
Commentary: Beyond Morgan's eight metaphors

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Abstract

This article focuses on the interplay between metaphor and metonymy in the construction of organization theory. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between the use of metaphor as *a way of thinking* and *a way of being*, and the specific metaphors that are produced through this process. It suggests that too much emphasis is often placed on metaphors as abstracted epistemological constructs rather than on understanding the more dynamic and changing role they play in the interactive modes of engagement through which people seek to grasp, concretize and act on their world. Developing the approach and ideas first presented in *Images of Organization*, this article suggests that a flexible use of metaphor can help us engage and understand the multidimensional and paradoxical nature of organizational life and help us to deal with the emerging issues shaping the contemporary socio-political–technological–organizational landscape. The article suggests that because most current approaches in social science are overly-focused on the study of abstracted metonymical constructs, they will have difficulty dealing with the multidimensional complexity we now face.

Keywords

complexity, epistemology, metonymy, multidimensionality, organization theory, paradox

I am very grateful to the Guest Editors, reviewers and contributors for all the work and creative thought that has gone into the production of this special issue on the role of metaphor in organization theory, and for this opportunity to comment on the articles.

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Obviously, a lot of changes have taken place in the world at large since *Images of Organization (Images)* was first published in 1986. There have also been important developments in our understanding of metaphor and its relevance for organization studies (see, for example, Cornelissen, 2005, 2006; Cornelissen et al., 2006, 2008; Grant and Oswick, 2006; Oswick et al., 2002, 2004; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). My own views on these topics and the role metaphor plays in everyday thought, language, science and the social sciences have been presented in Morgan (1980, 1983, 1986, 1996, 1998, 2011) and provide the context for my detailed commentary here. My particular focus will be on some of the key issues raised by the articles, followed by brief remarks on some broader issues for the future development of organization theory and the social sciences at large.

The importance of understanding the relationship between metaphor and metonymy

One of the most important developments in our understanding of how metaphor works in practice has focused on the relationship between metaphor and metonymy. Although these tropes are typically viewed as figures of speech used in language use, they are better understood as modes of thinking. Metaphor operates through the juxtaposition of images (e.g. 'A is B'; 'the organization is a machine'), where one element is understood in terms of another and provides a novel way of grasping, seeing and acting in any given situation in a manner that often ends up challenging taken-for-granted modes of understanding. The overall process is creative and expansive. But for metaphor to have specific meaning the metaphorical image needs to be tied down and articulated through a metonymical process focused on the naming of detailed elements. For example, the metaphor that the organization is a machine invites a metonymical elaboration that specifies the mechanical elements of the organization, for example, that it is highly structured, comprised of carefully designed parts operating to achieve a specific goal. The metaphor, especially if it is an unusual one, operates through an expansive mode of thinking, whereas metonymy is more reductive, focusing on details. The two are essential partners in the construction of meaning in everyday life, play a key role in the development of all professional practice and academic theory, and provide the foundations of empirical research focused on testing specific (metonymical) constructs in all branches of science (see Figure 1 and discussion in Morgan, 1996, 2011).

The relationship between metaphor and metonymy is also illustrated in *all* the articles in this Special Issue and is the specific focus of extended discussion in the article by Schoeneborn et al. (2016, this issue). This article provides an excellent analysis of the interaction between metaphor and metonymy in developing theories related to understanding the *flux and transformation metaphor* presented in *Images of Organization*. The authors show how this metaphor can be explored in detail metonymically by focusing on three features that tap elements of flux with a view to addressing what they identify as the entity/process paradox (another metonymical reduction). Their article is particularly helpful in illustrating some of the detailed relations between metaphor and metonymy in practice and how the metonymical elements of a metaphor can themselves generate new metaphors. This is a particularly important issue because it reinforces the point made

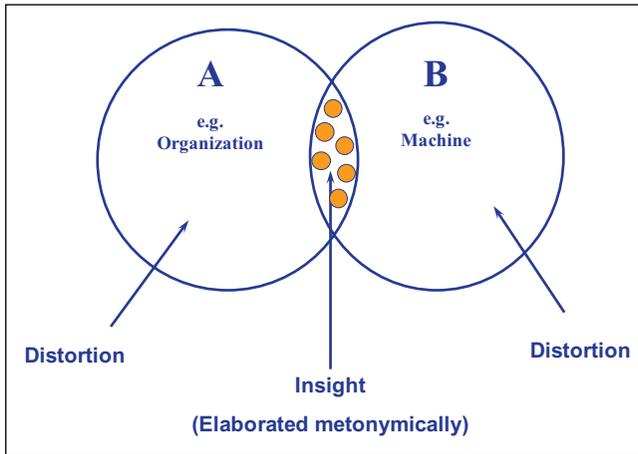


Figure 1. Metaphor – a process of experiencing A as B – is elaborated metonymically. Adapted from Morgan (2011: 463–465).

above that metaphor and metonymy in the most fundamental sense need to be understood as modes of thinking – which produce metaphors and metonyms as figures of speech. This thinking helps us appreciate the free-flowing and taken-for-granted nature of metaphor and metonym and how they are always intertwined as partners in meaning construction.

The process is illustrated in all of the articles in this Special Issue, including the present one. Consider, for example, how all the new metaphors that the authors put forward are based on metonymical development:

- In the article by Jonathan Pinto (2016, this issue), which presents the *Icehotel* as a metaphor for understanding ‘temporary organizations’, we see its metonymical development presented through an academic lens in terms of concepts relating to unifinality, purity, eco-coreness, re-birth and surprise. Looking into the detailed creation and functioning of the hotel, he sees these principles as capturing key aspects of its design and operation. His detailed description of the building itself and the organizational practices through which it is accomplished as a highly effective hotel also identifies key metonymical elements relating to projects that have to achieve specific objectives under extremely rigorous and uncertain conditions with regard to the following: timing and timeliness; the definition of clear operational goals; attention to detail (e.g. the purity of the ice); the coordination of multiple temporary multi-skilled teams; achievement of targets under tight time pressures; the role of competitive bids; the importance of ‘do what’s necessary to get it done’ team commitments; constant improvisation to deal with surprise; insistence on high-quality work; well thought patterns and processes of team banding and disbanding; and a great illustration of emergent design (the *Icehotel* was preceded by an igloo). Developed in this way, the metonymical identification

and naming of these key elements underlying *Icehotel* construction and day-to-day operation gives the metaphor a concreteness and detailed meaning from which all temporary organizations interested in high performance and the achievement of specific time-bound goals can learn. As a metaphor, the *Icehotel* may just seem a crazy and outlandish flight of fancy until elaborated in this way. It is the metonymical reduction that gives the metaphor grounded meaning and relevance beyond the fact that it is a large block of ice that is constantly coming and going and functioning as a 'wonder of the world' in Northern Sweden.

- Similarly, with the *Wonderland* metaphor offered in the article by Darren McCabe (2016, this issue), Alice's experience in Wonderland is converted into a set of metonymical reductions focused on the 'ridiculous, irrational, disordered, unpredictable, uncertain, unexpected, stupid, inane, nonsensical, contradictory, or just plain silly'. The invitation is to look beyond the details, imagined characters and weird situations in Lewis Carroll's fantastical story to identify and investigate the presence and significance of these abstracted features in modern organizational life as part of a non-prescriptive, non-managerial and distinctive way of analyzing and understanding organizations. The article also offers another list of 10 reductions from the overall Wonderland image (Expect the Unexpected; Anticipate the Unpredictability of Objects/People; Recognize the Limits of Knowledge; Appreciate that the Future is Uncertain; Examine Unintended Consequences; Interrogate Claims to Rationality; Explore Contradictions; Question a Top-down Understanding of Power; Investigate Dishonesty, Deviance and Misconduct; Identify Confusion–Misunderstanding–Ambiguity) to focus attention on what are seen as often neglected or marginalized issues.
- The article by Linzi Kemp (2016, this issue) illustrates the relationship between metaphor and metonymy in theory development in relation to gender and organization. The argument here, in summary, is that because the metaphors in *Images of Organization* underplay the role and significance of gender in organizational life, new metaphors are needed to advance issues relating to gender equality. To rectify the situation, she advocates exploring two new metaphors: 'organizations as femicide' and 'organizations as justice'. The images are offered as potential frames for new theory and research but not developed in any metonymical detail other than to suggest that *femicide* is about shocking awareness regarding women's inequality and their murder and disaggregation at work, highlighted by personal experiences that can be as 'harrowing as hell'. The *justice metaphor* is offered as a frame for exploring gender inequality. We are thus brought to a point at which we can ask: What are the precise implications of these metaphors? What is their relevance for understanding the treatment of women in organizations and how can they be developed more fully? This, of course, will lead us to think about the metaphors metonymically: for example, what does the 'murder of women', and other acts of hate and violence towards women, look like in a modern organizational context? What are all the variations? How can the basic experiences and concerns be further captured and elaborated through other metaphors, that is, along the lines of 'living in hell' and by identifying specific organizations and organizational practices that are the metaphorical 'murderers'? We can also bring

a similar line of thinking to elaboration of the *justice metaphor* in relation to women. What does it actually mean in terms of rights and equality: miscarriage of justice? What are all the nuances, variations and implications related to this theme? This line of thinking will help to highlight organizations and organizational practices that are virtuous here, and those in need of improvement. In the process, this line of thinking will also likely take us beyond the topic of gender to embrace justice issues relating to race, ethnicity, social privilege and the like. One topic will raise another, and in all likelihood we will find ourselves generating other metaphors in addition to the two proposed by Kemp, if the topic of gender and organization is to be explored in a comprehensive way. One can easily see this approach leading to an equivalent of an *Images of Organization* focused on gender, justice, race and so forth, because these are massive areas of inquiry open to multiple metaphorical insights, theories and research.

- Finally, in the article by Jermier and Forbes (2016, this issue), we also see a close relationship between metaphor and metonymy and an illustration of how an initial metonymical reduction can generate new metaphorical insights that can be further developed in a metonymical mode. In summary, the authors take their departure from the *instrument of domination* metaphor in *Images of Organization*, with an initial metonymical focus on how organizations abuse and exploit water – an increasingly challenged resource that is vital for human well-being. This is also coupled with a perspective that reverses the nature and focus of the *instrument of domination* metaphor by considering the possibility of finding or creating non-dominating organizations in relation to water use. In brief, these images lead to a focus on ‘Organizations as water exploiters’ and its antithesis, ‘Water-keepers’. Each image is further elaborated metaphorically and metonymically. For example, the interest in *water exploitation* leads to an interest in the relations between water hoarding (i.e. for selfish interests), privatization, commodification, wasteful use, destruction of aquatic systems, water footprints, virtual water, embodied water, embedded water, hidden water, and so forth. The *water-keeper* image focuses on similar issues from a conservation and care perspective, with a constellation of metaphors for capturing key aspects of the conservation agenda, for example, where organizations act as conservers, caretakers, stewards, trustees, protectors, restorers, combatants (against wasteful use) and de-maskers of green-washing. The analysis generates dozens of potential research topics on the role of organizations in water use, building to an overall understanding of the whole issue of domination and conservation, not just with regard to the role of water but in relation to the larger picture of environmental health and planetary protection generally. These issues need to be understood in terms of broader images associated with the pervasive anthropomorphic and largely taken-for-granted view that humans have the right to dominate and use the planet for their own ends, as opposed to a more eco-centric view. The above summary oversimplifies the detailed line of thinking and arguments presented by Jermier and Forbes, but nevertheless presents what I think is an accurate illustration of how metaphors and associated empirical reductions can intertwine to create challenging new frameworks for organizational theory, research and practice.

Returning to the discussion of the Schoeneborn et al. (2016, this issue) article, their detailed ideas and analysis of the relationship between metaphor and metonymy speak to the underlying dynamics of many of the processes and examples given above. The authors also give specific illustrations of how metaphor and metonymy are intertwined in three specific images: ‘organization as becoming’, ‘organization as practice’ and ‘organization as communication’. These images are seen as ‘offspring’ of the *flux and transformation metaphor* that become metaphors in their own right. The analysis is thorough and insightful. My one caution is that, as in many discussions of metaphor, including some of my own, it runs the danger of overplaying a spatial view of metaphor by placing so much emphasis on the *directional nature* of relations between metaphor, metonymy and other tropes (see, for example, the tables and figures in their article). This, in itself, is an interesting phenomenon for illustrating the relationship between metaphor and metonymy and how hidden images get embedded in language and work their way into much broader patterns of thinking.

To illustrate, if we go back to the earliest discussions of metaphor that originated with Aristotle, we find that metaphor is framed in a spatial way as ‘midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace’ and described in early definitions as a process of ‘carrying over’ of meaning from one domain to another. This practice, in effect, has created a spatial metaphor for thinking about metaphor, which over time has been elaborated metonymically through further spatial concepts, for example, emphasizing the role of ‘source’ and ‘target’ domains, and vertical and horizontal dimensions. This spatial conception is also evident in my own writing on metaphor in situations where I have presented the relationship between the elements fused through the metaphor in terms of overlapping circles that highlight the relationships between similarity (the basis of insight) and difference (the basis of potential distortion), with metonymical reductions characterized as elements elaborating the domain of insight (see Figure 1). This spatial representation, like all resonant metaphor, helps to generate insights but can also mislead – in this instance, underplaying the importance of the emergent and dynamic aspects of metaphor, that is, as a constantly evolving and, at many times, ill-formed mode of thinking, as will be discussed below. (The same bias applies to another metaphor of metaphor – that which invites us to see and use metaphors as ‘lenses’. This encourages us to see metaphors as ways of seeing, underplaying their active role in enacting and shaping the realities to which they are applied).

On the nature and status of ‘root metaphors’

The above discussion provides a convenient platform for another major theme underlying this Special Issue – whether there are any new ‘root’ or primary metaphors for developing organization theory beyond the eight featured in *Images of Organization*. The answer to this question is obviously ‘yes’. We see them emerging in articles in this collection, and it is also clear from the above discussion on the nature of metaphor as a way of thinking that the potential of metaphor is, in principle, unbounded. If metaphor is one of the principal means through which humans create and shape meaning in their daily world, it is clear that in changing times major new metaphors are likely to emerge. I will return to a specific discussion of this point in the next section of this commentary, but

before doing so it is interesting to explore the whole concept of what is and what is not a root metaphor.

Not surprisingly, when discussing root metaphors, we are again using a metaphor to discuss metaphor. The whole concept of 'root' evokes an image of something that is grounded and from which other things stem and grow. It encourages us to look for the origin, source or foundation of any given metaphor in another related metaphor, or to assess whether it stands as a new development on its own account. I think that all of this is part of the historical quest to find firm foundations for knowledge, and interestingly creates the paradox that we can only identify a root metaphor historically, that is, through retrospective analysis of its impacts in actually stimulating the development of 'offspring': second-order, or derivative, metaphors. In other words, root metaphors can never be new.

For these reasons, I find it more helpful, following Schön (1963), to think about all metaphors in terms of their generative potential and judge the power of a particular metaphor in these terms – namely, in terms of the insights and potential implications, actions and impacts that flow from the richness and power of the metaphor and the potentials it creates. This focus leads us to greater awareness of what metaphors actually do, or can do, in terms of thought and action, as opposed to thinking about them in a more abstract or classificatory sense. This focus on the generative power of metaphor is particularly helpful in encouraging us to focus on finding and using metaphors that can have major impacts on thinking and action as opposed to those that are more superficial, decorative, clever or cute. The generative focus also helps us to adopt a forward-looking and open approach that thrives on an open-ended evolving process where we can expect and encourage one metaphorical insight to catalyze another, stimulating thought and imagination in both convergent and divergent ways. This creates a very different mindset when it comes to the use of metaphor in everyday and academic contexts. Instead of being preoccupied with a narrow focus on finding 'the right metaphors', we can engage in using new metaphors in a more free-flowing and experimental mode in search of important insights with regard to whatever we are trying to understand. This more open-ended approach can help us to create clusters or constellations of metaphors that offer important insights about the same phenomenon in different yet related ways. To illustrate, we can return to the article by Schoeneborn et al. (2016, this issue) and their discussion about how metonymical reductions can also lead to new constellations of related metaphors. Or, returning to Jonathan Pinto's (2016, this issue) article on the Icehotel, we can ask the question as to whether the Icehotel will now act as a generative metaphor that can lead to a cluster of equally creative other metaphors for understanding temporary organizations from other perspectives? For example, what other images of temporariness offer themselves for consideration here? What novel insights can they add to those offered by Pinto? This approach may quickly lead to a diverse set of insights and theories about temporary organizations that have both practical and academic contributions.

In summary, my overall point here is that we need to focus our discussions about the merit or significance of any given metaphor on its generative potential, on whether it compels attention and allows us to grasp interesting or problematic aspects of our world, and on whether it creates new insights that supplement or challenge our taken-for-granted ways of seeing. The focus on generative potential also leads to a focus on the question,

‘generative for what and for whom?’. This query serves as an important reminder that all metaphors are created by human beings and embody an interest or intent on the part of the creator/user. It moves us from an abstract consideration of the merits of metaphors in their own right to a focus on the lived nature of metaphors and their lived effects. In discussions of the nature and use of metaphor and other tropes, it seems important that all of these considerations are kept in mind.

The issue of ‘sets’ and ‘classifications’

Let us turn now to the extent to which it is possible to classify, categorize and judge metaphors in terms of criteria that are intrinsic to the nature and content of metaphors in and of themselves and to the issue raised in the call for papers for this Special Issue as to whether the set of metaphors offered in *Images of Organization* can be regarded as a complete or adequate one for dealing with today’s world.

The first concern underpins many discussions about the nature and role of metaphor in the social sciences at large and is raised in several articles in this issue: for example, in terms of whether we can identify categories and sub-categories of metaphor (or metonymy), such as dead metaphors, frozen metaphors, negative metaphors, positive metaphors, meta-metaphors, second-order metaphors, paradoxical metaphors, managerial metaphors, genderless metaphors, entity metaphors, process metaphors, exploiter metaphors, partner metaphors, rational and irrational metaphors, traditional metaphors, new metaphors, root metaphors, offspring metaphors, and the like. They also underpin discussions related to whether the eight metaphors featured in *Images of Organization* provide comprehensive frameworks within which all other metaphors are deemed to fall. What we have here is essentially a metonymical approach to the nature and use of metaphor itself, perceived features of different metaphors being identified/named as a basis for classification. Although of interest from an academic perspective, this is problematic, for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, no metaphor ever has a definitive or absolute meaning in and of itself. This awareness creates major problems with regard to accurate classification, though attempts to classify may deliver their own insight or reward in academic or classroom discussions that draw attention to potential groupings in a search of explicit or implicit biases. To elaborate the issues here, as I have discussed in more detail in Morgan (1996, 2011), it is important to distinguish between *metaphor* as an ontological process and mode of *being in the world* through which we try to grasp, articulate and tie down the meaning of a situation by ‘crossing over’ and fusing different elements of our experience, and *metaphors* (note the ‘s’), which are *epistemological constructs resulting* from the metaphorical ‘crossing-over’. They generate specific frames for viewing, engaging and understanding the world, and shape *the specific content* of our knowledge by directing attention in different ways.

The image of a metaphorical ‘grasping’ is highly appropriate for our purposes here as it captures how the use of metaphor involves a search for and creation of meaning, because the use of a metaphor never comes fully formed. Thus, if I suggest that ‘the organization is a machine’, the machine-like qualities still have to be articulated metonymically by both the metaphor creator and others to which the metaphor is addressed.

Its meaning is also dependent on the precise organization or situation to which the metaphor is supposed to relate – a process that will likely be engaged and interpreted in different ways by all involved as they try to make sense of the situation and tie down the details in terms of their own knowledge and experience. In other words, the meaning of a metaphor always has an emergent and situation-specific dimension that is open to multiple interpretations by the parties involved. For example, the view that ‘the organization is a machine’ can tap the same aspect of organizational life in dramatically different ways for different people (e.g. as a source of pride and exemplary efficiency for the owner or manager profiting from its success or as a soul-destroying daily routine for the employee who is paid to perform day after day as a mindless cog in the wheel). Or, to take another example, the metaphor of *Wonderland* is outlined in the article by Darren McCabe (2016, this issue) to create a specific focus on stupidity and related dimensions of organizational life. But if one evokes the idea that ‘the organization is Wonderland’ here in my hometown (Toronto, Canada), or in Sydney (Australia), Melaka (Malaysia), or Jalandhar (India), the popular local theme park is what is most likely come to mind. (A theme park is, of course, an interesting potential metaphor of organization in itself.) This is an extreme example, but clearly makes the point that any metaphor is always open to divergent interpretations as people seek to grasp the meaning of it in terms of their own experience. In addition to saying that metaphors never come fully formed, we can thus also be confident in saying that a metaphor’s meaning will likely vary from situation to situation (e.g. from one organization to another), from one person to another, and in different social, historical, cultural and political contexts. Also, completely different metaphors may be needed to capture and communicate very similar messages in different socio-political and cultural contexts (see, for example, the ‘African’ metaphors of leadership offered by Joseph Mutizwa in his creative extension of some of the implications of *Images of Organization* for use in his home continent: Mutizwa and Protocols, 2015).

In summary, these considerations highlight that abstract discussions and categorizations beyond the most general descriptive level – for example, of Western/African/Chinese metaphors, or entity versus process metaphors – are often based on implicit assumptions that metaphors can be treated as free-standing entities defined by some intrinsic features, content, or meaning, as opposed to recognizing that, as discussed above, the most important aspect and meaning of any metaphor rests in its power of engagement in relation to the situation in which a metaphor is generated or used, that is, in what it allows one to see, understand and do, and *not in any abstract characteristics of the metaphor itself*. The danger with an excessive concern for classification is that it can keep us in an abstract intellectual space, placing too much emphasis on the epistemological aspects of metaphor as opposed to understanding and dealing with its role in the interactive, emergent process of engagement through which people are seeking to deal with their world. This process of emergence is always two-way and involves an interaction between the ontological elements of a situation (i.e. the specific events, people and other circumstances with which one is interacting), and the metaphorical mode of engagement through which one is attempting to understand, shape and act in relation to that situation. These ontological and epistemological elements are always intertwined and influencing each other; that is, the use of a metaphor and related actions resonates

and impacts a situation in an affirmational sense, or is challenged and changed by disconfirming features that may force a rethinking of the metaphor and associated interpretive frame, and favor a different mode of action.

Also, the idea that there are free-standing metaphors or sets of metaphors creates a potential bias leading organization theorists and practitioners to *impose their metaphors* on the situations they are trying to understand as opposed to allowing for a more interactive, interpretive relationship between the ontological (state of being) and epistemological elements involved. The need for this flexible interplay becomes even more important when we recognize that organizations, like virtually all aspects of the natural and social world, are multidimensional phenomena – that is, many things at once – where, in asserting or applying our favored metaphors or sets of metaphors too rigidly, we may ‘tap into’ and find resonance with some aspect of the phenomena to which they are applied, but will at the same time miss other equally important dimensions, the results of which generally present themselves as unintended consequences of the interventions we make.

This is why in *Images of Organization* I suggested that, in seeking to understand and deal with the multidimensionality of organizational life, we need to use our metaphors in the context of a broad and flexible ‘reading’ of the situations we are dealing with, so that we can increase our chances of engaging the nuance and signals that may be communicating that we are not really engaging and understanding what is happening in an appropriate way. The challenge, in summary, is to be constantly open to the interplay as opposed to applying any single metaphor or set of metaphors in rote fashion. This approach, of course, increases the chances that we can create or find new metaphors that are being used by people in the situation we are working with to enrich understanding and action opportunities.

In view of the above, I think it should be clear that the metaphors presented in *Images of Organization* should not be regarded as a definitive or fixed set, and, as illustrated in the following quote from the very first (1986) edition, why I have always emphasized that they illustrate a range of possibilities, inviting readers to think more about metaphor and to add metaphors of their own:

The metaphors discussed have been selected to illustrate a broad range of ideas and perspectives, but, of course, by no means exhaust the possibilities. This is why it is important to understand that the mode of analysis developed here rests in *a way of thinking* rather than in the mechanistic application of a small set of clearly defined analytical frameworks. While the book focuses on a number of key metaphors that have relevance for understanding a wide range of organizational situations, there are others that can produce their own special insight. Effective organizational analysis must always remain open to this possibility.

We live in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. Unfortunately, our styles of thinking rarely match this complexity. We often end up persuading ourselves that everything is more simple than it actually is, dealing with complexity by presuming that it does not really exist. This is very evident in the way fad and fashion dominate approaches to organizational analysis and problem-solving, an interest in one type of solution or set of techniques quickly giving way to another.

The approach to organizational analysis developed in this book stands against this general trend, in the belief that organizations are generally complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical. The real challenge is to learn to deal with this complexity. The method of analysis offered here points to a way in which we can begin to take up this challenge by relying on the most important asset we have: our capacity for critical thinking. I believe that by building on the use of metaphor – which is basic to our way of thinking generally – we have a means of enhancing our capacity for creative yet disciplined thought, in a way that allows us to grasp and deal with the many-sided character of organizational life. And in doing so, I believe that we can find new ways of organizing and new ways of approaching and solving organizational problems. (Morgan 1986: 16–17)

In selecting the eight principal metaphors featured in the book, I chose ones that would illustrate a broad range of social theory, guided by the paradigm framework offered by Burrell and Morgan (1979). Some of the metaphors address the foundations of organization theory up to the mid-1980s (principally the machine, organism and culture metaphors). Others sought to build on and enhance some emerging developments and take organization theory into new territory (e.g. the brain, political system, psychic prison, flux and transformation, and instrument of domination metaphors). Recognizing that most textbooks at the time were typically based on a single metaphor, or a couple of favored metaphors (i.e. most often machine and organism with associated metonymical constructs offered as ideal ways of understanding organizations and management), I systematically counterposed the insights of different metaphors and associated strengths and limitations (while trying to minimize absolute judgment on my part), hoping the counterpositioning could itself help to deconstruct dominant thinking and theoretical perspectives. As noted above, the whole book was also framed within a ninth metaphor – that of ‘reading organization’ – to help users understand and integrate the insights of different metaphors in pragmatic approaches that could serve different needs, for example, as manager or social critic. This approach was concretized in Chapter 10 of each edition (Morgan, 1986, 1997, 2006) by providing a practical illustration that showed how different metaphors could be used to frame each other according to the nuances of the situation being studied or managed.

In this way I have sought to develop a flexible interpretive approach to organization theory and organizational analysis that can deal with the multidimensionality of organizational life by recognizing that multiple rather than single metaphors are needed to understand most organizations and everyday organizational situations. The challenge for both academic organizational theorists and practitioners is to deal with this multiplicity and understand that different metaphors will resonate with different situations and different interests and intents in different ways. Space constraints prohibit further detailed discussion of these themes, but I hope that the links with the points I have made earlier with regard to the limitations of just seeing and using metaphors as free-standing epistemological constructs are clear. The important point is to understand and use them as living, practical frames for engaging and shaping the ontological dimensions of organizational life – a theme that I further pursued in *Imagization* (Morgan, 1993), with a specific focus on management practice. (One of my aims in writing that book was to overcome some of the limitations created by my metaphor of ‘reading’ organizations,

which, as rightly criticized by Shotter (1990) underplays the authoring and writing dimension of actually creating and shaping organizational life – hence, the emphasis in *Imaginization* on finding and working with metaphors that emerged from the situations I was studying or involved with and pursuing their action implications. On a related point, a similar epistemological bias with regard to organizational analysis arises if one gets trapped by the idea that metaphors are just ‘lenses’. This metaphor, like that of ‘reading’, encourages a focus on ‘ways of seeing’, which can just prove to be an academic exercise, especially in classroom settings, if the action implications are ignored.)

As noted by the Guest Editors in their introduction (Örtenblad et al., 2016) to this Special Issue, in subsequent editions of *Images of Organization* I chose to stick with my original eight metaphors. But, as illustrated in the quotation above, this decision was definitely *not* because I saw them as an all-encompassing definitive set. My overriding purpose was to continue emphasizing the importance of seeing all theory as metaphor and to encourage its use in the development of broadly based modes of critical thinking where we are continuously aware of the strengths and limits of what one is seeing and doing, and what one is *not seeing and doing*. I did not want to reduce the *Images* approach to just a methodological framework based on the application of a given set of metaphors, though as the Guest Editors point out, this is often how it has been interpreted.

Concluding remarks

Given what I have said above, I clearly embrace the aim of this Special Issue to go ‘Beyond’ the framework that I set out in 1986 and in subsequent editions of *Images*. From my perspective, this rests in going beyond the ‘eight metaphors’, and also, equally importantly, going beyond the epistemological constraints that we currently place on our understanding of metaphor to embrace, more fully, its role as an interactive, emergent process through which we are constantly engaging and shaping science, knowledge creation and the everyday world. As illustrated in the accompanying articles, we are definitely going to need new metaphors for understanding and influencing the issues and challenges that continue to emerge in our rapidly changing socio-political–technological–organizational world. My own biases here focus on the need to understand a great deal more about the logic and dynamics of contemporary flux and transformation, because that is where many of the most important driving forces seem to lie. For example, can we begin to think about this process as the equivalent of decoding a socio-political–economic–technological DNA? How can we understand more about the nature, dynamics and influence of the rapidly developing global brain being generated by the power of super-computing and the development of social media? How do we understand the quantum transformations being spawned by the shift away from print-based literacy? How can we address contemporary challenges relating to gender, race, religion and social inequality that seem to underpin so many current drivers of turbulence and change? How do we deal with issues of planetary sustainability and the multiple ways in which it seems to be undermined? And how can we learn more about the nature and limitations of the contemporary narratives and dialogue (and also absence thereof) that often seem to be so locked into self-referential bubbles preventing broad understanding of shared issues and concerns and how to deal with them.

These are obviously huge issues that are going to require a major collective effort to address, even in some small way. I think it is fair to say that under the influence of the reductive, concept-based ‘metonymical approach’ that currently dominates social science and socio-political debate, we do not have the appropriate frames of mind or the inter-disciplinary institutional supports to tackle the complexity of the most important of these concerns. These issues are all multidimensional in nature and require genuinely imaginative, open-ended and dialogue-based modes of inquiry.

I think that an understanding of the role of metaphor and metonymy in shaping scientific thinking can provide a good starting point for further discussion here. For example, when it becomes more broadly recognized that metaphor, and all theory and research generated by metaphor, is always partial and only capable of engaging a small element of any multidimensional phenomenon, always has strengths and limits, always creates ways of seeing that create ways of not seeing, and is always driven by some human intent or set of interests, we have a chance of opening the way to more open-ended and reflective approaches to the study and appreciation of phenomena of all kinds.

In short, that is where I think the challenge of ‘Beyond Morgan’s eight metaphors’ ultimately takes us:

Start with the issues and let powerful metaphors emerge.

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