is devoid of the necessary ingredients for stimulating the desired political action.

It is useful here to quote another definition of the metaphor, that of Harald Weinrich, that the metaphor is »a word in context, by which this word is determined in such a way that it says something else than what it means.«<sup>10</sup> The word »context« here is of primary importance, and by this context we come back not only to what Sparshott was implicitly saying, but also to the obsolescence of certain political metaphors. It is exactly the social and not the discursive context which is today so much different, so that metaphors of slavery and physical oppression etc. have usually nothing to do with the social reality in which such a political discourse appears, and if they do have, then they do not take into consideration the real facts, but fictitious ones. And not only that: such a discourse, exactly because of its use of obsolete metaphors — taken first of all in the context of the political speech and both taken together in the social context — explicitly shows its present ideological nature, shows its ideological crease in the making, and thus ceases to function as ideology. What happens is what Lefort describes in the following way: »Ideology cannot accomplish itself without revealing itself, that is, without exposing itself as a discourse, without allowing the appearance of the deviation of the discourse in relation to that of which it speaks.«<sup>11</sup>

We can now return to the spectre of communism. Why does this metaphor not evoke the same feeling of obsolescence, although it arises from the same discursive or political context? We can of course say, that everybody is not Marx or Engels, and that it is inappropriate to compare a given text, *The Com-*

<sup>9</sup> V. Sklovski: *Uskrnuće riječi*, Stvarnost, Zagreb 1969, p. 13—14.

<sup>10</sup> W. Weinrich: »Semantik der kühnen Metapher«, *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift*. Vol. 37, 1963, p. 340.

<sup>11</sup> C. Lefort: *op. cit.*, p. 299.

*munist Manifesto* to be exact, and a political discourse arising or connected with it of which we stress only a few metaphors and that it certainly depends upon the orators or writers whether they will be able to use such metaphors in an effective way. All this is certainly true, but it is not the whole truth. It is also truth that the spectre metaphor has a higher poetic value, its poetic function within the context of the ideological function — this time understood in the sense of Jan Mukařovský. that is, without its negative content — is strong and more effective. But nevertheless there exists an important difference, which from the start changes our attitude towards both mentioned discourses. We will explain this change by using a distinction between an idea and ideology. Lukács, in one of his works from the fifties,<sup>12</sup> greatly criticised Günther Andersch for stating, in my opinion justly, that an idea, of communism for example — glides into ideology. Something similar to what Andersch said, was elaborated also by Jan Patočka. Or to put it another way: as long as the idea of communism remains a vague notion, an idea, and as long as this idea is not materialized, it has a sort of aesthetic or poetic value and function. We could say, although perhaps this may appear to be pushing things too far, that communism too, is really a *metaphor* for all that is socially positive that does not yet exist. We know that Marxists in general and especially Marx, did not usually want to define communism and explained it as a movement. But is this really possible or is it just an easy way out of a difficult and perhaps unresolvable question? Of course it is easier to speak in such a way today, after our past and present experiences. The other possibility of explaining communism is an image of communism as a social system in the sense of past, primordial history or in the sense of a well-defined futuristic society. Or are these just images or notions?

I would like to defend the notion that communism is really a metaphor with all the necessary ingredients that define a metaphor.

But we have moved away from the spectre of this communism. This spectre in the described context is then not only a metaphor, but a metaphor which exists in a metaphorical and »ideational« context. It would be interesting to know if this was done deliberately by the authors of *The Manifesto*, because the idea of communism had already then existed for some time, but it nevertheless remained an idea and was in this respect not much different from today's situation.

The spectre of communism is thus a metaphor, and really reaches, as Ricoeur puts it, »a mythical level,« by playing upon its poetic function. It is, at the same time, a metaphor and an idea exactly because of the fact that communism did not become a social reality. If this happened, communism would cease to be a metaphor and would become a describable reality and describable in a direct descriptive way. How would then we perceive the metaphor of the »spectre«? It would all depend upon the communist social reality. If it were a success — and in principle only that is possible — it would cease to be a spectre and this spectre would become just a metaphor of a past historical attitude towards communism. If it were not successful, it would and perhaps will — keep its metaphorical value, but of course it depends for how long and especially, for how long it would remain in the realm of political program and

<sup>12</sup> G. Lukács: »Die Gegenwartsbedeutung des kritischen Realismus«, *Essays über Realismus, Werke*, Vol. 4. Luchterhand. Neuwied & Berlin 1971, p. 520—1.

thus in the realm of the political in itself and would not be transposed into the realm of literature, as has happened to works by Thomas More and others.

On the other hand, discourses which use metaphors of the oppressed are most of all at the present moment in danger of becoming explicitly ideological and, just because of this explicitness, also ideologically ineffective. I would say that this is just the case. It is not just a question of finding today new perspectives of leftist ideas, but a *new discourse*, with a new imagery and new metaphors, which should have — if they want to be effective — nothing to do with the Proletkult slogans, with the metaphors of leftist proletarian movements and with discourses of the 19th century or of the Engelsian tradition of *Anti-Dühring* — if this is really possible. We could say that in this sense a new discursive formation is in the making and that metaphors from the Marxist or communist tradition do not remain a part of it, but are losing ground and have already almost disappeared. In this sense »the spectre of communism« turns out to be a real monster, but in this sense, in this context, the reference of the metaphor is different: communism is portrayed as a dying monster and not as a ferocious beast in the eyes of some.

The metaphors used by Marxist political discourse derive of course also from the Romantic tradition. Marx himself<sup>13</sup> was submerged in the romantic discursive tradition and used its appreciated authors and metaphors freely in his work.

If we state things in such a way, it certainly means that we cannot today understand texts such as *The Communist Manifesto*, or discourses arising from its ideas or the discourses of politics arising from the same, as more than a thing of the past, which at the same time forms our present. If we go a step further, we could say that in reality, what should be done would really be to retain from the Marxist discursive or rhetorical tradition »the rational core«, to eliminate exactly the existing metaphorical content of this social theory, which means metaphors such as communism or scientifically defined surplus value or the all-pervading class struggle. They serve their purpose because of their mythical nature, which is perhaps best and most tragically portrayed by soldiers dying in the second world war for communism, a metaphor which embraced all that was good and positive.

When I say that social theory such as Marxism should get rid of its main metaphors, I do not mean with this that I am a proponent of pure scientific argumentation such as practiced or proposed by Louis Althusser or French positivism or logical positivism. What I mean is that another type of argumentation and verification is necessary and that basic theorems of a social theory should not be metaphors, while at the same time of course, metaphors and their use cannot be omitted or restricted to poetical discourse only, for we know that some basic scientific concepts — waves for example — are really metaphors, as Gaston Bachelard and on the basis of his work, Claudine Normand<sup>14</sup> or Jacques Derrida in his *Mythologie blanche*, have shown. It is no use then trying to drive out metaphors, they just should not form the basic concepts of a theory. In such a way, they, as metaphors, remain attractive ideas which never lose their youth, charm and attractiveness and again and again stimulate us — but that is all and sometimes even too much. When such ideas become a part of the lived-in empirical reality, their ideological nature appears.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the paper by Lev Kreft.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. C. Normand: *Métaphore et concept*, Ed. Complexe, Bruxelles 1976.

This appearance is dependent not only upon the metaphors used, but also and mainly upon the wider historical context which determines how long and when certain metaphors can be used, that is, when they will carry over the intended meaning better than some other metaphors or non-metaphorical means.

To conclude: I think that metaphors used in a discourse of political ideas in general are effective as long as this functions in an ideational complex, as an idea which does not form a part of experienced empirical reality. When and if it does, it reveals its potentially ideological nature. It turns out that basic concepts can be nothing more than metaphors and have an appeal exactly — but not only — because of their metaphorical nature. To a certain extent, the same is true for political discourse and its metaphors which should always keep up with the socio-historical reality which such a discourse wants to analyze and change.