# 12. Of tropes, totems and taboos: Reflections on Morgan's *images* from a cross-cultural perspective

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## INTRODUCTION

There can be little doubt that *Images of Organization* (hereafter *Images*) is one of the most important and iconic contributions to organization theory in recent decades. Several generations of organization studies academics, students and practitioners owe a great debt to Gareth Morgan for the intellectual work presented in *Images* and it is entirely apposite to take this opportunity, some thirty years after the first edition (Morgan, 1986) to acknowledge and celebrate this volume. As scholars who favour **social constructionist** and **interpretative approaches** to the study of organization, the present authors can testify personally to the impact that the emergence of *Images* had intellectually, pedagogically and practically. Here was a volume that, at once:

- served to consolidate and summarise social scientific thinking about organizations;
- gave due emphasis to the relativity of perspective;
- offered new ways of *seeing* and *interpreting organizational conduct* through a series of highly suggestive metaphors;
- enabled new forms of social and organizational critique;
- served as an impressively comprehensive yet accessible and student-friendly teaching resource.

In short *Images*, in all its incarnations (Morgan, 1986, 1996, 2006), is nothing short of an organization theory ***tour de force***. And yet, this encyclopaedic work is unquestionably a product of its time. We will argue that *Images* is the last **modern** organization theory text, and also one of the first **post-modern** texts. Its impact derives at least in part from its timely combination of comprehensive scope and accessibility. It is an all embracing theory of the provisional, perfectly fitting the moment at which we wanted to know how to approach our discipline in a way that is at once postmodern yet authoritative. Furthermore, since *Images* proposed that organisations might be studied through the lenses of specific metaphors it sensitizes us to the fact that, whether or not we are explicit or conscious of it, we inevitably study organisations in metaphorical terms. It follows, therefore, that our own discipline and methods are subject to the same remove from representational truth. Since Morgan's epic contribution, moreover, there has been no all-encompassing reformulation of organisation theory.

As Morgan (2011) reflects, *Images* began life as notes for an undergraduate course he taught as a visiting fellow at Penn State University in the USA in the early 1980s. The thinking in the first edition was, as Morgan himself acknowledges, greatly influenced by the collaborative work he undertook with Gibson Burrell at the University of Lancaster's Department of Behaviour in Organizations on *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* (hereafter *Sociological Paradigms*) (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). He and Burrell were still doctoral students when they wrote this

volume in part as an exercise in making sense of the sociological and philosophical literature and various perspectives they were working through (Morgan, 2011). Like *Images*, *Sociological Paradigms* is a work of categorization in which organizational analysis is mapped into competing paradigmatic domains according to meta-theoretical assumptions informing the groupings of theory.

Whilst both influential and controversial, Morgan was ultimately dissatisfied with *Sociological Paradigms* primarily because of its relative inaccessibility and intellectually demanding style. For example, few colleagues or students were familiar with the seminal work of historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1962 [1970]) on scientific paradigms. Driven by the demands of undergraduate teaching, Morgan wanted to translate *Sociological Paradigms* into a work which would appeal not only to academics and students of organization but also to practitioners. In pursuit of this aim, he alighted upon what we might characterize as a **super-metaphor**: the idea that "all theories are metaphorical. Working intensively in the University of Lancaster library in the early 1980s to review organization and management theory as comprehensively as possible, within a few short years Morgan explored the relationships between paradigm, metaphor and problem solving in organization theory (Morgan, 1980), considered some of the methodological implications of his thinking (Morgan, 1983; Morgan & Smircich, 1980) and had begun serious work on drafting the first edition of *Images* (see Morgan, 2011, p. 461).

Yet, for all its many merits, Morgan's work has not escaped critical gaze. Positivists have challenged the **ontological relativism** of *Images*, for example, while left-leaning detractors question its **ethical relativism** and unwillingness to commit politically to either Marxist or post-Marxist critique of organization theory and activism. Others are unhappy with the abstracted *analytical* position of Morgan's predominantly **ocular *view*** [*sic*] of organizations, arguing that it gives insufficient attention to embodied engagement with organizing practices. While Morgan (2006, 2011) has produced robust rejoinders to these forms of critique, we want, for our part, to shift discussion to other grounds for thinking critically yet constructively about his work. By so doing, we also want to suggest ways of moving "beyond" organisation theory as the (reflexive) deployment of metaphor.

We have selected two specific movements in organization theory (OT) through which to deepen our critical appreciation and pedagogical application of *Images.* These are the language turn (Czarniawska, 2011; Tietze et al., 2003; Westwood & Linstead, 2002); and the cultural turn (Martin, 1992; Morrill, 2008; Smirchich, 1983; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Willmott, 1993). In exploring these territories, we focus on how *Images* functions, asking how the metaphor (as deployed in *Images*) works as a **cultural artefact** of OT. We suggest these metaphors operate as **totems** in the OT community, and analyse their functions in a manner similar to Taussig's (2003) treatment of the totemic figures of the Cuna (Taussig, 2003). Further, we suggest that a deeper understanding of *Images*' efficacy in teaching OT might be derived from the totemic status of metaphor in international classroom settings.

Our aim is primarily to develop insight into how *Images* embodies a specific set of cultural assumptions, and to reflect on its use in non-Anglophone settings. The rationale for pursuing this line of argument is that we see the eight metaphors as tending to establish eight patterns of self-referential discourse which carry the danger of communicating an **ethnocentric** view of organization and organizing. Furthermore, because of their totemic functions, there can be a strong temptation to reify Morgan's eight metaphors and engage with them in relatively static terms.

The volume has acquired "orthodox textbook" status for many academics teaching organization theory and organization analysis courses in universities across Europe and the USA (both undergraduate and postgraduate). Ironically, to accept the eight metaphors as a form of orthodoxy, we suggest, is to risk sucking the very life from the concept of *metaphor* and its "**connotational field**". Indeed, it risks broaching a point where metaphor is no longer metaphor in any meaningful sense (i.e., once lively images descend into "**dead metaphors**"). If there is a core meaning to metaphor it is one that invokes ***movement*** in both psychic and material terms. To augment and make Morgan's work useful to the contemporary world of organization studies we need thus to be more reflexive in using **totemic metaphors**; to understand their *ethical* implications, the moral jeopardy they can invoke and to be sensitive to their use in differing cultural/linguistic contexts.

The chapter begins by setting up a **reflexive social anthropological stance** from which to explore the **mimetic qualities** and possibilities of Morgan's images. It then proceeds to consider the pedagogical implications of this theoretical reinterpretation of his work by offering some reflections on the use of *Images* in contemporary international teaching contexts, which is the empirical basis for our argument in this chapter. This chapter thus seeks to extend Morgan's work by: (a) moving further along the linguistic/postmodern and cultural turns taken by Morgan himself by introducing an anthropological sensibility offered by the concept of totem; (b) exploring some experiential illustrations of the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural *translations* of images in non-Anglophone settings.

## UNDERSTANDING TROPES, TOTEMS AND TABOOS

Morgan (2006, p. 340) suggested that metaphor can be used creatively to rethink and reshape organizational theory and practice. As such, it is a way of imagining and theorising the world that can both stimulate and obscure our understanding of organizing. Alvesson and Deetz (2000, p. 43) frame this issue graphically when posing the question: "what are we able to see or think about if we talk about it in this way rather than that?" Case and Gaggiotti (2014), for example, point out the dangers of deploying reductive economic metaphors in organization analysis: "while metaphor operates ubiquitously within both everyday and specialist discourses (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the relative value of its usage varies considerably" (2014, p. 4). While Morgan is aware of the propensity of metaphor to act simultaneously to mask aspects of reality as much as reveal them, he is less explicit about his own reflexive position as a white Anglo-Saxon male espousing predominantly Western forms of organization and social theory. Image construction becomes problematic when it is the product of materials and ideas hailing from a restricted societal and linguistic standpoint, and for reasons other than the ethical relativism admitted when other **tropes** are excluded. In this section we examine the cultural significance of images, perhaps the most important yet also the most *hidden* of metaphors in *Images of Organization.*

The title of the book, *Images,* selects specifically ocular references for Morgan's metaphors. Although Morgan points out that metaphors influence both what we see and how we look, his use of image remains somewhat implicit. Why not choose, for example, *Feelings, Tastes* or *Sounds of Organization*? Limiting ourselves to only one of our senses in everyday life – the use of only ocular images – reduces possibilities exclusively to what Taussig refers to as the production of "visual means":

> Medicinally triggered visions ministered by healers in the Upper Amazon … are surely effective not only because of visual imagery, but also on account of non visual [*sic*] imagery … the senses cross over and translate into each other. You feel redness. You see music. Thus non visual imagery may evoke visual means. (Taussig, 2003, p. 57)

The following analysis seeks to challenge Morgan's ways of working with images as metaphors from the point of view of its nascent ethnocentric and (subconsciously) colonial disposition. Whilst it may not be possible to avoid ethnocentricity entirely in organization analysis, we would like to emphasize the importance of remaining reflexively open to plural modes of representation and rhetoric. This is a point whose salience we try to illustrate later in the chapter when discussing our experiences of teaching in international settings.

**Images as natural and not cultural totems**

The identification and uses of metaphorical classes or patterns by Morgan could be understood from an anthropological standpoint as an exercise in ***totemic* selection**, operating with the **homologous logic** of objects linking the natural and the social. In other words, each of Morgan's eight metaphorical patterns have **totemic characteristics**. Like totems, the eight images simultaneously include *and* exclude. Morgan refers to this propensity of metaphor **epigrammatically** by pointing out that: "a way of seeing is a way of not seeing" (2006, p. 67).

Both totemism and metaphor presuppose translation and movement between objects which are re-presented (presented again) in another form (**animate or inanimate** things or words). Although metaphors have unquestionably been more popular in organization theory (e.g., Alvesson & Spicer, 2011), some authors have recognized the potential of totemism as a way of understanding how organizational classifications and meanings are constructed, in particular, with respect to organizational identity (Burgi & Roos, 2001). Likewise, Letiche (2004, p. 159) suggests that "narratives are totems – mythic structures that mirror the natural and the social, the individual and the universal".

The practice of totemism is based on the notion that the human soul and human thoughts pass into a class of animal, plant, or other objects. Discussing totemism, for example, the anthropological pioneer Tylor (1898, p. 143) refers to "the tendency of mankind to classify out the universe" by personifications and by making associations of people (or thoughts) with certain *selective classes* of animate or inanimate things, **mimetic objects** or natural species. Totems operate by representationally imbuing an object with a distinctive quality or power-through-association which a cultural grouping can readily identify with. By offering the possibility of identification, totems thus serve to create group ties and a sense of the collective. Durkheim (1976) explains how emblems and coat-of-arms, for example, work as modern totems by identifying people (family names) with particular images. Kamoche (1995, p. 371) in his organizational ethnography of teamwork in a Kenyan firm noticed that "organizational members combine language and ritual to construct an organizational phenomenon in the form of a totem" which, by offering a common way of imagining, creates ties that reinforce differences between the included and excluded. By excluding, including and differentiating between those who imagine in the accepted way and those who imagine "differently", totems represent the **taboos** that need to be avoided by the members of a group or clan (Freud, 1918 [1913]).

We suggest that Morgan's metaphors can usefully be positioned as totemic images which define the taboos that those who imagine in a particular way need to avoid. For those who imagine organizations around the mechanistic totem, for example, to be unconventional is a taboo:

> Mechanistic organization discourages initiative, encouraging people to obey orders and keep their place rather than to take an interest in, and question what they are doing. People in a bureaucracy who question the wisdom of conventional practice are viewed more often than not as troublemakers. (Morgan, 2006, p. 30)

The organismic totem invokes the taboo of avoiding being pluralistic and retaining individual freedom:

> The organismic metaphor has had a subtle yet important impact on our general thinking by encouraging us to believe in a state of unity where everyone is pulling together. (Morgan, 2006, p. 68)

Interpreted from this perspective, Morgan's images seem to follow the pattern of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist approach to totemism, by which cultural representations resonate with biological needs. As Burgi and Roos (2001, p. 8) observe:

> Totemism in this way tends to see the most important meaning in the "totem" or sacralized element itself, believing that the specific choice of species attempts to magically transfer properties of the species to the human group.

Each of Morgan's totem-images (machine, organism, brain, culture, etc.) has the propensity, *through forms of identification*, to transfer its properties to the group; that is, the group appropriates for itself the (mechanistic, naturalistic, intelligible, cultural, etc.) qualities of the totem-image. As Morgan notes, for example, "Under the influence of the culture metaphor, leaders and managers come to see themselves as people who ultimately help to create and shape the meanings that are to guide organized action" (2006, p. 143). The totemic organizational image thus has the potential to construct and render the individual reader – an academic, an organizational theorist, a manager, a student, a practitioner – subject to the power of images. As we have argued above, if not reflective and circumspect, readers of *Images* risk becoming captured by univocal representations that serve to reify organizational possibilities because the selection and reduction upon which totem images are based, the "as if" quality of their existence, is forgotten or not even noticed.

Evans-Pritchard (1951) and, later, Lévi-Strauss (1963 [1962]), argued that being captured by a totem is equivalent to being defined by association with it, and thus satisfies needs to belong. The reason for totemism is not so much revelatory as existential; it is a manifestation of how groups distinguish among them. For Lévi-Strauss the motivation of **totemic identification** is to understand, relate and situate one's group in relation to other groups. "Natural species are chosen [as totems] not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think'" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963 [1962], p. 89). The Lévi-Straussian concept of totemic phenomena (as opposed to "totemism"), places emphasis on the relation between groups and totems rather than the individual power of each totem within each group. The machines, brains, organisms, etc. viewed

as totems are also functional for social groups (academics, leaders, managers) who need to represent themselves and the organizations they study or work for. Even if it might seem to an impartial observer that these are ***magical metaphors*** with the power to facilitate understanding of the world (Morgan, 2006, p. 367) their significance exceeds sheer conceptual comprehension, instead possessing the capacity to colonize subjectivities and shape organizational acts.

**The power of images to effect action**

A central topic discussed among ethnographers is how mimetic objects – replicas – afford this associative and relational power and help communities to find explanations that motivate individual and collective action. Describing the curing figurines of Cuna culture in Panama, for instance, Taussig (1993) refers to the seductive power of **multifaceted replication**. The Cuna developed a practice of modelling figurines as a way of responding to physical and mental ailments they encountered. These figurines replicated an individual who was sick in the belief that such ritual mimesis would have curative effects. While the primary purpose may have been to cure, Taussig points out that the figurine replicas came to serve a much wider purpose, that is, to understand and make sense of self and other; in particular, the colonist in relation to the Cuna. The mimetic figurines not only represent qualities from one referent to another by similarity but also function to transform social relations:

> Note the magical, the soulful power that derives from replication. For this is where we must begin; with the magical power of replication, the image affecting what it is in an image of, wherein the representation shares in or takes power from the represented… (Taussig, 1993, p. 2)

The way the Cuna treat illness with the figurines has interesting resonances with the way we use metaphor. According to Taussig, the Cuna base cure on the creation of a set of social meanings surrounding the illness. The "other" as figurine becomes an agent that enables everybody to associate with the meaning of the illness, including the person represented, and by so doing to contribute collectively to the cure. To "cure" in this context does not necessarily imply a state of "perfect health", but rather a state of health that is consonant with shared expectations of what it is to have that ailment. (In an analogous way, in western society the meanings of "having cancer" are different to those of "having Alzheimer's disease". A diagnosis of either emerges as a figure representing much more than the pathology of the disease.)

The metaphors in *Images* function much as the Cuna figurines; images that obtain an apparent sense-making agency. That the Cuna figurines are replicas of European white men is of particular note. Neither the Cuna nor other local ethnic groups are represented. However, curiously, the Cuna themselves deny any connection between the two. This may express an unconscious (but quite reasonable) association of illness with foreign-ness. But the fact that they claim not to recognise this association alerts us to the possibility that we may not recognise associations vested in the metaphors of *Images.* As Taussig says, reflecting on the model of him made by the Cuna:

> What magic lies in this, my wooden self, sung to power in a language I cannot understand? Who is this self, objectified without my knowledge, that I am hell-bent on analyzing as object-over-there fanned by sea breezes and the

> smoke of burning cocoa nibs enchanting the shaman's singing? (Taussig, 1993, p. 8)

It might be appropriate, therefore, to conclude this section with a reflection on *our* authorial engagement with the images of *Images of Organization*. We might usefully ask: "who are we, organization theorists hell-bent on analysing Morgan's metaphors as objects-over-there". In the following section we begin to form an answer to this question by reflecting on our experience of *using* Morgan's book in non-Anglophone teaching settings and pointing to the quasi-colonial and post-colonial challenges of encouraging international students to *see their world* through totemic organizational images originating in modern Anglo-Saxon culture.

## TOTEMS, IMAGES AND REPLICAS IN INTERNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS

As we indicated in the previous section, Taussig points out that the Cuna figurines resemble white colonists. However, paradoxically, the Cuna themselves deny any connection between the two. This creates an epistemic dilemma in anthropology that, we suggest, is similar to dilemmas we potentially face when using *Images* as a teaching resource: something that appears obvious to Anglo-Saxon organizational academics using Morgan's text might not be so obvious for non-Anglo-Saxon students and/or for whom English is not a first language. In this section we recall and reflect on our own experiences of using Morgan's text whilst teaching in other countries and in other languages. Our overall point is that, in teaching organization analysis in different cultural contexts and/or using different languages, one needs to remain as sensitive as possible to the diverse *interpretative responses* of students to the images being mobilized. From our experiential observations, as we endeavour to point out, tropes function differently in varying cultural and linguistic contexts. In what follows, we connect Taussig's observations regarding mimesis to the accounts that doctoral and MBA students we have taught in the Nordic region, the Balkans, South America, Catalonia and Southeast Asia offer when explaining the meaning of Morgan's images. It has to be acknowledged that we did not set out systematically to research "uses of Morgan's metaphors" in non-Anglophone countries and thus the countries represented here simply reflect the somewhat contingent experiences and linguistic capacities of the authorial team. Nonetheless, our observations do encompass an intercontinental spread of countries and range of both non-Indo-European (Finnish, Malay) and Indo-European (Albanian, Spanish, and Catalan) languages.

### Finnish

While lecturing in Finland one of the authors interviewed a Finnish business school colleague about the challenges of teaching Morgan's metaphors to Finnish students. One interesting point made was in reference to his experience of explaining Morgan's organismic metaphor and, specifically, "the idea that individuals and groups, like biological organisms, operate most effectively when their needs are satisfied" (2006 [1986], p. 34). The colleague mentioned how the students struggled to imagine "organisms as living systems existing in a wider environment" (Morgan, 2006 [1986], p. 33) as the word organism (*organismi*) in Finnish can be used to denote more than one thing: a non-living being, a compound of parts of something or, for example, a multifaceted instrument, like a church organ. The metaphor did not work as an image, not

because of its lack of capacity of being a good copy (*antigraphos*), but because of its limitations when inducing complexity to the imagination and multiplying functions for the same image; a possibility inhibited if the word *organismi* is used. Working on the nature of the Cuna replicas, Taussig mentioned the multiplicity of the functions the figurines (putative images) had and described at least four different uses of the same figurine.

The work with our Finnish colleague when using Morgan's *Images* also resonates with Taussig's reflections of how the self is constructed by others and how the image *constructs the metaphor*. Explaining the contradictory feelings experienced when translating into Finnish Morgan's words for images, our colleague remarked:

> I remembered that I actually used a different Finnish word to denote organism in Morgan: *eliö*. *Eliö* has its roots in *elävä*, *elämä*, meaning "living, life". Sometimes I also offer a related concept, *olio* (creature, thing) to complement *eliö*. I use *eliö* because *organismi* in Finnish has this connotation of referring to systems or institutions in a more general sense that I want to avoid [i.e., referring to "organized systems" or "organized wholes"].

Our Finnish colleague suggested that when copies are not just copies but *replicas*, not only does the metaphor construct the image, but the inverse also applies: the image constructs the metaphor. As we noted in the previous section, this "magic of mimesis" – when the replica constructs the original – is also acknowledged by Taussig himself in his reflections on how a wooden Cuna figurine became an objectification of himself. Taussig also mentions the power of the replicas to construct holistic explanations of the cure, when spiritual and substantial levels of reality are conjoined and seen by the Cuna "as distinct yet complementary" (1993, p. 121). Similarly, our Finnish colleague found himself having to engage in considerable translational work – a kind of magical transubstantiation – with Morgan's original *organismic* image to construct meaningful metaphors for his students which, in effect, were distinct yet complementary to that original.

**Albanian**

Using *Images* when teaching a doctoral course in Pristina, Kosovo, one of the authors made specific reference to Morgan's "organizations as brains" metaphor. He noticed that students seemed to struggle to "get" either the root metaphor or explanations of the point being made. Changing pedagogical tack, the colleague asked students for examples of what came to their mind when the words for "brain" and "organization" were linked. In response, they said it was difficult to explain in English and that the best way of understanding the connection was with another metaphorical construction. They made reference to an Albanian proverb: *Qingji I but I thithë dy nëna* ("A soft lamb sucks from two mothers").

The students said they used this phrase to refer to someone who is competent, sensible and capable of engaging others in an organizational context; someone who is capable of "being" with more than one person or engaging in more than one activity. Yet, simultaneously, it also denotes someone who is very young, inexperienced, and yet is aware enough to see the sense in being able to adapt to more than one organizational situation.

The "brain" that Albano-Kosovar students imagined was not aligned with what we might, through our theoretical lens, see as Morgan's functionalist approach to

totemism (one magic object – a brain – with one transformational image – a learning organization). Instead, they *translated* and recovered the totem in a way that resembles a Lévi-Straussian idea of totemic phenomena; one which emphasizes the social sensibility around the "totem" brain; one that invoked connotations of "learning from others", "humility", "modesty born of inexperience", "openness to learning" and "capacity to *be with* more than one person". This is a rich constellation of meaning that is quite different from that which we might expect as teachers working with students, for example, in the UK or USA.

**Spanish**

As Taussig observes when discussing the magic induced by mimesis, "a first step here is to insist on breaking away from the tyranny of the visual notion of image" (1993, p. 57). When consulting *Images*, readers might be tempted to construct a single and "positive" image of, for example, a brain which is infinitely capable of learning. However, discussing the "organizations as brains" metaphor, once again, but this time while teaching postgraduate research students in Buenos Aires, Argentina, one of the authors encountered yet more revealing challenges of trans-cultural uses of Morgan's work. Having been introduced to the brain metaphor, instead of invoking a positive image of "individual and organizational learning", students interpreted it in an entirely *opposite* way. This image was taken to express an *incapability* rather than the capability to learn. Asked for examples, they expressed their interpretation of the metaphor through a proverb: *No ve dos en un burro* ("S/he doesn't see two people [riding] on a donkey"). The students said this proverb represents an individual's incapacity to learn. It can refer to someone who is incapable of understanding anything that is socially or organizationally complex, that is, someone who lacks sensitivity and is rather simplistic in their outlook; someone who, moreover, is only capable of linear and uni-dimensional thinking. Quite a contrast, once again, to the interpretation of the brain image that one might expect in an Anglophone teaching context.

**Catalan**

Taussig describes how there are many different wooden replicas of turtles among the Cuna, among them turtles for medical practice and turtles for hunting. The turtles, even though they have the same name and are made with the same material (wood), are essentially different. Following a parallel with the Cuna turtles, the "same" metaphor – rooted in the "same" analogy – can evoke very different images. For example, during a discussion in Catalan of "organizations as psychic prison" in a university in Barcelona, Spain, doctoral students indicated that this image prompted multiple associations to the idea that social practices constrain, like prison walls, mental and emotional possibilities. The same *physical* place evokes differing *symbolic* spaces. Asked for examples, one link they made was to the meaning of the Catalan word *can* (place). This is a term that can be used **synecdochically** to refer to the "same" organization but whose connotation is different according to circumstances and depending on who inhabits the organization. *Can* is the same metaphor represented by the same word but, like the turtle replicas, it has different meanings and uses. *Can Barça*, for instance, could be used as a **dysphemism** to refer to executives of the soccer club "Barcelona", but also as an **approbative** to refer to club players. In Catalan, the metaphor of prison as *a place* evokes the question "whose side am I on?". As an image, it is neither purely descriptive nor objective, any more than the turtle totems of the Cuna.

**Malaysian**

As noted above, even if we accept Morgan's suggestion that the creative uses of metaphor can help rethink and reshape organizations, we must also acknowledge, following Alvesson and Deetz (2000), that metaphors can obscure our understanding of them. We have experienced the obscuration effect in three ways when introducing the mechanistic metaphor to Malaysian MBA students.

The first was when students indicated that they not only have difficulties imagining organizations through the mechanistic metaphor but, in particular, are unable even to imagine what "a machine" in Morgan's sense is. Morgan's "machine" was perceived to constrain and limit students' imagination. The image of a machine represented for them a more complex and hybridized blend of images; one which simultaneously invoked *inter alia* brains, politics and culture. This resonates to some extent with our earlier claim that Morgan's eight metaphors, however unintentionally, seem to operate as modern western totems – each separated out and treated in a reified way. Asked for examples of what they meant by "machine", the Malaysian students came back with a range of possibilities, including robots, cell phones, search-engines, computer/phone apps, sat navs and others. One of our students commented:

> With reference to the Malay language, if you say something like *organisasi adalah seperti mesin* (organizations are like machines), this suggests the organization is something like a robot. (Student 4)

One non-culturally specific explanation of this interpretation would be that images of "a machine" and "mechanistic relations" have changed significantly in the thirty years since Morgan first suggested it as an organizational metaphor. However, we have used the metaphor extensively with mainland European and British students (as well as non-European internationals students in UK) and, in so doing, have not been presented with similar responses. The following is a field note made by one of the authors on the day that the machine metaphor was introduced to the Malaysian students:

> When discussing Morgan's mechanistic metaphor, students came back with examples of apps, mobile phones, robots, or even cyborgs, humanoids and "machines" that they referred to as "more related with the social, the environment…"; like a political party, a school. They described emotional relations between machines and humans, or between humans and machines. *Manga* comics, the relationship between machines and people in Kurosawa's filmography and Šabanović's (2014) ethnography on the Humanoid Robotics project and the relationship between culture and 'kansei robotics' in Japan, came to my assistance later [as I took the discussion further] …

As can be seen, students came with the image of a machine in terms of what **actor-network theorists** might take to be *hybrid objects* and *quasi-objects* (Callon, 1986; Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005); where socio-material elements combine in an alembic of the human, cultural, material and environmental to make up "a machine". Unlike in the Anglophone context, there is no easy separation between the human and non-human in the Malay conception of a "mechanistic view". When this issue was discussed with the students, their responses revealed a very different kind of

understanding than might be expected in Anglophone classes. In place of independent, isolated and autonomous conception of machines, we find a far more hybridized sensibility:

> I have the impression that Morgan is thinking of isolated machines, with no humans, and not part of the world. Let's assume that the machine is a sailing ship. As such, the following can be related as a metaphor to an organization: the sail – organizational direction; the engine – USP [unique selling point] of an organization; the captain – the leader or CEO [chief executive officer] of an organization; the sailors – an organization's objectives; the waves in the ocean – the challenges that an organization faces on a day to day basis; the oars in a sailing ship – the tools used by an organization to move forward; the hull of the ship – the financial security and stability of the company to keep it afloat and prevent it from sinking…The whole is the machine, but is not only "mechanical". (Student 3)

The second experience of obscuration relates back to what we said earlier about Taussig's concept of "visual means" and the reductionist dangers of exclusively using *ocular* images. Students came with a range of imagining through senses other than the visual. Here is an illustrative example as represented in the field notes of one of the authors:

> In the morning, I visited with the students the factory of an Asian carmaker, a semiautomatic robotic factory based on Japanese Mitsubishi design during the late 1980s in KL [Kuala Lumpur]. The students came to the class in the afternoon and when discussing the mechanistic image they described making references not only to what we saw – order, machines, processes – but to electric beeps, intermittent tuba-like horns and odours of brand new plastics, tyres and coffee (from the coffee machines situated in some corners of the factory where the workers have breaks). This is not really what came to my mind when imagining the "well-oiled engine" or "nuts and bolts" machine of Morgan's *Images*.

The third obscuration effect reflected in this experience of teaching Malaysian students relates to our suggestion that Morgan's metaphors operate as totemic images that simultaneously define *taboos* to be avoided by those doing the "**imaginization**". This taboo aspect of the image was, in fact, one of the main concerns of our Malaysian students. As already pointed out, the machine metaphor excludes those who imagine unconventionally, yet for the Malaysian students this image seemed to have quite the opposite effect. For them, to be unconventional is not a taboo to be avoided if someone imagines organizing mechanistically. As one of the students commented:

> The machine liberates you. By working mechanistically you can suggest improvements, innovate, discover other ways. The employees at Proton can suggest improvements precisely because they work mechanistically. It is like Chinese calligraphy: to repeat, liberates you…

The notion that mechanistic work can liberate the imagination is something quite alien to the Western mind. Marx, Marcuse, Braverman, *et alia*, would be utterly appalled! And yet, this student's words act as a potent illustration of just the kind of challenge

faced in using Morgan's book when teaching in international settings or, indeed, international students more generally. As with the other teaching experiences related above, this encounter serves as a cautionary tale to those who would otherwise take for granted the semantic fields and forces which any one of Morgan's eight metaphors might be *expected* or *presumed* to evoke.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have considered the culture-making ways in which Morgan's images function as totems and also reflected, experientially, on their uses in teaching OT in international settings. The chapter opened with the suggestion that *Images of Organization* occupies the cusp of modern and postmodern organization theory. Advocating multiple perspectives on organizing, and disclosing the conditional subjectivity of each perspective, Morgan invites his readers to invent whichever new metaphors they choose. Our discussion considers the socio-cultural function of the metaphors; specifically how, as images, they provide means for collective identification in much the same way as totems are seen to in both classical and contemporary anthropology. By analogy with the totemic figures of the Cuna, as studied by Taussig (1993), we draw attention to the way in which Morgan's metaphors have come to represent the pathologies of organization theory, cast in the likeness of the organizations that must be "other" to us, constituting ourselves as organization theorists and teachers. Morgan's metaphors have become the totems of OT. Thus the first part of the chapter contributes an interpretation of the community-forming functions of *Images of Organization*.

We then proceeded to consider the *translational* implications of using *Images* as a teaching resource when working with students in non-Anglophone settings. Having taught *Images* in languages other than English and in non-Western cultures, we draw on our experience of the differing ways in which images of machine, brain, organism, etc. are constructed, evoke diverse associations, and afford varying possibilities for organisation theorisation and interpretative analysis. We offered a series of lessons and cautionary tales deriving from our post graduate teaching experiences in Finland, Albania, Argentina, Spain and Malaysia. If pushed to derive a general conclusion from these diverse encounters it would be that Morgan's metaphors uniformly resist any single, univocal or unequivocal interpretation. Although there may be cultural patterns that inform a given national group's interpretation of the images, international students appear to respond to Morgan's metaphors openly and make varying semantic associations with them. This equates, metaphorically, to a kind of postmodern pedagogical unravelling of the modern theoretical tapestry to be found in *Images*. The associations and identifications made by international students have often been surprising and unexpected to us as OT teachers.

The key lesson we forge from this is that Morgan's metaphors cannot be interpreted or valued free from context. Further, anyone who uses Morgan's metaphors in an international setting – it may be in international collaboration on research, business, education or anything else, or it may be in international teaching, consultancy or research – needs to acquire and maintain a kind of anthropological sensibility which allows and, indeed, encourages space for multiethnic interpretation, pedagogical flexibility (Case and Selvester, 2000; Reynolds and Trehan, 2003). It should always be born in mind that metaphors can operate as much as *vehicles of obscuration* of our understanding as they can lucidity and insight, particularly if we fall into the trap of

univocal ways of representing them. We should at all times be on reflexive guard against the ethnocentric expectation that everyone is inclined to "**metaphorize**" and "imaginize" *in the same way as us*. Alertness to different ways of metaphorizing, moreover, not only carries anthropological but also ontological ramifications. We should allow ourselves the opportunity given by international communication to develop a profound respect for the **emic** imagination of the other and, as far as possible be prepared to journey into differing social and cultural epistemologies that the Other brings to the communication. The **ontological challenge**, moreover, simultaneously invokes an ethical challenge; namely, being sufficiently ready to de-centre oneself and one's perspective that a genuine encounter with the Other (Levinas, 1969; 1998) becomes possible. In Levinas' terms, this entails rejecting an **unreflexive ontological position** that would either *impose* or *project* analytical or judgmental categories on the Other. Such unreflexivity risks negating the Other's essence of alterity in a quasi-colonial or imperious way. Rather, an Ethics of the Other should spring out of the relationship with the Other and be realized through meeting the responsibilities that surge from the demands of an encounter with Otherness.

International communication, in terms of, for example, international collaboration, would thus ideally involve an ongoing encounter with the collaborator as Other, being mindful of the ethical responsibilities that come with the terrain. The moral challenge for anyone is to respond to the call of, and be prepared to *learn with*, the Other. This can only happen if one is not seduced by the erstwhile securities of ready-made Anglo-centric categorizations, generalizations, classifications, rules and obligations such as – in the wrong hands – might be seen to be offered and inscribed in Morgan's *Images*. This lies at the heart of the cautionary tale that stems from our teaching anecdotes. The implications of this for international collaboration and international management are not insignificant. To "learn with the Other" would imply to liberate the Other to imagine in unpredictable, non domesticated ways; not only or simply to *translate* Anglo-centric metaphors but also to imagine with new metaphors rooted in other linguistic traditions. A few international management examples might serve to make our point in this regard. The word *kaizen* was originally used to mean the introduction of amendments and rectifications intended to bring about an improvement of some kind, but it became a seminal image to inspire the invention of modern concepts like Total Quality Management and quality circles. As another example: when conducting fieldwork in Italian corporations one of the authors observed that the use of the word "family" (*famiglia*) by managers triggered representations of multiple images of organizing that were used to discuss international strategy in Italian corporations and business schools. Similarly, Dai (2015) shows how a modern Japanese term referring to corporate sustainability evokes much older Chinese characters (*gong qi*, 公器, communal vessel). This evinces qualities of containment and emptiness – meanings of sustainability that are not afforded by the English.

It is clear that Morgan-mediated-image-creation depends on multiple facets of international context, many of which are extremely difficult (and perhaps ultimately impossible) to fathom. This alerts us to the continuous negotiated malleability of the metaphors, and the political economy of which OT, embedded in particular relations of power-knowledge, is a constituent. The following conclusions thus follow from our analysis and illustrative examples:

1) that those who use Morgan's metaphors are cultural ambassadors who, by mobilizing Morgan's metaphors in their practices, also reflexively represent and impart a cultural stance to people from other cultures;

2) that Morgan's metaphors are not really "Morgan's" *per se* but, instead, are appropriated by readers whose differing ethnicities mediate and modulate their meaning and application.

These conclusions lead us to consider that one should approach *Images* with humility, intellectual respect and an appreciation of its sophistication. After years of engaging with the book, we are left with the impression that naïve and sometimes simplistic interpretations have attenuated the intellectual contribution of Morgan's work.

In retrospect, Morgan's work might ultimately go down as the last gasp of modernist organization studies, committed as it is to grand social theory (see, as evidence, the encyclopaedic bibliographic notes in both editions of *Images*) as opposed to working through the micro-narratives of a post-structural and post-modern sensibility (Lyotard, 1984). His book still serves as an extremely rich resource but its application in international contexts reveals that the theoretical tapestry needs to be unravelled and its "teachers" have to be prepared to work with surprising and unexpected interpretations of its images. We have sought through the analysis and experiences related in this chapter to promote a critical reappraisal of Morgan's metaphors, pointing to their totemic function and warning of the dangers inherent in their unreflexive and uncritical application in international settings.

Finally, though, we hope this chapter constitutes an appreciation of Morgan's work, and wish to express again our respect, admiration and gratitude for such a stimulating contribution to our field.

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**Learning Points**

- *Images of Organization* occupies the cusp of modern and postmodern organization theory.

- Metaphors fulfil a community-forming function in much the same way as totems are seen to operate in both classical and contemporary anthropology. In this way *Images* presents a theory of organization that is at once de-materialized, iconic and narratively embedded – foreseeing the narrative turn in organization theory.

- It is crucial to consider the *translational* implications of using *Images* as a training resource when working with participants in non-Anglophone settings.

- Although there may be cultural patterns that inform a given national group's interpretation of organizational images, international students appear to respond to Morgan's metaphors openly and make varying semantic associations with them.

- The international organizational theory (OT) teacher needs to acquire and maintain a kind of ethnographic sensibility that allows and, indeed, encourages space for multiethnic interpretation, pedagogical flexibility, and genuine educational encounter.

- Morgan's metaphors are not really "Morgan's" *per se* but, instead, are appropriated by readers whose differing ethnicities mediate and modulate their meaning and application.

**Glossary**

*Actor-network theorists*: Theorists espousing actor-network theory, which views the word as comprising networks of interaction between human and non-human actors and, thus, nonhumans are treated as if they have the capacity to act or participate in networks.

*Animate or inanimate*: Having or lacking the features of living beings.

*Approbative*: Words or grammatical forms that express appreciation or approval of the speaker.

*Connotational field*: A setting in which a certain word is given a particular meaning.

*Cultural artefact*: An object that conveys information and meaning about the community of humans that made it.

*Dead metaphors*: Metaphors that no longer function as metaphors in that they have come to be taken literally; examples include "face *loosing*", "being *on top* of things", and "the boss is *above* the employees".

*Dysphemism*: An expression with a subordinate meaning that is offensive either about the subject matter or to the audience.

*Emic*: The local point of view; the emic approach seeks to explore and recover knowledge, understanding and practice from the indigenous perspective..

*Epigrammatically*: In a pithy, satirical and witty way.

*Ethical relativism*: The view that what is morally right or wrong varies from person to person or from society to society.

*Ethnocentric*: Judging another culture by the values and standards of one's own culture.

*Homologous logic*: A logic that emphasizes similarities between differing structures, positions or states (in this case between society and nature).

*Imaginization*: A creative approach concerned with improving our ability to see and understand situations in new ways.

*Interpretative approaches*: Research that places the meaning-making practices of human actors at the center of scientific explanation, in contrast to research starting with concepts determined a priori.

*Magical metaphors*: Metaphors whose capacity to influence is mysterious, mystical or enchanting.

*Metaphorize*: To describe something using metaphor.

*Mimetic objects*: Imitations.

*Mimetic qualities*: In this case the imitative characteristics of metaphor.

*Modern*: An era with an optimistic belief in ultimate principles and the inevitability of progress; that there is a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody.

*Movement*: In this context, the concepts of motion, carriage and transference are integral to the etymology (word origin) of metaphor: from the Greek μεταφορά (Latin meta*for*á) meaning, literally, "a carrying over".

*Multifaceted replication*: Reproduction or imitation that has many features.

*Ocular view*: A view through the eye.

*Ontological challenge*: The questioning of one's fundamental sense of being.

*Ontological relativism*: The view that there is no absolute answer to the philosophical question of "what exists?" – there are only answers that are relative to a certain framework.

*Post-modern*: An era or position that denies or, at the least, criticizes the foundational assumptions and universalizing tendencies of the modern era.

*Reflexive social anthropological stance*: An intellectual and analytical position adopted by some social anthropologists which requires them to be aware of how their own cultural conditioning and disposition influences their interprets and interactions with alien cultures.

*Social constructionist approaches*: Approaches based on the assumption that our realities are shaped by the meanings that develop through our interactions with others.

*Super-metaphor*: A metaphor through which (all) other metaphors are made sense of.

*Synecdochically*: Something that is characterized by the figure of speech that is called "synecdoche", in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part.

*Taboos*: Actions that are prohibited because they are considered either too sacred or too dangerous for lay people to perform.

*Totemic characteristics*: Features and qualities pertaining to **totems**.

*Totemic identification*: The act of identifying with a totem.

*Totemic metaphors*: Metaphors that have acquired the status of a totem.

*Totemic selection*: The act of choosing a totem.

*Totems*: Mythic structures that mirror the natural and the social, the individual and the universal.

*Tour de force*: An exceptional performance or achievement.

*Tropes*: A concept denoting a group of linguistic expressions, of which "metaphor" is one (others examples include: irony, metonymy, synecdoche, exaggeration, understatement).

*Unreflexive ontological position*: An intellectual position from which the philosophical question of "what exists?" has a taken for granted or self-evident answer.