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**METAPHOR, INTERPENETRATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY:
A REVIEW ESSAY WITH REFLECTIONS ON NORTHROP FRYE'S IDEAS**

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ABSTRACT

Following ideas of the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye this paper intends to advance some reflections on two combined notions: *interpenetration* as a *verbal formula* for dealing in anthropology with the dynamic and dialectic complexity of sociocultural differentiation and integration, and *metaphor* as a concrete linguistic unity of the strange and the different. These reflections guide a literature review of the use of both notions within the social sciences in order to apply the conclusions to *ethnography*, given the fact that ethnographers have been distinguished “adepts of the special, the singular, the different, and the concrete” according to Geertz. In addition, metaphor seems to be highly popular among contemporary ethnographers not only because of the parallelism found in the “postmodern” discussion about *tropology* in *historiography*, but also because of the controversial programs of *poetic*, and again “postmodern”, *ethnography*. The contrast and the similarity between the two types of *graphies* in relation to metaphor/interpenetration, as seen by Frye, will become clear in the final section of the essay.

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Anthropologists were invited by Schweitzer (1997) to consider *embeddedness*, powered by the integrative formal language of social network analysis, as an appropriate alternative *verbal formula* for dealing with the increasing complex world of late modern times. Local people, typically studied by ethnographers, are drawn by demographic, social, political, and informational processes, to larger and larger exchange circuits that transcend even national boundaries, and constitute global and transnational linkages. These complex phenomena have been studied using “grand concepts” such as “globalization” and “change” in an ineffectual way –suggests Schweitzer-- since they simply cover with blanket terms, of supposedly uniform forces and effects, multiple and uneven processes that need to be identified and causally assessed in locally based fieldwork. Embeddedness is presented (p. 740) with two “facets”, the “vertical” one that relates to the *‘hierarchical linkages* of individual and corporate actors at the local level to the larger society, economy and polity of which they are part”; and the “horizontal” one that deals with *‘the interpenetration of*

societal/cultural domains,” an issue that “goes back to an old discussion in economic anthropology [remember Karl Polanyi] on the embeddedness of structures and moralities.”

This is an example of the discursive management within our discipline of the *e pluribus unum* [unity out of many] process responsible for many human phenomena in their different scales and manifestations. The qualification of *verbal formula* is intentional for it wants to underscore an idea that was central in the thought of the outstanding Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye, into whose works this paper wants to delve. According to a recent publication on his published and unpublished work (Denham 1999: 144) Frye was very conscious of the limitations of human discourse in its different forms, including the refined and elaborated ones called scientific and poetic, for conveying the fullness of “experience, understanding, process, concept and vision”, or –in Frye’s terms (1981:4)--the “essential thing or force or process”. Human discourse in its variegated forms struggles at times with the ineffable, the extremely complex, subtle or sublime, and at the end only *verbal formulas* come out in the most felicitous moments.¹ This occurs even in the case of specialists in the art of discourses and of criticism of discourses: “I’m intellectually prisoner of my own profession: for me, to know anything is to find a verbal formula for it”, confesses Frye (Denham 1999: 144).

Denham’s paper is dedicated specifically to *interpenetration* in the work of Northrop Frye, and concludes that this word is a good *verbal formula* for the phenomena in which a relation is established between unity and variety, wholes and parts, totality and particularity, self and other, human and divinity, and a host of other distinctions, dichotomies and polytomies that constitute our absolute experience. That *absolute experience* eludes our *absolute knowledge* even when expressed in the mode of discourse most able for dealing with the ineffable --the “imaginative or poetic”, where metaphor is given a full deployment and manifestation. Denham furthers a second conclusion that sets the stage for the present paper: in Frye’s writings *metaphor* supports the most apposite formula for interpenetration because it carries the counter-logical idea that two different things are, in spite of their strangeness and while maintaining such a strangeness, “the same thing”.

To a casual observer the word *interpenetration* seems to be rather unusual within the social sciences, although a more detailed exploration will render a different picture, as a major section of this paper will bear out. When used as an alternative for embeddedness, structural differentiation and integration, and similar verbal formulas, it reflects a response to perplexities arisen when one becomes conscious of the profound implications of the principle *e pluribus unum* when it is applied to society and culture. Its use within the social sciences ranges from a sort of loosely inserted joker, without proper (or at least implicit) definition, to a highly elaborated notion, central, for instance, to the sociology of Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann and the refinements proposed by au

¹ Of course a mention should be made of the *symbolic representation* which is a not-semiotic, not-denotative and not always articulate complement of linguistic and conceptual representation (Sperber 1975).

thors like Richard Münch and Loet Leydesdorff, who have continued this particular sociological tradition of causal and systemic modeling.

This paper intends to advance some reflections on *interpenetration* by on Frye's insights on this concept and on that of *metaphor*. It wants to apply the results of the literature review and the ensuing reflections to the field of *ethnography* given the deep affinities found, in the complex concreteness of fieldwork and its description, between this practical form of the anthropological trade and metaphor/interpenetration. Metaphor is highly popular among contemporary ethnographers not only because of the parallelism found in the "postmodern" discussion about *tropology* in *historiography* (White 1973, 1999), but also because of the controversial programs of *poetic*, and again "postmodern", *ethnography*. The contrast and the similarity between these two types of *graphies* in relation to metaphor/interpenetration will become clear in the final section of the essay.

Rundown on interpenetration and metaphor

Interpenetration is a composite word with two Latin roots. The term *inter* carries a sense of reciprocity (as in *inter nos*, between us); of temporality (as in *inter coenam*, during dinner); circumstance (as in *inter has turbas*, among these mobs); and similitude (as in *inter paucos disertus*, eloquent as not many). *Penetration*, the second term, has a similar enriched sense since it is related genealogically to the Latin *penetralia*, the interior of a house or temple, and to *penitus*, which in its nominal form means the interior or intimate realm, and in its adverbial form (to go) profoundly, to the utmost intimate point. *Penitus* is related to *penus*, the domestic provisions kept in a pantry, and extensionally (metaphorically, aha!) to the temple of Vesta. It also has an Indo-European root that means to feed, or food. Consequentially, the standard dictionary definitions of interpenetration allude to the vast range of senses conveyed by the coalescence of the two Latin roots.

This genealogy of penetration confirms a paradox on which Borges (2000:77-95) has called attention: on the one side, as it seems to occur with most abstract words, originally it is a plain or concrete term; on the other, an example of the more general Borgean assertion, taken from Lugones, that "all words were originally metaphors". Penetration, as its genealogy shows, is a homey term with a very concrete sense but at the same time it is a springboard for additional, metaphoric, senses. There is a paradox in the whole issue, Borges insists, because today in order "to understand most words, you have to forget about the fact of their being metaphors." Thunder meant for the old Norse, he says, not only the low rumbling of the sky but the associated lighting and the presence of God, who later became Thor; and criticizes, with Whitehead, the fallacy of the perfect dictionary, which holds that for every perception of the senses, for every statement or abstract idea, we can find a word in the ideal dictionary. The path going to the literalist sense of words is opposite to the poetic one, that goes back to the original and metaphoric senses.

Metaphor is a very ancient topic in philosophical and classical discussion. It was considered a sort of *bête noire*² by the scientific view of the world since this emerged in the XVIIth Century because metaphor was read, following Aristoteles, within a *literalist* –that is an anti- metaphorical—*conception of language*. Metaphor was a form of language that had to be excised to give place to the perfect and ideal language of science, which by definition was literal (Arbib and Hesse 1986:145-170). The position *against* metaphor (except in the arts and humanities) got full impetus and coherence in the following centuries and it is still maintained by important sectors in the science and technology establishment, including some self-defined positivistic pockets within the social sciences (e.g. Bernard 2000 for anthropology). There is, however, a growing body of literature in many specialized domains of science and technology –from chemistry to biology to mathematics and electrical engineering-- that not only mentions but recognizes with interest, that metaphor plays a decisive role in their *models* and discourses, as any one with access to digital bibliographic bases can ascertain: *metaphors* and *models*, these ones so common in science, have a complex underlying kinship that has been studied by respected philosophers like Max Black (1972) and Mary Hesse (1965); their equivalent role in the *invention* of creative arts and sciences has been explicitly formulated and sustained in contemporary philosophical analysis (Ricoeur 1975; Klinkenberg 1999).

Therefore, Northrop Frye was not out of focus when he wrote in the introduction of his last book, *Words with Power* (1990a:xxiii) about both the wariness elicited by metaphor and its inescapable presence in any serious analytical thought:

Of course “metaphorical” is as treacherous as a conception as “truth” or “reality” could ever be. Some metaphors are illuminating; some are merely indispensable; some are misleading or lead only to illusion; some are socially dangerous. Wallace Stevens speaks of “the metaphor that murders metaphor.” But for better or worse it occupies a central area – perhaps the central area—of both social and individual experience. It is a primitive form of awareness, established long before the distinction of subject and object became normal, but when we try to outgrow it we find that all we can really do is rehabilitate it.

And better that we deal frontally with it, rebounds nine years later Strasbourg’s philosopher Nanine Charbonnel (1999:1-6). After reviewing the enormous body of specialized papers on the subject, she concludes that in spite of such volume and the antiquity of the issue – going back to Aristoteles and Plato—the response to the question of its actuality and relevance is *oui, malgré tout*. *Oui* because there is an opening, with a variable geometry, of the metaphor within the whole field of human sciences; *oui* because the time has come to deal, while having metaphor and its sister metonymy as a pabulum, with some *foundational questions of language* and its use within our disciplines. “In any case, an initial condition would be that linguists and philosophers, historians of rhetoric and semantics, literatti and anthropologists, consent to read each other” (p. 3).

² Mallarmé’s title of one of his prose poems, *Le démon de l’analogie* is taken puzzinly by Bourdieu (1980) to title a section of his book where complex metaphoric structures are at work as part of his analytic and descriptive discourse. Later on in the present essay metaphor will emerge again as “the force of a demiurge.”

The question is *foundational* in the sense that metaphor is at the foundations of the relationship between experience/thought and language; and “foundationalists” have been called the authors who, *contra* the strong position of Davidson (1984), sustain that metaphors *do have cognitive content* (see Prosser 2000). *A fortiori* foundationalists should be those who, consciously working out “a new epistemology” for the forms of knowledge, scientific or otherwise, emphatically assert that “all language is metaphorical”, as do Michael A. Arbib and Mary B. Hesse (1986: 147-170) following the positions of Max Black (1962), Nelson Goodman (1978) and Paul Ricoeur (1975).

“Metaphorical”, say Arbib and Hesse (p. 152), is used here in a general sense to denote the basic fact about language in a FR analysis [family resemblances, in the sense of Wittgenstein] –namely, that the individuality of a particular object is indispensable in reality and that classification of objects by general terms in language is secondary and necessarily poorer in information content than is the reality described.

The authors explain (p. 145) that within this new epistemology a sentence like “the sky is crying” is not exhausted by a fixed internal *semantics* that would produce an a-contextual sense, but in a *pragmatic* or *context-dependent domain* it acts as a catalyst for a dynamic unfolding of *schema activity* in the head of the listener that produces a sense that is not limited to the speaker’s intention. The understanding of what is *literal* and what is *metaphorical* --the dichotomy that up to now has served as *casus belli* in the contention between literalists and foundationalists-- may even be reversed in the process of generating a sense for the contextually treated sentence. In fact, they state (p. 145) that “there is no right distinction between the literal and the metaphorical” because:

[We] should not see metaphor in terms of the interaction of distinct systems or languages, in one of which usage is literal and the other metaphorical. Rather, every word or phrase has its contexts or language games in which usage is recognized as normal and in which a standard meaning can be invoked, and others in which the use is unfamiliar or novel.

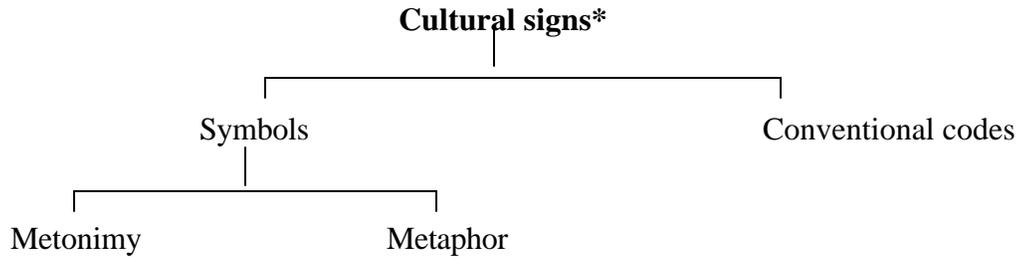
There is, in consequence, a relativization of the distinction between literal and metaphoric; its use is common and should be revered at the pragmatic level, but has no implications at the deepest semantic one. Literal meaning is, in fact, the standard one within *a determinate network* of established meanings while metaphorical meaning refers to what is “*novel*”, “*conflictive*” and “*impertinent*”. Nelson Goodman (1968: 50-51) brings the example of the dichotomic interpretation in the case of “a picture of trees and cliffs by the sea, painted in dull grays, expressing great sadness”. The picture, he says, is *literally* gray and *metaphorically* sad, not because there are two linguistic systems at play, but due to the pragmatic situation in which a previously existing, and still prevalent, classificatory schema of pictures, colors and feelings, establishes that gray color belongs to the class of gray things, while the possession of sadness belongs to a class of things that feel sad, and the picture does not feel. Thus, Arbib and Hesse explain (p. 152) the relativist, interactional, and network-based interpretation of the distinction between literal and metaphoric senses:

it concerns how speakers learn, use, and, if necessary, define the words of their language. Literal use enshrines the use most frequent in familiar contexts –the use that least disturbs the network of meanings. Thus, literal use is the easiest to manage, to learn, and to teach. It is often, if possible, the use that is susceptible to ostensive definition and is therefore the one with direct physical applications. It is the one least open to misunderstanding and mistake. Literal use is the one generally put first in dictionary entries, where it is followed by comparatively “dead” metaphors (“point” of a pin probably comes before “point” of an argument) and where perhaps more novel and interesting live metaphors may be omitted altogether. All these features explain why the analysis of metaphor apparently has to start from “literal” language already understood, but it does not imply that the semantic basis for the two sorts of expression are radically different.

Pressed to delineate in precise terms the notion of metaphor, considered today (e.g. by Lakoff-Turner 1989:188-194) as one of “the most potent and persuasive instruments of conceptualization”, a recent European author (Prandi 1999) responds that a most inclusive definition would view “metaphor as the projection of one entity or of one connection among entities in a strange domain”. A stricter definition, marking a distinction even with the closest twin-sister symbol of metonym/synecdoche, would say that only metaphor “is able not only of exploiting conceptual structures already partaken and of enriching in a creative manner our repertoire of our coherent conceptual structures, but also forcing concepts to interact in an unexpected way, according to schemas of relations that are unconceivable in conceptual terms”.

It is this creative ability, armed with impertinence, playful novelty, and conflict, what moves H. Weinrich to propose that metaphors rather than being faithful servants in the house of established analogies, are “*the instruments of a demiurg*” (cited by Prandi 1999:191). This simile is an invitation for the social sciences to abandon the old notion of *bête noire* they have for the metaphor and to consider, instead, the positive side of its creative –although conflictive and impertinent—power that operates at the very roots of our language.

Following Jakobson and Halle (1956), Arbib and Hesse take metaphor and metonymy as two necessary characteristics of language, the first governed by rules of *resemblance* and *semantics*, and the second as the combination of *contiguity* and *syntax*. Both primary forms belong, as symbols “with some ground in the world” and as different with purely conventional codes, to the realm of *cultural signs*, in the way they are conceived by the anthropological tradition of Evans-Pritchard (1956) and Beattie (1964). These symbols, linguistic and not linguistic, represent abstract ideas that are not susceptible of adequate translation into a literal code, as the positivist tradition would propose; “reality is misrepresented –says Beattie, cited by the authors (p. 167)—if the symbol, and not the often indefinable thing that it symbolizes, is taken to be the ultimate truth.” Arbib and Hesse present a classification of symbols within the cultural signs that is derived from Evans-Pritchard and Beattie (figure 1); it will be very illuminating to relate it closely to Frye’s classification of *mythoi* brought in figure 2, further in the essay: these *mythoi* may be taken as *the content* of the classification presented in figure 1.



*With Eco (1995) we could talk of “cultural units” to avoid any semiotic implication at this maximum level of classification (see Sperber 1975).

Figure 1: Classifications of signs derived from Evans-Pritchard (1956) and Beattie (1964)

Interpenetration in social science literature

A search in the Cambridge Web of Science for papers with the term *interpenetration* in their titles or abstracts evidences a lack of a standardized denotative meaning of the word for expert use in the social sciences, as can be found for instance in the chemistry of polymers. However the use of the word by social scientists is rather common; it ranges from perfunctory insertions in the chain of discourse -- where it stands as a joker with the approximate sense of differentiation/(dialectics)/integration without much consideration of its rigorous sense— to highly elaborated technical applications. A quick summary review of the 85 references, some of them studied in detail, is enough for the present purpose.

1. Although there was no direct and extensive search for *the humanities, arts and literature* it seems convenient to start with a small sample of the use within these disciplines in order to stress the idea that this is a semantic domain where the absence of neat definitions and precise categorizations --as in the dream of positivist sciences -- are part of the state of affairs; and it also reminds us of Frye’s idea that metaphor, as the unity of strange things, is the best verbal formula for the concept of interpenetration. In his account of Rollo May’s existential psychology, Martinez (1998) suggests that there is no matter of either psychological or religious insight, but a “mutual interpenetration”; Hartshorne (1997) criticizes Bergson’s version of “aesthetic creationism” because, among other things, he treats asymmetrical temporal relations with the symmetrical concept of “interpenetration. For Huws (2000) art is a propitious place for the growing interpenetration of ‘the natural’ and the ‘technological’ aspects of culture; other authors take art as a domain that interpenetrates with politics, in the case of theater and drama (Londré 1986), and with ‘reality’ and ‘life’ in the case of poetics (Golomb 2000).

This reference to poetics is helpful for it shows the potency of the combination of metaphor, brought forward in words and molded in a piece of metal ³, in the function of *symbolic formula* that expresses the interpenetration of a very rich variety of human experiences, based both in the biography of authors and in poetically created plots and characters. Golomb (2000) brings the case of Chekhov's drama "The Seagull" where a medallion with the inscription "If you should ever need my life, then come and take it" plays a key role in the plot and *dénouement* of the story. The engraved sentence and the medallion have received much consideration in literary criticism due in part to its symbolic force and in part to its derivation from another sentence of Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment." A paper coming from *anthropology* presents a similar *poetic (allegoric)* case, where the artistic medallion is substituted by the serially produced coin of one cent (the imagination can carve a metaphor of whatever matter, even out of a prosaic penny): Stephen Gudeman (1998), an outstanding economic anthropologist, uses 'interpenetration' to summarize in a very suggestive and 'impertinent'⁴ manner his understanding of a penny [emphasis added]:

*Consider a US one cent piece. Shown in relief on one side are a bust of Lincoln and the statements 'In God We Trust,' 'Liberty,' '1996,' and 'D.' The expression 'one cent' is inscribed on the other. One side tells about trade value; the other - pointing to religion, politics, and place of minting - portrays community values. On every coin, the commercial and the communal are represented and fulfill separate functions. Each requires the other, although we cannot see both at the same time. But let us give the penny a second reading, because community symbols - including the Lincoln Memorial - are struck on the commercial side as well, and this picture of separation, dependence, and **interpenetration** holds for other coins. Carried by everyone, coins provide a model of the economic anthropology I advocate. It explores economy's two sides, by focusing on practices and the small; ethnography from around the world, including the US, reveals the complex intersections of community and market in material life.*

2. Within the realm of *social sciences proper* we can start with the use of interpenetration to refer to the relationship authors establish between the natural, psycho-cultural and social spheres of human life, manifested, for instance, in the description of the ontogenetic developmental process, where the behavioral, neuro-biological and psychosocial perspectives are selected by Hinde (1997) for a unitary consideration; or in the case of Vandervert (1996) who presents a 'neurological positivistic' model in which disciplinary boundaries interpenetrate to holistically treat the interconnections among consciousness,

³ Borges attributes to *El Zahir*, an emblematic coin –the common Argentinian chip of 20 cents— wonderful powers over human time, memory and destiny, more or less in the same way Frye attributes "verbal magic" to metaphor in ancient times and pseudo-magic power ("hypothetical") in modern times (see *infra*). In this beautiful story Borges (1974:589-595) quotes Tennyson (because anything can be *Zahir*: a piece of marble, a tiger, for instance) saying that if we could understand a flower we would know who are we and what the world is. "Perhaps he wanted to say that there is no event, humble as it may be, that doesn't entail the universal history and its infinite concatenation of effects and causes."

⁴ Paul Ricoeur (1983), faithful to a very large consensus, synthetically defines metaphor as an "impertinent attribution of sense", which means an unexpected junction of two strange semantic units.

mind and thinking, and their implications for the unification of intuition and science/mathematics, all with the help of fractal theory. A more encompassing and highly dynamic (because of the presence of other co-evolving life worlds), although paradoxically more reductive (because of the overlook of cultural and social domains) notion of “interpenetration” appears in the case of co-evolutionary networks that some specialists like Tosta (2001) identify in human infectious diseases. There human organisms are seen as interpenetrated by the world of microorganisms from conception to death; different levels of interactions, restricted as said to biological exchanges, are envisioned in this relationship and interpreted in terms of mutual adaptation and co-evolution.

In the area of *psychology* and *psychological anthropology* the word interpenetration comes to the help of authors who speak of child development in general, as Meacham (1996) does when he says that Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s theories conceptualize the relationship of mind and society in terms of ‘mutual interpenetration’. It is also restricted to cognitive development as in the case of D’Andrade’s (1992) idea that in the process there is a ‘complex layering and interpenetration’ of cultural and idiosyncratic schemas, or Campbell’s (1994) description of child’s number reading and number-fact retrieval process in terms of interpenetration; the same use is given in the case of ‘cognitive affective interpenetration’ during latency (Hippler 1977) and of the ‘interpenetration of cultural content and structural form’ in ego moral development (Snarey 1992).

In *psychoanalysis* interpenetration has been used to refer to ‘relational approaches’ like Mitchell’s (1988) ‘bold integrative theorizing’ where ‘the interpenetration of illusion and actuality’ is treated side by side with the significance of sexuality, the impact of early experience, the relation of the past to the present, the centrality of the will, the repetition of painful experience, and the nature of the analytic situation. The analytic encounter and dialogue itself has been interpreted also as an ‘interpenetration’ (Schafer 2000, and Sucharov 2000).

Other therapeutic situations have also been interpreted using the term, for instance in Butler’s (2000) case report of sequels of head injury that highlights “the interaction and interpenetration of a complex array of biological, psychological, and social factors in the crystallization of a delusion system .” In the broader perspective of illness experience Dyck (1995) refers to ‘the interpenetration of the public sphere in the private lives’ of patients with multiple sclerosis who intend to re-map the meaning of their renegotiated life-worlds.

In a still more encompassing vision that affects normal life, Yunt (2001) says that Jung’s psychological research envisions “an interpenetration of psyche, nature, and spirit, thus bridging the modern epistemological gap that has developed between them in the Western world.” In a similar vein Hoshmand (1995) challenges the beliefs and self-identification of psychologists as “scientists-professionals” when she presents S. L Jones’s ideas as an attempt “to conflate the scientific text of psychological discourse with the metaphysical and the religious, apparently in the hope of promoting an interpenetration of the respective related modes of thought.”

The field of *economics, political science and political economy*, in particular when the focus is on the relationship of the society, the state and the market economy, has offered many opportunities for authors to resort to interpenetration as an appropriate verbal formula to convey the complexity and dynamics of the various elements at play. Holden (1999) says that today the competence of political scientists has to face “the interpenetration of politics and economics” due to the close interaction of the exercise of power with the impact of markets forces. These operate at the international level through the “extensive interpenetration of capital flows and business networks” (Yeung 2000) or through the “interpenetration des capitaux et concurrence industrielle mondiale” (Laubier and Richemond 1981); and induce refinements in the complicated strategy of competition, such as the one studied by Chalmers (2001) who focus on the “interpenetration of masculinity projects and managerial politics” of marketing, given de fact that gender characteristics have proved to be a flexible and potent resource in the market struggle.

The phenomenon of globalization in which the market forces play a crucial role has induced some authors to talk of “global interpenetration” (Baltodano 1997), of “interpenetration of foreign and domestic (‘intermestic’) issues (Cha 2000) such that national governments increasingly operate in spaces defined by the intersection of internal and external interests, that requires a reinterpretation of the relationship between the market and the state; Jacobsen (1995) speaks, in this context, of “interpenetration of interests and ideas”. The European Common Market has given opportunity to talk of the “economic interpenetration” between the EU and Eastern Europe (Winters and Moore 1996; Henriot and Inotai 1997), for which the “cantonal interpenetration” of the Swiss Federation may serve as a paradigmatic model (McKay 2000). However, market transitions have involved pervasive quasi-public, quasi-private phenomena, including the proliferation of hybrid organizations and “the interpenetration of state/society boundaries” (Francis 2001) or “state and society interpenetration” (Boyle 2000; Young 1998); these “profound processes of economic, social, cultural, and political interpenetration” (Dogan 1994) introduce tension within national identities, citizenship and sovereignty, that give reason to Jessop’s (2001) appreciation that with “globalization” we are improperly referring to multi-scalar, multi-centric, and multi-temporal processes, where complex and tangled causal hierarchies are at work rather than a simple, unilinear, bottom-up or top-down movements.

In this way we come to the full range of *sociocultural dynamics*, which is the analytic domain where the word interpenetration has been most extensively used by social scientists, in particular by anthropologists, to refer either to the mutual relationships of human cohesive units at the various levels of the social organization, or to the interaction between specific aspects (of functional domains) of their cultural life, or to both. This is a current concern in anthropology that led authors to propose newly crafted verbal (and mathematically based graphic) formulas similar to Schweitzer’s (1997) *vertical and horizontal embeddedness*. Before entering this domain it seems helpful to give an wide-angle critical overview coming from a political economist: Jessop (2001) defends his “strategic relational approach” that goes beyond “‘nesting’ in the manner of Russian dolls” implicit in the notion of *embeddedness*, and recovers, to be treated in new terms, the old Marxist dialectical approach to the complexity of social totalities and *concrete universals*.

Globalization, “seen as a multi-scalar, multi-centric, and multi-temporal process” involves, for him, “complex and tangled causal hierarchies rather than a simple, unilinear, bottom-up or top-down movement as well as the extent to which globalization is always a contingent product of tendencies and counter-tendencies.” It seems that a key formula in Jessop’s discourse is “eccentric ‘interpenetration’” occurring at different scales of social organization, although his personal research deals with major societal subsystems (such as the market and the British State). He thinks that, legitimately transposed from cell biology to sociology, the autopoieticist (Maturana’s) approach allows treating these sub-systems as self-referential, self-reproducing, and self-regulating. For instance, the relative autonomy of the state and the market economy “can be addressed in terms of the path-dependent ‘structural coupling’ between two *operationally autonomous* but *ecologically interdependent* subsystems”.

Outstanding in the anthropological tradition is the work of the French anthropologist Roger Bastide (1950, 1995) who decades ago (1950) was talking already of the “*interpénétration des civilisations et psychologie des peuples*” and later published a book (1978) with an obvious title (in English): “The African religions of Brazil : toward a sociology of the interpenetration of civilizations”. The “interpenetration of communities”, “collective identities”, “traditions”, “cultures”, at various scales and in various political and socioeconomic contexts, is a topic frequently written about (Schwartz 1995, de Vos 1995, Bader 1997, Tonna, Bourdier, Al-Sayyad, Eds. 1989, Walker 1993). This has led some authors to talk of “interpenetration of racial and ethnic boundaries” (Bartolomé and Macedo 1997), of “hybridity and interpenetration of cultures” (Meindl 1999) and, when posited in a context of globalization, of “interpenetration of local and global pressures” in the development of ethnic politics (Gabriel 1996). When these collectivities reach higher levels or scales the word is of “interpenetration of national identities” (Robertson, Abercrombie, Hill, Turner, Eds. 1990), or of continental, hemispheric or civilizational interplay: we are invited to transcend the Huntingtonian “clash of civilizations”, a sort of billiard ball concussion of external and atomistic forces --the metaphor is frequent—in order to speak of their interpenetration, given the fact that there is internalized interaction, and “unity in diversity” is generated (Mirza 1998); we hear also of “interpenetration of civilizations in the New World” (Perez-y-Mena 1991) of which an instance is the development of Afro-Latin religion among Puerto Ricans islanders.

The differentiation and integration of wholes is viewed not only in terms of cohesive units of people at the various scales but between the different aspects, functional domains, or spheres of their activity, or between the different actors, roles, and institutions that conform their internal social structures. For instance Rigg (1998) speaks of the “interpenetration” of shifting pursuits between rural and urban spaces that are attached to agricultural or industrial forms of labor; Sonntag, Contreras, and Biardeau (2001) talk about a process that reflects “the union or interpenetration of modernity and development” as it occurs in Latin America; and Demendonca (1994) of the same phenomenon of modernization, interpreted in terms of Trotskyan “permanent revolution”. Beck (1997) talks of “the interpenetration of civil freedom and family” when he studies the issue of democratization of intimate relations between its members, a concept that has been traditionally applied only to public life; also,

the concern about the family relationships with public domains in the life of Polish women leads Zarnowska (1996) to speak of “barriers and interpenetration”. Callahan, Meulen and Topinkova (1995) refer to the “interpenetration of the various moral, cultural, and economic issues” that are at play in the question of welfare and health care of the elderly; Cicourel (1987) mentions the “interpenetration of communicative contexts” in the case of medical encounters; and Yang (2000) the “interpenetration of the universal and the particular” in the case of China’s higher education system now under pressures of globalization.

This rather dense collection of citations of perfunctory uses of interpenetration in the study of cultural dynamics ends with the following assorted cases, most of them, belonging to the so called “cultural studies”: Molina y Vedia (1998) speaks of an “interpenetration process between Disney and both the social and personal systems” in her study of the effect of a local but globalized project of audience of Disney products in Mexico; Macleod (1995) analyzes the “interpenetration of power and knowledge” that affects girls in the double-bind they are inserted in when they intend to study mathematics in mixed classroom settings; Crawford (1985) talks of “interpenetration of Rugby and New Zealand Society” in a study of the game ‘Glory and Hard Knocks’; Toffin (1998) talks of the “interpenetration of music and society” in his description of an ethnographically studied situation of drums and drumming in Nepal; and of idem between “religion and politics” does Beckford (1998) in a paper dedicated to the study of local educational institutions in a multicultural English city where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are able to bring their distinctive religious values to bear on debates about educational policy. Similar religious background, but this time intermeshed with local partisan politics within rural Protestant regions of Weimar’s Germany (1918-1933) have Pyta and Jones (1998) in a paper dedicated to the “interpenetration of milieu and parties” in such rural villages; and, finally, Chevallier (1996) concludes that there are no reasons to talk of “interpenetration” in the case of the extremely common “elite politico-administrative”.

3. This review will end with the mention of authors who use and discuss the concept of interpenetration as a key element of *metatheoretical and technical* analysis; their central concern is in favor of fresh methodological and modeling approaches that adequately respond to the perceived exigencies of contemporary social and cultural dynamic complexity. In this sense goes Scheff’s (1997) book on emotions and social interactions, viewed from a perspective of part-whole analysis; the author presents an approach that “allows the interpenetration of theory, method, and data in such a way that each equally casts light on the other, generating a theory that is based directly on observations of actual human behavior, both inner experience and outer conduct.” Argyriadis (1999) anticipates “an interpenetration of explicative theories” that help to understand, beyond mere juxtaposition and relegation to marginality, the complex relationship that has occurred in Cuba during the past three decades between the government-oriented public health successes and the cumulative practice of diverse possession cults (called religion in Havana). Mathur’s (2001) review article, dedicated to the problem posed by the simultaneous treatment of five inter-linked themes of the common domain of history and anthropology in the case of India dominated by the European imperial presence, speaks in

particular of “the interpenetration of power and knowledge” (a phrase already found as applied to a classroom and gendered context, see *supra* in McLeod (1955)) in the colonial archive. And Kenny’s (1995) specialized paper deals with Western psychiatric practice that sets up the terms for the debate in cases where there is an urgent need of “interpenetration of theory and experience” in order to assure an adequate interpretation of the phenomenon commonly called “illness”.

In a debate more restricted to ethnographic traditions of research Lolfland (1995) pleads for an “analytic ethnography”, that provides propositional answers to questions regarding social life and organization so that the conceptual elaboration matches descriptive empirical detail in the way it is used in ethnography, in a model that carries a true “concept-data interpenetration”. A similar concern is expressed by Poland and Pederson (1998) who, taking as a concrete instance the potential interpretation of silences “embedded in interview transcripts”, express their interest for an appropriate theoretical and methodological treatment of “the social” and the “dense, dialectical interpenetration of structure and agency, context and interaction”. They conclude that Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* may exemplify the way “how a *dialectic orientation* that privileges neither structure nor agency but their dense interpenetration might be grounded theoretically” [emphasis added, ESC].

Bourdieu’s identical concept of *habitus*, matched with Giddens’ concept of *structure*, is taken by Fararo and Butts (1999) to work on a mathematical-sociological model of analysis, called “multilevel generative structuralism” that proceeds in two stages to resolve two linked theoretical and methodological problems: first, how to deal adequately, in modeling, with the “interpenetration of agency and structure”; and second, how the proposed generative multilevel model-building process, proposed at the first instance and adapted to micro situations (on the basis of Bourdieu’s and Giddens’ concepts) can be extended to large-scale social system dynamics. In a similar vein of mathematically grounded models, this time with graphic expression and publishing in a *Poetics* journal, Mische and Pattison (2000), work on previous technical ideas of Fararo and Doreian (1984) regarding tripartite structural analysis, to propose an analytic device that extends standard technique of ‘Galois lattice analysis’ algebraic technique extending it from dual to three (even to n-way) relationships. They apply their tripartite model, which should be carefully distinguished from any social network technique (like the one proposed by Schweitzer to deal with embeddedness, see *supra*), in order to construct a complex concept of “civic arena in a fractured, contentious and multi-sectoral political field” where they place and treat “the interpenetration of organizations, projects and events” that occurred during the storming process of impeachment for corruption of Brazil’s president Fernando Collor de Melo.

Charged with *metatheoretical, technical and graphical* emphasis is also the solution proposed by Leydesdorff (1996, 1997) who is working, within a Parsonian context of systemic model building, on Luhmann’s concept of interpenetration and on Münch’s adjustment of them. (See the author’s work for a complete list of references). Before entering in some details it seems useful to say a word about Luhmann’s own concept because he is probably the author who more explicitly has developed a sociological

interpretation of interpenetration, this time within a systemic-autopoieticist context of analysis. Interpenetration --taken as the reciprocal and effective influence of systems in interaction in such a way that the receptor system has an effect upon the formation of structures within the penetrating system, an vice-versa-- was applied by him not only to the different scales of intra-societal subsystems of communication but to the relations between individual (psychic) systems and society (as in socialization), and between individual systems as such (Luhmann 1995). The third instance (individual to individual interpenetration) may serve as an example of Jessop's (2001) "eccentric interpenetration" at the minimal level of human interaction, that is at the dyadic level. In fact, Luhmann (1986) gives substantial treatment to the process of human interpenetration in terms of intimacy, sexuality and love. Intimacy was seen, in this light, as a complex process in which more and more domains of the *ego's* (vivencia)**T, behavior and biological substratum become accessible and relevant for *alter*; and vice-versa. He spoke not only of *ego's* experiencing of *alter's* behavior as a simple response to the complexity of ego's environment but as a selection, mastered from *alter's* inside, and conditioned by her complex personal world. He clearly distinguished between social interpenetration (that implies communication and language) and human interpenetration that may be non-social and may go beyond language and mere physical contact, because in the intimate relations there are experiences that are left, as he says, "to silence..."

Leydesdorff's papers reflect perhaps the most advanced point of the social scientific debate regarding the concept of interpenetration, *and the richer one within the sociological tradition*, since the discussion starts with Parsons's explicit and detailed introduction of the concept for the theoretical management of the external relations between a subsystem (personality, cultural or social) and its environment. According to Smikum (2000) it was taken from Weber's analysis of the relation between religious ethics and the world, and more specifically, according to Münch from his sociology of religion where Weber deals with the "interpenetration of cultural meaning and power in society" as a case of "interpenetration of subsystems among one another" (Leydesdorff 1996:12). According to this author, as we can see in the following paragraph, interpenetration plays an important role in one of the central and most debated issues of sociology, the relationship of agency and structure, of individuals and society, stated this time in terms of relationship among individual "subsystems", or between these, sole or in groups, with higher level instantiations of the societal organization:

Traditionally, structural functionalism has used the model of a dialectic between functional differentiation and institutional integration at the system level. Action is then taken as the integrating category, but action is not considered as itself constructed (Parsons 1937; Münch 1982/1988). Parsons (e.g., 1968) and Luhmann (e.g., 1977 and 1984) studied this phenomenon under the heading of 'interpenetration'. Giddens (1984) has called this dialectic operation 'the duality of structure', but the focus in his sociology has remained firmly on action as the system of reference. (Leydesdorff 1997:2).

This is not the place to describe the full details of the debate; it seems sufficient for our survey purpose to state that Leydesdorff's proposal (1996, 1997) is made in terms of a

methodology for dealing with second order systems (those proposed by Luhmann's sociology) where the central role is played by two ideas: one, that society is constituted by networks of communications to which human individuals (considered subsystems) do not belong, who act externally to society, simply as "human carriers" of cultural meaning and who can only have "expectations" about the distribution of that meaning in society and about society itself ⁵. The second idea is that at this level the issue is not meaning in itself ("carried" by the individual actors) but its distribution and the uncertainty attached to that distribution, which is not known by individuals. This is technically expressed either in a standard table of binary analysis with its rows (actors) and columns (variables), or graphically in a series of interacting Venn diagrams. In the first technical case a cell is taken as the instantiation of an individual experience within a socio-cultural context specified by the column-variables and "interpenetration" occurs when there is co-variation among two or more cells. When this co-variation is projected in the axis of time we can talk of co-evolution, that is, of co-evolving interpenetration. In the second technical representation, we can have two situations, either the subsystems (Venn's circles) intersect or do not intersect: in the first case, the common ground corresponds to the classical Weberian notion "of 'culture' as a meeting place between otherwise incompatible value-orientations", and we have "interpenetration with integration"; in the second case, the (sub)systems have grown so far apart that the communality in the intersection has been dissolved, the higher order system has become "constitutionally complex" and cannot be considered as emerging from a shared origin; here we have, according to the author, "a form of interpenetration but not yet integration". In this case the problem of the self-organization of the macro-system, which is submitted constantly to new differentiation and needed integration, is solved by *translation of codes* (carrying of meaning) and *local stabilization of these codes* at the higher level; this translation and stabilization is not an easy process since it has to solve, first, the not coincidence, in principle, of the various perspectives of reflexivity ("bounded rationality") of the carrying actors. At the start there may not be an intersection among subsystems (there is no common cultural ground of codes) but a mechanism of integration may occur, such as *a social movement*, that codifies meaning *in the interaction among people* and provides motivation for its stabilization. Another powerful mechanism for the stabilization of the new cultural codes, and therefore of the instantiation of interpenetration-cum-integration, is the "triple helix of university-industry-government" that has emerged, during the 20th century, as the apparently solid basis for the "institutional acculturation of the new *epistèmè* of *science-technology-economy*." At the service of this new *epistèmè* seems to be working the current discussion and refinements of the concept of interpenetration within this sociological tradition.

⁵ There is a stronger idea behind this one: "second-order systems cannot be delineated clearly in terms of empirical observables", that is, "an empirical account [of any societal system] teaches us about the case which historically occurred, but it does not yet specify the range of cases which could have occurred." This ontological position about society as an "intangible substratum" coincides with the current strong position of critical realism: "Society, as an object of inquiry, is necessarily 'theoretical', in the sense that, like a magnetic field, it is necessarily unperceivable. As such it cannot be empirically identified independently of its effects: so it can only be known, not shown, to exist." (Bhaskar 1998: 225).

Finally, a word should be said concerning another very precise discussion of interpenetration presented in the context of the mathematics of non linear dynamics and applied to current theories of catastrophe, chaos and emergent dynamics of complexity. It is interesting here because it gives full attention to a theme that, up to now, has only been treated *en passant*: the *dialectics* that seems to be at the core itself of interpenetration, when this is taken as a truly dynamic relationship. Rosser (2000) reviews the three main “laws of dialectics” belonging to the Marxist tradition, the transformation of quantity into quality and vice-versa, *the interpenetration of opposites*, and the negation of negation. He shows how these laws can be partially treated by the current non-linear dynamical models, which are capable of methodologically managing catastrophic discontinuities, chaotic dynamics and other complex dynamics such as self-organization and bifurcation. What is important here is to note three points: one, that *interpenetration* is restrictedly related with one of the “laws of dialectics”, the one that deals with the fundamental contradiction *between irreconcilable opposites* that by a dialectical process, not always well understood by analysts, become an emergent unity which is qualitatively different from the original elements in opposition; two, that in this tradition, contradiction can be simply logical (‘A’ and ‘not A’ cannot be simultaneously true) or *in re* or nature (which is Marx’s strong position); and third, that there is a ‘penumbra’ of fuzziness where the two opposites coexist and interpenetrate, and the interpretation of this phenomenon “is a matter of perspective or the level of analysis of the observer.”

Northrop Frye’s notion of interpenetration

In a paper fully dedicated to Frye’s concept of interpenetration, Robert Denham (1999) says that the word *interpenetration* serves as a centerpoint of a host of *verbal formulas* that help to define the “*experience, understanding, process, concept, and vision*” that come to the mind when one speaks of the following: two things that are the same thing (*as in metaphor*), unity in variety and viceversa, part and whole and viceversa, totality and particularity and viceversa, self and other, human and divine, and all the dichotomies and polytomies in which we, in our different modes of *not-metaphoric modes of language* – metonymic, descriptive, conceptual, propositional-- have divided the dynamic unity of the “essential thing or force or process”. Denham mentions three major sources from which Frye drew elements for his notion of interpenetration. Initially, he captured this sense in the Spenglerian idea that, within the organic growth of cultures, everything that happens is a symbol of everything else that is contemporary with it.

Later, he ran across a very decisive text in which Whitehead (1926), during his 1925 Lowell Lectures of 1925, establishes a contrast between the “false simplicity” of scientific abstractions derived from “the notion that simple location [either in time or in space] is the primary way in which things are involved in space-time” (p. 133) and *the “entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others”* (p. 122) characteristic of poetic language. Denham quotes, as an example of Whitehead’s very influential ideas, the following one taken from the fourth lecture: “In a certain sense, [in the poetic apprehension of objects in the world] everything is everywhere at all times. For every location involves

an aspect of itself in every other location. Thus every spatio-temporal standpoint mirrors the world” (p. 133).

And, finally, as a third major influence, Frye became acquainted with the Buddhist tradition of the Avatamsaka and Lankavatara sutras that work on the idea of the identity of everything and the interpenetration of all elements in the world. In Susuki’s terms (the author who made the sutras known to the West), this is a “fundamental insight of the sutras”. “It is, philosophically speaking, a thought somewhat similar to Hegel’s conception of *concrete universals*. Each individual reality, besides being itself, reflects in it something of the universal, and at the same time it is itself because of other individuals. A system of perfect relationship exists among individual existences and also between individuals and universals, between particular objects and general ideas. This perfect network of mutual relations has received at the hand of the Mahayama philosopher the technical name of interpenetration” (in Denham 1999: 153; emphasis added by ESC).

Denham informs that most of Frye’s writings on interpenetration belong to that enormous body of manuscripts called The Notebooks that, in their aphoristic form, constitute the Daedalean workshop where the author performed his lifelong intellectual struggle; he recognized that his major problem was fusing the aphorisms in sequential and propositional arguments, apt for formal publication. Instead, the Notebooks may represent an unfinished dream, his “Ogdoad unfulfilled fantasy”, a sort of twilight valediction where only a careful and charitable reading may advert a pattern or arrangement independent of linear sequence. However, Denham concludes, in such a virtual arrangement interpenetration will certainly count with a complete chapter.

In fact, according to Denham, one of the most authoritative Frye’s specialists, many are the places in the Notebooks dedicated to interpenetration. Denham reviews several contexts where interpenetration plays a role; these contexts are arranged here in the following sequence: historical, philosophical, social, religious and *literary*; this one, dominated as it is by *metaphor*, will receive a separated treatment in the following section.

In the *historical context* the emphasis is laid on the myth of eternal recurrence and the organic (Spenglerian) vision of culture; interpenetration may be a way of putting in verbal formulas the required moving beyond the endless repetition of historical cycles. In the *philosophical context* Frye’s plays initially with the Hegelian *Aufhebung* but later draws back because of its emphasis on propositional agreement; against this dialectic solution he quotes the famous Blakean indictment of a fallacious harmony that may be like “the smile of a fool”; and adds, influenced by Whitehead, “My goal would be something like *absolute experience* rather than *absolute knowledge*: in experience the units are unique, and things don’t agree with each other; they mirror each other” (in Denham 1999: 147). Similar attention is paid to David Bohm’s notion of *implicate order*, where totality of existence in the objective world unfolds from an unborn enfolded order that is beyond the reach of our experience.

In the context of *social affairs* Frye considers that the centralizing tendencies of institutions become aggressive, ideological, and authoritarian and may lead to different forms of imperialism and homogenization. In the opposite direction, where the concept of interpenetration seem to be helpful, there is a movement away from ideology and power and in favor of decentralization and genuine dialogue of persons, communities, and cultures. In this line of thought there are also some notes on love, taken as interpenetration of people and their interests without threats or domination; in this interpersonal process there is much more than what occurs in mere sexual interchange. He thinks also of interpenetration in regard to self-identity, where individuality doesn't disappear in its relation to others. In the social context there was the issue of cross-fertilization of cultures within the same nation (Canada) that took a very concrete and propositional argument in which Frye became intensely involved. His influential paper on the levels of cultural identity (1992) summarizes his liberal views regarding multiculturalism, and his progressive proposals for the constitution of a Canadianness that puts at the center of "everything else [that] dissolves and re-forms" the human creative power represented by the arts and sciences.

But it was in his stronghold of *literary criticism and religious (Biblical-literary) scholarship* where Frye's concept of interpenetration reached the most advanced and elaborated form. Denham transcribes an early letter of Frye to his wife where he, in his twenties, anticipates his intellectual journey: "I propose spending the rest of my life, apart from living with you, on various problems connected with religion and art. Now religion and art are the two most important phenomena in the world; or rather, the most important phenomenon, for they are basically the same thing; they constitute the only reality of existence" (In Denham 1999: 154).

In the Western cultural tradition the unity of *religion and art* –Weber (1997) would add eroticism as a third form of window to transcendence of our human condition—comes through the *unitarian production of symbolic thought and forms*, the realm of Frye's fertile theorization. His three major works, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Great Code*, and *Words with Power* deal with this symbolic unity at the root of which is the human production of *mythoi* or *primordial narratives* that are developed, in the course of human Western history, in the two major families: story-myths and arguments, that will blossom, *with the aid of metaphor and models*, in the modern forms of *literary* and *scientific* verbal formulas. Figure 2, taken from *The Great Code*, in the section appropriately called *The Order of Words* (Frye 1981:34), helps to summarize his comprehensive classification:

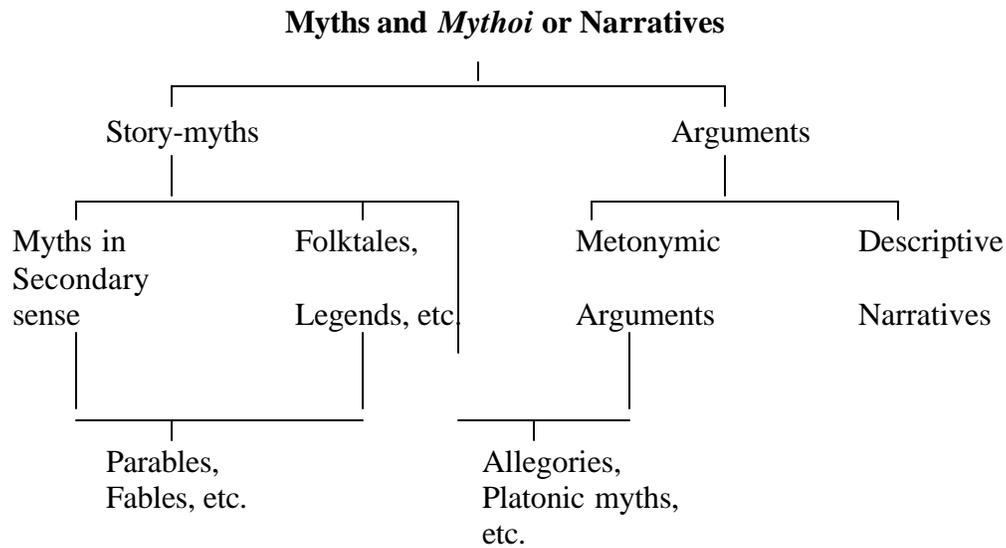


Figure 2: Story-myths and arguments as specification of *mythoi* in the Western tradition

Denham is right in quoting, while mentioning this obsession of Frye, Borges’s lines of *El Aleph*: “all language is a set of symbols whose use among speakers assumes a shared past. How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my flundering mind can scarcely encompass?. Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols.” (In Denham 1999: 154; see Borges 1974:624-625). Following Blake, Frye considered that Incarnation –the human form made divine –was the ultimate radical metaphor in Christian theology but, with a flexibility that reveals his anti-dogmatic scholarship, thought similarly –as an alternative mode–of Buddhism. There is no time to delve in this important line of Frye’s thought since there is a topic that merits preference –metaphor as the best instance of interpenetration.

Frye’s unique notion of metaphor

Back in time, as of 1947, Frye was clearly convinced of the radical importance of metaphor and shared Blake’s motifs to plainly reject the Baconian and Lockian principle –that still prevails among positivist oriented users of language, included of course some natural and social scientists-- that words are *spectral ghosts* of real things existing outside the mind, and the scientific ideal of capturing these words (and the world with them) in a perfect, *literal meaning*, dictionary. His study of Blake “as an illustration of the poetic process” had this premonitory statement (1969 [1947]:114):

The Baconian mind strives to make every word reproduce one definite “thing” or one reflected “idea,” to the exclusion of all others: it is a perpetually demanding definition in the sense of establishing a general law for each word that will meet every case. This cannot be done. A word’s meaning depends partly on its context and partly on its relation to the mind of its hearer: all general meanings are only approximate. To the poet the word is a storm-center of meaning, sounds and associations, radiating out indefinitely like the ripples

of a pool. It is precisely because of this indefiniteness that he writes poems. The poem is a unity of words in which these radiations have become the links of imaginative cohesion. In a poem the sounds and rhythms of words are revealed more clearly than in ordinary speech, and similarly their meanings have an intensity in poetry that a dictionary can give no hint of.

At the end of his career it was clear that one of Frye's major concerns was the relationship between "*the essential thing or force or process*" (1981: 4) of our human experience and its expression in language. At this point he had upgraded an old and cherished Viconian scheme that distinguished a series of modes of language and writing that, in a sort of historic, or even evolutionary, sequence, were called *phases* (pp. 3-30).

In the first "phase" or "period," called "*poetic*" or "*metaphoric*", subject and object are not clearly separated and there are forms of energy common to both, and "an articulated expression of words may have repercussions in the natural order" as well as in the human mind. It is a period that can be called *of verbal magic* due to the presence of an energy common to words and things, though embodied and controlled in words. Prose in this phase is discontinuous, appearing in the form of epigrams, oracles and aphorisms with a cosmological reference, like Heraclitus' "all things flow".

The second phase, called *metonymic*, is inaugurated exemplarily by the Platonian and Socratic-style of language and writing operations. There the intellectual activities of the mind are distinguished from emotions and feelings; subject and object become more consistently separated; "reflection" with its overtones of looking into a mirror, comes to the fore; abstraction becomes possible, and logic opens the road to demonstration. Language, not in the ordinary form but in "the culturally ascendant" (elitist) one, becomes more individualized and words are expression of inner thoughts and ideas. The basis of expression is not, as in the metaphoric phase, a "*this is that*" formula (a mark of *identity with*) manifesting the creative power of words. Words are now "put for" thoughts (a mark of *identity as*) and operate with the logic of *analogy*, that is, verbal imitations of a reality beyond itself that can be covered directly by words. "Metonymic thinkers" have the challenge of overcoming the apparent inconsistencies of the metaphoric "this is that" through the use of *verbal formulas*. *Allegory*, then, comes to the help of writers. "Commentary thus becomes one of the leading metonymic genres, and the traditional metaphorical images are used as illustrations of a conceptual argument." The culminating point of this metonymic way of thinking and writing is Kant's phenomenal world which is "put for" the world of things in themselves.

The beginnings of the third phase, characterized as *of descriptive writing*, overlaps with the metonymic phase since historically they can be traced back to the XVIth Century. This mode of writing constitutes a response to the insatisfaction with syllogistic and metonymic reasoning that was seemingly leading to verbal illusions or to unmanageable transcendence: lion and unicorn were the same if treated with the logical and syntactical rules. A consistent *referential link* was needed between the order of words and the order of "things", which was coincident with the order of nature; with it emerged the problem of *truth as*

correspondence between the two orders, of words and of external things. The aforementioned Baconian and Lockian principle was a welcomed response that, through a well established method for fact-gathering, gave origin to the modern confidence in the ways of positive science. Language should be primarily descriptive, with its truth conditioned by a rigorous correspondence with the objective order, which is the order of nature. This descriptive and literally minded use of words – corresponding to “arguments” in figure 2-- is a warranty against the vagaries and a priori untruth of “story-myths”, which are all metaphorical and mythical orders of words. Metonymic arguments occupy an ambiguous position since for Frye they are either a form of analogical thinking in which (sometimes with the help of allegories) the verbal formulas are not adequate descriptions of a transcendent “something” that is beyond an actual empirical reach; or (without analogy nor allegory) a refined form of adequate descriptive writing in which the order of words is “put for” (e. g. as part for whole) the object it describes.

It is impossible to cover the full range of Frye’s abundant and suggestive original points on metaphor; a good selection can be seen in his three major works (*Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Great Code*, and *Words with Power*) and in his collection of essays *Myth and Metaphor* (1990). The following comments from such works, unless singularly specified, are based in a *passim* worked selection of references taken from such works. The starting point on metaphor, in reference to interpenetration, seems to be Frye’s conviction that a metaphoric mode of language and thinking is not only unavoidable (we cannot outgrow it, as positivistic authors may hope or think) but is being nowadays rehabilitated as an alternative and powerful mechanism of *verbal formulas* that help humankind –in a balanced cooperation with the other modes of language and thinking — in her asymptotic search for better knowledge and expression of it, given the fact that they will never be adequate to absolute experience.

The case is clear for interpenetration when it is worked in a metaphoric-mythical régime of language which complements the verbal, mathematical and graphic formulas that were invented –as it was shown in a previous section-- by the descriptive and conceptual (argumental, propositional) social scientific literature. Metaphor in Frye’s radical thinking, in a sharp contrast with most specialized authors, *is an expression of identity not of mere resemblance* (“A is B”, “this is that”) between two elements that do not belong but are put together in *identity relation* (identity *with*, not simply identity *as*, which is based on *mere resemblance*) by the “magical” power of the poet’s word. In our contemporary literary world this magic power is not –as in Homeric or mythical times—the power of creating gods and things that people the world, but the imaginative power of an author to create, *hypothetically* in his work of art --and in the imaginative interpretation of a reader-- gods, things, and infinite dimensions of reality (1981:25). Metaphoric language is an original mode that cannot be reduced to another mode of language (say, “literal language” in the positivistic dream) and its expressions range from minimal units like sentences to complete discourses (or “story-myths”). It has its own rules and purposes, of which the most important is not to make statements about the world [the referential function of language, according to Jakobson; ESC)—but to play artistically with words in fertile and imaginative ways. For this the question of *truth as correspondence of words with facts* in a descriptive

story (say, an ethnographer's story), or the question of *mimetic fidelity* of the historian to an event-story (Ricoeur 1983), is not relevant. *Metaphoric truths* are "essential truths about its own cultural context or about the human situation generally" and are "much the closest to the conception of faith in the New Testament as the *hypostasis* and *elenchos* of the unseen and hoped for." (1990b:252-253).

A metaphorical *statement of identity* becomes the best formula for interpenetration when the *e pluribus unum* is obtained in a *simultaneous apprehension* which is a *counter-historical* and a *counter-logical* act of creation (1990b:8-9). It is counter-historical because, as a *story-myth*, it performs a departure from the historical time of actual events in order to give a unique form to *this story*; the historical event, with its factual truth of correspondence or mimesis, may remain as a kernel, but its presence is simply *not relevant* in this mode of expression. It is counter-logical because by the "magic power" of the poet, or if you prefer, by his *poetic licence* and authority, two logically apart elements, or at least two independent elements are unexpectedly put together in a formula of *identity-with*. In the *Anatomy* (1971: 124) Frye states that

The rose in Dante's Paradiso and the rose in Yeats's early lyrics are identified with different things, but both stand for all roses –all poetic roses, of course, not all botanical ones. Archetypal metaphor thus involves the use of what has been called the concrete universal, the individual identified with its class, Wordsworth's "tree of many one."

and adds that

In the anagogic aspects of meaning, the radical form of metaphor, "A is B" comes into its own. Here we are dealing with poetry in its totality, in which the formula "A is B" may be hypothetically applied to anything, for there is no metaphor, not even "black is white", which a reader has any right to quarrel with in advance. The literary universe, therefore, is a universe in which everything is potentially identical with everything else.

An excellent example, incidentally introduced by Frye (1990b:223), is the metaphor of journey, of which, according to the author, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is "the definitive" modern case. Frye contrasts two readings of Marlow's journey into the heart of Africa: the literal and factual one, which can be easily tracked in a map and can be critically appraised in the light of contemporary historical and geographic events (as it has been; see Kimbrough's critical edition of the tale (Conrad 1988); ESC); and the poetic or metaphorical reading, interpreted by Frye as "a journey into the darkness of human heart as presented by the figure of Kurtz." Frye's point is clear, and neatly sorts his notion of metaphor from other notions that confound metaphor with analogical, allegorical or metonymic figures: "there is really nothing strictly allegorical in it: that is, the journey to the interior of the human self and the journey to the interior of Africa are simultaneous, independent, and equally significant."

In addition, Conrad's tale helps to exemplify another important point of Frye's regarding metaphor and interpenetration. Story-myths perform a *radical condensation of time and*

space locations or, in Frye's words, "[w]hat metaphor does to space the myth does to time": actions and things are present, not as they do in ordinary experience, but in "a present where as Eliot says [in *Burnt Norton*; ECS] past, and future are gathered". At the end of the tale Marlow visits the *Intended* lady, Kurtz's fiancée, who looked, in a room growing darker and darker, "as if the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead". This is the *simultaneous apprehension* of the whole sequence of events:

But while we were still shaking hands such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And by Jove, the impression was so powerful that for me too she seemed to have died only yesterday – nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time – his dead and her sorrow—I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together – I heard them together. She had said with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived' – while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation (Conrad 1988:73).

No wonder Frye was very fond of Whitehead's thought regarding human knowledge and its linguistic expressions; Frye's "*simultaneous apprehension*", typical of metaphoric figures, is closely related to, and perhaps derived from, Whitehead's "*entwined prehensive unities*" (1926); for the American philosopher these are the necessary counterpart to the *false simplicities* of scientific discourse, which are constructed on the questionable basis of *simple locations* within the complex arrangement of time and space, and which occasionally drift toward errors of *misplaced concreteness*. Whitehead does not reject the scientific abstract mode of language but explicitly encourages to be critical of it, and to complement it by direct comparison with *direct and more concrete intuitions of the universe* where we find the "*salvation of reality in its obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities, which are limited to be no other than themselves*" (p. 137).

These intuitions are not the *ingenuous instances of naive experience* but the highly refined forms of the *poetic apprehension*. Poets engender fortunate and appropriate verbal formulas like those of Wordsworth's where he recollects "*the brooding presence of the hills which haunts him*" (p. 121) --a beautiful instance of the "*deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact.*" The metaphoric mode of language, with its necessary attachment to concrete instances of experience is, according to Frye, the best suited among the various modes of human language to respond to the search of Whitehead's *enduring things* which, as distinct from eternal objects such as color and shape, are present in objects such as stones, trees, and human bodies that coalesce in the unity of *concrete events*. Metaphor is, therefore, a powerful verbal mechanism for reaching, with its unique rules of a very special verbal régime, the dialectics of the *concrete universal*. This topic has been object of much interest among scholars of the Hegelian-Marxist tradition (see Ilyenkov 1982, Kosik 1976) and less among literary critics (although see Wimsatt (1994[1954]) for an exception). Frye was not alien to this specific interest, up to the point that a recent specialist could establish, in relation to his work, a "*Faulkner principle*", consisting in "the double vision of the local being universal" (Hart 1999: 56), an

idea that, --equally with reference to Faulkner-- was mentioned years before by Geertz in one of his essays on *Local knowledge* (1983).

Ethnography's lot

In an analytic perspective where all verbal formulas are considered metaphorical it is not surprising to find that anthropologists have by necessity used metaphors. The point is to establish how consciously and critically have ethnographers done so. In a paper on this subject, and using the dense case of aboriginal Australian social groups denominations, Keen (1995) demonstrates how the metaphors in anthropological meta-language are misleading because in their abstraction they distort in an irrecoverable way the complexity and richness of the "enacted" local verbal formulas ("tropes") that represent even more complex forms of "group" identities and their relationships with other social, natural, and cosmological entities. Keen makes a quick reference to the meta-theoretical tradition of anthropology in regard to metaphors and conceptual models (Geertz 1975, D'Andrade 1984, Fernandez 1986), to the more general discussion led by Black (1977), and to Lakoff and Johnson's very influential book (1980)*.

Similarly, James Fernandez's collection of well though essays, not cited by Keen, intended to present the "state of the art" among anthropologists of the "incandescent" and "hot" issue of metaphor within the discipline. The essays were presented at a North American professional meeting and the reception by the common reader in the field was not an enthusiastic one, probably because of its conceptual inaccessibility (see for, instance, Paine 1993).

Nearly a decade earlier another North American anthropological conference was held where the memorable launching of alternative ways of doing ethnography took place. The edited product was *Writing Culture*, a book on "*the poetics and politics of ethnography*" which in a ten years retrospective was considered to have parted in two the history of ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, Eds., 1986; James, Hockey and Dawson, Eds., 1997). One of the key papers in the collection *On the ethnographic Allegory* by Clifford (1986), made a strong claim for *allegorical readings* of ethnographic texts and for the ensuing recognition of the political and ethical dimensions of ethnographic writing (and reading).

However, *allegory is not metaphor*, if we follow the neat distinctions established by Frye, the same author Clifford cites in support of his allegorical exhortation. Allegory, says Frye (1981:10) "is a special form of analogy, a technique of paralleling metaphorical with conceptual language in which the latter has the primary authority. Allegory smoothes out the discrepancies in a metaphorical structure by making it conform to a conceptual standard." Allegory is "at one extreme" (Clifford is right is citing Frye is this way) in the sliding scale that ranges from the explicitly allegorical to the strictly metaphorical; in the allegorical extreme --which is literature at all-- metaphor is put at the service of the

conceptual authority of the ethnographer: a contradictory predicament for anyone who intends --as Clifford and his followers do-- to question that conceptual authority.⁶

What should be, then, the consciously recognized place of metaphoric thought and writing in ethnography? There are no definitive answers, but one could start by confirming the strong adherence of ethnographers to the generic form of *story-writing*, the very form that has been analyzed by Hayden White (1973, 1999) and Paul Ricoeur (1983, 1984, 1985) in major works dealing with a twin-brother of *ethnography* called *historiography* and in direct relation to tropology and metaphor.⁷ In a paper destined to comment on the standards of ethnographic quality under the “the new rubric of poetic social science”, Arthur Bochner (2000) brings a comment from Robert Coles that delves on this old time liaison of ethnography and the stories. “How to encompass in our minds the complexity of some lived moments in life?” His answer: “You don’t do that with theories. You don’t do that with a system of ideas. You do it with a story.” And in his list of agreements and disagreements between those in favor and against alternative (versus traditional) ways of doing ethnography, comes first, as *undisputed common goal*, the production of “valid, useful, and significant knowledge”. That is, *knowledge* written in the form of stories.

The question is rephrased then: should these stories come in the form of *story-myths*, which are different from the *descriptive arguments* of Frye’s scheme described above (see figure 2)? In closer Frye’s terms, should they be constructed in strong metaphoric language, not in the diluted form of borderline allegoric ones? Laurel Richardson (2000), a prolific writer of experimental ethnography, is clear in stating that they should be both, *art and science*: “Creative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified.” This is a high-flown end in view: not less than to encompass in an ethnographic text or performance not only two major forms of cultural *invention*, the scientific *model* and the creative *metaphoric text* (see Ricoeur 1975) but the aesthetic idiolect as well (Eco 1995: 359).

What have been the *ostensible results* of these attempts? To rigorously assess them it is helpful to have in mind the three régimes that should be distinguished, according to Nanine Charbonnel (1999: 34-35), in the use of metaphor: the semantic-expressive, the semantic-cognitive, and the praxeological. This set of régimes can be interpreted in connection with Jakobson’s (1988) *poetic function* of language and should be evaluated, as predominant or not within a specific discourse, according to the disposition given by the author (or to the reader’s interpretation). The *expressive* régime favors the lyrical manifestations, as when Romeo says to Juliet “you are the sun of my eyes”; the *cognitive* régime puts metaphor at the service of knowledge, e.g. when Niels Bohr’s speaks of the atomic nucleus as “the sun

⁶ Probably, the evaluation of this confusion between metaphor and allegory is what led Borges to dedicate a small essay to declare that, for a majority of nominalist and Aristotelic persuasion, and contra some Platonic believers, “allegory is an aesthetic mistake”, a “fable of abstractions” while the modern novel is a fable of individuals” (Borges 1983[1968]).

⁷ A recent treatment of the old issue of contrast and similarity between history and anthropology is found in Geertz (2000: 118-133)

of the electrons”; and the *praxeological* gives preeminence to the practical (in our context, ethical and political) intentionality of discourse.

If one follows the opinion of external readers like Dutch sociologist Brunt Lodewijt (1999) the results of the poetic-ethnographic experiments are not so impressive, since sometimes what appears is “egocentric soul-searching of the investigator’s own motives and experiences”, that produce “second rate attempts at poetry”. This condition is explicitly recognized by the insider and practicing ethno-poet, Ruth Behar (1999), who proclaims a consolatory ethics of “second-fiddle genre” given the fact that “Greatness eludes us” who want to be true poets and have had no other choice but being mere ethnographers. We may have in this case an excess and perhaps perversion of the emphasis on the *expressive régime* of the metaphorical language. If one follows the opinion of an experienced insider (Geertz 2000:102) “in this post-everything era” (post-modernism, colonialism, structuralism, positivism), after twenty-five years or so of *moral, philosophical, and political* attack, “one could wish it were being met with less breastbeating and lashing out at supposed failures of mind and character on the part of bourgeois social scientists, and more attempts to answer it” (pp. 95-96). That is, we may have an over-emphasis on the praxeological function of metaphor. If we agree with the undisputed postulate signaled by Bochner (*supra*), and with the very identity of ethnography as a *cognitive* endeavor among academic disciplines, the attempts should be, at least, as convincing in terms of *knowledge*, that is, show a strong emphasis on the semantic-cognitive régime: this emphasis is, by the way, a heritage coming from traditional ethnography.

Geertz (2000) goes on in his chapter “State of the art of anthropology”, stating that there is not a paradox in the current the conjunction of cultural popularity (because many do recognize that anthropology is nowadays a popular discipline among outsiders) and professional disquiet; nor a sign of a passing fad. “It is an indication that ‘the anthropological way of looking things,’ as well as (what more or less is the same thing) ‘the anthropological way of finding out things’ and ‘the anthropological way of writing about things,’ do have something to offer the later twentieth century –and not only in social studies—not available elsewhere, and that it is full in the throes of determining what exactly that is.”

Probably an element for the identification of what exactly ethnography has to offer as quintessential is that --in spite of their multifarious denominations and epistemological, ethical, and political beliefs-- ethnographers still are adamant “adepts of the special, the singular, the different, and the concrete” (Geertz 2000: 117). The *singular and the concrete* are here of crucial importance for gauging the potentiality, among ethnographers, of an apt and critical use of the metaphor. Whitehead (*supra*) warned convincingly against the *false cognitive simplicities* and *misplaced concretedness errors* that menace an unbalanced confidence in the abstractions of science, and indicated how metaphor in the pen of sensitive and careful writers (as in Wordsworth’s case) is perhaps the only way for producing verbal *prehensive unifications*. These metaphoric verbal formulas seem to pay the due tribute, claimed by Keen (1995), to the complex set of cultural-historical relations established by local people in their tropes (“enacted metaphors”) as well as --to honor the

universalistic orientation of the *cognitive function*-- go beyond the idiosyncrasy of the ingenuous expression of the singular, in order to catch in what Whitehead calls “the durable and the eternal.”

The reflections on Frye’s notion of interpenetration and on his belief in the strong affinity of this type of verbal formula with metaphor seem to offer a good demonstrative case for the pertinence of metaphor in ethnographic writing. The dialectical interpenetration of the multiple “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions of reality (remember Schweitzer’s *embeddness*, (*supra*) occurs in a metaphorical expression because of its elemental connection with concreteness, a connection already also detected –in its elementariness— for ethnography as a trade. Nobody among ethnographers seems to dispute that this concreteness comes the best in the form of *local knowledge*.

Lived and narrated locality is for ethnography what *le temps vécu and raconté* (Ricoeur 1985) is for *historiography*. A close reflection on the fact that any lived locality belongs to the past human experience, and that any human experience needs a locality, supports the idea that, because of their strong similarities (as well as their interesting dissimilarities; Cfr. Geertz 2000: 118-132) ethnography can learn a lot from the erudite discussion about the *poetic function* (called *tropology* by Hayden White) in historiographic writing.

Jakobson’s (1977a) theory of *la dominante*, applied by him to the interplay of his famous six functions of language (1988): emotive, conative, phatic, poetic, referential, and metalinguistic, is well known to claim here for details. *La dominante* is the “focal element” of any discourse (Frye would say, “the center of gravity”) that exerts the dominant function, not only to warrant its structural coherence but to mark its character. Two functions seem to be in dispute, as dominant, in the pretentious goal of the poetic ethnographers, the *poetic* and the *referential*. The first focuses on the play of words in such a way “*que le mot est ressenti comme mot et non comme simple substitut de l’objet nommé ni comme explosion d’émotion. En ceci, que les mots et leur syntaxe, leur signification, leur forme externe et interne ne son pas des indices indifférents de la réalité, mais possédent leur propre poids et leur propre valeur* (1977b: 47). This statement is of crucial importance for its clear position regarding the relation between words and external referents, a relation taken care by the *referential function* which is, in language structures where the *poetic functions* is *dominant*, remitted, as are the other functions, to secondary and subsidiary roles.

The above statement has direct consequences for the question of poetic and ethnographic truth: the former has no connection with any notion of *truth as correspondence*; they belong to different, not competing, domains of linguistic relevance. Jakobson quotes Sir Philip Sidney’s phrase “Quant a Poète n’affirmant rien, il n’a jamais l’occasion de mentir” (1977b: 92); which is to repeat a frequent topic of Frye --that *poets do not deal with truth as correspondence* nor, what comes to be tautological, do not care for the referential function which links a verbal structure to the things out in the world. Instead, the ethnographer’s *cognitive lot* forces her to have as not negotiable the *factual truth* that is dependent on truth as correspondence, if we still agree with the old distinction --that comes in chapter nine of Aristoteles’ *Poetics*—between the work of Herodotus who relates *what*

has happened, and that of the poet who deals with *what may happen* according to the law of *probability or necessity*. In this way we come again to Whitehead's *enduring things* to which points the *poetic truth*, as it happened with Wordsworth's "Ye, visions of the hills / And Souls of lonely places!"

After many years of debate Hayden White (1999) has won enough audience to state convincingly that an *historiographic* writing can never avoid the "tropology" of poetic configuration –which amounts to sustain the unavoidable, although occasionally denied, operation of the *poetic function*. But, similarly, after erudite debates, Paul Ricoeur has equal audience for his assertion in favor of "the reality of historical past", of the payment of *la dette à ce qui, un jour fut* (1985: 253). Historians cannot, in any case, bargain the *referential function*. If the lesson from the long debate around *historiography* is valid for *ethnography*, any of its practitioners cannot either, in their urgency for playing with words, in their longing for poetry (and for politics with words), forget *la dette* to the lived local concreteness.

What, then, may happen with experimental ethnography?. The question, at last, is to decide whether it is possible to subvert Jakobson's well respected rule about the exclusiveness of *one dominante* (poetic, referential, or whatever) in a verbal structure; which is the same as to ask whether –in Frye's terms—a verbal construction can have two, or more, centers of gravity. If we follow well documented Frye's scholars (Hart 1999), we find that this great Canadian tower of *propositional* literary criticism failed in proving, with his own exertion, that the task is at all possible. However, other authors, similarly well thought and documented, (see O'Grady 1999-2000) are of the opinion that he was on the verge of a radical subversion, and prefer to talk of a still unrecognized success.

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