

Meaning in Organizational Communication

Why Metaphor Is the Cake, not the Icing

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The authors propose an alternative to the postmodern way of viewing metaphor primarily as an instrumental and functional rhetorical tool designed to influence members of an organization through ideological appeals, a view that depicts rhetoric as merely subjective and manipulable. Our alternative draws from the “aesthetic side of organizational life” and argues that communication exceeds the theoretical reach of the postmodern perspective, which requires a new conceptualization of metaphor as epistemic and capable of signaling meaning that is inseparable from its unique and discrete form.

Keywords: *metaphor; postmodernism; aesthetic*

Most scholars of organizational studies agree that managerial rhetoric plays an important role in organizational effectiveness. A substantial body of literature describes the power of metaphors and other figures of speech to influence behaviors, shape attitudes, and create positive or negative images about organizations (e.g., Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998; Grant & Oswick, 1996; Oswick, Putnam, & Keenoy, 2004), but there is no accepted understanding about the way metaphors work (Cazal & Inns, 1998; Cornelissen, 2005, 2006; Oswick & Jones, 2006). One perspective adopts a representational and positivist stance, which argues that the world exists objectively “out there” and that figurative language is a distraction from literal meaning (e.g., Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). Other scholars reject the objectivist “mythology” and insist that metaphors are a human capability to comprehend and shape experience “like seeing or touching or hearing,

with metaphors providing the only ways to perceive and experience much of the world” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 239). From this perspective, metaphors are seen as illustrative devices to aid our understanding of social and organizational processes (Goffman, 1959; Morgan, 1986) or as embedded within our everyday communication (Cunliffe, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Similar to the approach of Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003), we examine in greater depth the notion that metaphorical language is neither objective nor subjective in meaning but something categorically distinct from the division between the “self” and the “world.” That bifurcation poses the ontological dilemma that postmodernism resolves through a linguistic turn. Postmodernism, however, simply reproduces the dilemma by denying the objective meaning of language.

In our article, we propose that metaphor, presented as an aesthetic form, results in an active and unified apprehension of knowledge. Such knowledge is made up of more than facts and information; it is an affective state that simultaneously invokes cognition and produces a crucial sensory response. Thus, metaphor as an apprehension of knowledge induces a state of consciousness that produces a physical reaction that creates feeling. Metaphor translates an experienced reality into a perceptible object that has emotive import as well as discursive content, and neither quality is separable from the creative imagination and affective response that produced the object. Both the objectivity of physical phenomena and the subjectivity of human sentience are fused through an act of immanent apprehension. In short, metaphor has *meaning* that goes beyond, and is not reducible to, either rational discourse or emotive utterance.

The metaphorical use of language is essentially poetic in quality and has its roots in the nature of language itself (Langer, 1942). Metaphor drives creativity, leading to a communal recognition of the “way things are” in the world. Properly understood, then, metaphor can be a powerful tool for expressing a particular and unique kind of meaning that is essentially poetic in nature. In terms of theory, our conceptual framework goes beyond present notions about communication and organization and proposes an alternative mode of analyzing managerial rhetoric. That theory incorporates insights from emerging theories in physics. It is popularly articulated in such works as the film *What the Bleep Do We Know?* (Arntz, Chasse, & Vicente, 2004). Succinctly, the argument is that aside from infinitesimal pulsations of energy, no material world exists independent of the human mind. This starting point formed the groundwork for early analyses of language and metaphor, which date from the inception of linguistic positivism in the 1920s, and those early analyses remain the superior explanation of

how language *means*. We turn first to the shortcomings of the postmodern view currently in vogue in communication theory.

Metaphor and Organizations

Over the past several years, organization scholars have increasingly argued for a recasting of our images of organizations to adhere to a linguistic model in social sciences or language-based conceptualizations of organizations (Boje, 1995; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979; Putnam, 1999; Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). This progression toward conceptualization of organization grounded in discourse is consistent with changes occurring in organizations and with the challenges organizational researchers may face in the future (Putnam, 1999). In this section, we provide a brief summary of the literature dealing with the use of metaphor in organizational studies (for a more exhaustive review of metaphor, see the work of Putnam, 1999, and Putnam et al., 1996). Then, we examine the basis of these ideas and show how our approach goes beyond previous theoretical speculations on metaphor in organizations and offers a contribution to the analysis of meaning in communication.

In an important contribution to the field, Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) argued that metaphors are embedded in the way we act, interact, and think about our world; they influence the way we experience and understand our world from both commonsense and conceptual perspectives. Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) suggest that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5) and that by studying the use of metaphors, we begin to understand our physical and cultural experiences. The metaphorical form “A is B” represents the perception, conceptualization, and understanding of one object or event in terms of another. The form “A is B” is not arbitrary because metaphors display directionality: A less clearly delineated object or event, A, is structured by the more clearly delineated experience of a second object or event, B. The conceptual power of metaphor comes from this directionality. The use of a metaphorical expression is made possible and has its power by a nonostensive reference to the main metaphor (Koch & Deetz, 1981). A common example in the literature for this expression is found in the metaphor “work is a game.” The particular experiential aspects of life are highlighted by the more clearly conceptualized and widely shared understanding of the game. (Thus, metaphor represents one way of seeing *as* is possible.) In the “work is a game” metaphor, work comes to be seen *as* a game, with players,

losers, good moves, and strategies (Koch & Deetz, 1981; Putnam et al., 1996).

In organizational studies, metaphors contribute to theory construction, help to structure beliefs and guide behavior in organizations, express abstract ideas, convey vivid images that orient our perceptions and conceptualizations, transfer information, legitimate actions, set goals, and structure coherent systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003; Ortony, 1979; Putnam et al., 1996). Because metaphors are enacted and surface through everyday language use, they can be used as tools to illuminate organizational practices, including capturing perceptions and reactions to ambiguity with organizational goals (Feldman, 1991); norms, motives, and meaning in studying organizational culture (Pondy, 1983; Trice & Beyer, 1984); the nature of struggles between competing ideologies (Hirsch & Andrews, 1983; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987); and covert practices that mask power relationships by highlighting certain features while suppressing others (Deetz & Mumby, 1985).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) showed how systems of metaphors develop out of the most clearly delineated and shared life experiences and how systems of overlapping metaphors connect experience with abstract concepts. Experience and concepts can be structured through such illustrative typologies as the following: orientational metaphors, which appear to organize a whole system of concepts with one another and are typically spatial in nature (e.g., control is up: "I have control over him"); ontological metaphors, which allow us to understand experiences through objects and substances and typically quantify, group, and categorize experience to the extent that they appear to us now as straightforward, literal description (e.g., mind is a machine: "We're turning out new ideas every day"); and structural metaphors, which go beyond naming and quantifying concepts and allow us to build meaning of one concept in terms of another (e.g., understanding is seeing: "I see what you're saying").

The most basic of these metaphors has become sedimented through habitual use. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) called them "literal metaphors" to stress the point that although they seem to be ordinary speech, they depend on a comparison that initially sparked a "shock of recognition" in the listener (e.g., "she is the head of the company"). This literalness is the everyday derivative mode in which seeing *as*, and the entire system of meaning that makes that possible, is covered up and forgotten (Koch & Deetz, 1981). In addition, all metaphors are grounded in sensorimotor and cultural experiences with the relationship between physical experience and metaphor being the stronger (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 1980/2003).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) further demonstrated that metaphorical phrases are reduced to the metaphors they display. Their description of structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors provides a guide for this, although these categories tend to be more heuristic than prescriptive (Koch & Deetz, 1981). The work of Lakoff and Johnson has greatly influenced the work of Morgan, whose research may be considered the theoretical pedigree of the use of metaphor by modern organizational scholars. Morgan (1980) analyzed the ways in which traditional metaphors (e.g., organizations as machines or organisms) have influenced theoretical discussion of organizations. Morgan's (1997) perspective has been useful in conceptualizing paradigms for organizational research by using metaphor as a systematic way of thinking about how we should act in a given situation.

Metaphor from a perspective of communication has aimed at understanding social reality (Putnam et al., 1996). Weick (1979) demonstrated the weaknesses of linear models of social reality in organizations that focus solely on either the effects of social structure on interaction in the organization or the manner in which social structure is developed from communication practices. Most recently, Putnam and her colleagues (Oswick et al., 2004; Putnam, 1999; Putnam et al., 1996) have demonstrated the use of metaphor in examining the domains of and orientations to research in the communication-organization relationship. From a more interpretive perspective, metaphors are studied as taken-for-granted aspects of everyday interaction that are constitutive of social and organizational realities (Cunliffe, 2002).

Taken together, most of these works show a history and predication of scholarship employing an instrumental use of metaphor in organizational studies. For example, instrumental goals and needs include the use of metaphor as an instrument that socializes newcomers (Brown, 1985); legitimizes power relationships (Mumby, 1987); enhances identification processes (Kreps, 1989); performs managerial roles (Trujillo, 1985); and acts as an implicit mechanism of control (Kunda, 1992). Often, an instrumental view of metaphor in the communication-organization relationship includes research on the uses of communication technology in organizations, the functions of communication in conflict management, and the development of bridges and networks not only focusing on the skill or system within the organization but representing an ontological stance about communication in organizations (Putnam, 1999).

As the foregoing discussion suggests, the use of metaphor in organization studies frequently has been focused on its instrumentality toward serving an organization's ends (Putnam, 1999). The point is emphasized in the

following generalization from a leading review of the scholarship (Putnam et al., 1996): “Metaphor is probably best understood as a system of beliefs about figure and ground relationships which serve to highlight certain features while suppressing others” (p. 377). From this perspective, metaphor involves “beliefs” that are presented in the separable components of a “figure” and a “ground,” one of which denotes the desired meaning and a secondary element that develops an illuminating context. It follows, then, that metaphor can be deconstructed for purposes of analyzing its constitutive elements and reassembling those elements into theories of organizational behavior, and scholars using the approach have produced original and influential works (e.g., Mumby, 1987). We suggest that a different philosophical approach yields more productive insights for communication studies.

Getting Past Postmodernism

One of the hallmarks of modern philosophy is its effort to overcome the Cartesian duality between the individual self and the physical world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). The asserted disjunction between objective and verifiable kinds of knowledge and subjective beliefs leads to contested domains where some forms of knowledge are deemed superior to or more trustworthy than others. That bifurcation has given rise to preferred methods of conducting social sciences research, in particular the dominance of quantitative and empirical techniques. In an influential work, Bernstein (1976) traced the restructuring of theory in the social sciences, a development that had its intellectual roots in the encroachment of the “positivist temper” in academia in the 1950s and 1960s. As Bernstein summarizes the point, “Basically, the positivist temper recognizes only two models for legitimate knowledge: the empirical or natural sciences, and the formal disciplines such as logic or mathematics” (p. 5).

Consistent with that focus, scholars deployed new methodologies more closely related to the quantitative techniques in the scientific models. The goal of such research was to produce knowledge free from normative values and based on systematic, deductive, and objective criteria; it tended to discount theorizing based on rhetorical analysis (e.g., Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). The affinity for empiricism eventually dominated many social science disciplines, such as economics, and generated sharp debates about the positivist claims (e.g., Dugger, 1992). Similar developments occurred in organization studies with the rise of postmodernism.

In response to the main tenets of positivist philosophy, postmodernists deal with the problem of dualism by repudiating all forms of “foundationalism” based on the scientific method of the physical sciences (Best & Kellner, 1997). Much of the current linguistic organizational analysis derives from critical or postmodern theory (e.g., Cunliffe, 2002; Putnam, 1999). That theory also plays a central role in other business disciplines, such as accounting (Tinker, 2002). In the area of management studies, Alvesson and Willmott (1996) articulated one of the basic premises of the critical approach in their assertion,

The idea of value-free knowledge is questionable because it deflects attention from how, in practice, what counts as “scientific knowledge” is the product of value judgments (e.g. about ontology and epistemology) that are conditioned by the specific, historical and cultural contexts of their production. (p. 43)

For postmodern and critical theorists, the positivist claims about human knowledge remain suspect and subject to attack as social constructions. According to the recent study by Best and Kellner (2001), post-positivist philosophers do not accept the “naïve realism that informs modern science. They regard all perception and knowing as value-laden and socially conditioned, and they seek self-reflexive clarity regarding the origins and structure of scientific knowledge itself” (p. 110).

One of the limitations of the postmodern approach, however, is that it questions the possibility of any unified conception of meaning in language. A key doctrine of postmodern thought “turns on a rejection of the notion of [linguistic] representation—in fact, a rejection of an *empiricist* model of representation, in which the representational baby has been slung out with the empiricist bathwater” (Eagleton, 2001, p. 79). As a result, statements about important social institutions such as the legal system and its ideals of justice are seen simply as discourses that promote dominant interests (Derrida, 1990). Postmodernists thus surmount the problem of representationalism by contesting empiricist claims about the nature of meaning in language. As a consequence, postmodern linguistic productions are only a text to be interrogated and deconstructed as articulations of power, such as Arrington and Francis’s (1989) skillful dismantling of the well-known article by Jensen (1983) purporting to establish a positivist method of organizational behavior through an agency conception of firms. To summarize the point in the words of well-known scholars in the field (Clegg, Hardy, & Nord, 1996), “Postmodernism announced the death of meaning by showing the meaning of ‘non-meaning’” (p. 701). The asserted “death of meaning”

leads into a particular kind of nonfoundational space for a totalitarian appreciation of the visible: "With postmodernization, signs signify everywhere. No space remains innocent of meaning, of style, of ambiguity, of irony. In matters of style, appearance and reference are everything. Scratch the surface and one should find nothing deeper" (p. 701). We propose that, to the contrary, metaphor is the birth of meaning, and a unitary world in which subjectivity and objectivity remain an indivisible whole lies beneath the everyday linguistic patina of human interaction.

Some current research, such as the aesthetic perspective, appears to adopt this approach, arguing that lived experience should be viewed as "expressive activity" (Clair, 1998, p. 40). The link between an aesthetic perspective and communication theory rests on a narrative approach to metaphor (Buie, 1996; Clair, 1998; Ramirez, 1996), where narratives are a principal symbolic form through which organizational practices and patterns are reproduced and resisted (Mumby, 1987). According to Clair (1998), aesthetic theory holds that discourses are creative experiences and that metaphor creates realities through the symbolic and poetic expression of meaning that "acknowledges the realistic renderings as well as the surrealistic experiences of social relations" (p. 186). More recently, Cornelissen (2005) suggested that an adequate theory of metaphor would recognize "the generation and creation of new meaning beyond a previously existing similarity." The process proceeds through a "conjunction of whole semantic domains," whereby corresponding qualities are "constructed rather than deciphered" and meaning is emergent and creative (p. 751). Problematically, though, Cornelissen limits his explanation to individual cognitive processes, which opens the theory to attack from a sociological point of view (Oswick & Jones, 2006). As conceived nearly eight decades ago, a deeper examination of metaphor and meaning renders distinctions between the individual and the social irrelevant.

Philosophical Foundations

Writing some half a century before the postmodern fashion, Owen Barfield (1928/1973) set forth remarkably prescient insights about the nature of language, poetry, and cognition. His ideas ran counter to the philosophical trend of linguistic analysis, which marked the early positivist foray into epistemology dominated by philosophers such as A. J. Ayer (1946). Barfield (1928/1973) begins with a description of the aesthetic

imagination, which he said induces “a felt change of consciousness” (p. 48). The experience entails the immediate and concrete apprehension of an individual’s surroundings, and it is *felt* because it produces a change in sensory activity that is “attended to.” Poetry creates the aesthetic moment by the physical effect of progressing from one plane of consciousness to another. It invokes a movement of feeling across levels of perception and is sparked by a process of integration. In Barfield’s words, “This ability to recognize significant resemblances and analogies, considered as in action, I shall call *knowledge*; considered as a state, and apart from the effort by which it is imparted and acquired, I shall call it *wisdom*” (p. 55).

The most fundamental type of recognition of similarities and differences is metaphor, which is the vehicle of meaning in language. By exploring the roots of language, Barfield concluded that metaphor reveals something inherent and real about the natural world that unifies perception, emotion, and understanding. In his view, the origins of language reveal the process of cognition itself. Meaning, that is, inheres in objects, which we know by the names we give them. In Barfield’s (1928/1973) description, we may suppose that

the earliest words in use were “the names of sensible, material objects” and nothing more—only, in that case, you must suppose the sensible objects themselves to have been something more; you must suppose that they were not, as they appear to be at present, isolated, or detached, from thinking and feeling. (p. 85)

The splitting up of meaning into objective and subjective involved a process of separating the abstract from the concrete and the referential from the emotive. Metaphorical meaning, the fusion of self and other through language, lies at the core of human experience. According to Barfield (1928/1973), the “mysterious relations” (p. 86) we have with external objects are in fact created for human apprehension by the action of language, and “these relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker” (p. 86).

Deprived of the immediate sensory perception of reality, modern humans experience that reality through metaphorical language. Mythology is the systematic reflection of the earliest apprehensions of the world (Barfield, 1928/1973). Writing at the same time in the mid-1920s, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer reached nearly identical conclusions about mythical thinking. Cassirer (1946) speculated that mythology articulated in language embodied a religious experience that occurs when external reality

overcomes a man in sheer immediacy, with emotions of fear or hope, terror or wish fulfillment: then the spark jumps somehow across, the tension finds release, as the subjective excitement becomes objectified, and confronts the mind as a god or a daemon. (p. 33)

Humans explained their relationship to the world through powerful images and symbols that captured the emotional resonance of physical nature.

Building on those aesthetic insights, Susanne Langer developed an integrated theory of aesthetics, philosophy, and psychology in her books *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), *Feeling and Form* (1953), *Philosophical Sketches* (1962), and *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (1967-1982). Her core argument, based on the ideas of Barfield and Cassirer, derives from the origins of language as a symbolic form articulated through successive physiological events or *feelings* that present an abstracted image comprehensible to other humans. Indeed, Langer (1962) says that art “may be defined as the practice of creating perceptible forms expressive of human feeling” (p. 76). She considers many versions of artistic expression, including music, dance, painting, and drama, as symbolic communication. Literature, however, poses special problems because it employs a medium used in nonartistic activities, that is, language. Her solution to the problem of kinds of linguistic meaning is a radical one similar to Barfield’s explanation of metaphorical language. Langer (1953) says that poets use words “to create an illusion, a pure appearance, which is a non-discursive symbolic form” (p. 211). The artistic form is a symbolic presentation of feeling, which is a physiological state rather than an emotional condition. She continues, “It may take us some time to perceive it, but the symbol expresses it at all times, and in this sense the poem ‘exists’ objectively whenever it is presented to us” (p. 211). The artistic use of language, in short, resists decomposition into bits of information, ideology, and manipulation. Neither the writer nor the reader “privileges” the meaning of the artistic creation because the expressive form transcends both. To ask what poetic language is “trying to say” is the wrong question. Rather, we ask, “What has the poet made, and how did he make it?” (p. 211).

Differentiating discursive from poetic meaning involves a theory of cognition as well as a theory of aesthetics. Langer’s approach begins with the process of feeling. As Langer uses the term, feeling is not a description of emotional states but of actual physical activities of the body. Sensory apprehensions provide the very foundations of human intellect, which Langer (1967-1982) demonstrates in her multivolume work titled *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. Artistic creations communicate by setting forth an

object that is symbolic of feeling; the object has a rhythm and movement embodied in, and inseparable from, its form. Thus, poetry is always something other than “a factual statement” dressed up in verse. Langer (1953) writes,

A poem always creates the symbol of a feeling, not by recalling objects which would elicit the feeling itself, by weaving a pattern of words—words charged with meaning, and colored by literary associations akin to the dynamic pattern of the feeling (the word feeling here covers more than a state; for feeling is a process, and may have not only successive phases, but several simultaneous developments; it is complex and its articulations are elusive). (p. 230)

The philosophical insights developed by Barfield and Langer with respect to language, meaning, cognition, and feeling were validated by an exceptionally skilled practitioner of poetic creation. Dylan Thomas, one of the greatest 20th-century poets writing in English, devoted himself to the creation of literal meaning, which Barfield described as “poetic diction.” What Thomas understood by the term was precisely the power of metaphor to create previously unapprehended relationships. In a 1933 letter to another poet, Thomas explained the difference between true and false poetry as a function of metaphor (Fitzgibbon, 1966). He criticized her efforts at imagery with the following comment:

A rhyming dictionary, a little selection of natural objects, and a halfpenny gift for stringing pretty words together, and one can write like [your verse] all day. “My blood is drawn from the veins of roses” is on an altogether different plane; here you have added to the by-now meaningless repetition of association, and have contributed something quite lovely both to yourself and to the rose. (p. 97)

The difference between true and false, Thomas went on, was the production of poetic meaning. He concluded his artistic credo with a statement concerning the effect of metaphor on the poem’s reader (Fitzgibbon, 1966): “By the magic of words and images you must make it clear to him that the relationships are real” (p. 97). His most accomplished work, such as *Poem on His Birthday*, stands as an exemplar of metaphorical truth about the natural world.

The insights from philosophy, aesthetics, and poetry suggest important propositions about language, metaphor, and meaning. Human mental activity creates the physical world, to the extent that the world has meaning,

because we know the world through appearance. Near the end of his career, Barfield (1965) incisively captured the relation between physical reality and humans' knowledge of it by pointing out that "if the particles, or the unrepresented, are in fact all that is *independently* there, then the world we all accept as real is in fact a system of collective representation" (p. 20). The closest we can approach to the real, true, or literal meaning in the world is through the creation of metaphorical relationships, which offer the felt proof of unified reality, just as *What the Bleep Do We Know?* instructs us. Metaphors are powerful, but they are not simply tools to be recruited for manipulation. Indeed, the more effective the metaphor, the less likely it will have an available discursive content. Poetic language generates a complex emotional and aesthetic state that speaks to the human condition generally, and not specifically to the intentions of the speaker (Cunliffe, 2002).

We suggest that the current focus of organizational studies and metaphor can be enriched by further theoretical expansion of the "aesthetic side of organizational life" (Clair, 1998; Gagliardi, 1996). We argue that it is important to move beyond the postmodern (and still objectivist) notion of metaphor as a rhetorical strategy used intentionally or otherwise to manipulate and dominate organizational members. Although this perspective may be suitable for deconstructing communication as a vehicle of power and influence, it does not consider that meaning exists outside discursive reproduction.

If we think of metaphor as aesthetic and poetic, situated within the experiential nature of organizational life, then our understanding of organizations draws on an apprehension of knowledge that is not purely intellectual but also sensory. The objective, as Johnson (1987) states, is "to explore how the body is in the mind—how it is possible, and necessary, after all, for abstract meanings, and for reason and imagination, to have a bodily basis" (p. xvi). Whereas Lakoff and Johnson draw attention to the mind-body relationship, they emphasize the cognitive aspect by focusing on the systematicity and coherence of metaphorical schema. In the following section, we further explore the relationship between mind, body, and metaphor through the lens of organizational aesthetics and propose that our approach offers a way of embodying the sense-making process. Aesthetics emphasizes the sensory nature of knowledge. Toward this end, we claim that metaphors not only are conceptual, analytical, or linguistic tools but are embodied and embedded ways of orienting ourselves in the world and involve cognitive, social, and linguistic processes. We situate our argument within organizational studies.

Aesthetics, Metaphor, and Organizational Life

The importance of language and metaphor has long been recognized in organization studies. Gowler and Legge (1983) argued that management is an oral tradition involving the management of meaning. Rhetoric is both the means by which culture is created and passed on to organizational members and a form of social control. This notion has been expounded by many researchers, in particular in studying organization culture and leadership.

Metaphors are commonly used in organizational analysis (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Morgan, 1986; Tousoukas, 1991). Scholars have analyzed metaphors that explore organizations as living systems, political systems, brains, and instruments of domination (Morgan, 1986). Moreover, metaphors are frequently used when communicating organizational change to inform and inspire (Keizer & Post, 1996), rouse followers (Akin & Schultheiss, 1990; Burke, 1992; Inns, 2002), facilitate knowledge production (Morgan & Ramirez, 1984), and create shared experiences (Zurawski, 2004). They are used to enhance organizational design, manage conflict, and understand organization culture. Gayle and Preiss (1998), for example, described various metaphors that are commonplace in an environment of interpersonal conflict. One common metaphor is that of Goffman's (1959) theater, where organizations are studied through the lens of performance and drama or where organizing is seen to be theater (Boje, Luhman, & Cunliffe, 2003). As an example of the first approach, Rosen (1985) used dramaturgy to analyze the cultural rituals of an American advertising agency's annual corporate breakfast. An example of organizing as theater is Czarniawska's (1998) study of how organization members create their identities through playing roles and constructing an image.

In terms of leadership, metaphors are often seen as discursive tools to enhance organizational performance. They offer common ground for dialogue while simultaneously opening new paths for consideration by offering direction through compelling visions. Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000), for example, suggest that leaders shape and frame meaning through discursive instruments including stories, slogans, artifacts, and metaphors, the latter being the most important. Leadership, from this view, involves building commitment to organizational goals through the sensitive linguistic construction of vision and mission statements. Metaphors will influence followers, promote change, and enhance the retention of powerful images (Katz, 1996; Ortony, 1975). Charismatic leaders have long been known for their use of language that contains verbal imagery (Willner, 1984), symbolic references (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993; Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, & Popper, 1998), and metaphors (Conger, 1991).

Yet, within this work, metaphors are viewed as conceptual, analytical, or discursive tools and do not necessarily speak to human experience and emotions: The mind-body-metaphor connection is often viewed as an instrumental one. For example, leaders employ emotional expressiveness or the ability to depict nonverbal behaviors via facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice (Friedman, Prince, Riggio, & DiMatteo, 1980; Friedman, Riggio, & Casella, 1988), and effective leaders communicate and regulate emotional communication (Riggio, 1987, 1998). Watson's (2001) ethnographic study of managers in a telecommunications company perhaps comes closest to situating mind-body-metaphor in human experience. Watson not only emphasized the importance of talk in persuading others and in making sense but also drew attention to the relationship between language and emotion, arguing that talk and stories allow us to "confront and come to terms with the threats and dangers of the world around us. Laughter allows us to cope emotionally with that which could frighten us into madness" (p. 188). So, how can we build on this work to develop an embedded and embodied notion of metaphor? We suggest that aesthetics can offer such possibilities because situating metaphor within the sensory realm helps us to make sense of our everyday experience, to figure out who we are, and to deal with the emotion of organizations.

Within the field of organization studies, Antonio Strati (1999) has been influential in drawing attention to an aesthetic understanding based on an artistic rather than scientific understanding. He suggests that aesthetic experience relates to physical perceptions, sensory faculties, emotions (joy, fear, anxiety, passion), and aesthetic categories such as beauty, the comic, and the tragic (Strati, 2000). Aesthetics is not just about the symbolic aspects of organizational life—physical spaces, symbols, images, and artifacts—but also about the experiential and practical aspects: the human senses, tacit knowledge, and aesthetic judgment (Strati & de Montoux, 2002). In terms of the latter, we emphasize that metaphor is integral to the aesthetics of organizational life, not purely in an instrumental way, but also as a poetic (embodied, imaginative) orientation to our world, as an implicit part of the mundane routine of ordinary talk and of bodily and perceptual experience. This experiential aspect of aesthetics brings with it *sensible* (perceived through the senses) knowledge rather than ratiocinative cognitive knowledge (Strati, 2007) that is immanent to organizational life. Ewenstein and Whyte (2007), for example, based on a study of an architectural practice, suggest that design work involves "an improvised engagement with an emerging design" (p. 700) that incorporates a feel for the site and the relationship between shapes, spaces, and materials. In much the same way,

organizational members feel their way around their organizations, shaping and being shaped in their everyday actions, interactions, and relationships. To summarize with Langer's (1967) powerful insight, an "intimate and expert knowledge" of human feeling abounds in the people who create its image. "In the hands of a natural artist—professional or not, called 'artist' or 'artisan' or whatever else—almost anything may become a work of art: a bed, a doll, a scientific drawing, a photograph. Haydn wrote the bugle calls for the Austrian army, and they are music" (p. 64). It is hardly surprising, then, that organizations would rely on objects and practices expressive of feeling to create shared experience.

As the foregoing review suggests, language is the glue holding together organization, with metaphor and aesthetic knowledge as its foundation. Our theoretical framework explains how the cake of metaphor nourishes the organization's members and allows them to flourish—metaphor is an appealing concoction of intellect, perception, emotion, and physical sensation. The act of apprehending metaphor is an act of consumption: unique, immediate, inimitable, and experiential. Any description of the way metaphor works is simply icing that attempts to embellish the cake. Without an adequate conception of meaning, metaphor may appear to be a distraction to the process of comprehension. With an appreciation of the poetic qualities of organizational language, metaphors bring alive the power of language.

Conclusion

The contending intellectual paradigms in organization studies can be described as the empirical and the critical (Gagliardi, 1996). The first rests on the assumption that meaningful knowledge in social science derives from empirical models, with their quantitative apparatus and presumption of objectivity as a working agenda. The critical approach, to the contrary, rejects empiricism as a suspect species of intellectual hegemony. For critical theorists, the foundationalist assumptions of empiricism are insufficient as a path to understanding human behavior. Those intellectual constructs both lay claims to a legitimating, but categorically exclusive, epistemology. As a consequence, they tend to carve out discrete domains for the study of organizations.

Our theory offers an alternative view of metaphor in organizational studies. It is neither ontological—which aims to uncover reality—nor epistemological—which aims to analyze how we know reality—but a perspective from which such a distinction is entirely beside the point. This view avoids the Cartesian dualism that sustains the competing visions. It relies on the

unification of feeling and intellect. Our approach is based on literary dimensions of motivation, action, and communication. Accordingly, our article adds to our understanding of the role of metaphor, myth, and language as it can guide communication and organizational studies. It emerges from a literary tradition that takes metaphor as the highest form of cognitive activity. The animating idea is that organizational rhetoric may sometimes be neither persuasive, informative, manipulative, ideological, nor intentional, but more than all of them. Skillful communication is a hallmark of effective leadership, and we have set forth some theoretical considerations in support of that assertion.

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