

METAPHORS, UNIVERSAL TRANSFER, AND TRAUMDEUTUNG

by Paul Jones

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I have been a little surprised by that serious reaction on my brief note intended to merely mark my return to active life after a period of forced silence. This makes me hope that the problem of epistemological hierarchy is of importance for the science of consciousness and its applications.

I agree with Klaus Krippendorff that we should not generalize the word 'metaphor' to any act of conceptual transfer at all. No doubt, etymology may influence one's understanding of the other's text, but this is in no way the principal feature of verbal communication, which is primarily characterized by the portability of meanings related to the commonality of activities. Let us note that adopting words from the foreign languages normally serves to convey something special that cannot be merely translated. In particular, the word 'metaphor' can hardly be considered a mere substitute for 'transfer' – in the modern usage, it rather refers to a specific way of transfer typical of the arts, and poetry first of all. (I realize that this may not hold for some languages like German, where the specific meaning of poetical metaphor has to be conveyed with the contextual means)

On the other hand, I must admit that Zvi Lothane is right to stress the universal importance of transfer processes in human behavior and reasoning, including 'internal' activity. I could even assert that the *universality* of binding things together is the determinative feature of a conscious being, distinguishing it from the animal, or an inanimate thing. However, this universal transfer takes specific forms in every particular activity, and we have to describe these individual forms along with their subjection to the general scheme.

In my previous comment on metaphors [TA25 C02], I referred to the levels of art, science and philosophy – but this does not mean that all the human life is either art, or science, or philosophy, and there is nothing else in it. There are other levels, both below and above, implying the appropriate forms of transfer, with the general ordering from syncretism, through analyticity, to synthesis. Metaphor in the proper sense (poetical metaphor) is syncretic: it melds (using Zvi Lothane's word) the three levels distinct in science: description, explanation, modeling; on the higher level (in philosophy), interpretations synthesize all the three in a way quite different from the syncretic mixture of a metaphor. However, on a lower level, in our everyday life, we find various forms of *activity transfer* which are much more syncretic as compared to poetical metaphor, since they do not involve the recognition of the very fact of transfer, while a poet's metaphor is intentional and conscious, and its 'domains' (the term suggested by Klaus Krippendorff) are deliberately linked rather than randomly mixed.

In the same way, using words 'metaphorically' is different from meaning transfer so frequent in the language: the former *suggests* a link between different domains, while the latter is a *manifestation* of an activity transfer that has already occurred.

With all that in the mind, we could treat dreams as one of the most primitive (that is, the most ancient and syncretic) forms of activity transfer, common to humans and higher animals. The primitiveness of a dream makes it also a good starting point for further creative work, providing something to analyze.

This is where a psychoanalyst steps in. Normally, people do not pay much attention to their dreams – and this is quite understandable, since they usually have much more advanced (and more efficient) means of coping with the world (including themselves), and there is no need to watch a clepsydra, with a good wristwatch on the wrist. However, in certain cases, higher-level mechanisms may lose their efficiency, which is usually an indicator of social inappropriateness. Still, the people continue to manipulate the broken gears unaware of their loose movement. Psychotherapy is to help people to

grasp something solid instead of emptiness, and reconstruct the hierarchy of self-control in a way more adequate in the new circumstances. However, as Freud stressed, it is the patient who has to do the work, not the analyst; the role of the latter is to provide a professional feedback, an active environment enhancing the patient's own reflective abilities.

In principle, a therapist can work with any pieces of personal experience, dreams being one possible component. Good therapists combine various techniques and use every known theory to achieve optimal treatment in each case. To select the appropriate means, they have to interpret the patient's behavior, including external activity as well as dreams. Still, lack of professionalism may lead to strained interpretations and suggestion, negatively influencing the whole processes of rehabilitation. Quite often the therapist's errors originate from the same social imperfections as the patient's troubles, which results in a complex interference pattern.

It should be stressed that the patient's internal processes and his/her involvement in therapy are the different levels of the same hierarchy, and the whole therapeutic process can be considered as internal to the collective subject comprising both the patient and the therapist, in the context of their social position, that is, their embedding into a higher-level totality. The interaction between the participants of psychotherapy may hence be treated as just another case of transfer, on the group level. This transfer may be as hierarchical as in the individual case, involving activity transfer, metaphors, analysis and synthesis etc. A clear understanding of transfer processes involved is of ultimate importance for correct interpretation and efficient feedback in psychotherapy.

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