

***The Use of Metaphors in Poetry and Organization Theory:
Toward De-Compartmentalization of Organizational Knowledge***

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Abstract

Since the time of Western modernity, knowledge is compartmentalized into differentiated fields. This has however not mitigated the influence of natural science model of theorizing on social sciences. As a result, the discipline of organization theory has grown without the influence of abstract, ephemeral and metaphysical fields such as religion, history, mystic philosophy, arts and literature. With the rise of organizational cultural studies and the emergence of symbolic-interpretive view of organizing during the last three or four decades, the trend is however gradually shifting. Corporate aesthetics is a field within organization theory which places value on the aesthetical aspects of managing and organizing. Taking the lead from corporate aesthetics, this paper highlights the link between Organization theory and literature (poetry, both English and Urdu). The linguistic and conceptual instrument of metaphors is isolated as the underpinning tool of this link. The role of metaphors in organization theory seems to have further importance because of the emergence of 'social construction' and 'sense making' views of organizations. The paper reinforces the views of contemporary writers of organization theory that the field draws from multiple and diverse disciplines by highlighting the link between organization theory and poetry through employing metaphoricity.

Keywords:

Organization Theory, Poetry, Metaphors, Corporate Aesthetics, Linguistics.

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Introduction

Organization theory draws from multiple disciplines. These disciplines include not only the more obvious ones such as economics and mathematics, but also the more remote ones like philosophy, religion, arts and literature (Hatch, 1997, p. 1-3).

The relation between literature or as a whole arts and organization theory is manifested clearly in the emerging field of corporate aesthetics. In general terms aesthetics is defined as “philosophy of beauty” (Langfeld, 1920, p. 28). It “is the field of philosophy that deals with form, beauty and ugliness, and the sensuous and symbolic dimensions of existence such as arts, music and culture” (Thorpe & Holt, 2008, p. 24).

Corporate aesthetics are concerned with the knowledge or impression which we get through our senses about a particular organization. Hospitals, for example, are known to exude a particular smell (McAuley & *et al.*, 2007, p. 453). Similarly five-star hotels are associated with a particular environment appealing to our senses, fragrance, background music played in lighter notes and properly dressed up staff with name tags and designations displayed, are all part of the ‘package’ which one expects from that organization. The idea of corporate aesthetics developed in 1980s in relation to the study of organizational culture and artifacts (Ramirez, 2005).

Corporate aesthetics is a means to project “highly stylized corporate identity”. Many organizations in the world are accumulating art collections. Deutsche Bank is said to have the world’s largest corporate art collection, around 50,000 arts works. There are also stakeholders in the proprietorship of Deutsche Guggenheim art museum in Berlin. Even some military cemeteries are using specialized designs and layouts which exude a sense of “solace and peace rather than depression”. All the corporate aesthetic endeavors are targeted to ‘feel’ the organizational values, beliefs and practices, the *pathos* underlying an organization’s culture (Hancock & Spicer, 2010, p. 53-56). Corporate Aesthetic Management (CAM) is

developing as a full-fledged strategic framework. CAM seeks to strategically manage an organization's range of visual and aesthetic outputs. These outputs include products, logos, company showrooms, building and interior, packaging, advertisement and employee uniforms (Schmitt *et al.*, 1995; Hancock, 2005; Teck, 2006).

The whole edifice of marketing is based on the psychological assumption that the semiotic decoding of aesthetic symbols creates a brand image in the minds of consumers (Jones & Bos, 2007, p. 166). It is through advertisement and various other marketing campaigns that organizations build positive images about themselves and their product offerings in the eyes of the consumers (Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006).

The colors, sounds, smells and images which make an organization *beautiful*, *revolting* or *ugly* are included in the field of corporate aesthetics. These more ephemeral aspects of organizations are more phenomenological rather than substantial because they require time and reflection to be appreciated and are beyond the immediate fleeting moment of consciousness (Dale & Burrell, 2002).

The use of photography in studying organizational culture and behavior and 'art therapy' used as a psychotherapeutic technique are also examples of how corporate aesthetics are gaining more and more significance in the contemporary organization theory (Barry, 1996; Warren, 2002).

From the above discussion it can be inferred that the field of corporate aesthetics is about the artful projection of an organization's values. Corporate aesthetics therefore serves as a link between the fields of organization theory and arts and literature. There are numerous ways and instruments which link the two fields which cannot be captured through one paper. This paper explores only one of such link, metaphors, which are used to convey or impart meanings in both literature¹ and organization theory. A brief summary of how metaphors are being employed in the two fields follows.

1. This paper limits the field of literature to poetry only.

Literature and Metaphors

The language of poetry according to P.B. Shelley “is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehensions”. This means metaphors create new meanings and insights. They are used as a tool for revitalizing the language. By recreating through employing metaphors the poet also restores something old, ancient and lost (Hirsch, 1999, p. 14).

In a generalized way a metaphor is defined as: “a word or expression that is used to talk about an entity or quality other than that referred to by its core or most basic meaning” (Deignan, 2005, p. 34). It is also said to represent “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or concept that it does not literally denote” (Juhasz, 1974, p. 40). In *Poetics* Aristotle defines metaphor as “the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species, or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else, by analogy”. Metaphor is a literary device in which terms from two different areas of life are brought together in order to achieve a special meaning which goes beyond the ordinary meaning of words or concepts (Abma, 1999, pp.7-8). It is also defined as “a set of correspondence between two conceptual domains” (Steen, 2002; Crisp *et al.*, 2002).

Conceptual metaphors and image schemas generate the inferences we make using metaphorical conception. For example, falling is an action in which one is out of control. Cognitive poetics would thus infer that “falling in love will entail being out of control, being excited, and being scared”. This implies that ‘falling in love’, as compared to being ‘in love’, would be more emphatic expression because the one who falls in love is out of control, highly excited and beyond recovery. This abstract and sublime difference between the two categories of love, ‘in love’ and ‘falling in love’, therefore enhances our understanding of the difference in degree of feelings and emotions between the two categories. In the same way body movements play a major role in conveying meaning. We can only understand what a ‘twisted personality’ means if we know the body movement of being twisted. Similarly ‘standing straight’ and ‘tall’ imply moral uprightness. The true essence of which cannot be inferred unless and until the body movement of standing upright is fully understood. It

suggests that meaning is not merely a linguistic phenomenon which is only a matter of words and sentences. Music, painting, architecture and even poetry (if not likened with prose) provide us with something beyond words. They provide us with image schemas or metaphors and exalt them above the pure entertainment value (Johnson, 2007, pp.17, 26, 185, & 208; Schram & Steen, 2001, pp.145-147).

According to critical theorists of language there is hardly any difference between literary and ordinary language. Similarly metaphors are used to convey meanings both in serious literary and 'idle talk' sense. They simply transfer meanings and information. It is however important that a metaphor entails two terms: target and source. For example if it is said "He was a lion in today's meeting" here *he* is the target while *lion* is the source (Hogan, 2003, pp.87-89). The listener will understand that he behaved bravely or aggressively (both qualities of the source or lion in this case) during the meeting.

Some Specific Examples from English Poetry

Metaphoricity or symbolism of Yeats is occult in nature. He uses metaphors of hound with one red ear, a white deer with no horns, and island in the sea to capture the Irish legendary characters. He also uses many metaphors to represent the Kabalistic traditions. The metaphors of 'Immortal Rose' and the 'seven lights' capture Rosicrucian flower and the seven planets and astral lights (William York Tindall as in Unterecker, 1963, p.46-47). He also uses the metaphor of 'Byzantium', an imaginary city where the entire culture is permeated with peace, solace and holiness (O'Neill, 2004, p. 40; Arkins, 1990, p. 175). He captures the zenith of Christian civilization through 'Byzantium' where the culture has reached its utopian perfection and there is no harm committed against any by the others. He employs the metaphor of 'rose' to convey a sense of eternal love and beauty and also frequently convey religiosity through the metaphors of 'cross', 'bird', 'tree', 'moon' and 'sun'. Other times he uses symbols such as 'dance' (representing patterned movement and joyous energy) and 'wheel' to represent civilization as it passes through various stages and phases of the unstoppable wheel of time. It is through rich symbols and metaphors that he gives "dumb things voices and bodiless things bodies" (Loizeaux, 2003, pp. 1-2 & 50).

Similarly T. S. Eliot's use of metaphors of 'air' represents lofty thoughts and of 'earth' represents biological progress of human life in his poem "The Dry Salvages". This poem is the metaphorical reflection of American optimism in the sense that 'dry drowners' are transformed as 'salvagers' (Hay, 1982, p. 1). His famous poem "The Wasteland", metaphorically expresses the mood of T.S. Eliot's generation around the time of Great Depression of early twentieth century and his own personal mood (Miller, 1978, p. 4). The metaphor of 'wasteland' is both 'macro' in the sense that it reflects the aftermath and miseries of First World War and 'micro' in reflecting the wasted and missed opportunities of life at a personal level.

Philip Larkin's poem "Church Going" uses the act of going to church as a metaphor of wisdom and nostalgia rather than a religious practice. It was written in mid-twentieth century when the practice of church going was fast receding. The following lines metaphorically depict the societal conditions of his time:

The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.
Yet stop I did: in fact I often do. (Lall, 2005, pp. 8 & 34)

He uses many metaphors within the poem "Church Going". For example, the metaphor of 'Irish sixpence' reflects the worthlessness of Irish money as compared to English money and the 'dubious women' reflects the dwindling faith of populace in religion which is yet also a ray of hope for many in those times (Zama, 2004, pp. 150-152). He goes to church though, from a typical modernist stance, it was not worth going to. This thought reflects that going to church is used as a metaphor to keep alive a tradition.

The following lines from a brief poem entitled "Post-Mortem" are another example of how metaphors are used in poetry:

A cold corpse of a bread
On the platter,
And the knife tenderly

Going through its flesh,
 To assuage
 A hunger

The poem is highly metaphorical reflecting the imagination of a rejected lover who is viewing his beloved's honeymoon with someone else. The rejected lover is viewing the honeymoon as a kind of 'post-mortem'. The key metaphorical words are 'bread', 'platter', 'knife', 'flesh' and 'hunger'. Bread is the frigid and unwilling beloved whose flesh is cut across by the maleness (knife) of her husband. Hunger is the reflection of carnal desires of her husband which is devoid of non-physical and eternal love, the kind of love, which the rejected lover's broken heart harbored for his beloved (Gopal & Sachar, 2000, p. 237).

One Specific Example from Urdu Poetry

Mir Taqi Mir (1722-1808) is one of the immortals among Urdu poets. He uses suggestions, images, and metaphors in a masterful manner. His favorite theme is unfulfilled love. His mastery over the art of composing *ghazal*, a special genre of Urdu poem is acknowledged by his contemporary Zauq, another famous Urdu poet, in the following words:

Never, never could I attain the grace of Mir's style,

Though I strained every nerve to cultivate the *ghazal* (Kanda, 1992, p. 72; Samiuddin, 2004, p. 183).

A critic and writer of Urdu poetry, M.A. Majeed Yazdani has conducted a thorough search of the use of body parts (employed as metaphors) in the poetry of Mir Taqi Mir.

According to Majeed Yazdani (1986, pp. 13 15), body parts play vital roles in poetic collection of Mir Taqi Mir. In *Qulyaat-e-Mir* (the collection of Mir's poetry) the use of body parts as metaphors is quite in abundance. He qualifies this statement by painstakingly collecting 6746 couplets from the 13578 couplets of *gahazals* in *Qulyaat-e-Mir* which employ the body parts such as heart, liver, chest, eye, brain, hand, feet, head, and tongue. This amounts to about 50 percent of the total couplets of *Qulyaat*. These body parts metaphorically convey the notions and feelings of intellect, grief, unfulfilled love, beauty,

promise, tears of hope, and eloquence.¹

Organization Theory and Metaphors

The clear demarcating line between social sciences and art and aesthetics is blurred and questionable. The modernist stance of organization theory (and social sciences) was that of differentiation. Social sciences were made ahistoric and amoral as a result of the projection of this differentiation. Prior to Western modernity, religion, art and rational knowledge were undifferentiated. The positivistic movement of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, only exalted that knowledge which was empirically demonstratable (Palshaugen, 1998, p. 128).

How empiricism affected the field of organization theory can be inferred from its definition which was in use well in the 1970: it was defined “as the study of structures, functioning and performance of organizations and their behaviors of groups and individuals within them” (Jones & Munro, 2005, p. 3). It was in 1980s that organization theory started dismantling its colonial burden of value-neutral and amoral language.

During 1980s a branch of organization theory called ‘action research’ started to emerge. Action research challenged the notions of ‘method’ and ‘methodology’ in the process of research and had more in common with arts than with sciences. The purpose of this kind of research was to find out truth without the imposition of scientific methodological framework (Palshaugen, 1998, p. 129).

It was also in 1980s that metaphors started finding their place in organization theory. Metaphors are used in organization theory

1. In English Language there is also a tradition of using idioms with body parts as key words. For example the body parts arm (shot in the arm), back (having no back bone), blood (like getting blood out of stone), bone (bone of contention), brain (the brain drain), chest (getting something off one’s chest), ear (turning a deaf ear), eye (see eye to eye), face (facing the music), finger (keeping fingers crossed), foot (foot the bill), heart (heart break) and many more are used to convey meaning metaphorically (Seidl & McMordie, 1988, pp. 213-230).

literature after Morgan's groundbreaking work *Images of Organization* (1998). Since then some theorists have attempted to capture different organization theory perspectives through metaphors. The metaphors of machine, organism, culture and collage are respectively descriptive of the classical, modern, symbolic-interpretive and postmodern perspectives in Organization theory (Dreiling, 2007, pp. 32-33; Hatch, 2011, p. 146). He opened up these 'tight paradigms' or perspectives by linking them to abstract symbols. These abstract symbols or metaphors had the power to convey meanings in more enriched and purposeful way. Morgan's simultaneous use of two metaphors (binocular vision metaphor) posits that two metaphors used together are superior to one in providing a picture of the reality, just as two eyes used together provide a better and broader vision than one eye (Gibson Burrell as in, Clegg *et al.*, 1996, pp. 651-652, Morgan, 1980). Metaphors are said to have added a rich and creative dimension to the understanding of organization theory related issues (Czarniawska, 2006, pp. 242-252).

Metaphors are used in organization theory as tools to convey meanings and to illuminate and illustrate theories by linking them with some more familiar word, phrase or object (Hernes, 2004, pp. 28-29). For example, the metaphor of jazz is used to reflect the "temporal, emotional and ambiguous aspects of organizational structure (Kamoche *et al.*, 2005, p. 90; Lewin, 1998; Zack, 2000). Similarly organizations are metaphorically described as theatres (Cornelissen, 2004). Metaphors are useful to organization theory not only because they provide a linkage between an organizational phenomena and a word, phrase or object (the comparison model) but also because they create and generate new meanings beyond the more visible association between the source and the target (Cornelissen, 2005). Metaphors allow us to create a thought. But that created thought is disciplined. This duality of creativity and discipline, allows one to grapple with the many-sidedness of an organizational issue, phenomena or problem (Oswick *et al.*, 2002).

Currently the description and analysis of organizational metaphorical forms is a common practice in organization theory. A metaphor is a particular linguistic expression that links abstract social constructs to concrete social actions. It works through invoking a concept originated

from another field or level than the one that is being studied. A Metaphor forms a specific image or gestalt of the organization (Mills *et al.*, 2006, pp. 365-366). Literature identifies certain characteristics or criterion of a sound organizational metaphor. One such criterion is the capacity of a metaphor to generate new theoretical and practical insights about organizations. Other criteria include the ability of one metaphor leading to the creation of new metaphors and variables and providing right balance of similarities and differences between the 'source' and the 'target' (Morgan, 1998, p. 47; Alvesson, 2002, p. 28; Clegg *et al.*, 1996, p. 394). Metaphors are the basic structural forms of experience through which people engage, organize and understand their worldviews and are considered as the most effective communicative devices and if seen as epistemological devices to understand organizational phenomena, they must be able to embrace the ontological dynamism of organizations and their sub-systems (Sadler-Smith & Evan, 2006). Not unlike brands, they are the conceptual abstract "which resides in the minds" of organizational stakeholders and highlight the difference and identity of a particular organizational form (Pfister, 2009, p. 123; Yanow, 1996, p. 135; Polley, 1997).

It is interesting to realize that we understand the world on the basis of stories and narratives which are deeply rooted in our mind since early childhood. They prepare our minds to see and perceive the world and happenings around us as stories (Stewart, 2001). Narratives are concerned with metaphorical articulation through language. Therefore, metaphors are an automatic instrument of our language through which we 'socially construct' our worldviews and realities and formulate the link between abstractions and concrete forms and realities. Metaphors provide insights which help to understand the organizational meanings, goals, values, processes, strategies, structures, cultures and systems (Hopkinson, 2003).

Discussion

The discourse of organization theory informs us that it has been devoid of abstract, ephemeral and metaphysical facets of knowledge. The fields of religion, history, mystic philosophy, arts and literature apparently seem to have had little impact on organization theory. This particularly refers to the Western style of organizing and managing which emerged after the eras of Enlightenment, Renaissance and Modernism.

However this trend seems to be shifting even in the West. Western writers and critics are pointing towards this shift by highlighting that nonempirical fields are slowly clawing their way back into the mainstream organization theory. Corporate aesthetics is one such emerging arena where value is put on the beautiful, sensuously pleasing and aesthetical aspects of organizations. Contemporary writers of organization theory suggest that the field does not only draw from natural sciences and economics but from multiple and diverse disciplines. They do not rule out literature and arts from these parent perspectives. The symbolicinterpretive view of organization theory cognizes that organizations are socially constructed and that language plays a vital part in this construction or sense making. This opinion paves the way for disciplines of linguistics, sociology, religion, arts and literature to formulate ‘undifferentiated’ organizational knowledge and theories.

This paper has focused on the link between organization theory and poetry. This link between the two disciplines is captured through the use of metaphors in both fields. Metaphorical employments in poetry are well known and this paper provides some examples from both English and Urdu poetry. Metaphors emerge as instruments and tools of conveying multiple meanings which enrich and contextualize the language and enhance understanding. The metaphor of ‘Wasteland’, for example, informs us of the psychological, social and economic conditions of post-World War world. These conditions could be described without employing this metaphor but it would not be as terse, concise, enriched and immediate as what the writer wants to convey. The one word ‘wasteland’ conveys it all forcefully and immediately. The same characteristics of metaphors are seen in the analysis of Mir Taqi Mir’s poetry where body parts are employed to convey sublime and ephemeral meanings and feelings. It comes out that metaphors are the best tools to describe the felt emotions which are otherwise difficult to describe and convey.

We will now discuss how the same instrument is employed for the same purpose of conveying meanings and enhancing understandings in organization theory.

The examples of organizational metaphors highlighted in this paper show that the basic purpose and function of a metaphor is to create a link between an abstract concept and the concrete form of organizations. The

'machine' metaphor, for example, captures the abstraction of a machine. These abstractions include the ability of a machine to produce something and interconnection of its individual parts to produce a whole. These abstractions, when applied in organizational context, capture concretely the various systems, sub-systems, departments and processes which coordinate with each other to produce products and services. The 'organism' metaphor takes the abstract-concrete link a step further. It also includes the context of organization environmental elements through the abstraction of intercellular or immediate physical environment of a cell or organism. The metaphor 'theatre' encompasses organizational stakeholders through the abstract concept of stage actors (organizational actors or employees), audience (external stakeholder like consumers and competitors), directors and producers (top management of organization) and success or failure of the theatre (organizational performance). It can be inferred from this discussion that metaphors have different levels or dimensions. 'Theatre' metaphor is more multi-dimensional than the 'machine' metaphor because the former captures, compares and links more elements of the abstract with concrete organizational forms. In the same way the employment of two metaphors in conjunction (what Morgan terms as 'binocular vision' metaphor) also improves the meaning-conveying capability of the metaphors. For example, if the 'machine' and 'organism' metaphors are simultaneously used to describe an organization, they would not only capture its internal machine like functioning but also its organism like the link with the external environment and other stakeholders.

The above discussion highlights that both in poetry and organization theory, the metaphors have the theoretical and practical potential to compare and contrast the 'source' (abstraction) with the 'target' (the actual organizational or social reality). As an episteme, the metaphor possesses the power to encompass the ontological reality. This reality could be the structure, systems, culture, strategy, processes, in case of an organization or the daily life sorrows, joys, elations, depressions and devastations at social and societal levels. Poetry and organization theory are therefore not entirely and highly differentiated fields but are strongly linked through the medium of language which enables both organization theorists and poets to 'construct' social realities. Metaphors are but such conceptual tools of language.

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