

Frozen Metaphors

Critical reason depopulated heaven and hell, but the spirits returned to earth, to air, to fire, and to water—they returned to the bodies of men and women. This return is called Romanticism.

Octavio Paz

I asked for ice, but this is ridiculous.

Titanic, 1913, anonymous

Questions relating to the (most) fundamental characteristics of beings hold a prominent place in the tradition of Western philosophy. This is one of the major distinguishing characteristics of philosophy in relation to science: it does not question the variety of beings, but rather what gives beings their Being. Since the thirteenth century this metaphysical or ontological questioning has been referred to as *transcendental*. In the Scholastic tradition, the transcendental characteristics, or *transcendentalia* (such as Being, Object, Truth, Good, Beauty), are conceived as independent characteristics that enable beings to *be*. Since Kant's Copernican Revolution the general concepts that, in Scholasticism, were referred to as transcendental, have become more commonly designated as *a priori* concepts of the human subject.¹ Given that transcendental concepts maintain a relation to beings, even if only to the extent that such beings are objects for the human subject, the term *transcendental* continues to preserve an ontological stature.²

Although the Kantian shift to transcendental subjectivism signifies an important discontinuity in the development of transcendental philosophy, Kant nonetheless does, with respect to another fundamental characteristic, remain loyal to this tradition. He continues to consider that the transcendentalia are universal and timeless characteristics of reality. Kantian transcendentalism, too, remains concerned with the unchanging within everything that changes, and, in this respect, it is, like Scholasticism, an heir of Plato.

In this chapter, on the basis of a poem by the Dutch poet Peter Delpout, two works by the Icelandic sculptor Sigurdur Gudmundsson, and some texts from the German philosopher Nietzsche, an aesthetic experience of reality is examined that, in contrast to the transcendental tradition, sees in the changeable *as such* that which is the only constant. This paradoxical experience brings into sharp relief, on the basis of the words and images provided by the aforementioned persons, a fascination for metaphors, and this will be discussed. Without exception, the conceptualizations that are brought into discussion with each other in this context are not only exceptionally metaphorical, but, at the same time, they form a (more or less explicit) *reflection* on the metaphorical character of language and reality. The process of the metaphorical transfer is hereby understood as a metaphor for a reality that is constantly transforming itself. The metaphorical conceptualization that emerges in the following dialogue implies a sharp critique of the traditional view of the metaphor, rooted in Platonic metaphysics, that sees the metaphor, in relation to the abstract, philosophical concept, as an inferior instrument of knowledge. This critique goes hand in hand with a fundamental reevaluation of art's cognitive capacity that receives, for this reason, a prominent place in reflections concerning man and his place in the world.

A theme that runs as a red line through this chapter is the relationship of the views here discussed and the Romantic project. These views are located between the poles of enthusiasm for the aesthetic affirmation of the constantly-transforming reality and the ironic appreciation of the tragic, human-strength-exceeding character of this affirmation.

1.1 A METAPHOR OF WINTER: THE WINTER OF METAPHOR

Several years ago, Peter Delpout sent me one of his poems entitled: "The Man Who Came from the Cold."³ The following lines appear in the poem:

those who come from the cold are themselves winter,—he said.

They love their sledges and their dogs.
It is not through a landscape they travel,

but seasons of storm and ice:
it freezes their thought.

zij die van de kou komen zijn zelf winter,—zij hij

Zij houden van hun slee en van de honden.
Het is niet het landschap dat zij reizen,

Maar een seizoen van storm en ijs:
Zij bevrozen hun denken.

It was the metaphorical language of the last line that struck me in this excerpt: *it freezes their thought*. A metaphor is a speech act whereby a particular thing is replaced by another. Ordinarily, it is presumed that this replacement is facilitated by the fact that the two things that are brought into a nexus are in one way or another related to each other; the second referent is then referred to as *an image* of the first. In the excerpted poem a comment is given concerning the thinking of people who come from the cold. Such thinking is illustrated by blending it with the imagery of extreme cold: *it freezes their thought*. This blending of both elements is expressively illustrated by the pictorial language in the poem:

He told stories of sleet and snow,
blending them into a legend for radio and TV:

those who come from the cold are themselves winter,—he said.

Hij vertelde verhalen van hagel en sneeuw,
versmolt ze voor radio en t.v. tot een legende:

zij die van de kou komen zijn zelf winter,—zei hij.

The metaphor is traditionally presented as a specific form of figurative speech that is based upon a particular analogy between two elements that, in the metaphor, are combined. In his *Poetics* (1457b) Aristotle maintained that a substitution occurs on the basis of this analogy: a thing receives the name of another thing. Quintilianus conceived of the metaphor as a condensed comparison. In his *Institutio Oratoria* he defined the metaphor as: “*Metaphora brevior est similitudo*” (VIII.6.4). However, the condensed comparison may justifiably be regarded as a

special case of the substitution thesis: both are based upon analogy (cf. Whately, 1864, 280). When a camel is portrayed as the ship of the desert, then the metaphorical expression involved depends upon an analogy of movement—both referents demonstrate a rolling motion. An analogy always presumes a differentiation between two separate areas, while a metaphor expresses a transition of meaning from one area to the other on the basis of an analogy between the two areas. The Greek *metaphorein*—literary meaning ‘transfer’—is a particularly apt description for this phenomenon.

In the excerpted poem a transition is made between what is sensorially perceptible—freezing in winter—and what is not sensorially perceptible—the thinking of people who come from the cold. These people freeze their thinking. According to Heidegger, the transition from the sensible to the nonsensible is characteristic for the metaphorical. In *The Principle of Reason* he maintains that every use of metaphorical language is based upon the distinction between them: “The idea of ‘transposing’ and of metaphor is based upon the distinguishing, if not complete separation, of the sensible and the nonsensible as two realms that exist on their own” (PR, 48).

Heidegger’s remark concerning the distinction between sensible image and nonsensible concept makes it clear that the study of metaphors is of significance for at least two philosophical disciplines. In the first place, the metaphor brings us onto the terrain of aesthetics. This discipline, which concerns itself with providing discursive commentaries about non-discursive (visual, tactile, auditory) images, cannot avoid the issues of the relationship between image and concept and of the conditions of the possibility of the transition from one area to the other. Accordingly, the study of metaphors belongs to the fundamental research concerns of aesthetics: without an explication of the relationship between image and concept, every aesthetic analysis ultimately remains unclear.

In the second place, Heidegger focuses our attention on the relationship between the metaphorical and the metaphysical. The quotation above continues: “The setting up of this partition between the sensible and the nonsensible, between the physical and the nonphysical is a basic trait of what is called metaphysics and which normatively determines Western thinking. . . . The metaphorical exists only within metaphysics” (PR, 48). According to Heidegger, every metaphorical figure of speech is founded in a particular metaphysical conceptualization of the relationship between image and concept. However, in almost the entire Western tradition metaphor is simultaneously, on the grounds of this

conceptualization, excluded from the domain of metaphysics. In order that this latter point be clarified I must briefly refer to one of the origins of the tradition to which Heidegger's remark refers, that is, Plato's theory of Ideas. In Plato's metaphysics a sharp distinction is made between, on the one hand, the perfect, unchangeable and suprasensible world of the Idea, and, on the other hand, the imperfect, changeable and sensible world of concrete things. For Plato, the world of the Idea possesses an ontological priority, something that makes clear that for him "not the visible but the invisible thing is the primary reality," that is, the *essence* of the visible thing (De Vogel, 1967, 107). Real knowledge (*episteme*) is only achievable through pure, philosophical thinking and relates exclusively to the unchangeable, real Being. Plato assumes hereby that the characteristics and value of a form of knowledge are completely determined by the nature of the known objects. Sensory perception offers only an image of the changeable world of Becoming and accordingly leads to only transitory meaning (*doxa*). Only the philosophical concept offers an immediate representation of an Idea. The thinker should for this reason apply himself to the dialectic and detach himself as far as is possible from his sensory organs (cf. Matthews, 1972, 15).

Already on basis of this summary sketch of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology, it is not difficult to comprehend his rejection of rhetoric. If the world of the unchangeable Idea can only be comprehended by pure, dialectical thinking, then metaphorical speech damages the correct conceptualization. The metaphor shifts attention away from the origin (the concept) to the derivative (the image), leading the thinker away from his citadel of concepts and deluding him with illusions in an apparent world of images. In the *Gorgias*, a dialogue concerned with rhetoric, Plato maintains that rhetoric can only lead to *doxa* and, for this reason, he condemns it quite sharply. In *The Republic* the comment is that a poet using figures of speech fashions "phantoms far removed from the truth" (X: 605c). Although more nuance is introduced in the treatment of rhetoric in the *Phaidros*, even there it is only accorded, at best, a didactic function. Metaphorical speech forms merely an illustration of a more fundamental conceptual demonstration.

Even without completely agreeing with Whitehead's idea that the totality of Western philosophy consists of writing footnotes to Plato, it can be maintained, without exaggeration, that Plato's condemnation of rhetoric is characteristic for the pejorative attitude toward it that is found in the Western philosophical tradition.⁴ There is a complete tradition that considers rhetoric as a manner of speaking that moves away from the truth, that is, from a direct representation of reality through the

medium of pure concept. Especially after the victory of Cartesian philosophical self-knowledge, the ideal of pure (*clare et distincte*) thought, the condemnation of rhetoric is indubitably apparent. According to Kant, the *ars oratoria* is even a danger for freedom: rhetoric hampers thinking and subjects the hearer to an unreasonable authority (CJ, 197 ff./KU, B216 ff.). In his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (sections 446–64), Hegel maintains that the dialectical development toward the Truth moves from image to pure concept. Even a more sceptical thinker such as the later Wittgenstein, who no longer believed in the possibility that language could represent reality like a mirror, maintained that philosophical illusions are the result of metaphorical appearance. In the mainstream of Western philosophy, metaphorical expressions are, in the best case, permitted as a didactic decoration that, however, because of their dubious character, should be avoided as far as possible. With a nod to the famous seventh thesis of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Black, in an article concerning the relationship between philosophy and metaphor, summarizes the pejorative attitude of philosophers as follows: "Addiction to metaphor is held to be illicit, on the principle that whereof one can speak only metaphorically, thereof one ought not to speak at all" (Black, 1978, 451). It is indeed legitimate to maintain that the metaphorical, in a complete tradition, is excluded from philosophical argument. In the metaphysical tradition the metaphor appears to be in hibernation.

Given that the metaphor is a characteristic method of expressiveness in art, it is not surprising that it is also effected by the condemnation of rhetoric in Plato's metaphysics. Plato conceived of the different forms of art as parts of the broader class of *technē* or (handi)craft. Moreover, Plato understood art as belonging to the subclass of productive crafts: the artist, however, does not produce real things such as, for example, the furniture-maker, but rather merely images (*idoola*) of things. Images may completely imitate the original, or they may merely give the appearance of doing so: in the first case, one speaks of an *eikoon*, and in the second, of a *fantasma*. For Plato, in a certain sense, works of art are always *fantasmata* because a perfect reproduction or *eikon* is no longer an image but rather a duplicate of the real thing. A perfect imitation of a chair, for example, is itself a chair. Given that, for Plato, all transitory things in the world of Becoming are already reflections of the eternal, unchangeable Ideas, works of art are merely reflections of the second degree. Plato's banishment of artists from the ideal Republic is, therefore, an unavoidable consequence of his metaphysics (*The Republic*, X: 607b). Just as in the case of rhetoric, this condemnation of art is characteristic for almost the entire metaphysical tradition: only when traditional meta-

physics loses its quality of self-evident truth—and, beginning with the period of Kant's critique of reason, this increasingly occurs—does the philosophical condemnation of art *also* lose its self-evident character.

Now, after this exposition, we return to the poem. What is fascinating for me in this fragment is that the metaphor appears to be reflexive in terms of the linguistic expressiveness itself: the poem treats the metaphorical processes of creating poetry. This process appears to me to be suggested in the image of the freezing of thinking. That the poem possesses a self-reflexive character is not in itself surprising: since its emancipation at the end of the nineteenth century, modern art has increasingly been characterized by a reflexive relationship to itself. Just as much of modern philosophy, modern art explores primarily its own medium.⁵ However, what is fascinating in this fragment is the specific content of this reflexive, metaphorical image. Initially, I could not come to grips with the analogy upon which it was based. The people love their sledges and their dogs, simultaneously, and, for one reason or another, they freeze their thinking. However, another line from the poem gives an indication of which analogy provides the basis for the metaphor: *those who come from the cold are themselves winter*. The areas of the sensible and the nonsensible are not sharply distinguished from each other, and, in fact, they cannot, ultimately, be differentiated: they merge, blending in the poetic metaphor. The image of the freezing of thinking forms an evocation of a romantic longing toward the overcoming of the distinction between the spheres of the sensible and the nonsensible.

1.2 GUDMUNDSSON'S GREAT POEM

In 1982, the year Peter Delpout sent me his poem, a rather enigmatic sculpture by Sigurdur Gudmundsson, entitled *The Great Poem*, was on show in the exhibition '60-'80 that was held in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. It was not only the title that made me think about the poem that had only recently been sent to me.

Gudmundsson, born in Iceland but living and working as a sculptor in Amsterdam since the 1960s, made his debut in 1969 as a member of the Icelandic AUM group, a circle of sculptors, composers, poets, and writers related to the Fluxus movement. His early work possesses a strong poetic character and, among other features, presents various visual metaphors: objects and actions that are combined on the basis of the fact that their names rhyme with each other. For example, *Moss-Gross* (1973) consists of two squares, the first of which is formed by a quantity

of moss and the second of which comprises 144 matches. *Hestur-Lestur*, from the same year, portrays a man, reading, and a horse ("reading" and "horse" rhyme with each other in Icelandic). In this period, too, Gudmundsson organized so-called *Full-House* performances. A photograph produced in 1971 shows a group of five men standing in front of the Balderich Gallery: according to the caption, two of the group had read Heine, and three of them had seen the Shetland Islands from the air.

After his definitive settling in The Netherlands, where he came in contact with a number of Dutch conceptual artists, Gudmundsson produced several photographic works that he called *situations*. These are tableaux vivants wherein, besides a diversity of landscapes and objects, Gudmundsson himself constantly appears as the central figure. These works, too, are strongly metaphorical in character. *Dialogue*, from 1979, shows a motionless Gudmundsson in an ambivalent position: a number of balloons, attached to his hair, attempt to pull him upward, while a block of stone in his arms attempts the opposite. *Mathematics*, also from 1979, shows Gudmundsson, wrapped in wool, sitting next to a pyramid of sand. Since the beginning of the 1980s, Gudmundsson has been making large sculptures from diverse materials such as concrete, glass, paper, and plaster; he also uses natural materials such as seaweed. Once again, metaphors play a significant role in these works. *Kantadorum* (1981) consists of a high pedestal topped with an arrow pointing upward, and *Stella Maris*, from the same year, shows a giant paper boat placed high above the pedestal (this piece can be seen in the Academic Medical Centre, Amsterdam). In a publication from the Public Art Collection concerning Gudmundsson, the art historian Marlies Levels justifiably maintains that "everything which is visible and tangible in Gudmundsson's work has a metaphorical and poetic meaning. Motifs such as the scenic (earth, air, mountain, balloon, paving stone) and geometric or abstract forms (arrow, pyramid, line, colour) together comprise the alphabet of a language of signs. . . . Such a symbolic language can only be 'interpreted' via a figure of speech" (Levels, 1982, 6).

The Great Poem, which was on show in the Stedelijk Museum, belongs to the sculptures from the beginning of the 1980s. We see a trinity of cement pyramids standing on a wooden base (figure 1), with the head and neck of a swan achingly reaching out from each pyramid. It is as if the swans long to fly away, but are uncompromisingly doomed to failure because they are imprisoned in the cement. It is tempting to consider this sculpture, too, as a striking metaphor of the culture-nature relationship. *The Great Poem* embodies a theme that plays a large role in Gudmundsson's work: nature and culture are presented as an antago-

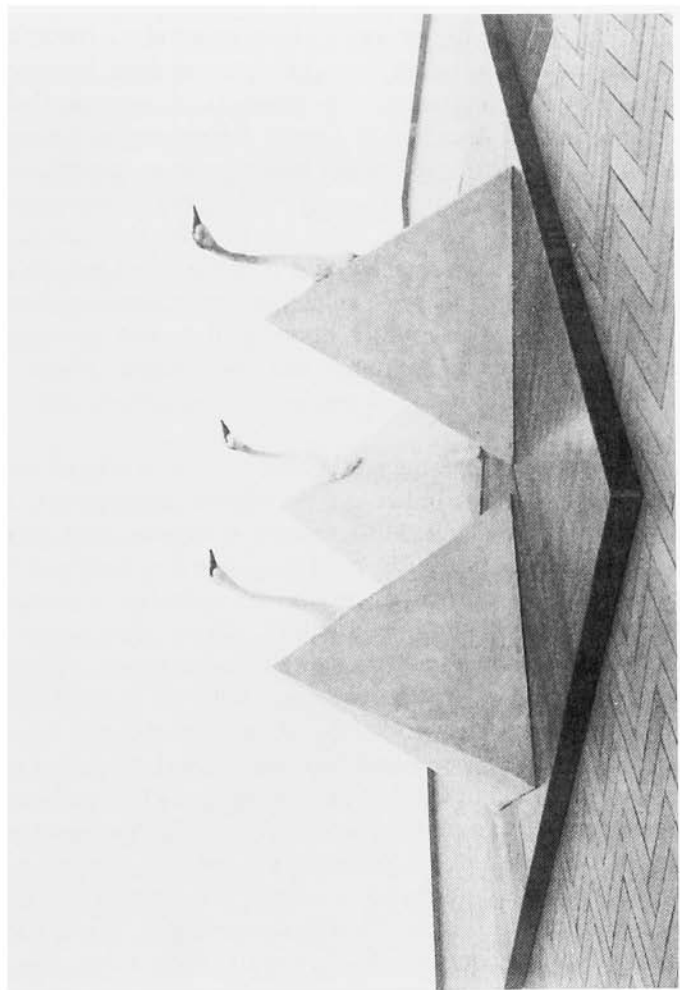


FIGURE 1

The Great Peen, Sigurdur Gudmundsson, 1981, concrete, stuffed swans and steel, 350 × 350 × 150 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

nistic polarity. In the publication already cited, Marlies Levels interprets the work in this light, adding: "If creating art is compared with the longing to free oneself from earthly constraints, then this work could be comprehended as a metaphor for art itself" (Levels, 1982, 14). Levels points to the reflexive character of *The Great Poem*: it is a metaphor of the artistic, metaphoric desire. She maintains that the attempt by the swans (read: nature) to escape from the pyramids (read: culture) is a metaphor for the artistic longing to free oneself from earthly constraints. However, this interpretation is not completely unproblematic: it appears that a transposition of terms has occurred in Levels' interpretation because, while the swans in *The Great Poem* attempt to escape from culture, art is precisely characterized, according to her, by the longing to free oneself from earthly constraints, from nature. Now, it is possible that Levels, in her interpretation, only has a formal analogy in mind—that is, both art and the swans are attempting to free themselves from something. Some metaphors, do, after all, rest entirely upon such formal analogies. Nonetheless, I wonder if Levels has not, in this case, missed a chance to achieve a deeper interpretation, with respect to its contents, of Gudmundsson's sculptures.

It is Levels herself who set me on the trail of a more extensive interpretation of *The Great Poem*. In her master's thesis concerning Gudmundsson's work, she investigated the extent to which his work could be placed in a Romantic tradition. The brief foregoing description of his work already suggests an affirmative answer: the inclusion of material elements in reality as symbols in a universal, divine "language" is, namely, typical of nineteenth-century aesthetic Romanticism. After an extensive comparison of Gudmundsson's work with the Romantic tradition, Levels concludes that his work, too, "at the level of content, form (composition), and method of presentation, can, indeed, be called Romantic" (Levels, 1981, 128). In the first part of her investigation Levels also remarks that nature has a central place in German Romantic art and aesthetics. As characteristics of the Romantic she specifies, among others, the view that nature is considered as a metaphor for the universal, and that the Romantic artist is in search of an identification of spirit and nature (cf. 0.2). Following Sørensen (1963), Levels places these characteristics in a tradition of mystic naturalism: the Romantic artist is connected to this tradition to the extent that, through the medium of metaphorical imagery, he too hopes to evoke a blending of spirit and nature, subject and object.

Given these characteristics of the Romantic tradition, Levels' interpretation of *The Great Poem* is rather surprising. After all, she main-

tains that art characterizes itself through the longing to liberate itself from earthly constraints, from nature. It would appear more reasonable to present the metaphor of *The Great Poem* as follows: just as the swans attempt to escape from culture, represented in the geometric pyramids, so also does Romantic art, to which Gudmundsson's work is closely related, attempt, in its striving for a fusion with nature, to escape from the constraining pressures of an alienating culture. In the Romantic work of art, nature attempts to free itself from the dominion by culture.

This Romantic conceptualization of art's task can be clarified by a brief reference to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a text that, although difficult to locate in the authentic Romantic tradition, nonetheless, in important respects, paved the way for Romanticism (see 0.2 above). Kant concluded, on the basis of the first two critiques, that an "immense gulf" (*unüberschbare Kluft*; CJ, 14—literally: an "unsurveyable gulf") exists between the terrains of nature and freedom (whereon culture is founded). According to Kant, man occupies a remarkable middle position because, as a physical being, he constitutes a part of nature and is subjected to its laws, he is simultaneously also, as a thinking being, a constituent part of the freedom of Reason. For this reason, for Kant, man is a citizen of two worlds. In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant undertakes an attempt to bridge the gulf between these two worlds, accrediting art, in the attempt, with an important role. This view, regardless of the caution and hesitancy with which it is formulated, locates Kant at the dawn of Romantic aesthetics.

A pregnant expression of this Romantic attitude with respect to art is found in section 46 of the *Critique of Judgment* wherein Kant addresses artistic genius. Genius, a central concept in Romantic aesthetics, is defined by Kant as "the innate disposition of the mind with which nature provides its rules" (CJ, 179/KU, B179). In this definition, the Romantic distrust of the grandiose pretensions of a culture based upon human Reason is specified: when Reason is no longer considered to be able to close the gap between nature and freedom (an Enlightenment ideal that achieved its magnificent apotheosis in Hegel's *Odyssey of the Spirit*), then this reconciliatory capacity is ascribed to nature itself. Art, as nature's "mouthpiece" in humans, thereby receives the task of realizing the reconciliation of nature and freedom (cf. Marquard, 1982, 96).

On the basis of the foregoing it can now be argued that Gudmundsson's place in the Romantic tradition, made plausible by the art historian Levels in her analysis, is intimately connected with the recognition, embodied in his work, of the reconciliatory claims of nature at the expense of the totalitarian pretensions of Reason. The metaphor of

The Great Poem points, for this reason, not to the longing of art to escape from nature, but rather to art's attempt to realize a reconciliation by submitting to nature. *The Great Poem*, however, can also be read as a symbol of the precarious character of art's escape attempt: although the swans in the work reach for their freedom, they remain imprisoned in the stone pyramids. Art reaches toward the natural, but remains imprisoned within the constraints of the culture of Reason. In this sense, *The Great Poem* is, indeed, a metaphor for Romantic art: it binds, in an ironic fashion, enthusiastic desire for an absolute reconciliation of nature and freedom with the insight of the unachievable character of this desire.

1.3 NIETZSCHE AND METAPHOR

Regardless of how multifaceted the contents of Nietzsche's texts are, they share a common extreme metaphoricism: one is confronted with little argumentation but much suggestion, seduction, and enchantment.⁶ Accordingly, the dividing line between a philosophical explication and a poetic eruption of images is not always easy to establish: for Nietzsche, philosophy is a "reasoning in images" (*Bilderrede*), an "artwork made of language" (*sprachliches Kunstwerk*) (D, 74). He was convinced of the impossibility of making a distinction between analysis and imagination: the philosopher "knows if he poeticizes, and poeticizes if he knows" (KSA, 7:439). Time and again Nietzsche emphasises that his metaphorical style is in no way decorative, but rather that it is inextricably connected to the contents of his philosophy. He maintains the metaphor as a strategic weapon against a philosophical, moral, and religious tradition that, in a radical manner, has suppressed its metaphorical origins and thereby excluded them from its domain.

Just as is the case with Gudmundsson, a century later, it is easy to refer to Nietzsche's relation to the metaphor as being Romantic. This Romantic root is especially and explicitly expressed in early works such as *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872). Nietzsche refers to art with the imagery of the "healing enchantress" that enables man to be absorbed by the primal unity of nature (B, 23, 35, 40). Although, in the "Versuch einer Selbstkritik" that he added to *The Birth* in 1886, Nietzsche distances himself from the *Artisten-Metaphysik* of his early ideas, this self-criticism does not so much constitute a change of viewpoint as a radicalization of his position. He criticizes, namely, his attempt in *The Birth* to discursively explicate his insights: "It should have been singing, this 'new soul,' not speaking! What a shame that I dared not say what I had to say then as a poet: I might have been able to do it" (B, 6). Ac-

cording to Nietzsche, the radical critique of his book made by his philologist colleagues made it clear what the motive was behind his *Artisten-Metaphysik*: in *The Birth*, science was presented, for the first time, as problematic (B, 4). The audacious step taken in that work was "to see science under the lens of the artist, but art under the lens of life" (B, 5).

If we want to understand the rehabilitation of art at the expense of discursive science and Nietzsche's extremely metaphoric expression of this program in their connection, then the lectures concerning classical rhetoric that he gave in Basel at the time of the publication of *The Birth*, along with the linguistic views he developed at that time, form a good starting point (cf. De Man, 1974). In these lectures Nietzsche gave a lot of attention to classical rhetoric and, in contrast to the Platonic tradition, he placed it in a remarkably positive light. He conceived of the rhetoric of the Greeks as "the breath of life for this artistic people" (MA, 5:3). In that time, according to Nietzsche, rhetoric did not possess the pejorative connotation which it gained from the time of Socrates; on the contrary, it was highly regarded by the Greeks. Rhetoric is related to the probable (*pithanon*): rhetoricians, he maintained, "have the meaning about things and therefore the effects of those things upon people in their control, and they know that, too!" (MA, 5:4). The rhetorical figure upon which Nietzsche concentrated in his Basel lectures was the metaphor: he conceives of this figure as a collective name for all rhetorical figures that establish a transference of meaning. He conceives of this *transference* (*Übertragung*) as having two meanings: it refers to both the result of the transfer and to its process. That Nietzsche gives such a central place to the metaphor in his lectures is an equal expression of his view that the totality of language is ultimately based upon metaphors: he quotes the Romantic Jean Paul: "Every language is a dictionary of faded metaphors" (*Jede Sprache ist ein Wörterbuch erblasseter Metaphern*) (MA, 5:315).⁷

This idea was further elaborated by Nietzsche in his essay "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn" (1873), written at the time of the Basel lectures but only published posthumously. The essay, which, although only sixteen pages in length, is of cardinal significance for an understanding of Nietzsche's metaphorical crusade, has as its central question the extent to which language offers us an adequate expression of things. According to Nietzsche language does not provide such an adequate expression because what we call the truth rests upon a double metaphor: "A nervous impulse transferred by an image. First metaphor. The image once again transferred by a sound. Second metaphor. . . . We believe that we know something of the things when

we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, yet we possess nonetheless nothing other than metaphors of these things, metaphors which, in their totality, do not refer to the original *Being* of those things" (KSA, 1:879).

There is, thus, no logic here with relation to the origin of language: the totality of the material with which humans work and build does not originate from the essences of things. There is, however, yet a third transfer that concerns the transformation from word to concept. According to Nietzsche, this is where contact with things is lost: a word becomes a concept at that moment when it no longer functions as the expression of a unique, individualized primeval experience to which it owes its original existence, but rather when it is used to refer to a multitude of more or less similar but never identical experiences. Use of the word *leaf* prompts the image of a primal leaf in us, although there is only the multitude of different leaves in our world. "Every concept," concludes Nietzsche, "originates by virtue of an imposed identity upon what is not identical" (KSA, 1:880).

For this reason, for Nietzsche, our entire world of concepts is completely anthropomorphous. That which we call truth is ultimately "a moving army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in brief, the sum of human relations which, in a poetic or rhetorical manner, are elevated, transferred, and romanticized, and which appear to a people, after long usage, as canonic and binding: truths are illusions which people have forgotten to be illusions, metaphors which have become threadbare and impotent, coins which have lost their portraits and which are no longer used as coins but only as metal" (KSA, 1:880–81). Because man has forgotten the illusory character of truth, he lies when he thinks that he speaks it.⁸

The foregoing quotations make it expressively clear that Nietzsche is here maintaining a metaphor that differs radically from those employed by Aristotle and Quintilianus. For him, there is absolutely no meaning beyond the metaphorical transfer, or, more rigorously formulated: in the final analysis, the meaning of a word or concept is the result of the (metaphorical) interpretation whereby the relationships between words and things are instantiated in an aesthetic manner. Between the two domains that metaphor in a single movement unites and equally articulates the distinction between them, there "exists no causality, no correctness, no expression, but, at the most, merely an aesthetic relation" (KSA, 1:884). The concept completely derives its meaning from this metaphorical interpretation; it is a derivative phenomenon. Here, Nietzsche appears to defend a position that is the converse to that expressed in the already quoted view of Heidegger. According

to Nietzsche, metaphysics is only possible on the basis of the metaphorical transference.⁹

In his argument, Nietzsche also employs the metaphor of fossilization that we earlier saw embodied in Gudmundsson's *The Great Poem*: "While each perceived metaphor is individual and unique, moreover remaining free from every possibility of being placed in a given rubric, the constructed edifice of the concepts demonstrates the rigid regularity of a Roman columbarium" (KSA, 1:882). Anyone familiar with the severity of this conceptual structure will hardly be able to believe that the concept is merely a residue of a metaphor and that "the illusion relating to the artistic transference of a nervous impulse into images is, if not the mother, then at least the grandmother of each concept" (KSA, 1:882). Only by forgetting the primitive world of metaphors, only by the hardening and stiffening of the stream of images that originally, like molten lava, flowed outward from human phantasy, only by the invincible belief that this sun, this window, this table, constitutes in itself a truth, in brief, only by forgetting that man is a subject, and an artistically creative subject, *nota bene*, can one live with any peace, certainty, and consequence; if one could escape for even one moment from the prison walls of this belief, then one's 'self-consciousness,' in that moment, would be shattered" (KSA, 1:883–84).

Nietzsche does not unambiguously reject conceptualization; it is also, after all, a symbol of human grandeur: "In this sense, one may certainly admire the human being as a magnificent constructive genius who succeeds in building, on shifting foundations and running water, as it were, a towering, infinitely complex cathedral of concepts" (KSA, 1:882). When, in *The Birth*, Nietzsche nonetheless comes to the defense of the artist at the expense of the *theoretical person*, this is because art, along with the myth, has become the refuge for the basic capacities of the metaphor: "The compulsion to form metaphors, the fundamental compulsion of man, which one cannot dispense with unless one also dispenses with people, this compulsion is truly not suppressed, scarcely even curbed, because, from its evaporated products, the concepts, a regular and rigid new world is built as a dungeon for man. It merely seeks another territory and other channels for its activities, and finds these in myths and, even more, in art" (KSA, 1:887).

1.4 FOSSILIZATION AND FREEZING

With both Gudmundsson and Nietzsche the domination of the rhetorical imagination of reality by conceptual rationality is presented with the image of fossilization. And, in contrast to the fossilized discursiveness

of the concept, both place poetic thinking in images that do more justice to the metaphorical primal capacity of man. In the poem by Peter Delpeut, which I interpreted above as a reflection on the writing of poetry, this poetic imagination was evoked as follows:

those who come from the cold are themselves winter,—he said.
 * * * * *
 it freezes their thought.

zij die van de kou komen zijn zelf winter,—zei hij.
 * * * * *
 zij bevroren hun denken.

The process of the poetic imagination of reality is presented in this fragment as a process of freezing: in the poetic imagination, the constantly shifting reality is frozen. Just as one gets to grips with water by freezing it, so does the poet freeze the upward streaming wealth of imagery in his language. In the poetic imagination, subject and world are blended together so that they can, subsequently, be frozen in the work of art. This “freezing” of thinking is essentially different from the fossilized working of conceptual thinking: the unity evoked in the poetic work is not definitively fixed, as in theoretical concepts, but rather it maintains *in potential* its liquidity. In our interpretation of the work, it recuperates this liquidity once again. We could, following Schelling (see 0.3), also express this point by saying that the poem is characterized by a fundamental openness, an abundance of meaning that necessarily transcends every individual interpretation.

Gudmundsson, too, maintains the metaphor of freezing in a work from 1970: *Untitled* (figure 2) consists of the documentation of an event. That which remains to us of this event is merely a number of “frozen” images in the form of six photographs and an annotation. The annotation reads: “this is about how my philosophy becomes a part of human beings and their surroundings.” The first photo shows us a hand that, holding a pen, writes six sentences on a piece of paper. The writing reads: “writing the philosophy and simplifying it to six sentences.” The second photo shows a number of molds of the individual letters that make up the six sentences. The molds are filled with water. The caption informs us that the water in the molds is subsequently frozen. In the third photo, we see Gudmundsson, with the frozen sentence, on his way to the gallery *Now Constructions*. This sentence, according to what we see in the fourth photograph, is displayed on the floor of the gallery. In



This is about how my philosophy became a part of human beings and their surroundings:

- ① writing the philosophy and simplifying it to six sentences
- ② making moulds and filling them with water - then freezing them
- ③ going every day to the gallery with one sentence of ice
- ④ the philosophy laying on the floor in the gallery
- ⑤ the philosophy has become water
- ⑥ the water is gone - some of it was carried away by people's shoes to the streets and their homes - some of it went into people's bodies by their breathing in the gallery and there it stayed for some time - some of it went into the open air and it became a part of the clouds and later it came back as rain, etc....

FIGURE 2

Untitled, Sigurdur Gudmundsson, 1970, project with a report in photographs and text, Poster Gallery Now Constructions, 63 × 46.5 cm. Collection of J. de Mul, Molenhoek.

the fifth photo, there is still some water to be seen, and in the sixth and final photo we see the empty floor of the gallery. The caption to the sixth photograph reads: "the water is gone—some of it was carried away by people's shoes to the streets and their homes—some of it went into people's bodies by their breathing in the gallery and there it stayed for some time—some of it went into the open air and it became a part of the clouds and later it came back as rain, etc."

Untitled, too, should be understood as a metaphor of the artistic imagination. In this sense, the metaphor comprises both the form and the content of the work. In the six sentences, Gudmundsson attempted to "conceptualize" this philosophy. The six sentences had been written in Icelandic, and, when I asked him to translate them for me he only did so after some hesitation. He later told me that he would now formulate his philosophy differently, with more nuance, than he had done in 1970. The conceptual expression of his philosophy appeared rather rigid, no longer able to adequately represent the abundance of meaning of the image. But he nonetheless remained loyal to the image that had been evoked in *Untitled*. Because of its ability to constantly summon different meanings, the image appears more able to function as a metaphor of the poetic process.

However, *Untitled* does not appear to exclusively point to the poetic imagination: the water that becomes frozen and is subsequently carried off on the shoes of people simultaneously refers to the reality outside of art. This reality is characterized, to use the words of Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher, by a constant flowing: all things are in flux (*panta rhei*). For this reason, according to Heraclitus, we can never step twice into the same river (Heraclitus, in Kirk and Raven, 1980, 186, 197). The constantly flowing reality is temporarily frozen in the work of art, but, after the image is melted, it returns to the stream of life: the houses of the people, the streets, the clouds. While the concepts of Gudmundsson's philosophy form a rigid and unchanging structure, the images appear able to represent more adequately the *panta rhei* of reality. In contrast to the conceptualization of the theoretical person, which petrifies reality like the glance of Medusa, art expresses the movement of life itself.

1.5 THE TRANSCENDENTAL METAPHOR

In the case of Nietzsche, too, the interpretation of metaphorical imagination is simultaneously an interpretation of the most elementary characteristic of reality. And, just as with Gudmundsson, this fundamental

ontology is in accord with Heraclitus' *panta rhei*.¹⁰ The insight that, because it is constantly in the process of change, Being can never be completely identified by understanding, is one that we could propose as Nietzsche's thesis of *ontic difference*.¹¹

Nietzsche summarizes the absolute stream of the world's occurring as a metaphorical occurring, a continuous transfer. The fundamental need for metaphor on which he spoke in 1873 was not only attributed to man, but rather also to life itself, and, with certain reservations, even to nonliving nature. "A superior physiology shall undoubtedly understand the artistic processes in our development—not only in humans, but also in animals: a superior physiology shall teach us that the artistic begins in the organic. . . . Even the chemical transformations of anorganic nature are, perhaps, artistic processes" (KSA, 7:437). And, in a fragment from early in 1884, the formulation is: "Everything organic which 'judges,' behaves as an *artist*. . . . The creative—1) appropriating 2) selecting 3) transforming 4) the self-regulating element 5) the separating" (KSA, 11:97). In his later works, Nietzsche proffered this metaphorical interpretation as the creative *Will to Power*, which he understood as the "most intimate essence of Being" (WDB, 3:798). For him, the *process* of transfer is central in the concept *Will to Power*: "One must not ask 'who is it who interprets?', but the interpretation itself exists as a form of the Will to Power, (But not as a *Being*, but as a *process*, a *becoming*), as an affect" (KSA, 12:140). This creative process of the metaphorical interpretation of the Other, which for Nietzsche necessarily possessed an aspect of subjugation, simultaneously implies an aspiration to the overcoming of one's self (Z, 136).

Seen in this light, the human compulsion to metaphorical thinking, which cannot be denied without denying humanity itself, is nothing less than a metaphor for nature's constant metaphorical transformation of itself. Without this metaphorical transformation Being itself would not be able to exist. For Nietzsche, the metaphorical process forms the transcendental condition for the possibility that Being occurs. The ontic difference is rooted in the transcendental metaphor. The use of the term "transcendental" is, incidentally, not without tension because it breaks with two connotations that are closely connected with the traditional usage of the term: for Nietzsche, unlike those in the Kantian tradition, the conditions of the possibility of the appearance of Being do not reside in the human subject, but rather in the metaphorical transfer that is inherent to Being in itself and that exceeds human experience. If, in connection with Nietzsche, we actually dare to speak of Kantianism, then there is—to use an expression that Ricoeur employs in

another context—a reference to a Kantianism without a transcendental subject. In addition, and here Nietzsche places himself in opposition to both the Kantian and the Scholastic traditions, *this* notion of the transcendental metaphor expresses the postulate that the only *constant* in every change is the abysmal dimension of change itself, something that, for this reason, can never be named in positive terms, but rather can only be brought into issue in the sense of a transfer, by being employed as a metaphor, for example.¹²

In *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872) Nietzsche first gave expression to his in every way Romantic conceptualization of reality as a constant artistic transformation. Still under the influence of the impression that Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1817) had made upon him, he specified, in metaphysical terms, this process of artistic transformation as *World Will* (although he also maintained other metaphors such as primeval foundation, core of Being, mother of Being, and primal unity. As is the case with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche regarded the Will as a process wherein man is nothing other than the instrument and medium of this Will (cf. the explication of Schopenhauer's metaphysics in 3.2 below). However, other than Schopenhauer, he considered the process as artistic comedy, "an artistic game which the will, in the eternal abundance of its pleasure, plays with itself" (B, 115).

For this above all must be plain to us, to our humiliation *and* our enhancement, that the whole comedy of art is not at all performed for us, for our improvement or edification, any more than we are the actual creators of that art world: but we can indeed assume for our own part that we are images and artistic projections for the true creator of that world, and that our highest dignity lies in the meaning of works of art—for it is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*—while of course our awareness of our meaning differs hardly at all from the awareness that warriors painted on canvas have of the battle portrayed. Thus all of our knowledge of art is utterly illusory, because we, as knowing subjects, are not identical with that being which, as sole creator and spectator of that comedy of art, prepares an eternal enjoyment for itself. (B, 32)

Art reveals "the spirit that playfully builds and destroys the world of individuals as the product of a primal pleasure: similarly, dark Heraclitus compares the force that builds worlds to a child placing stones here and there, and building sandcastles and knocking them down again" (B, 115).

Nietzsche explains this artistic game of the world's foundations, the eternal origin and decay of finite Being, as the eternal conflict be-