The origin of the Metaphor Lab Amsterdam

The Metaphor Lab Amsterdam is the largest group of researchers in the world working on metaphor and other figures of speech. The lab has a coherent research program that comprises philosophical, theoretical, methodological, empirical, and applied research. There are currently some 20 on-going projects divided over five themes involving almost 20 researchers collaborating with each other. Our overall interest lies in answering the following question: When does metaphor work as a metaphor in which ways with which effects on which people?

How did all of this come about? The origin of the Metaphor Lab lies on a high, green meadow in the Italian Alps, where founding director Gerard Steen was camping with his family in the summer of 2009. It was just before the beginning of the last year of funding of two five-year research programs on metaphor in discourse, and the question began to pose itself: what next? The research programs set the pathway to launching

Metaphor Lab Winter School 2013

a new and independent metaphor group with their own line of research but in 2009 the Humanities Faculty at VU University Amsterdam was in dire straits. All new initiatives were applauded but had to be self-supporting. Was there a way in which we could continue the innovative research begun in a permanent and sustainable way?

Fortunately, in that summer of 2009 VU Amsterdam was in a stage of transition. It had just set up a dozen brand-new interfaculty research institutes and was busy transferring all research from the traditional faculties to these new interdisciplinary research centers. Steen's involvement as member of the Scientific Advisory Board of one of these, CAMeRA Center for Advanced Media Research Amsterdam, showed him how to design a mini-interdisciplinary research center as part of this undertaking. His ideas found support from the dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Douwe Yntema and the Head of Department of Language and Communication, Mike Hannay.

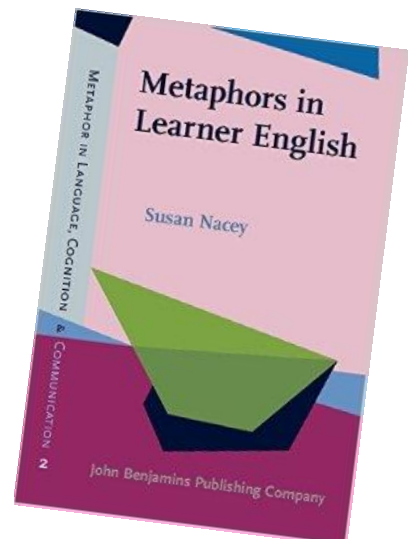## On 1 September 2010, the Metaphor Lab was launched.

By that time it involved five PhD projects that were getting finished in the two research programs on metaphor in discourse (Dorst, Herrmann, Kaal, Krennmayr, Pasma), a postdoc project in a newly acquired interuniversity program on visual metaphor (Šorm), and a postdoc project in the Marie Curie framework IEF on the relation between metaphor and genre (Sinding). An extramural PhD project on metaphor in primary education in Columbia (Pineda) was well under way and a new PhD project on metaphor in knowledge management was just getting started (Wittink). This was a substantial group with lots of shared interests and drive and we were all curious what the future was going to bring.

A lot has happened since.

In 2011, three PhD theses were successfully defended on metaphor in fiction, by Lettie Dorst, in newspapers, by Tina Krennmayr, and in Dutch, by Trijntje Pasma. 2011 also saw the launch of our VU Amsterdam Metaphor Corpus, the first and biggest hand-coded corpus annotated for metaphor by means of a reliable method of metaphor identification. In 2012, we ran our first Winter School in metaphor identification and analysis, attracting

over 50 PhD and young postdoc researchers from all over the world. This has turned into a tradition that was continued over the years with now four schools in Amsterdam. Special courses were also extorted in the form of special courses and workshops at universities in Sheffield (UK)Kiev (Ukraine), Perm (Russia), Guangzhou (China), Cagliari (Italy), Calabria (Italy), Belo Horizonte (Brazil), and Belgrade (Serbia). More PhD theses were defended in 2012 (Anna Kaal, on metaphor in conversation), 2013 (Berenike Herrmann, on metaphor in academic texts), and 2015 (Patricia Pineda, on metaphor in primary school education in Columbia). 2013 also saw the publication of the first two volumes in the John Benjamins MiLCC (Metaphor in Language, Cognition and Communication) book series: Dennis Tay, on metaphor in therapy, and Susan Nacey, on metaphors in learner English. Two new volumes came out in 2015 (Wan and Low on elicited metaphor analysis in educational discourse; Herrmann and Berber Sardinha on metaphor in specialist discourse) and two more are in production for 2016. In 2014, the visual metaphor program on the identification and processing on visual metaphors, between the universities of Tilburg, Nijmegen and VU Amsterdam was finished off with a workshop preparing for an edited book that has just been submitted for publication. We also launched the VisMetBaby, the first publicly available corpus of visual metaphor in cartoons, advertisements, public campaign posters, and so on.

In 2015, the Metaphor Lab moved across the city of Amsterdam to encompass both Amsterdam universities in the newly minted Metaphor Lab Amsterdam.

We set up a management team and re-wrote the research program now comprising five themes: deliberate metaphor, visual metaphor, variation in metaphor, figurative framing, and metaphor and argumentation. We also have a new International Advisory Board and are affiliated with three interdisciplinary research institutes: the Network

[Institute](#) at VU, and the [Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication](#) as well as the [Amsterdam Brain and Cognition center](#) at the University of Amsterdam.

Since the launch of the lab in 2010, we acquired funding for several new projects, expanding the scope of the program. In 2012, Gudrun Reijnierse started her NWO funded PhD project on the value of deliberate metaphor. In 2013 Christian Burgers received funding for a NWO Veni project on Figurative framing. In the framework of this project, additional funding was acquired for a related PhD project carried out by Amber Boeynaems.

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In 2014, Marianna Bolognesi's was awarded an ERC Marie Curie IFP grant for a project on the cognitive grounding on visual metaphor. And in the last month of 2015 Gerard Steen received an award of 750,000 euros for a new research program on resistance to metaphor (with three PhD and two postdoc positions), which brings together the disciplines of metaphor studies, argumentation analysis and discourse studies. Funding was also received from NWO for two visiting researchers, Isabel Negro from Spain in 2014 and Valentina Cuccio from Italy in 2015. Other researchers visiting the lab, from Morocco, Malaysia, Spain, Poland, Brasil, Turkey, China, and Germany, were sponsored by their own university or international funding. Collaboration with universities in Denmark and Germany led to co-supervision of PhD theses on metaphors for knowledge in knowledge intensive organizations (Linda Greve, University of Aarhus, defended on 5 February 2015) and deliberate metaphor in college lectures (Anke Beger, Flensburg University).

The work of the lab is drawing increasing attention.

The group's metaphor identification method has been cited 182 times. Chapters for handbooks have been invited for *The Bloomsbury Companion to Cognitive Linguistics* (2013), *The Cambridge Handbook of Stylistics* (2014), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics* (2015), and Springer's *Handbook of Linguistic Annotation*. Prizes for best papers at conferences were won by Lettie Dorst, Gudrun Reijnierse, Marianna Bolognesi and Amber

Metaphor workshop in Belgrade 2015

Boeynaems with Christian Burgers. Keynotes by members of the lab at international conferences now average over four per year. Invitations for responses and debates in journals were extended to Gerard Steen, the lab director, in *Metaphor and the Social World, Discourse Processes,* and *Journal of Pragmatics.* On Academia.edu, he has over 100,000 site visits and more than 2600 followers.