

METONYMIC METAPHORS AND ETHNICITY: SLOVENES IN CLEVELAND

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0. Introduction

Wherever we have culture, we have ethnicity. In this essay we explore what I advance as an important aspect of the expression of ethnicity, that is the complex implementation of the device of metonymic metaphors. I see ethnicity as based on a Peircean opposition of **we:other**. To the extent that all cultural groups perceive and act upon this opposition, all cultures are viewed here as potentially ethnic cultures. While ethnic units within larger societies are easy to detect, even the most isolated tribe is not so sequestered as to be unaware of "the other" Accordingly, there follows the construction of what I have called ethnic culture texts—verbal and nonverbal—which, by means of this opposition, act as commentaries on the ethnic culture ("We" are different from "them" in certain respects). Thus ethnic texts function as metaethnic texts. I have also noted that ethnic texts are structured similarly to artistic texts, the aesthetic function being present whether or not it is dominant (cf. Portis Winner 1976, 1979). Thus I suggest that the metaethnic function and the aesthetic function are interdependent attributes characterizing ethnic texts, and that a typical device which interlocks these two functions is that of verbal and non-verbal metonymic metaphors. The exploration of this device in ethnic texts departs from conceptions concerning aesthetic structures advanced by Jakobson (1960) and Lotman (1976), but my emphasis is on the dual function, not only aesthetic but also metatextual, of metonymic-metaphoric constructions.

In this discussion we first consider metonymic metaphors within our conceptual framework, and then turn to some applications. Examples are drawn from a modern ethnic culture, that of the Slovenes in Cleveland.

1. Concepts

In his path-breaking conceptualization of his multifunctional and multifactored communication model, Jakobson saw the poetic function as always present in verbal activities, whether dominant or not, and thus as relevant to the analysis of all verbal messages (Jakobson 1960: 356). I have interpreted the principles of this model as applicable, in a broad sense, to non-verbal as well as verbal messages, which I believe was clearly implied by Jakobson. This does not imply the necessary dependence of nonverbal sign systems on verbal ones. Rather, we assume the relative autonomy of nonverbal systems as opposed to a logocentric position.

In scrutinizing Jakobson's model, which we extend beyond linguistic texts, we need to consider his challenging depiction of metonymic metaphors in poetry and his conception of the relationship between the aesthetic function and the metalinguistic function. As Jakobson wrote:

"The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. . . Similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its thorough going symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence. . . In poetry, where similarity is superimposed upon contiguity, any metonymy is slightly metaphoric and any metaphor has a slightly metonymic tint,"

and, furthermore, that

“. . . poetry and metalanguage. . . are in diametric opposition to each other. . . in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence.” (1960: 358).

In other words, poetry is based upon the sequential use of equivalent expressions. In Jakobson's words, units are combined “on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity.” It is argued here that Jakobson's dichotomy between the aesthetic and the metafunctions, which we can trace to the traditional separation by Plato of arts and philosophy, should be modified. Thus the metonymic metaphors, which Jakobson sees as a fundamental construction in poetry, can also impart metalinguistic meanings. For instance, the juxtaposition of words of different categories, creating metonymic metaphors, may also indirectly comment upon the linguistic code. An example, which Jakobson himself often gave in his lectures on “The Poetry of Grammar and the Grammar of Poetry,” is the poem by Heine, *Der Fichtenbaum und die Palme* (“The Fir Tree and the Palm Tree”). The fir tree (masculine in German) and the palm tree (feminine in German) take part in a metaphoric loving relationship. The grammatical gender lends meaning here which, as Jakobson noted, is particularly marked when we compare the German original to its translation into genderless English. We add the clear implication that since the metonymic-metaphoric construction juxtaposes the two trees of opposite genders, this figure stimulates reflection upon the code, and thus in this respect the poem acts like a metalinguistic text. In considering ethnic texts, the opposition between categories such as my culture:other culture is frequently conveyed by metonymic metaphors which, by virtue of the aesthetic function, cause the receiver to focus attention on the text. Accordingly, such an orientation on the text stimulates abstract thought, speculations about the codes and nature of the ethnic culture. For metonymic metaphors juxtapose unforeseen similarities and mix categories formerly looked upon as separate, creating new concrete similarities, and consequently there arises reflection upon these new meanings. This is effected without Jakobson's “sequence to build an equation” which, in Jakobson's formula, is essential to metalanguage. I am suggesting that Jakobson's felicitous comment that “in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation, whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence,” need not imply that poetic formulae cannot contribute to metalinguistic thought. Furthermore, considering the reverse, a metalinguistic or in our case metaethnic text, if juxtaposed to other texts in a particular context can, by virtue of this juxtaposition, also create metonymic metaphors and thus contribute to aesthetic conceptions. For example, we may frame and artistically decorate the margins of a metacultural text, such as a code of law. The juxtaposition of the written code and the artistically rendered manuscript creates an aesthetic text.

Metonymic metaphors fall into various types. Particularly important to our discussion of ethnic texts are distinctions by modality: verbal (which is both visual and audial), visual, audial, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory. Lotman's concept of montage, implicit and explicit, is an expansion of this thought (Lotman 1976: 56). Here two criteria are used: 1) modality, which in addition to modes determined by our ways of perceiving, is understood to include such variables as tense, mood, location, etc., and 2) semantic criteria. Thus in implicit montage the juxtaposed elements are drawn from one semantic paradigm: they represent one and the same thing, but the two elements are cast in different modalities. Consider one object contrasted to itself in different locations, or one face appearing in different moods, or the vocalization of the word “horse” as contrasted to its written form

or visual rendering, etc. Here we have, in fact, one element subject to "grammatical" transformations. In contrast, explicit montage juxtaposes elements drawn from differing semantic paradigms but in identical modalities. For example, consider traditional clothes: modern automobile in one location, or a gesture counterposed, apparently inappropriately, to a linguistic expression, both elements sharing the same temporality. Putting this somewhat differently, in montage construction, there is a collision of elements from apparently different systems (differing modalities but the same referent, differing referents but the same modality) but these are unified on some more abstract level (Lotman 1975: 51). In fact, a new paradigm is being created. In other words, the combination of two elements in montage, whether implicit or explicit, is based on equivalence in some respect. This is the constitutive principle on which such figures are founded.

In the following section, we wish to demonstrate that the aesthetic device of metonymic metaphors, understood as encompassing Lotman's implicit and explicit montages, is a fundamental technique in the construction of ethnic texts which typically juxtapose units from two cultural systems. Consequently, both the aesthetic and metaethnic functions are exploited and, indirectly, often the emotive function as well. Underlying the opposing units in ethnic texts are world views and values which are organized by differing time orientations and values. For example, there is frequently the contrast past:present-future. This analysis of the metonymic-metaphorical design in ethnic texts presupposes that the receiver or audience perceives, at least subliminally, the metonymic-metaphoric construction, and thus interprets such texts as ethnic texts. In the last analysis, the question of whether texts are ethnic texts is dependent on contexts, the cultural content and point of view of the receiver as well as of the sender who imparts to the text, consciously or unconsciously, a general orientation.

2. Exemplification of metonymic metaphors in Slovene ethnic culture

In this discussion of the complex role of metonymic metaphors in ethnic texts, we see that images conveyed in cultural performances of all kinds, visual, verbal, etc., are frequently powerful renditions of cultural clashes as well as of new relations between cultures (or ethnic groups). We view such texts as dramas or performances in Turner's sense (cf. Turner 1984) and as forms of narration similar to those modelled by Lotman's semiotics of film (Lotman 1976), and as including human sign texts in the Peircean sense (cf. Portis Winner 1983, 1987a, 1987b).

Thus in the following two life histories of second generation Slovenes in Cleveland which I recorded, we portray ethnic human sign texts which demonstrate contrasting value systems and the manipulation of past:present-future. The individuals described are not past-oriented. They are Americans and share the present-future orientation of the prevalent American culture that surrounds them. However, in their recollections of life in peasant villages in Slovenia they recall a traditional life style that existed before World War II. Furthermore, in their preservation of Slovene culture in the New World they retain archaisms, traditional ways, that have often disappeared in the home villages decades ago. In addition, the meaning of traditional ways or objects is altered and transformed in the new society.¹

From the various data I have gathered in a Slovene village and among Slovenes in the United States, we can isolate a general characteristic of Slovene-American ethnic culture in Cleveland, that is the juxtaposition of two world views, that of the American perspective oriented towards the present and the future, and that of the past-orientation in the homeland village. This underlying implicit montage, a metonymic-metaphoric construction, receives

concrete expression in ethnic culture. We detect various themes creating semantic paradigms reflecting opposing values, traditional and modern. The two themes we wish to contrast here are the intersecting ones of poverty on the one hand and music, particularly its expression in song, on the other hand. The perspective of traditional poverty, which emphasizes the past, is opposed to the New World view that poverty is something one must believe one can overcome, and in so far as migrants have succeeded in realizing this goal they share the ideal American outlook. But in as far as they recall the village past, where poverty could not be overcome, these two views of poverty are opposed. The second theme, Slovene music and song, nostalgically recalls the past in the traditional village, all the more poignant, since much of this music is no longer part of the Slovene village today. This is opposed to the implementation of traditional music in the present which solidifies such ethnic groups as they live out the competitive struggle in the New World. Thus Slovene folk music, which gains new meanings in the ethnic culture, typically conjoins a past orientation of memories with the present-future orientation of American culture.

We turn now to our two life histories rendered in the first person, which inform us of the two related themes we are tracing, poverty and music.

- 2.1. *Maria* (a pseudonym), whose parents were born in Slovene villages, was born in 1915 in Pennsylvania and as a young woman she moved to Cleveland. She lives in the traditional Slovene section where we find neat wooden houses fronted by fenced gardens and flowers. The entire neighborhood is overlooked by the spires of the Slovene Catholic church, which is also the pattern found in Slovene villages, and is served by the Slovene shops strung along St. Clair Avenue.

Poverty:

"My father went to West Virginia as a lumberjack. But in 1908 he wanted to go home. He went back to his village, but he had to return again to the United States. In West Virginia he met my mother, a Slovene woman who came with a group of girls. They took in sixty boarders, and she and her friends worked as a group in shifts. They baked bread outdoors like in the old days and only slept four hours, but the men got fresh bread every day. My father and mother married and stayed in West Virginia until 1920. It was a rough life. The guys stayed in the woods the whole week. They came into town to drink, dance, play cards and then went back again to the forest. Women were slaves. When I was five years old and it was time for children to return to school, my mother and father returned to my father's village. We were ten children. My father was spoiled by the USA, so he spent all the money in taverns. He came back to his village with lots of money but he drank it all up. My mother did all the work.

"I was always sick as a child, and there was no money. My mother took a basket of potatoes to the doctor and the doctor examined me. He said there was too much work and not enough food. We had an average farm and we were very poor. Ninety per cent of the people in the village lived like that. Life in the village was hard work. At twelve years no one had ever bought me a dress. You had to break a hole through the ice to wash clothes until your fingers were frost bitten. I went to America when I was twenty-two. My mother cried when I left and said she hoped I would have a better life in America. I went to Johnston, Pennsylvania where my aunt signed up for me. It was just after the depression. In 1937, I went to Cleveland and worked in a tavern as waitress at \$8 a week, seven days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day and Friday to midnight. I went to night school and I learned English. When you come from Europe you're full of energy, and load hay like any guy. I had to work like a man.

"I quit working in the tavern when my child was born; then I worked for fourteen years in a factory when my child went to school. The factory made parts for rifles. I became an inspector. My husband also worked in the factory. We bought a two-family house and rented out one side. Then I gave up the factory and became a part time cook for weddings.

"I have returned to Slovenia four times since the war. But earlier I did not write. I was ashamed to admit it, but I did not have enough money to help my people earlier. To Slovenes, America is heaven, but for me this was not the case. I was too proud to admit that I was not doing well. So I was silent—I wrote no letters. I did not buy anything until the house was paid off. I am not like young people who spend on anything."

Music:

"I loved to sing and dance when I was a child. Sunday afternoons and Saturday evenings, these were the most beautiful part of growing up. I knew five hundred songs. Everyone joined in the singing. I played in operettas and sang all the time. At weddings we had an accordion player. The wedding took three days.

"In Cleveland, when I looked for a job, at the same time I looked for a group where I could sing. I was a good singer. I found a singing group in 1937. I needed the company.

"I returned to Slovenia three times with the Cleveland Slovene singing society *Zarja*. During the last war I worked for Slovenia as did all Slovenes abroad. I worked for the Red Cross and we gave concerts for the benefit of Yugoslavia.

"I speak Slovene all the time and my daughter speaks beautifully. I feel strongly about singing. We sing all the time because we want to and not for profit. They must know about our songs in Slovenia. They are forgetting their past. When we went back we took operas to Slovenia."

Comments: In this story, we see the typical traditional view of the poverty and frugality of the past opposed to the somewhat imperfect American present-future orientation. But the past is also nostalgically evoked by the memory of music and by the rebirth of village music in Cleveland. Furthermore, traditional music invests those individuals who express the ethnic culture, and who visit their traditional village, with a special power. As mediators, they can bridge the gaps between the past and the present for their compatriots by revitalizing the past. As Maria tells her story in a modern American, yet in a reminiscently Slovene, house, the montage-like setting is persistent, counterposing the two cultures—Slovene and American—and the two world views as expressed in conceptualizations of poverty and by emotive connotations of music.

- 2.2. *John*: We turn now to the life story of another second generation Slovene migrant, this time a man whom we give the pseudonym John. John was born in Pennsylvania. His parents had emigrated to the United States from Slovene villages.

Our discussions take place on John's front porch. His comments are broken by his singing, off and on. We learn that he is a member of *Zarja*. His wife serves us iced tea and comments that her husband tells good stories and loves to talk. Both the exterior and interior of the house are profuse with signs of the ethnic culture. There is a vegetable garden bordered by flowers, and the linden tree, symbolic to Slavic peoples. There is also a wooden bench in front of the house, just as one finds in Slovene villages. Inside the house there are two objects which our informant discusses during his comments on his life history. I interpret both as condensed

polysemic signs that participate in metonymic metaphors expressing the ethnic culture. One object is a lump of coal placed noticeably on a desk, to show, as John said, that he and his father were miners. John told us that he promised his father that the piece of coal would always be there. It signifies hard work and poverty in the New World, which apparently led to the relatively comfortable house and furnishings of people who have achieved some success.

The second object is a small-scale model of a *kozolec*, the traditional Slovene rack for drying hay. John remarks that he has made a full scale *kozolec* on his land. There is space, since he owns a double lot. John comments that he will extend the roof of the *kozolec* just as in Slovenia. He will make a place for a pitch fork and there will be room to pull in a wagon from the rain when people have a picnic lunch. The *kozolec* will be standing in the 'farm' of the Slovene Mutual Benefit Society (*Slovenska Narodna Podporna Jednota*) outside of Cleveland. The 'farm' is a place for celebrations, music, dance and feasts. It is overlooked by the complex sign, the *kozolec*.²

We now turn to the two intertwining themes we are tracing, poverty and music. John tells us the following:

Poverty:

"I was born in Pennsylvania. My father had come to the United States in 1905, at the age of eighteen. But when I was five years old, we went back to my father's village. There were six children. My mother's family were *bajtars* [peasants with little or no land]. They had one cow, one pig and were too poor for even a dog or cat. But they had a *kozolec*. My father also was a *bajtar*. He had only one or two cows, two pigs, and some chickens so that he could have eggs to bring to the store to exchange for oil and sugar. We had no horse. We had to carry wheat on our backs down into the valley to be milled. There were flowers in every window. They might not have had time to whitewash every house. Oh beautiful Slovenia!

"My father did not want to go to the United States and leave his singing and his church choir. In the evenings he wandered around the village and sang. They had started having mixed choruses in the church. The *župnik* [parish priest] promoted singing. But he objected to some songs as too peppy. I was an altar boy. I loved to sing. Everyone in Slovenia knew songs. I learned them from my mother.

"My father said he was going to save up some money so he went back in 1932 to Pennsylvania and worked in the mines. The Slovenes there were good and generous and he got lodging and food. We followed him in 1936 and I got a job in the mines. It was 384 feet down. My father spent all his life in the mines, and I went with him. I was his buddy.

"When I was a coal miner, I loaded nine tons a day. Now this is all mechanized. The ceiling was quite high, and I did not have to crawl. But I never could get used to mining."

Music and economic success in Cleveland:

"One day in 1941 in Pennsylvania, my brother and I heard Slovene songs from Cleveland. We got so homesick. We were thirsty for this stuff. It was the day of the solidarity parade in Pennsylvania and my father was going to the parade. My twin brother and I picked up and went to Cleveland. For three weeks we worked in the foundry. But it was too hot. It was at 42nd and St. Clair Avenue. Then I met the members of *Zarja* when I went to the Slovene Home [a building on St. Clair Avenue which is the principal meeting place of Cleveland Slovenes, and in which the editorial

offices of the Cleveland Slovene newspaper are located]. The boys were singing in the clubroom. My brother and I joined. We didn't lose any time.

"In 1949 I got a job in a trucking firm and I am still there, after twenty-five years. But it will close its doors next year. It was a pleasant place to work. Good union, good fringe benefits. Now it's day-to-day. For us guys eligible for pension it's not too bad, but it's not good for the ones who have only been there twenty years and no pension. "All these years I sang with *Zarja*. It's fortunate that they stand me. That was my only tranquilizer. I never need more than aspirin. But in Pennsylvania we never learned so much that we could put a concert on. I love to sing and to act in plays. We had plays in the Collingwood Workmen's Home. I used to belong to the Ivan Cankar dramatic club. But it is no more. Today we do not have a good director and people can't read and memorize Slovene. Last night we had a singing rehearsal. It was wonderful. It makes me feel good.

"I was fortunate I was born not too soon and not too late. My father worked so hard in the mines. When I came to Cleveland, the Slovene Home was already there and we were ready to sing and act in plays there.

"There is no bunch like *Zarja*. So funny, so cooperative and so kind. I'm going to put in a cement foundation for the *kozolec* on the SNPJ farm. Too bad my parents are not alive. They would get a kick out of the *kozolec*. It is just like the one near my mother's house."

Comments: In John's story, visual montages are strong. The lump of coal and the *kozolec* render the contrast of the pull of the traditional way of life and the impoverished past in Slovenia and in the mines of Pennsylvania, as opposed to the successful present in Cleveland as signified by the comfortable house on two lots which John owns. At the same time, traditional music, which is in many ways iconic of traditional family ties as opposed to the fluidity of modern America, acts to recall the past and strengthen the present. The Slovene singing society is a montage itself, since it reflects many moods and is contrasted to two cultures, the present American and the traditional Slovene. And in both cases it is an anachronism, representing, in American society, the Slovene past and, in contemporary Slovenia, the past and the future (something to be regained). The montages created by music, juxtaposed in this way to both societies, implement the aesthetic and emotive functions and, by virtue of the self-focussing quality of these images, as well as the nostalgia evoked by them, there follows reflection upon cultural meanings.

3. Conclusion

We could offer many illustrations from ethnic culture of the interesting phenomenon of powerful metonymic metaphors implementing the aesthetic and metaethnic functions. We could also recite other oral histories of Cleveland Slovenes that dramatize past:present-future contrasts. The immigrants' travels, back and forth, across the Atlantic Ocean several times in a life time to gain a livelihood, are themselves metaphors of ethnic patterns and ethnic values. We could trace other themes, such as family solidarity (which we have noted is metaphorically signified by music) as opposed to the American age-graded society. We have considered poverty and music, and underlying time orientations, since these themes partake in particularly significant and dynamic signs.

We return to Jakobson's principle that in poetry (and we expand this to encompass all aesthetic expression including those of everyday life) every metaphor becomes slightly metonymic and every metonymy becomes slightly metaphoric. I conclude that images of migrant Slovene ethnic culture in the United States may be seen as one concretization of this perception. Such images become further energized by their stimulation of reflexivity, both individual and cultural, posing the questions: what is my nature and what is the nature of my (ethnic) culture?

It is not our intention to suggest that other sign types, in addition to metonymic metaphors, are not powerful conveyers of the meanings of ethnic culture, and that other functions, in addition to the aesthetic, metatextual, and emotive are not equally important. Clearly, for example, the purely cognitive or referential function expressed in purely linear verbal sequences or iconic visual constructions or in other ways, has its own importance. As Jakobson showed, all the functions of the message or text are dynamically related, in hierarchical and ever-changing order.

However, here we have interested ourselves in the complexly interpenetrating aesthetic, metacultural or metaethnic and emotive elements in ethnic culture texts.

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1. For background material for these studies, see Portis Winner 1971, 1978a, 1978b.
2. As I have described elsewhere (1984), the traditional Slovene hay drying rack, the *kozolec*, has taken on a new significance among Slovenes in Cleveland. This essentially practical and utilitarian object has come, in Cleveland, to signify the homeland, the countryside and the good traditional way of life. When John had completed the true-to-life full-sized *kozolec*, it was loaded with hay and carried on a truck in a Fourth of July parade. In large letters, a sign underneath the *kozolec* bore the inscription, "Heartland of Slovenia". A moving hayrack, loaded with hay appearing on a main street in Cleveland, is a good example of an explicit montage which gives rise to the metaethnic, symbolic meaning of 'my homeland' as signified by the rural life in villages.

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POVZETEK

METONIMIČNA METAFORIKA IN ETNIČNOST: SLOVENCİ V CLEVELANDU

Kot se odraža v Peircovem gledanju na nasprotje 'jaz sam / drug', ko je 'jaz' označen kot subjekt in objekt hkrati, prav tako v množinski varianti 'mi / drugi', se estetsko sredstvo metonimične metafore kaže kot prenašalec estetskega in metakulturnega pomena v kulturnih tekstih etničnih skupin. Tako je tu prilagojena po Jakobsonu izražena rast diametralnega nasprotja med metajezikom in poezijo. Metanomična metafora je tu opazovana na osnovi dveh tipov povezav, implicitne in eksplicitne (v Lotmanovem smislu). Pomene metanomičnih metafor v besedilih etničnih skupin usmerja pogled na svet, vrednote in njihovo osnovno dojetje časa in prostora. Take metafore so v besedilih etničnih skupin prikazane v vseh tipih po Turnerju. Ponazoritev je zajeta iz kulture slovenske etnične skupine v Clevelandu.