

A Possible-Worlds Approach to the Pragmatic Analysis of Metaphysical Imaging across Genres and Art Forms

Abstract: This article reports on an enquiry into the ways through which Metaphysical discourse, by disrupting the conventional linguistic uses that normally ‘constrain’ imagination into socially-accepted routines, is actually capable of restoring language to its original and creative mental/physical entirety within counterfactual possible-worlds contexts. It will be suggested that the best way of triggering in readers an explorative process of ‘possible-worlds imaging’, is to propose a reading approach that is visual as well as kinaesthetic, which would also enable readers to have an authorial role in the interpretation of Metaphysical texts. The theoretical construct of Metaphysical discourse analysis outlined in this paper introduces some elements of novelty that can be summarized as follows: firstly, current research on Possible Worlds has always associated this distinctively truth-conditional construct with the traditional Logical Semantics of an abstract kind, despite the fact that modality is involved – which in itself should represent a challenge to the Objectivist truth/non-truth polarity. This paper, instead, advances a novel association between Cognitive-Experiential Linguistics and Possible-Worlds Semantics. Secondly, Possible-Worlds Semantics has conventionally been concerned almost exclusively with the epistemic dimension of Modal Logic, which represents the domain of mental speculation underlying the tradition of Metaphysical thought. On the contrary, the correlation advanced in this paper between Metaphysical discourse in the traditional philosophical argumentation and Metaphysical discourse expressed through other linguistic and non-linguistic genres, rediscovers also the deontic dimension of Possible-Worlds Logic. This bimodal quality of Metaphysical language is here claimed to be founded on novel ‘archetypal images’ resulting from the readers’ interpretation of Metaphysical texts. Indeed, such epistemic ‘images’ are here assumed to deontically elicit in readers’ minds subjective emotional and even ‘embodied’ reactions to the visual representations that they imaginatively achieve from the ‘deviating’ forms of Metaphysical texts. Thirdly, this paper will formulate a novel correlation between the Possible-Worlds construct in Modal Logic and Pragmatics on the grounds of newly defined ‘possible-worlds cooperative maxims’ of ‘experiential pliability’ and ‘cognitive suspension of disbelief’. It will be argued that these new pragmatic maxims proceed from the typical performative nature of Metaphysical discourse (which can be linguistic as well as visual), that ‘deontically’ induces ‘imaging readers’ to believe that the counterfactual contexts that it ‘epistemically’ represents in its composition can be conceivable and, thus, ready to be visually authenticated and even physically appropriated – as the case study reported in this paper will illustrate.

Keywords: *Metaphysical Discourse, Possible-World Logic, Metaphysical Imaging, embodiment processes, deontic and epistemic modalities, Objective Correlative*

1. The Bimodal Structure of Metaphysical Discourse

This article intends to demonstrate how the counterfactual semantic structure of a Metaphysical text of an argumentative type can influence its pragmatic interpretation within a possible-world context. This view will be seen to apply also to the structure of Metaphysical poetry and painting. It will be argued that a Metaphysical construction (either textual, or compositional) markedly deviating from the structure of accepted ‘factual’ logic, can prompt in receivers novel perceptions and interpretative responses involving not just their cognitive faculties, but also a whole process of emotional/physical embodiment.¹ Indeed, such an experiential embodiment and even physical enactment of this type of

¹ Maria G. Guido, *The Imaging Reader: Visualization and Embodiment of Metaphysical Discourse* (New

language formally and functionally diverging from the normal parameters of communication makes the interpretative process of a Metaphysical discourse resemble the process of poetry interpretation, insofar as it also involves an interaction between the reader's cognitive and physical background experience – or *body/thought schemata* –² and the atypical structure of the poetic text. The possible displacing effects that image-based, representational discourses may produce on readers' 'body/thought' schemata leads to the formulation of the first question justifying the present study:

- (1) If poetic discourse can be defined as 'representational' on the grounds that its context does not refer to real situations of the actual world, but it takes shape from the verbal pattern of the poem,³ is it possible to attribute the same definition to other discourse genres based on the representation of 'counterfactual events' – such as Metaphysics?

The focus on the discourse of Metaphysics is justified precisely by two interconnected features that can be identified in its structure:

- (a) the distinctively epistemic and doxastic nature of this discourse, almost completely built on an interplay of propositional attitudes (e.g., to believe, assume, deduce, etc.),⁴ making it resemble a constative act describing abstract speculations on possibilities, entailments, and beliefs;
- (b) the markedly 'imagistic', concrete language through which abstract concepts are made 'visible' and, thus, capable of exerting the deontic force of a performative act (of obligation, requirement, and even permission) on the reader who may feel compelled to accept such speculations.

This 'bimodal structure' of the Metaphysical discourse reveals its indeterminate nature insofar as it can be both epistemic and 'representational' in its abstract propositional content, and deontic and 'referential' in its illocutionary force aimed at influencing its empirical readers' interpretations. Moreover, the concrete images employed in the formal pattern of a Metaphysical discourse to convey abstract concepts and to induce specific thoughts and states of minds in readers, make it close to the language of Imagist poetry. Imagism in Modernist poetry advocates a poetic language made up of "hard, clear and precise images" resembling the "abstract and geometrical art ... the exact curve of the thing, the dry hardness of classicism", to the point of suggesting the "elimination of every word that did not contribute to the presentation".⁵ The aim is the creation of an Objective Correlative meant as a textual image described in these terms:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.⁶

York/Ottawa/Toronto: Legas Publishing, 2005).

² Maria G. Guido, *The Acting Reader: Schema/Text Interaction in the Dramatic Discourse of Poetry* (New York, Ottawa, Toronto: Legas Publishing, 1999).

³ Henry G. Widdowson, *Practical Stylistics: An Approach to Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1992), 32.

⁴ Herbert P. Grice, "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence Meaning, and Word Meaning", *Foundations of Language*, 4 (1968), 147-177.

⁵ David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature. Vol. IV: The Romantics to the Present Day* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), 1122-1123.

⁶ Thomas S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1920/1986).

The Objective Correlative is therefore a representational image created within the semantic structure of the text with the purpose of conveying a particular illocutionary force – i.e., the writer’s conditions of intentionality – aimed at producing a specific perlocutionary effect on readers, thus inducing in them a particular interpretation.⁷ In it, therefore, there is a co-existence of (a) epistemic and doxastic modalities in the semantic devising of a counterfactual image with no reference to real-life ‘objects, situations, or events’, and (b) a deontic modality in the pragmatic elicitation of a specific response from actual readers by means of such textual image. The parallel with the counterfactual images of Metaphysical discourse is evident. In this paper, however, it is argued that the processing of a textual image implies more than simply producing a stimulus (a ‘formula’, in Eliot’s words) for eliciting in readers a pre-determined response. A Metaphysical text, like an Imagist poem, can produce on a certain reader a particular effect that might be different from the one intended by the writer. This is due to the fact that readers and writers may possess quite different world-views – or *world schemata*⁸ – through which they normally interpret everything – the semantic textualization of counterfactual images included. Besides, there is a crucial difference between the type of effect produced by a poetic image, and the type of effect produced by an image within Metaphysical discourse. Poetry plays on the readers’ senses and imagination with its structure of sounds and images, thus inducing in them an all-involving, physical experience of *imagistic embodiment* of the poetic utterance, in many ways similar to the subjective interpretation of a dramatic discourse.⁹ The discourse of Metaphysics, instead, is here assumed to trigger in readers a process of *embodied imaging*, where the physical dimension of interpretation represents only a stage towards the development of the readers’ awareness of their speculative abilities of meaning-exploration within imaginative ‘possible worlds’.¹⁰

2. Possible Worlds in Metaphysical-text Analysis

The application of the Possible-Worlds construct in Modal Logic to the pragmatic analysis of Metaphysical discourse is therefore essential in this study.¹¹ Being intrinsically hypothetical, a metaphysical discourse is primarily concerned with mental projections of possible worlds that obviously exist only within an imaginary dimension, not in reality. For this reason, such a discourse is inevitably formulated into a modal language containing non-truth-functional modal operators and conditional sentences.¹² Moreover, its semantic structure is assumed to be built on a ‘visually-based system of transitivity’ which is meant to help the reader understand the epistemic stance reported in

⁷ Manfred Bierwisch, “Semantic Structure and Illocutionary Force”, in John R. Searle, Ferenc Kiefer and Manfred Bierwisch, eds., *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatic* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), 1-35.

⁸ David E. Rumelhart, “Schemata: The Building Blocks of Cognition”, in Rand J. Spiro, Bruce C. Bertram and William F. Brewer, eds., *Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension: Perspectives from Cognitive Psychology, Linguistics, Artificial Intelligence and Education* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1980), 33-58.

⁹ Guido, *The Acting Reader*.

¹⁰ Guido, *The Imaging Reader*.

¹¹ Sture Allén, ed., *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences: Proceedings of the Nobel Symposium 65* (New York/Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989); Barbara Hall-Partee, “Possible Worlds in Model-Theoretic Semantics: A Linguistic Perspective”, in Allén, ed., *Possible Worlds*, 93-123; Jaako Hintikka, “Individuals, Possible Worlds, and Epistemic Logic”, *Nous*, 1 (1967), 33-62; Jaako Hintikka, “Exploring Possible Worlds”, in Allén, ed., *Possible Worlds*, 52-81; David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Robert Stalnaker, “Possible Worlds and Situations”, *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 15 (1986), 109-123; Robert Stalnaker, “Semantics for Belief”, *Philosophical Topics*, XV (1987), 177-199; Robert Stalnaker, “Modality and Possible Worlds”, in Kim Jaegwon and Ernest Sosa, eds., *Blackwell Companion to Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 333-337; Robert Stalnaker, “On Considering a Possible World as Actual”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 65 (2001), 141-156.

¹² Robert Stalnaker, “Notes on Conditional Semantics”, in Yoram Moses, ed., *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on Theoretical Aspects of Reasoning about Knowledge* (San Matteo, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 1992), 316-327.

the text by *visualizing* virtual entities (what Eliot defines as “objects, situations, or events”) and hypothetical processes (e.g., material, mental, verbal actions) taking place within the representational ‘possible world’. Since these entities and processes often ‘semantically deviate’ from conventional entities and processes of the real world, then the reader is deontically prompted by the textual structure itself to undergo a first-person pragmatic *embodiment* of such virtual entities and hypothetical processes in order to make sense of them by means of his/her own ‘world schemata’. These two processes of ‘visualization’ and ‘embodiment’ of the metaphysical text may be said to be informed by the two primary metaphors representing the human initial conceptualization of experience and which Lakoff and Johnson define as ‘Seeing is Understanding’ (influencing epistemic visualization) and ‘Manipulating is Understanding’ (determining deontic embodiment).¹³ The discourse outcome of this visualization-and-embodiment experience is expected to be an exploration of a number of subjective, interpretative possibilities with reference to the counterfactual environment of the possible world. This, as discussed later in this paper, should produce in readers a displacing sensation of being within an unreal dimension of existence which is similar, in many ways, to the experience of interacting with the virtual environments conveyed by Modernist poetry and visual art. Such an experience may explain the cognitive processes by which *imaging readers* of Metaphysical texts¹⁴ seek coherence not simply on the referential, indexical level of the ordinary use of language in real situations, but also, and crucially, on the representational, iconic level of fictitious situations.¹⁵ This would induce a reader to bridge logical inconsistencies in the text by activating non-logical cognitive processes of inference involving imagination.¹⁶ The imaginative aspect of such interpretative processes raises a further question:

- (2) How far can Metaphysical discourse be considered a specialized language, rooted in specific situational contexts and, thus, ‘socialized’ in everyday communication? And how far, instead, can it be considered as the textualization of imaginative and conceptual abstractions?

Indeed, Metaphysics cannot be easily classified as a specialized disciplinary discourse.¹⁷ Conventionally, the language of disciplinary discourses is codified by the established textual norms sanctioned by actual communities of specialists to ensure felicitous interactions within their group on clear, shared and, above all, factual grounds.¹⁸ Therefore, if we grant Metaphysics the status of a

¹³ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

¹⁴ Guido, *The Imaging Reader*.

¹⁵ See Stalnaker, “Possible Worlds and Situation”.

¹⁶ Judea Pearl, “Causation, Action, and Counterfactuals”, in Alex Gammerman, ed., *Computational Learning and Probabilistic Reasoning* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995), 235-255.

¹⁷ Ken Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing* (London: Longman, 2000).

¹⁸ The ‘clear and shared factual grounds’ that constitute the rational structure of specialized disciplinary discourses are justified by the very function of such discourses that, exactly because of their specific theoretical foundations, are expected to meet the truth-conditions shared by a particular community of practice with reference to the actual world within which such a community has to operate. Even the specialized discourses of a scientific type, when they seem to advance hypotheses on possible extraordinary discoveries (e.g., the invisible subatomic particles in Particle Physics), they do so by grounding such hypotheses on exact experiments which are regarded as valid in that they are reproducible all the time with the same results, or on demonstrations based on statistical probabilities. It is here argued, instead, that differently from the specialized disciplinary discourses whose theoretical grounds need to justify their practical applications to domain-specific contexts of use in the actual world, and differently from the experimental scientific discourse that derives hypotheses from precise empirical data (which, eventually, can modify them as the experiments progress), metaphysical discourse is purely hypothesis-generated, without being justified by empirical data or by any reference to the real world. In fact, metaphysical theories do not need experimental evidence or statistical demonstrations insofar as they are only intuited, imagined with reference to counterfactual possible worlds. A similarity between metaphysical speculations and novel scientific discoveries can be found only in the discourse of scientific popularization, when ordinary people’s sense of wonder at the new scientific findings may

factual and referential disciplinary discourse, how can we account for utterances like, for instance, those found in the following extract from Descartes' text?¹⁹

From the metaphysical point of view, however, it is quite unintelligible that God should be anything but completely unalterable. It is irrelevant that the decrees could have been separated from God; indeed, this should not really be asserted. For although God is completely indifferent with respect to all things, he necessarily made the decrees he did, since he necessarily willed what was best, even though it was of his own will that he did what was best. We should not make a separation here between the necessity and the indifference that apply to God's decrees; although his actions were completely indifferent, they were also completely necessary. Then again, although we may conceive that the decrees could have been separated from God, this is merely a token procedure of our own reasoning: the distinction thus introduced between God himself and his decrees is a mental, not a real one. In reality the decrees could not have been separated from God: he is not prior to them or distinct from them, nor could he have existed without them.

(Descartes, from *Conversation with Burman*)

Though apparently structured according to the standards of an argumentative discourse,²⁰ this Metaphysical text is actually built on a counterfactual logic. More precisely, it is possible to observe in it the 'bimodal structure' at work, on the grounds of a visually-based system of transitivity. 'Bimodality' is here represented as being composed of two levels of modality, each characterized by two cognitive dimensions affecting the writer/reader communication.

The first component of bimodality is constituted by the *representational level of epistemic and doxastic modalities* which devise the expression of the writer's thoughts and beliefs. At this level, the text is built on a semantic pattern of propositional attitudes accounting for two world dimensions that are assumed to co-exist in both writer's and reader's minds:

- (a) The *indexical dimension of the actual world*, where the conventional sense of a concept – or 'primary intension' – is given by what the concept refers to in reality.²¹ This is the dimension by which human beings normally make sense of things and ideas, thus determining their truth-conditions. Both writer and readers, as human beings, are therefore assumed to share, implicitly, such truth-conditions.
- (b) The *iconic dimension of the possible world*, where the referent for a concept – or 'secondary intension' – may diverge from its conventional sense in the actual world.²² This means that truth-conditions are determined by the semantic value that a concept acquires within the alternative and textually-constructed counterfactual world.²³ Within this dimension, also 'non-normal concepts' (and even 'impossible concepts') may be explicitly assumed to be true by both writer and readers, provided that they activate in their minds counterfactual-logic procedures.²⁴

trigger in them metaphysical feelings of awe as they get the unsettling impression of facing an unknown and unfathomable world. And indeed, this displacing sensation at the cognitive and cultural challenges of novel scientific discoveries can be found, for instance, in John Donne's Metaphysical poetry of the 17th century – but also today, as in the case with the Higgs boson in Particle Physics popularly called "God's particle" – a definition that the scientist Higgs himself rejected as he considered it as emotionally misleading.

¹⁹ See John Cottingham, ed., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Volume 3, The Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1984).

²⁰ Ernest Lepore, *Meaning and Argument: An Introduction to Logic through Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

²¹ Joe Lau, "Pietroski on Possible Worlds Semantics for Believe Sentences", *Analysis*, 55 (1995), 295-298.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Harvard: Harvard U.P., 1973).

²⁴ Edward N. Zalta, "A Classically-Based Theory of Impossible Worlds", *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 38.4 (1997), 640-660.

The second component of bimodality is constituted by the *referential level of deontic modality* which determines the illocutionary force of the Metaphysical text. At this level, the abstract dimension of theoretical speculation is displaced into an actual communicative context where the writer tries to pragmatically convey his intentionality conditions to empirical readers who, however, may diverge from the expected interpretation. Also this process can be defined as ‘two-dimensional’ and described in this way:

- (c) The *dimension of text-production*, accounting for the writer’s creation of the accessibility conditions for his readers to transcend the referential dimension of the actual world and come to inhabit the modal logic of the counterfactual world that he has constructed in his text. This means that, although the writer (Descartes, in this case) represents his thoughts and beliefs through the epistemic structure of his text, his argumentative register has indeed the deontic value of a performative act, operating at the referential level of the actual world to induce empirical readers to share his thought.
- (d) The *dimension of discourse-interpretation*, accounting for the readers’ actual use of their interpretative strategies to make sense of the Metaphysical text, based on their own world schemata. This means that different readers might associate different secondary, and even primary intensions with a sentence in the text.²⁵ Readers, for instance, may decide to follow a two-dimensional logic as they make sense of its semantic structure, and try to interpret it as a consistent discourse. Yet, in doing so, they must soon realize that it is impossible to ignore the counterfactual language of a Metaphysical text, as it is mainly built on non-truth-functional modal operators instantiating inference patterns that are valid only by reference to a paraconsistent logic.²⁶

In the next section, this bimodal construct will be applied to the analysis of Descartes’ extract.

3. The Representation Level of Epistemic and Doxastic Modalities: An Analysis of Belief Reports

At the *representational level*, Descartes, the writer, has built his text on a series of propositional-attitude sentences, each representing a ‘belief report’ signalled by a modal operator – i.e., epistemic verbs and adverbs.²⁷ Throughout this text, belief reports are of two types:

- a. *Standard belief reports in possible-worlds semantics*, expressed by a *that*-clause whose semantic value is assumed to be identical to the intension of the embedded sentence, as in the following examples:
 - (a) It is quite unintelligible *that* God *should* be anything but completely unalterable.
 - (b) It is irrelevant *that* the decrees *could* have been separated from God.
- b. *Hidden indexical beliefs* expressed by a relation between a subject, a proposition, and a contextually-specified mode of presentation set within a specific possible world under which the subject believes that the proposition is true,²⁸ as in this example:

²⁵ Lau, “Pietroski on Possible Worlds Semantics for Believe Sentences”; Paul M. Pietroski, “Possible Worlds, Syntax, and Opacity”, *Analysis*, 53 (1993), 270-280.

²⁶ Zalta, “A Classically-Based Theory of Impossible Worlds”.

²⁷ Stephen Schiffer, “Belief Ascription”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 92 (1996), 102-107; Stalnaker, “Semantics for Belief”.

²⁸ Lau, “Pietroski on Possible-Worlds Semantic for Believe Sentences”.

(c) [God] *necessarily* made the decrees he did, since he *necessarily* willed what was best.

The two standard belief reports found in (a) and (b) are of an agentless indirect type, insofar as they are introduced by an impersonal clause with ‘it’ as a Subject placeholder. In both cases, the propositional attitudes are expressed by epistemic verbs (‘should’ and ‘could’) within the two *that*-clauses, rather than by a direct affirmation of belief within the main clause. Readers are thus assumed to derive the writer’s direct belief report by a process of semantic presupposition involving the explicit identification of the individual to whom belief is attributed.²⁹ In the following examples (aa) and (bb), this individual is identified as ‘Descartes the writer’, or as ‘the first-person pronoun *I*’, representing the Subject of the belief reports associated with the embedded sentences:

(aa) I believe [Descartes believes] *that* God is alterable.

(bb) I believe [Descartes believes] *that* the decrees can be separated from God.

The concepts expressed by the propositional attitudes in (a) and (b), therefore, are assumed to coincide with the secondary intensions of the corresponding embedded sentences. These embedded sentences, in their turn, have truth-conditions that are equivalent to the truth conditions of the embedded sentences in the corresponding semantic presuppositions (aa) and (bb). In (aa), the semantic presupposition has been deduced by a process of *entailment*, involving the concept of *necessity*. In (bb), instead, the semantic presupposition has been inferred by a process of *compatibility*, involving the concept of *possibility*. In both cases, however, readers need to account also for the primary intensions underlying embedded sentences. This means that they have to make reference to the indexical dimension of the real world if they want to determine the truth-conditions and the modal status of the *that*-clauses in the iconic ‘possible world’ represented within the Metaphysical text.

This indexical/iconic interaction between real and possible worlds seems useless, instead, as regards the case of the hidden indexical belief found in example (c). Sentence (c), in fact, is heavily context-dependent, which means that it relies neither on primary nor on secondary intensions for its belief attribution,³⁰ as its truth-conditions can be inferred from the representational context within which it is framed. The representation of the context in sentence (c) is prompted by the epistemic adverb ‘necessarily’, stating the modal conditions of entailment that are valid within that specific context.

In other words, this sentence (c)

(c) [God] *necessarily* made the decrees he did, since he *necessarily* willed what was best.

which may appear inconsistent in the actual-world dimension (mainly for the lack of a concrete indexical referent for the Agent ‘God’), can indeed be considered true in Descartes’ possible-world dimension of representation. In it, the given anthropomorphic properties of God are compatible with the properties of ‘making decrees’ and ‘willing what is best’. Within this counterfactual world, therefore, *de re* modal claims – such as the claim in sentence (c) – stating that something is *necessarily* or *possibly* something else, can be asserted without being ‘prefixed’ by expressions of ‘angle’, containing or implying the ‘according to’ operator.³¹ Divers defines such modal claims as ‘extensional’, which indicates that they define their truth-value at the possible-world level

²⁹ Stephen Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), 199-204.

³⁰ Lau, “Pietroski on Possible-Worlds Semantic for Believe Sentences”; Pietroski, “Possible Worlds, Syntax, and Opacity”.

³¹ John Divers, “A Genuine Realist Theory of Advanced Modalizing”, *Mind*, 108.430 (1999), 217-239.

independently from the truth-values at the actual-world level. This means that modal-logic processes, such as ‘entailment’ (claiming that a thing is ‘necessarily’ as it is) and ‘compatibility’ (claiming that a thing is ‘possibly’ as it is), are essential in the activation of a possible-world context. In this case, entailment creates a representational context within which the following semantic presupposition to sentence (c), inconceivable in the actual world, becomes conceivable as a logical deduction within Descartes’ possible world:

(cc) God *must* have made the decrees he did, since he *must* have willed what was best.

So far, analysis has regarded the first level of the bimodal structure of a Metaphysical text, concerned with the representation of the epistemic/doxastic modalities by which the writer structures his thoughts and beliefs. At this level, readers are assumed to be aware of the two-dimensional modal logic underlying their process of meaning inference. In other words, they are expected to make sense of those semantic patterns of the Metaphysical text, that they perceive as non-coherent according to the actual-world logic, by projecting them on to the possible-world dimension of an alternative, paraconsistent logic that would make them meaningful. Descartes’ textualization of his Modal Metaphysics³² is a clear example of how Metaphysical discourse by its very nature starts from reality to extrapolate beyond it, thus transcending any accepted notion of time, space, and social contexts.³³ The purpose is to induce readers into an exploration of alternative semantic possibilities underlying conventional meanings. This interpretative procedure is totally different from the procedure that readers are conventionally required to activate in their minds as they interpret other generic types of disciplinary discourses. These, in fact, are embedded in shared social/professional contexts sanctioning their interpretation as an expression of meanings, cultural values and ways of thinking of particular social or professional groups, or communities of practice, in particular historical periods.³⁴ Hence the raising of another question:

(3) On the basis of such a lack of generic classification, then, is it possible to apply a Functional-Grammar approach³⁵ to the analysis of Metaphysical discourse, or does such discourse-type transcend any ‘social semiotic’ pattern of investigation?

The claim in this paper is that a Functional-Grammar approach is excellent for the analysis of the textual patterns of a Metaphysical discourse, yet it requires the integration of a Cognitive-Grammar model when applied to the investigation of the readers’ responses to such textual patterns.³⁶ A Cognitive-Grammar perspective, in fact, may account for the empirical reader’s processes of inference, explication,³⁷ meaning construction (e.g., by creative *visualization* and *embodiment*) and, finally, interpretative *imaging*.

The need for a ‘Cognitive-Functional’ model becomes evident in the analysis of a Metaphysical text at the second level of bimodality, concerned with the *indexical reference* to a pragmatic

³² See Alan Nelson and David Cuning, “Cognition and Modality in Descartes”, *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 64 (1999), 137-153.

³³ See Stephen Laurence and Cynthia MacDonald, eds., *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

³⁴ Hyland, *Disciplinary Discourses*.

³⁵ Mark A. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 1994).

³⁶ Ronald W. Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Vol. II, Descriptive Application* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1991), viii.

³⁷ Robyn Carston, “Implicature, Explication, and Truth-Theoretic Semantics”, in Ruth M. Kempson, ed., *Mental Representations: The Interface between Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988), 155-181; Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 182.

communicative context within which writer and readers interact. At this level, the writer employs the functions of the language to convey his intentionality to readers, and readers are engaged in a cognitive interaction with the transitivity system, organizing the semantic patterns of the text, in order to achieve from it their own subjective interpretations. The pragmatic dynamics of this second level of bimodal analysis will be described in the following section.

4. The Referential Level of Deontic Modality: A Pragmatic Analysis of a Visually-based System of Transitivity

At the *referential level* of bimodality, it is possible to observe how Descartes, the writer, has constructed his Metaphysical text as an exchange on two pragmatic planes:

- a. an *overt illocutionary plane* through which he intends to convey information about his beliefs and ideas, and
- b. a *covert perlocutionary plane* through which he surreptitiously tries to offer readers his metaphysical view and expects them to accept it.

In other words, the dimension of text-production in Descartes' text simultaneously accounts for the two types of speech roles defined by Halliday as *proposition* (a statement of information about belief, knowledge, etc.) and *proposal* (offers, or commands) in relation to the Interpersonal Metafunction of language underlying communication.³⁸

On the plane of *proposition*, the writer's stance is *epistemic* and *doxastic*. Descartes overtly makes his illocutionary point by means of constative utterances expounding his metaphysical thoughts and beliefs through a projection of 'non-logical images' conveyed by an interplay of mental and material processes. The most evident example of non-logical image is the central anthropomorphic figure of God, representing both the psychological subject (the Theme) and the logical subject (the Agent) of this text,³⁹ though they do not always coincide with the grammatical subjects of the clauses constituting it. Often, in fact, the image of God loses its thematic position as the psychological subject within a sentence to be postponed into a *that*-clause with 'it' as a subject-placeholder, thus reducing its concept to an experientially-distanced, rhematic 'fact'. The distancing of experience in metaphysical texts is not casual. In considering again the two examples (a) and (b):

- (a) *It is quite unintelligible that* God should be anything but completely unalterable.
- (b) *It is irrelevant that* the decrees could have been separated from God.

it is possible to notice that these two sentences are regarded in a Functional-Grammar perspective as 'fact reports',⁴⁰ although the facts reported here are of an abstract, mental kind. Actually, every 'fact' represented in a clause of mental process is not a factual event, but a 'metaphenomenon' – i.e., a mental reinterpretation of a factual event. This means that, within an interactive context, a 'fact' is linguistically created by the human 'participant' who 'thinks of it', 'conceives it' (the writer as a Senser, in this case) and, then, textualizes it 'as a projection' in embedded or hypotactic forms – typically, in the form of *that*-clauses with a declarative mood.⁴¹ Yet, in a Metaphysical text like the one under analysis, facts are not even mental reinterpretations of factual events, since they are purely possible-worlds projections of beliefs, to be rather classified as 'chances', 'possibilities', or even

³⁸ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

‘impossibilities’ wholly ‘imagined’ by the writer.⁴² It is therefore claimed that the Metaphysical writer’s process of ‘imagining facts’ can be described as a cognitive adaptation of shared ‘image schemata’ – by which the writer as a human being links perception to reason –to the abstract characteristics of the Metaphysical concepts s/he intends to convey through his/her text.⁴³ The result is a semantic structure of the text built on a ‘visually-based system of transitivity’ which does not correspond to the experiential system of transitivity normally applied to the everyday use of language. In Descartes’ text, the abstract and, indeed, ‘counterfactual’ concept of God is adapted to the conventional image-schema of a powerful male human being (a recurrent personified idea in the ‘Cartesian Theater’)⁴⁴ who performs the semantic roles of Actor and Senser in, respectively, the material and mental processes constituting the transitivity system of this text. Yet, even this conventional image cannot account for a shared visual representation of such a transcendental entity. Here, in fact, the transitivity system does not represent any truth-functional semantic pattern applicable to a real-world context, though it is logically and experientially organized by the Ideational Metafunction of language underlying actual communication.⁴⁵ However, this ‘visualization’ of a ‘counterfactual logic’ does fulfil a specific pragmatic function:⁴⁶ that of allowing the writer to grant readers’ accessibility to his non-consistent thought-development, thus permitting them to instantiate logically valid inference patterns by creating their own ‘visual images’. Yet, the ‘accessibility-by-visualization’ to the semantic structure of a metaphysical text does not automatically imply the readers’ achievement of an experiential proximity to the non-logical processes represented in it. In sentences (a) and (b) above, for instance, the pronoun ‘it’ employed as a subject placeholder emphasizes the experiential distance from the ‘metaphysical fact’ which is projected impersonally in a separate, hypotactic clause. This type of ‘fact’ projection has indeed an important function as an ‘objective modulation’ whereby the writer disclaims responsibility for his semantic abstraction.⁴⁷ Therefore, at the textual level of ‘clause as a message’, these projections of ‘possible-world facts’ through impersonal *that*-clauses are seen to be related to:

- a. *epistemic and doxastic propositions*, whose overt illocutionary point is to present objectively to readers a metaphysical view (a ‘vision’, indeed) of a ‘possible fact’ (i.e., an epistemic ‘noun of modality’ concerning hypothetical chances, possibilities, or impossibilities),⁴⁸ which may imply no personal involvement from the writer’s side, and may likewise require none from the readers’ side;
- b. a *deontic proposal*, whose covert perlocutionary point is to induce readers into concluding that what is reported is not just a ‘possible fact’, but it is rather a ‘need’ (i.e., a deontic ‘noun of modulation’ representing a category of ‘facts’ that requires the writer’s and readers’ commitment in believing it and, then, realizing it by subjective embodiment).⁴⁹

As a result, this double-message coming from the language of Descartes’ text can produce an ambiguous ‘distance-proximity effect’ on readers. On the one hand, they are overtly elicited to consider the writer’s discourse as a sheer exposition of abstract ideas (point a.) and, on the other,

⁴² Ibid., 267.

⁴³ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 440.

⁴⁴ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).

⁴⁵ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 106.

⁴⁶ See Lewis, *Counterfactuals*.

⁴⁷ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 269.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 268.

they are covertly induced to feel committed to the writer's stance (point b.). The application of b. to Descartes' text will represent the second 'plane of proposal' of the referential level of bimodality.

On the plane of *proposal*, therefore, the writer's stance is *deontic*. Descartes covertly makes his perlocutionary point by means of utterances whose pragmatic function is performative, as they are employed to bring readers to share his metaphysical thoughts and beliefs. This objective is pursued through a kind of argumentation textually built on an 'assert/deny' structure typical of the discourse of persuasion.⁵⁰ Thus, for instance, Descartes' extract starts with a circumstantial element of 'angle' characterizing the first clause ('From the metaphysical point of view')⁵¹ which is, unexpectedly, impersonal, as it does not specify whose speaker's 'angle' it reports. Therefore, by using this introductory stance as a disclaimer for the assertions that shall follow, the writer seems to keep his distance from his own metaphysical contention. His overt intention, in this case, may be to reassure readers that his discourse is objective, detached and, thus, unchallenging. On the other hand, however, the writer might use this discourse structure to convey his covert intention of not endorsing the truth-values of what he asserts. Consequently, as readers proceed in their examination of the clauses that come next, they may experience a sense of displacement at perceiving that their interpretative freedom is limited by the writer's introduction of non-logical semantic constraints aimed at systematically diverting their normal cognitive operations of information processing. This is demonstrated by the transitivity system underlying Descartes' text that is built on a 'hypothetical syllogism' based on contraposition and 'vacuous truth' – which are typical features of Possible-Worlds Semantics.⁵² The clauses in Descartes' text under analysis are ranked into two main counterfactual types, which are here defined as:

1. *Clauses of illogical compatibility*, semantically constructed as a mental projection of opposing polarities and, at the same time, epistemically modalized within a conditional logic. Furthermore, they are structured impersonally, with the pronoun 'it' as a grammatical subject in the thematic position, and the logical subject as the Rheme.
2. *Clauses of illogical contingency*, semantically constructed as hypotactic expansions 'by concession' and, at the same time, interconnected by means of relational processes of an intensive, attributive type equating two wholly contradictory concepts.

Examples (a) and (b) can be therefore regarded as instances of Type 1 (*clauses of illogical compatibility*):

- (a) it is quite unintelligible that God should be anything but completely unalterable.
- (b) It is irrelevant that the decrees could have been separated from God; indeed, this should not really be asserted.

In sentence (a), at first readers may feel displaced by the self-contradicting association in the thematic clause between the mood adjunct of degree 'quite',⁵³ signalling positive polarity, and the denying prefix '-un' in 'unintelligible' signalling negative polarity. Then, in the ensuing *that*-clause, readers experience again the same displacement, projected this time as a modalized extension (introduced by the variation-marker 'but') of the previous incompatible polarities. Moreover, the modal operator 'should', signalling a median degree of 'probability', modalizes also the intensional relationship between 'God' (the logical subject) and the contradictory polarities characterizing him.

⁵⁰ Michael Billig, *Arguing and Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996).

⁵¹ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 158.

⁵² Lewis, *Counterfactuals*.

⁵³ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 83.

Also this time, the contradictory polarities are constituted by another mood adjunct of degree, ‘completely’, signalling positive polarity and, again, the denying prefix ‘-un’ in ‘unalterable’ signalling negative polarity. Since the beginning of this extract, therefore, the image of God comes out blurred by what readers may perceive as an illogical compatibility of opposites, which makes the cognitive processing of the sentence very difficult, but also conceptually and ‘visually’ challenging.

The same degree of difficulty in meaning inference may be faced by readers in sentence (b). Here, a semantic notion of negation is introduced in the dominant impersonal clause – ‘It is irrelevant’ – which confers the value of ‘possibility’ to the ensuing projected *that*-clause represented by an ‘impossibility’-type of conditional sentence (“that the decrees *could have been separated* from God”). The agentless passive voice used in the *that*-clause makes it difficult for readers to visualize the possible actors of this ‘separation’ process. Moreover, the readers’ cognitive difficulty in immediately achieving a semantic presupposition from the ‘possible-impossible’ concept conveyed by the initiating clauses is further heightened by the clarification conveyed by the continuing clause. This is characterized by two mood adjuncts of intensity: ‘indeed’, in a thematic position stressing an interpersonal stance, and ‘really’, following the modal negation ‘should not’, stressing an experiential stance. Moreover, the modal operator ‘should not’, in “this should not really be asserted”, has an ambiguous value: it could denote epistemic possibility, but also deontic recommendation – which represent two quite different signals sent to the readers as they are engaged in interpretation. This means that readers need to resort to a subjective process of ‘explicature’⁵⁴ to achieve a logical interpretation from what they assume to be the modality (epistemic or deontic) of the communicative context encoded by the writer in his text.

The following sentences from Descartes’ text, on the other hand, represent examples of ‘type 2’ counterfactual clauses (i.e., *clauses of illogical contingency*):

- (c) For although God is completely indifferent with respect to all things, he necessarily made the decrees he did, since he necessarily willed what was best, even though it was of his own will that he did what was best.
- (d) We should not make a separation here between the necessity and the indifference that apply to God’s decrees; although his actions were completely indifferent, they were also completely necessary.
- (e) Although we may conceive that the decrees could have been separated from God, this is merely a token of our own reasoning.

In all these three complex sentences there is a circumstantial element of *contingency* marked by the concessive expressions ‘though’ and ‘although’,⁵⁵ which normally enhance a causal-conditional logical-semantic relation among the clauses.⁵⁶ Yet, in this Metaphysical text, logical-semantic relations do not follow ‘normal’ cognitive routes – in fact, they are patterned according to what Lewis defines as a ‘paraconsistent hypothetical syllogism’.⁵⁷ Thus, for example, the concessive clause in (c) introduces a relational process of an intensive type, where the intension is signalled by a high degree of attribution, conveyed by the positive-polarity adverb ‘completely’, which ascribes the attribute ‘indifferent’ to its Carrier – i.e., the personified entity of ‘God’. Yet, the sense of passivity conveyed by the attribute ‘indifferent’ is immediately denied by the obligation-adjunct of modality represented by the adverb ‘necessarily’. This adverb is iterated twice in this sentence to stress the contradiction with a different entity of ‘God’ as an Agent, this time, whose material processes (“he necessarily made the decrees”) and mental processes (“he necessarily willed what

⁵⁴ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 182-183.

⁵⁵ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Counterfactuals*.

was best”) are believed to have a high value of certainty. Again, the image of God is characterized by opposite notions of ‘passivity’ and ‘dynamism’, which make its visual processing quite challenging. The final concessive embedded clause of this complex sentence introduces another impersonal disclaimer which, however, does not seem to enhance the confused notion of God as a simultaneously passive/active entity.

In sentence (d), nevertheless, the writer abandons the impersonal stance and tries to involve readers directly in his paraconsistent thought-processes. This is signalled by the first-person pronoun ‘we’, associated with the deontic operator ‘should’ denoting an expected response of inclination. The concessive enhancement by means of the causal-conditional element ‘though’ reiterates the same non-logical correlation between the opposite concepts of ‘necessity’ and ‘indifference’ attributed to God, only that this time it is directly expressed through a relational process of an intensive type. Here, the intension is represented by the relation between God’s ‘actions’ and the opposite attributes ‘indifferent’ and ‘necessary’, emphasized – as in sentence (c) – by the polarity-adverb ‘completely’ (“although his actions were *completely* indifferent, they were also *completely* necessary”).

Sentence (e) contains another concessive clause introduced by ‘though’, where the writer tries to involve readers on an epistemic level, this time. This is represented by the expression of possibility “we *may* conceive”, suggesting in readers a potential mental process which is, however, soon denied by the projection of an ‘impossibility’-type of conditional sentence by means of a *that*-clause (“that the decrees *could have been separated* from God”), and minimized by the intensity-adjunct of mood ‘merely’.⁵⁸

So far, analysis has regarded the possible plan of propositional attitudes and illocutionary/perlocutionary points intended by Descartes as the writer of this text. Obviously, the writer’s intentionality has been achieved from the text by a process of subjective interpretation. Yet Descartes’ notion of the centrality of reason to determine the truth-values of the real world, in total detachment from the ‘misleading’ bodily experience, can be inferred from the whole macro-text of his works.⁵⁹ This notion, indeed, may explain the lack of actual guidance in Descartes’ text for readers to ‘visualize’ the abstract and contradictory entities of ‘God’ and his ‘decrees’. The vague conventional image of the anthropomorphic God does not seem to be of any effective help. Hence, a further question:

- (4) What are the possible perlocutionary effects that this Metaphysical text may induce in empirical readers?

The reply may be that precisely this absence of clear visual input from the text may produce a truly creative interpretative outcome. The tenet is: since readers are deliberately denied any ‘model-visualization’ of God, and since even the conventional image of this entity appears inconsistent with the representation of processes and attributive intensions ascribed to it in the text, then, paradoxically, readers may feel free to represent God according to their own *imaging* parameters. This means that readers may allow their ‘image-schema archetypes’ to pragmatically interact with the deviating possible-worlds semantic structure of the text. In this way, the transitivity system would acquire a subjective ‘kinesthetic’ dimension, exclusively taking place within each *imaging reader*’s mind.⁶⁰ This leads to the formulation of the last question:

- (5) What is actually meant by ‘imaging’ in this interpretative context?

⁵⁸ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 83.

⁵⁹ See René Descartes, *Correspondance avec Arnauld et Morus*, ed. by Genevieve Lewis (Paris: Vrin, 1953).

⁶⁰ Guido, *The Imaging Reader*.

By the term *imaging* it is here meant that process by which empirical readers of Metaphysical texts resort to their archetypal practice of developing embodied image schemata in order to make sense of their experience,⁶¹ as it will be illustrated in the following section.

5. Metaphysical Imaging: The Rationale

The experiential dimensions of conceptual archetypes was investigated by a number of Experiential-Cognitive linguists⁶² who have revealed how such archetypes reflect the explorative roles that primitive human beings originally experienced as “sentient creatures and manipulators of physical objects”⁶³ within contexts of the world that were totally novel to them. This early exploration of meanings was based on the testing of hypotheses that, once verified, were accepted as truths and “appropriated as the prototypes of basic linguistic categories (e.g. agent, patient, and experiencer for subject, direct object, and indirect object, respectively)”⁶⁴. Such primary ‘physical’ mode of meaning exploration and categorization seems to be definitively lost in today’s experience of interaction with the world, as it is reflected in contemporary Objectivist views of Metaphysics, Semantics, and Cognition, regarding ‘role archetypes’ simply as abstract, disembodied, and decontextualized categories.⁶⁵

The research illustrated in this paper, instead, has been grounded on the tenet that, in the interpretation of a Metaphysical text, the reader’s cognitive processes cannot follow a common, truth-functional logical development insofar as Metaphysical language is essentially divergent from any conventional social-semiotic forms and functions regulating the use of most ordinary as well as disciplinary discourses. This justifies the claim for the reader’s rediscovery of the primary explorative experience of embodying ‘potential role archetypes’.⁶⁶ This rediscovery of the early experiential procedures of meaning conception involves a quest into the semantic possibilities, necessities, consistencies, entailments and, ultimately, impossibilities that lie unrealized at the root of human experience. The implication of such a quest, therefore, is that Metaphysics requires from readers a readiness to transcend the everyday experience of reality – and its conventional interpretations – by displacing it into the modal logic of different possible worlds evoked by the very semantic structure of a Metaphysical text. The possible worlds represented in Metaphysical texts provide alternative models of contexts – and objects in those contexts – which would count modal statements in the text as true if they meet certain relevant conditions within the contexts of those possible worlds, allowing an experiential exploration of the very ‘imaginative’ roots of being – an exploration that is triggered by the writer’s ‘logically-deviating’ and ‘imagistic’ textualization of his/her Metaphysical discourse.

The reader’s awareness of such characteristics of Metaphysical discourse is here assumed to trigger a similar ‘sense of estrangement’ presumably felt by early human beings towards the novel objects and situations of the real world. Research evidence shows that this initial feeling of

⁶¹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

⁶² Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*; Leonard Talmy, “How Language Structures Space”, in Herbert L. Pick and Linda P. Acredolo, eds., *Spatial Orientation: Theory, Research, and Application* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 225-282; Leonard Talmy, “Force Dynamics in Language and Cognition”, *Cognitive Science*, 2 (1988), 49-100.

⁶³ Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, 285.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 552.

⁶⁵ See Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, ix-xvi; Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, 157-195.

⁶⁶ See Paul Kugler, *The Alchemy of Discourse: An Archetypal Approach to Language* (Lewisburg: Bucknell U.P., 1982); Eve E. Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990).

defamiliarization prompted in our ancestors an all-involving, primary-logic experience of exploration into modal phenomena,⁶⁷ which enabled them to develop the embodied archetypal images (or ‘image schemata’) at the basis of the human conceptualization of the world.⁶⁸ By analogy, it is here suggested that the same sense of estrangement is initially experienced also by an ‘imaging reader’ towards the possible worlds represented in a Metaphysical text, within which s/he attempts to visually re-explore, pragmatically re-embody and, lastly, cognitively re-semanticize concepts, objects, contexts and situations that s/he perceives as deviating from similar concepts, contexts, and situations of the real world.⁶⁹ In other words, this estrangement is the result of a schema/text interaction which induces readers to realize that the images that they derive from the Metaphysical text are semantically and pragmatically ‘divergent’ from their everyday schematic experience of language. The experience of displacement produced by such a realization is at the basis of the readers’ discovery of novel image archetypes that normally are not employed to make sense of everyday experience.

It seems necessary, at this point, to specify what constitutes, in a Metaphysical text, a ‘divergent formal structure’ that (a) impedes readers to process its language by normally resorting to their world-schemata, and (b) prompts them to develop novel ‘image archetypes’ in order to infer a logical sense from the text. The hypothesis suggested in this paper is that a Metaphysical text has to be identified with a particular formal structure characterized by an ‘illogical schematic distance’ between two concepts. The implication is that one concept should be entirely alien to the other – because they are normally stored under two different semantic fields within the reader’s real-world schemata – but, then, they are unexpectedly brought together within the same ‘possible-world’ context represented through the language of the Metaphysical text. Such a distance is explicitly designed by the writer with the purpose of compelling the reader’s imagination to establish a coherent relationship between the two discrepant concepts inducing in him/her a fresh sensitivity for possible alternative perceptions of the world. The interpretative reaction of the ‘imaging reader’ to the ‘illogical schematic distance’ between concepts in the Metaphysical text is here assumed to be the cause of their quest back to the roots of human cognition, in search for remote ‘image archetypes’ which could suggest novel meaning-associations never experienced in everyday life. This quest, in fact, should clarify the nature of Metaphysical discourse as a prototypical use of language, allowing simultaneous cognitive ‘epistemic’ representations of thoughts, and communicative ‘deontic’ references to actions to be taken upon those thoughts. Such coincident experience of both modalities is assumed to be induced in readers by a visual conceptualization of logically-discrepant entities and processes of the possible world represented in the text, perceived by readers as if they were experienced afresh by the early human beings. The assumption is that in dealing with a possible world constructed within a Metaphysical text, readers allow their own conventionally-shared social-semiotic schemata (through which they make sense of the actual world) to interact with the paraconsistent deviations and non-logical images that they achieve from the text so as to project possible meanings within imaginary contexts in the attempt to make sense of the non-coherent textual patterns. The implication is that, if at the actual-world level the primary-intension relationship between two distant concepts – such as, for instance, ‘clock is cloth’ – is [\langle (a), True \rangle , \langle (b), False \rangle], at the counterfactual-world level, the secondary-intension relationship – meant as a function from

⁶⁷ William A. Croft, *Syntactic Categories and Grammatical Relations: The Cognitive Organization of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985).

⁶⁸ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987); Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*.

⁶⁹ Guido, *The Imaging Reader*.

worlds to referents – is [$\langle (a), \text{True} \rangle, \langle (b), \text{True} \rangle$].⁷⁰ This means that if a ‘clock’ can be only a ‘clock’ in the actual world (a), in a possible world (b) this concept picks out the referent ‘cloth’ as if it were actual. Obviously, the same type of illogical association can be attained with other types of concepts, such as, for example, the abstract concept of ‘God’ associated with the concrete concept of a ‘male human being’, seen in Descartes’ previously examined Metaphysical text. The new image created by such a unification of distant concepts is supposed to induce in readers opposite modal responses: on the one hand, it triggers new epistemic thought-processes and, on the other, its deontic force prompts fresh reactions and behaviours. In this sense, the effect of this new Metaphysical image can be equated to the earliest ‘bimodal’ impact of the entities and processes of the world on human beings – an impact at the basis of the creation of image archetypes. This image-based interpretative strategy, typically characterizing Metaphysical argumentation, is also shared by Metaphysical poetry and art. Indeed, the counterfactual intensional relation ‘clock is cloth’ has actually been employed by Dalí in his famous Surrealist paintings of clocks hanging out like cloths on dry tree-branches. Being ‘estranged’ in such a counterfactual context, the clock loses its real-world connotations and suddenly appears before the viewers’ eyes like the vision of some unknown object, thus triggering in their minds novel perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. Such simultaneous involvement of the three dimensions of mental processes – perception, affection, and cognition in the interpretation of visual art is particularly relevant in the process of Metaphysical-poetry reading.⁷¹ Also in this case, the poet employs a formal strategy consisting in a juxtaposition of two completely different conceptual images to stimulate in readers fresh sensibilities involving both reason and emotion. John Donne, for example, in his Metaphysical sonnet *The Sunne Rising*, adopts the same ‘clock-cloth’ intensional relationship explored above, and creates the metaphor “houres, dayes, moneths, which are *the rags of time*”.⁷² In traditional Metaphysical argumentation, this juxtaposition of opposite conceptual images comes to be foregrounded against the background of philosophical debate. So that, for instance, also Nietzsche in one of his Metaphysical arguments, introduces an adaptation of the same incongruent visual image to represent ‘time’ as an “enormous, rapid series of *shredded, melted moments* ... neutralizing every impression”.⁷³

In sum, by considering this parallelism between Metaphysical argumentation and Metaphysical poetry and art it is possible to conclude that the discourse of Metaphysics is not to be associated with any specific register – not even with a unique genre – as in the case, instead, with most disciplinary discourses. Indeed, differently from the socio-cultural contexts of the actual world, sanctioning possibilities and necessities into specific registers, the contexts of Metaphysical discourse not only deviate from ordinary modal phenomena, but even from the standardized registers and genres that provide a conventional and agreed expression to them. This can be explained by the fact that a metaphysical discourse does not refer to the dimension of everyday communication, but represents alternative dimensions of ‘visionary’ imagination re-inventing experience. Indeed, Metaphysical discourse transcends genres in the same way as it transcends actual-world logic. As a result, this type of discourse can be rendered into a multiplicity of genres, registers and visual images, with the purpose of inducing imaging readers to interpret it by undertaking their own experiential journeys into diverse and personalized possible worlds.⁷⁴ The only constant feature characterizing a Metaphysical discourse is the bringing together of the most distant concepts to create brand-new archetypal images invoking in readers fresh bimodal responses consisting in simultaneous epistemic conceptualizations and deontic reactions – like the original archetypal images at the foundations of

⁷⁰ See Lau, “Pietroski on Possible-Worlds Semantic for Believe Sentences”.

⁷¹ Halliday, *An Introduction*, 118.

⁷² John Donne, *The Collected Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Roy Booth (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994).

⁷³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Opere*, Volume VIII, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Milan: Adelphi, 1964).

⁷⁴ See Lubomír Doležel, “Possible Worlds and Literary Fiction”, in Allén, ed., *Possible Worlds*, 221-242.

human consciousness. ‘Bimodality’, in this sense, is assumed to be the textual basis of the ‘imagistic prompt’, allowing the expression of the readers’ diverse ‘metaphysical states of mind’ – as it will be illustrated in the following report of a case study.

6. Metaphysical Imaging: Principled Applications

The purpose of this section is to describe the various phases of the *imaging process*, starting from the structure of the Metaphysical text, which functions as a prompt to readers’ and viewers’ perception of its ‘deviant’ form, and developing into the pragmatic processes of ‘epistemic visualization’, ‘deontic embodiment’ and, finally, ‘body/thought imaging’.

Halliday’s metafunctions of language will be adopted as a general scheme to describe these phases,⁷⁵ which can be defined as:

1. The *Textual/Compositional Perception Phase*, to be related to Halliday’s Textual Metafunction. This first phase is concerned with the writer’s ‘unusual’ linguistic organization of the Metaphysical text aimed at ‘impeding’ the readers’ initial perception of its form so as to induce in them a sense of estrangement. This strategy applies to every Metaphysical genre and register, visual composition included.
2. The *Visualization Phase*, to be related to Halliday’s Ideational (logical/experiential) Metafunction. This second phase regards the activation of relevant image schemata already present in the readers’ minds, allowing them to interact with the deviating form of the text. The result is the reader’s production of ‘novel archetypal images’ enabling him/her to visualize the new epistemic domains s/he achieves from the text by projecting them on to alternative possible-worlds that the text itself evokes within his/her ‘mental spaces’.⁷⁶
3. The *Embodiment Phase*, to be related to Halliday’s Interpersonal Metafunction. This third phase is focused on the readers’ actualization of the previous possible-world representations into a referential space of pragmatic interaction with the text, where the text exerts its deontic force on readers. Readers may interpret this force differently, according to the different perlocutionary effects that this text produces on them. At this stage, readers are expected to activate two *pragmatic maxims of cooperation*, valid only within a possible-world environment, which are here defined as:
 - (a) The *maxim of experiential pliability*, requiring the readers’ experiential adaptation to the paraconsistent logic of the possible worlds usually prompted by the formal structure of the Metaphysical text, and
 - (b) The *maxim of cognitive suspension of disbelief*, requiring the readers’ detachment from real-world logic in order to activate strategies of embodiment of the counterfactual possible-world suggested by the Metaphysical text.
4. The *Imaging Phase*, which is inclusive of all the three metafunctions outlined above as it engages readers into the activation of ‘imaging processes’ through which they undertake pragmatic explorations of the Metaphysical text first by ‘appropriating’ the novel archetypal images achieved from the textual language and then by ‘incorporating’ them within their own experiential schemata. In doing so, ‘imaging readers’ achieve from the Metaphysical text their diverse discourse interpretations. This is the phase that will be explored in the following case-

⁷⁵ Halliday, *An Introduction*.

⁷⁶ See Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces*; Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, “Conceptual Integration in Counterfactuals”, in Jean-Pierre Koenig, ed., *Discourse and Cognition: Bridging the Gap* (Stanford: CSLI/Cambridge, 1998), 285-296.

study report.

The longitudinal case study introduced at this stage was developed with a group of Italian university students of English linguistics and literature who represented the sample of subjects for this enquiry and who were expected to develop an *imaging* ability for the interpretation and embodiment of the possible worlds introduced by a Metaphysical text. The case study started with the reading of T.S. Eliot's Metaphysical poem *The Waste Land*,⁷⁷ chosen for its typically Imagist structure and for its analogies with the visual composition of Metaphysical and Surrealist paintings. De Chirico, in his paintings, disrupts space and time categories (mainly under the inspiration of Freud's and Einstein's Relativist currents of thought which were highly influential in his – and Eliot's – times), by foregrounding, for instance, ancient Greek, classical forms against a background of contemporary geometrical figures. Such a space/time visual disruption was meant to induce in viewers a sense of out-of-time displacement of the foregrounded figures, which would allow viewers to rediscover conventional objects and forms under new, refreshing perspectives capable of prompting in them unexpected emotions and sensitivities, and revealing new, imaginary worlds. This is the same effect that was sought after also by Modernist musicians, such as Stravinsky who, in his symphonic work *Le Sacre du Printemps*, foregrounds the metallic, sharp noises of a chaotic and stressing contemporary metropolis – trumpet sounds similar to motor horns – against a background of rhythmical, drumming footsteps of ancient, barbarous hordes advancing in the steppe, conveying, by means of two dissimilar 'sound images', the same oppressing sensation of impending menace. A similar foreground/background interplay of incongruent images, brought together by textual coordination and juxtaposition, and triggering in readers a displacing sense of contradictory thoughts and sensations, can be found also in Metaphysical argumentation of a traditional type.

The aim of the case study, therefore, was precisely to elicit in the subjects an imaging process of visualization and embodiment of the images conveyed by a Metaphysical composition.

The first step of the study was meant to provide the case-study subjects, as 'imaging readers', with preliminary visual-art elicitation by introducing a Surrealist painting by Salvador Dalí entitled *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, where atmospheres and images are similar to those found in Eliot's Metaphysical poem *The Waste Land*.

⁷⁷ Thomas S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, with the addition of *Notes* from *The Criterion* and *The Dial* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922).

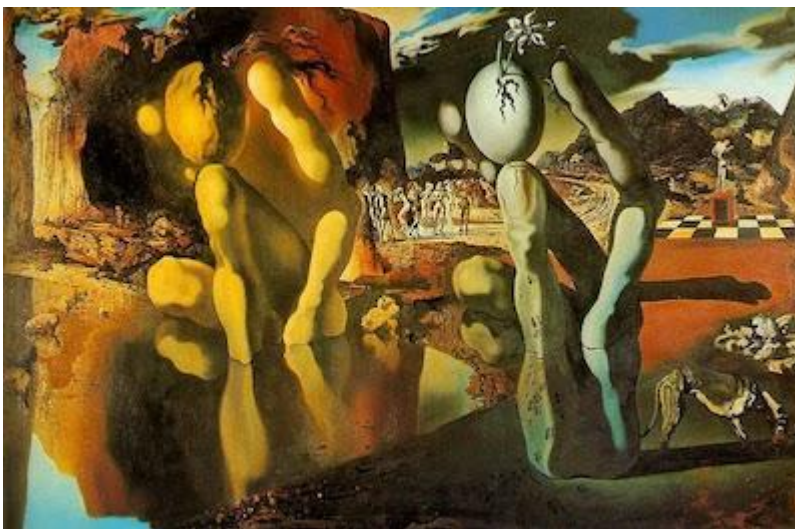


Fig. 1: Salvador Dalí, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, 1937, Tate Gallery, London. ©Tate

As in Eliot's poem, also in Dalí's painting there is a juxtaposition of disparate images, brought together within the same visual frame: i.e., from primordial images of vegetation myths to a modern chess-board; from images of bent human figures cut in dry stone to images of humans clustered together like Dante's representations of doomed people in Hell. Moreover, these images in Dalí's painting are organized into a pattern of foregrounded and backgrounded levels, so that images placed in the background are subordinated to foregrounded ones, exactly in the same formal way as Imagist poetic texts, like Eliot's poem, are organized. The case-study subjects, therefore, were initially asked to describe the images they perceived in Dalí's painting, specifying their foreground and background position in the picture, and attempting a coherent correlation among them. In this way, they were expected to develop imaging processes based on their emotional experience of the possible world represented in the work of art.

The following 'Protocol 1' reproduces the transcription of a 'think-aloud recording' by a subject as he tries to find a coherent correlation among the images in this painting:⁷⁸

Protocol 1:

Subject's recording (dots correspond to pauses in speech, due to thinking or dictionary checking):

"There is a human body made of rocks in the foreground.... He is bent on himself ... he is coming out of water.... There are other people in the background, they are many ... they make desperate gestures, one puts her hands in her hair, another raises his arms to the sky.... In the foreground there is another strange image, a ... huge hand made of rocks ... resembling the image of the rocky man, ... keeping a stone egg from which a plant comes out. In the background there is a ... chess-board... and also a rocky, gray mountain, ... and a gray, menacing sky".

After becoming aware of the structure of the painting and of the emotions that its very form prompted in them, subjects were introduced to the second step of this case study as they were encouraged to turn their interpretation of the work of visual art into another Metaphysical genre – a poem, this time, that they were asked to create by grounding it on their impressions of Dalí's painting.

⁷⁸ Karl A. Ericsson and Herbert A. Simon, *Protocol Analysis: Verbal Reports as Data* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1984).

The objective was to make them aware of the aesthetic interpretative choices based on their judgements of meaning-relevance. In this case, the bimodal quality of the Metaphysical discourse is kept latent in the representation of the possible worlds, here described as if they were ‘real’ through the use of the ‘factual’ present tense and simple aspect. This is the Metaphysical poem created by the same subject who produced ‘Protocol 1’:

Creative Text 1: Metaphysical poem

A Rocky Being painfully comes to life
Bent on himself, out of the cold, still lake,
And behind him, cut by an inner knife,
Crowds in despair wish that their lives could end.
But before them, huge like a mountain, raise
The Fingerstones holding the Endurance Egg,
From which a Flower sprouts its hoping face
Ready to play on the chess-board of Time.

This poem clearly shows the capacity of this subject to create metaphysical links among images by using formal devices of coordination (‘And’), juxtaposition (‘But’), subordination (‘From which’), and even ‘poetic’ lexical condensation (‘Fingerstones’) and illogical schematic distance between two concepts (‘Endurance Egg’). In doing so, this subject also demonstrates his ability to establish relevant foreground/background relationships among the images that he subjectively achieved from Dalí’s painting.

As a third step of this case study, subjects were then required to explore another Metaphysical genre – namely, they were asked to write a brief Metaphysical essay providing argumentative support to the meaning that they attributed to the Metaphysical poem they creatively derived from their previous description of Dalí’s painting. In this way, they were expected to conceptualize the concrete poetic images into an abstract philosophical thought, on the assumption that the unification of concrete images and abstract concepts is at the very source of Metaphysics.⁷⁹ What follows is the ‘philosophical essay’ provided by the same subject who developed the poem in ‘Creative Text 1’ from his own description of Dalí’s painting in ‘Protocol 1’. In his essay, the subject explains what he meant in his Metaphysical poem:

Creative Text 2: Metaphysical argumentative genre

“I want to talk about the painful transformation of the human soul into a hopelessly lifeless essence that, eventually, revives with almost imperceptible flickers of spiritual hope. The human soul is reduced to a cold, hardened being, arid like a dead stone, issued by an indifferent dried earth and by dull-still water. The human soul has become spiritually dumb in a world of despair, inhabited by crowds of doomed people frozen into the pains of their sins, unbearable, like cutting knives. The hardened human soul endured all this in silence, for a long time. Then, slowly, a faint hope for a possible re-birth of the spirit sprouts from the soul like a little plant”.

Through the writing of a Metaphysical essay like this, subjects were assumed to become aware of their ‘imaging processes’ informing the interpretation of a Metaphysical text and allowing them to create novel ‘archetypal images’ from the counterfactual representations of ‘possible worlds’.

In other words, in order to believe that an image, known to be false in the actual world, may nevertheless be true in a possible world, ‘imaging readers’ of Metaphysical texts need to activate in their minds imaging processes involving the pragmatic-cooperation principle previously formulated

⁷⁹ See Phyllis E. Whitin, “Exploring Visual Response to Literature”, *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30.1 (1996), 114-140.

into the maxims of ‘experiential pliability’ and ‘cognitive suspension of disbelief’. Thus, for instance, the imaging readers of the Metaphysical poem reported in ‘Creative text 1’ know by their own experience that there is no ‘Rocky Being coming to life’, or ‘Fingerstones holding the Endurance Egg’ in the actual world. However, their ability to conceive these fantastic creatures as ‘novel archetypal images’, and their cognitive pliancy enabling them to project the existence of such creatures on some alternative world, allow them to suspend their disbelief and actually conceive the existence of such creatures on an alternative ‘possible world’ which becomes ‘imaginatively real’. Accordingly, it is possible to postulate that although a proposition like ‘there is a Rocky Being coming to life’ is false in the actual world, it is true in a possible world (namely, the one that the writer has constructed in his Metaphysical text) and, therefore, it is possible. This is a typical ‘false syllogism’ characterizing the counterfactual modal nature of the Metaphysical discourse.

After turning their own Metaphysical poems inspired by Dalí’s painting into an essay conceptualizing the Metaphysical images that they had created for the poetic text, the subjects entered the ‘fourth step’ of the case study as they were asked to read a Metaphysical text of an argumentative type. The text in question was taken from Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* – a visionary argumentative passage on the subject of ‘metamorphosis’,⁸⁰ which characterizes the present case study since its beginning. This is an abridged version of the text (dots stand for omitted parts):

The Three Metamorphoses

Of three metamorphoses of the spirit do I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child....

Like the camel that, when laden, hastens into the desert, so speeds the spirit into its desert.... Here the spirit becomes a lion; he will seize his freedom and be master in his own wilderness.

Here he seeks his last master: for victory he will struggle with the great dragon.

“Thou-shalt,” is the great dragon called. But the spirit of the lion says, “I will” ... to create freedom for oneself, and give a sacred No even to duty....

But tell me, my brothers, ... why must the preying lion still become a child?

The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes.

Having read this philosophical text for the first time, subjects focused on the deviant formal construction of its argumentation by adapting Halliday’s functional categories to their analysis.⁸¹ In particular, they were required to reflect on the shift from abstract to concrete categories (“how the spirit becomes a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child”), as well as on the deontic modal verb phrase ‘Thou-shalt’ and on the ‘yes/no’ adverbs turned into nominalizations (“Thou-shalt is the great dragon called”; “sacred No” / “sacred Yes”). As a whole, this text represents a process by which inner, mental states or concepts come to be perceived by a Senser (the ‘speaking voice’ of the passage) as if they were outer, material actions or things. This is typical, for instance, of the argumentative style of the Metaphysical sermons produced at the beginning of the seventeenth century in England (cf. the sermons by John Donne and Lancelot Andrews), full of allegorical and hyperbolic figures, plays of words and false syllogisms. Indeed, this deviant textual construction can be considered as a ‘prompt to inner visualization and outer embodiment’ for the ‘imaging reader’. The evidence is provided by the protocols collected after the subjects’ reflection upon such peculiar argumentative structures of Nietzsche’s text. Having analyzed its functions, in the next fifth step of the case study, subjects were elicited to activate their *imaging* processes by focusing on how such

⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1883/1978).

⁸¹ Halliday, *An Introduction*.

deviant textual images contributed to the structuring of argumentation. In doing so, they were encouraged to ‘visualize’ and then to physically and emotionally ‘embody’ within a real space of enactment the shifting and contradictory images that they achieved from the text. In particular, they were elicited to:

- a. visualize in their minds the metamorphosis from one concrete thing to another; from one abstract thought to a concrete thing; from one concrete thing to an abstract concept;
- b. visualize the metamorphosis from material to mental processes and categories – and vice versa; from one grammatical category to another (e.g., from verb to noun; from noun to adjective, etc.);
- c. embody their ‘possible-worlds’ visualizations through ‘physical gestures’,⁸² subjectively expressing the essence of their own emotional and, indeed, ‘bodily’ reactions to the incongruous images of the Metaphysical text that they were exploring by physically and emotionally ‘improvising’ on it.

What follows is the protocol of a subject’s retrospective report on the activation of his own imaging processes involving the visualization and embodiment of Nietzsche’s passage:

Protocol 2:

The imaging reader’s visualization and embodiment of the textual images in the metaphysical argumentative text (physical-theatre improvisation workshop):

“I saw the spirit as a camel with a heavy burden, which wears out its body and soul. I started feeling this burden on my own shoulders, bending my knees. I started walking sad and humiliated towards the desert with the desert in my soul. There, I met the Dragon I once adored. THOU-SHALT was his name and his shape. He was raising in all his glory, but I didn’t believe in him any more, so I opposed to him my NO. As I shouted the sacred NO, I began to raise higher, higher, and my body was immediately filled with energy, and I soon became a fiery lion, defending my territory, my I-WILL. I put my hand-palms on the floor and started walking menacing, roaring NO louder and louder till the dragon disappeared. Then, my lion-walk slowly turned into a child’s crawl. All my energy shifted into my heart and I began to feel warm and happy. I started giggling YES, till the burden in my soul and my aggressive mood disappeared and I really felt a free, innocent and pure spirit”.

This ‘Protocol 2’ clearly illustrates this subject’s embodiment of the Metaphysical argumentation, showing how a spiritual metamorphosis can be pragmatically experienced as a physical metamorphosis in the Metaphysical context of a possible world through the subjective creation of novel mental and physical ‘archetypal images’. In this context, such fantastic metamorphoses are not only possible through the reader’s own body and in his ‘pictorial writing’, but they are also representative of the spiritual dimensions of his soul. Hence, such an experience accomplished the very dictate of T.S. Eliot’s Metaphysical poetry – namely, the creation of *objective correlatives*.⁸³

7. Conclusions: Objective Correlative Revisited

From the protocols examined so far it is possible to discern that the perception of poetic language is not to be merely reduced to its relevance to the readers’ ordinary background experience and knowledge (or ‘world schemata’). On the contrary, this case study has explored the process by which

⁸² Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953).

⁸³ Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*.

the form of Metaphysical language enhances the readers' displacement of their individual experience into an imaginative, 'artistic' dimension where the verbal, visual, and physical dimensions of the experience of the Metaphysical text come to be framed within possible-worlds time/space categories. Such an 'out-of-time artistic space' can be thus defined as a cognitive, virtual space that readers build in their own minds during the process of interpretative interaction between their own conventional world schemata and the deviating schematic forms of the Metaphysical text. Within this subjective artistic space, readers feel free from any social and behavioural constraint on their imagination. As a consequence, they feel encouraged to explore a wide range of imaginative associations between the objective images conveyed by the Metaphysical language and the subjective cognitive, affective and perceptive associations such images trigger in their minds.

It has been claimed in this paper that readers start achieving their own interpretative discourse from the Metaphysical text through an associative process which, in many ways, is analogous to the 'objective correlative' process described by Eliot (1920) – i.e., from an estranged and objective '*optic perception*' of the formal properties of the text to an emotionally-based '*imaging process*' of subjective interpretation. Yet, the process of Metaphysical discourse interpretation explored in this study can be said to take just its origin from Eliot's theory of the Objective Correlative. In fact, its rationale has been developed further, on the assumption that the objective correlative is not a textual stimulus, a 'formula' – in Eliot's terms – for eliciting in readers a pre-determined response (i.e., "that *particular* emotion") because readers' responses to Metaphysical language are subjective and multiple. Besides, the objective correlative is not even a textual device just limited to the creation of a 'mental artistic space' for readers to 'give vent' to their own imaginative associations regardless of textual and semantic constraints. Indeed, this paper has maintained that the process of Metaphysical discourse interpretation implies more than that. Readers look at the Metaphysical text and they are able to see what the text is epistemically referring to in the world. In this way, they make semantic sense of the textual structure of clauses and words. Apart from their inferring the 'referential sense' of the text, readers can also infer an 'illocutionary meaning' – that is, the deontic 'force' that particular text has got for them. This is the dimension of Eliot's notion of the Objective Correlative, meant as a textual image created to convey a 'particular' force which should correspond to the effect it produces on readers ("the formula of that *particular* emotion"). Clearly, Eliot's position does not correspond to truth, for a Metaphysical text like a poem can have, on a particular reader, a certain 'effect' that may be different from the one intended by the writer, since writer and readers possess different world schemata through which they interpret the formal organization of the typically counterfactual images represented in the text. Hence, the readers' reactions to an image in the text (or objective correlative) depend on what effect it might have on them. Therefore, the location of meaning is to be identified neither in the text nor in the author's schemata alone, but in the readers' subjective world schemata as they interact with the 'deviant' semantic form of the Metaphysical text. This paper has argued that the nature of Metaphysical cognition is not only linguistic, but also inherently 'visual' and 'bodily', as the five senses are the primary ways to experience the world, and, consequently, the essential ways to conceptualization. 'Imaging', thus, is meant as the reader's ability to experience Metaphysical discourse, which ultimately depends on an explicit influence of the peculiar linguistic form of the text on readers' subjective 'body/thought' schemata.

The ultimate claim of this paper is that 'imaging readers' should 'step out' from purely mentalistic interpretations of Metaphysical texts that transcend the body, and feel instead entitled to make Metaphysical language and its images their own (i.e. to appropriate them to their own schemata) by, at first, 'visualizing' them and, then, by even 'embodying' them within an artistic space that they should be able to actualize into a three-dimensional 'virtual-reality'. This is a 'possible-world reality' within which readers can 'physically' move freely as on a theatrical stage,

and upon which every word, image, and gesture may acquire the status of a ‘tangible’ work of Art.⁸⁴ Considering the artistic space as an actual stage, a three-dimensional space for the readers’ physical actualization of their own visual imagination, implies the possibility for imaging readers to ‘plunge’ – physically – into the imagery that they achieve from the Metaphysical text and, then, to explore its possible meanings thoroughly, through the sensorial emotions that such imagery triggers in both their bodies and their minds.

⁸⁴ See Guido, *The Acting Reader*.