

# Reflections on the Visceral: Metaphors and Illness Experience

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## Abstract

With changing literary and socio-cultural conventions, theories on metaphor have undergone revision in their conceptualisation and use since Aristotle's *Poetics*. Although Aristotle premised his theoretical framework of metaphor on analogy, most contemporary research on metaphor is grounded on its role as a linguistic device and of poetic imagination until the radical exploratory studies made by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who redefined metaphor as a characteristic of thought and action. However, a systematic reflection on metaphor as a phenomenon of lived experience and conditions for its expression is lacking in different metaphor theories. Therefore, this essay aims to provide an overview of the major theoretical postulates on metaphor, with an emphasis on Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory (CMT) and its correspondence to expressions of illness experience. Further, the wider implications of using metaphors, especially visual metaphors in graphic pathographies, will be analysed in the essay.

**Keywords:** metaphors, comics, illness, graphic medical narratives, conceptual metaphor theory

With the help of metaphoric meaning, our experiences can be enriched and better understood, and our realities thereby broadened.

- Hermine Feinstein, "Meaning and Visual Metaphor."

## 1. Introduction

With changing literary and socio-cultural conventions, theories on metaphor have undergone revision in their conceptualisation and use since Aristotle's *Poetics*. Although Aristotle premised his theoretical framework of metaphor on analogy, most contemporary research on metaphor is grounded on its role as a linguistic device and of poetic imagination until the radical exploratory studies made by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who redefined metaphor as a characteristic of thought and action. However, a systematic reflection on metaphor as a phenomenon of lived experience and conditions for its expression is lacking in different metaphor theories. Therefore, this essay will provide an overview of the major theoretical postulates on metaphor, with an emphasis on Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive metaphor theory (CMT) and its correspondence to expressions of illness experience. Further, the wider implications of using metaphors, especially visual metaphors in graphic pathographies, will be analysed in the context of illness.

Originating from the theories of Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, metaphors were understood as a matter of language, not thought. This classical theory of metaphor proposed that metaphorical expressions were mutually exclusive from the realm of

everyday literal language. Based on similarities, two concepts were compared in rhetoric intended for aesthetic qualities such as “rhetorical force and stylistic vividness and pleasantness of a discourse” (Abrams, 1991, p. 155). Juxtaposition of classical metaphor theory with Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive approach to metaphors of the twentieth century reflects a definitive paradigm shift from locating metaphors as a matter of words/language to a matter of thought/action. However, this perspectival shift was shaped across the centuries of theorising metaphors in literary and philosophical domains.

## **2. An Overview of Metaphor Theories**

### **2.1 Comparison Theory**

Aristotle’s view of metaphor as an implicit comparison, based on analogy and its aesthetic function, forms the basis of the comparison theory of metaphors. According to this theory (also called similarity theory), a metaphor is understood by comparing its two constituent terms to find its common features. In other words, comparison theory views metaphor as an implicit simile. Unlike similes, which are comparisons made explicit by the use of the terms ‘as’ or ‘like’, comparison theory asserts the truth value of a metaphor by listing all respects of their similarities. Max Black (1955) states that a “metaphor consists in the presentation of the underlying analogy or similarity’ to its literal equivalent (p. 283). In other words, Black calls this view of metaphors a ‘condensed or elliptical simile” (p. 283). Although this view surmises the traditional persuasive and decorative function of metaphors, it overrides the distinction between comparison and categorisation. As Cacciari contends, the entities of a metaphor have in common “more than mere resemblances in that they belong to the same category sharing relevant features” (1998, pp. 135-6). Here, rather than constructing similarities between two distinct entities, the author merely correlates two concepts that are already associated by possible experience. The shared features of a metaphor, according to comparison theory, are from a fixed set. Thus, in interpreting a metaphor, a common category must be found for the target and source, and the fixed feature sets must be activated from which identical features must be found. Comparison theory of metaphors also extends the argument towards the generation of novel associations between distinct entities with the correlation of existing similarities.

### **2.2 Transference Theory**

As one of the oldest theories of metaphor, transference theory is associated with Aristotle’s characterisation of metaphor as a sign of absolute linguistic mastery. In locating the specific use of metaphor in poetry, Aristotle regarded metaphor as a decoration or ornament, not integral to the functioning of language. Aristotle defined metaphor as “transference of a term from one thing to another:” the transference being either from “genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by an analogy” (as cited in Halliwell, 1987, p. 55). In other words, when the reader/listener confronts something outside the ambit of usual language, resemblances that are transferred from one genus to species or vice versa, or between species of ideas, will deepen his/her experience and enrich his/her apprehension of the world. However, contemporary critics find Aristotle’s definition problematic in that he does not distinguish between metaphor and other tropes, such as metonymy, synecdoche, irony, etc., although metonymy (genus to species) and synecdoche (species to genus) are also contained in Aristotle’s definition. As such, all forms of transference would count as figures of speech in general. Further distinction between the broad and narrow notions of metaphor has been suggested by semiotician Winfried Nöth according to whom the narrow notion of metaphor signifies metaphor as a particular figure of speech and the broad notion denoting all figures of speech as metaphors (1995, p. 128).

Aristotle's idea of metaphor fostered the misconception that the strangeness of metaphors is necessarily bound to rhetorics and not to the ordinary. However, later metaphor theories postulate that metaphors describe poetic aspects of everyday language instead of being considered as a predominant feature of poetic language. Aristotle also foregrounds the principle of analogy between two unrelated ideas in a metaphor. In his example for a metaphor—"the evening of life"—the analogy between evening and old age is determined by their similar proportions (as cited in Kirby, 1997, p. 534). Therefore, by these two principles of strangeness and analogy, the operation of metaphors converges the matters of similarity as well as dissimilarity.

The notion of transference implies metaphorically that the characteristics of one thing are transferred to another thing (Isenberg, 1963, p. 610). In this comprehension of one matter in terms of another, critics problematise whether the transference is made possible due to a pre-existing analogy or is claimed in their operation. Therefore, it leads to substitution where strangeness, analogy, and transference converge. Accordingly, in a metaphor, an ordinary expression is substituted with something non-ordinary (strange), implying the transference of meaning of one noun to another, which is possible only because of an existing analogy between both of them (Black, 1955, p. 285). The reader thus engages in an act of deciphering the literal meaning of one noun using the literal meaning of the other as an indicator. This process of transference conglomerated with strangeness, analogy, and substitution incidentally remedies the gap in the literal vocabulary—thereby transforming metaphors as a 'species of *catachresis*' (Black, 1955, p. 280) where common words gather new senses. Black argues, however, that when the catachrestic function of metaphor cannot be invoked, attempts at 'substituting an indirect, metaphorical, expression are taken to be stylistic' (1955, p. 281).

### 2.3 Interaction Theory

First advocated by the literary theorist I.A. Richards, interaction theory of metaphor holds that "thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom" (1936, p. 94). Here, metaphors operate by the interplay between the source and target of a metaphor as readers invent relationship between them to arrive at meaning. In introducing the terms *vehicle* for the metaphorical word and *tenor* for the subject to which the metaphorical word is applied, Richards proposed that a metaphor functions through the interaction between these, not by the similarities between them (p. 100). Rather than being an embellishment to the tenor, a vehicle co-operates/interacts with it in generating a meaning distinct from either of the elements. Further, Richards posits that this interaction between tenor and vehicle can potentially create a metaphor dependent on an adequate context. Accordingly, metaphors are freely evoked instead of commonplace comparisons, in that the practicality of it will vary from one socio-cultural setting to another.

Refining and expanding I.A. Richards's interaction view of metaphors, Black (1955) proposed that the two elements of a metaphor—"subsidiary subject" (p. 286) (Richards' 'vehicle') and "principal subject" (p. 287) (Richards's 'tenor')—interacts along a "system of associated commonplaces" (p. 287) whereby this complex set of associations serves to select and reorganise a "distinctive intellectual operation" (p. 293) in the reader/listener in order to evoke new ways of perceiving the 'principal subject'. Black critiques the traditional view of metaphors as stylistic devices, arguing that the predominant function of metaphors is to "remedy a gap in the vocabulary" (p. 280) and that a metaphor's effectiveness relies not on the authenticity of the comparison made but in the fact that their meanings may be freely evoked. Accordingly, Black documents three distinct views/theories of metaphors: (a) comparison view, (b) substitution view and (c) interaction view (p. 292). Endorsing the third view of metaphors, Black argues that here,

the reader is forced naturally to connect the two distinct ideas—in other words, to use a system of associated commonplaces as the frame imposes extension of meaning upon context of the focal word (principal subject), thereby gathering a new meaning distinct from its literal use (p. 287).

Since the interaction view proposes a distinctive mode of operation based on socio-cultural systems of implications, Black, who developed this idea, argues for the prerequisite of reader involvement in deciphering the meaning of a metaphor (p. 290). The dynamic aspects of a reader's response to a metaphor connects its distinctive concepts according to the diverse ideologies that they have imbibed through time. In a given context, the focal word/vehicle "obtains a *new* meaning, which is *not* quite its meaning in literal uses, not quite the meaning which any literary substitute would have. The new context imposes *extension* of meaning upon the focal word" (Black, 1955, p. 286); also, the new implications thus constructed by the reader will be determined by the pattern of implications associated with literal uses of the vehicle and tenor. These patterns and assumed literal usages function according to what Black calls "the system of associated commonplaces" (p. 287). In the process of meaning interaction and transference, Black observes, some of the associated commonplaces also suffer metaphorical change of meaning, most of which can be described as "*extensions* of meaning" (p. 289) as they do not involve perceived connections between the two conceptual systems.

Most attributes of the interaction theory of metaphors are relevant to the study of the visual metaphors that abound in graphic pathographies. The novel meanings that emerge during metaphor comprehension are of immense significance in expressing intangible and intimate psychological experiences that cannot be conveyed in either of the conceptual systems (of the vehicle and tenor) but necessarily require metaphorical interactions. Further, in a medium that involves an active reader in the process of meaning making through comics closure, the metaphorical processes converge with those aspects of comics reading where the reader creates meaning in a context-oriented interaction with images from diverse conceptual systems.

## 2.4 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Recent research on metaphor has attempted to dismantle the presumptions regarding metaphor as a linguistic tool by exploring and demonstrating its cognitive dimensions. The preliminary analysis of metaphors as an inherent part of conceptual system was undertaken by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). They proposed that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (2003, p. 3), and that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (p. 3). Thus, redeeming metaphors from its conception as a matter of language, these cognitive theorists argued that they are a significant tool by means of which reality is conceptualised, thereby impacting the behaviours and actions of the users of language. In contrast to comparison and transference theories that regard metaphors as extraordinary and ornamental, cognitive theory foregrounds the use of metaphors in everyday language. Deploying instances from everyday language, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate how metaphorical concepts are realised in 'natural' speech. For instance, the following expressions from colloquial language are based on the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR:

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.

His criticisms were *right on target*.

I *demolished* his argument.

He *shot down* all my arguments. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 4)

As evinced by the italicised words drawn from the conceptual category of war in the above example, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argues that more than mere comparison, “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). For instance, as the abovementioned sentences expose how most part of the ordinary arguments are partially structured by the concept of war (p. 4), one could argue that the concept, activity, and language of WAR is metaphorically structured. Although Lakoff and Johnson attempt to propose the universality of this conceptual structure in most everyday argumentative speech, they also hint at the cultural differences that could engender diverse formulations of metaphorical structuring. In a culture where arguments lack any sense of attack or defence, gaining or losing, and instead are viewed as a dance, the goal would be to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In other words, recognition of distinct conceptual structures in terms of discourse formation resolves the cultural conflict and its consequent influence on cognitive metaphorical structures.

### 3. Metaphors and their Context-Dependency

According to CMT, the mapping of two distinct conceptual domains (source to the target) takes place not by comparison but based on the correlation of the user’s experience in the two domains of thought and his/her ability to structure one abstract concept in terms of another. Orientational metaphors, as Lakoff and Johnson would call them, foreground spatialisation of physical and cultural experience in their use. For instance, the following statements are grounded on the conceptual metaphor HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN, as drooping posture is typically associated with sadness and depression and erect posture with a positive emotional state:

I’m feeling *down*.

That *boosted* my interest.

I *fell* into a depression.

My spirits *sank*.

However, by giving examples of conceptual categories that betray clear conflict between mainstream and marginal cultural values, CMT theorists declare any attempt to link metaphorical expressions to a standard account of meaning as futile. Experiential gestalts—structured wholes within recurrent human experiences—that characterise the conceptual categories of a metaphor themselves are not always universal but could also vary from culture to culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 117). Further, these gestalts are products of interactions with one’s physical environment, as well as with other people within one’s culture. Taking cues from this argument, Elisabeth El Refaie proposes that basic sensorimotor experiences are deeply imbued with socio-cultural meanings, in that bodily experiences become not just the source, but also the target of metaphorical mappings. Departing from most metaphor theorists, who tend to operate under static and deterministic notions of culture and society, El Refaie argues: “the body does not constitute a prediscursive, material reality; rather, it . . . is constantly being constructed and reconstructed on the basis of social and cultural assumptions about class, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, age, health, and beauty” (2014, p. 111). El Refaie, based on Pritzker’s notion, argues for the perception of cultural models as a rich resource that individuals can exploit in order to create meaningful stories of their bodily experiences.

Delineating the socio-cultural models of analysing visual metaphors, in “Understanding Visual Metaphor: The Example of Newspaper Cartoons,” El Refaie proposes a context-dependent



method. She argues that even “conventionality,” which is foregrounded in the cognitive model, is an elusive concept, thereby emphasising the significance of specific socio-cultural contexts in analysing conceptual metaphors:

[T]he degree to which the connections between two concepts strikes us as literal or metaphorical does not depend on any objective distance between the two but rather on how deeply the connection is ‘entrenched’ in our conceptual system, in other words, on how conventional it is. In fact, conventionality is also rather an elusive concept, which cannot be determined once and for all but depends on the specific discourse context. (2003, p. 82)

While the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor are explicitly stated in the verbal mode, in a visual metaphor, an abstract entity cannot be depicted without the mediation of symbols or metaphors. Even in the absence of the tenor, Forceville observes that context assumes a pertinent role in determining the meaning of a verbo-visual metaphor (as cited in El Refaie, 2003, p. 85). In distinguishing pictorial context, linguistic context and world knowledge, Forceville uses Barthes’s theory of text-image relations. Accordingly, the linguistic message is functionally referred to as “anchorage,” as images by nature are “polysemous” in a floating chain of signifieds (Barthes, 1977, p. 39). However, in reading the verbo-visual metaphors, El Refaie prefers the theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to Barthes’s “unidirectional concept of anchorage” (2003, p. 86) which grants preference to the verbal message over the visual. Kress and van Leeuwen, on the other hand, propose a mutual influence between the distinct semiotic modes and assume that verbal and visual meanings “intermesh and interact at all times” (40). Taking these cues, El Refaie analyses the verbo-visual metaphors in newspaper cartoons based on the verbal context (located in close proximity to the image), and the broader discourse context (all other items of text on a newspaper page), which Forceville calls “world knowledge” (as cited in El Refaie, 2003, p. 86). El Refaie thus lays bare the immense range of possible interpretations of a verbo-visual metaphor, as their context-dependencies are more implicit than explicit. Accordingly, she goes on to argue that “the depiction of an abstract entity in the visual mode is utterly impossible without the mediation of metaphors” (p. 91).

Noel Carroll differentiates the visual metaphor from the verbal metaphor through what he refers to as “homospatiality,” or, in other words, a fusion of ideas within the same space (1994, p. 190). In the visual metaphor, he argues, two “discrete elements coexist in the same space, . . . and call . . . to mind different concepts or categories” (pp. 191, 193). Another element of the visual metaphor, for Carroll, is that the image at hand must be “physically noncompossible,” which implies that the viewer should perceive those elements in the same space, not as “a representation of a physically possible state of affairs, but as an opportunity to regard one of the categories as providing a source for apprehending something about the other category” (p. 199). As such, Carroll establishes the nature of visual metaphor as the fusion of two distinct images (or ideas) that should not be interpreted distinctly on their own. Carroll states that “in determining whether the elements in an array are physically noncompossible, . . . we need to consider the context in which the image is presented and the intentions of the image-maker in presenting it” (p. 208). In a similar vein, Charles Forceville, who has published at length about pictorial metaphor, understands it as a phenomenon in which a visual replacement of expectations occurs (El Refaie, 2003, p. 80).

Further, based on Lakoff and Johnson’s argument about metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon, El Refaie argues that “it must be expressible in many different modes, not just language” (2017, p. 148). In such a context, the metaphors used in graphic

memoirs/autobiographical comics gain import, as most of the metaphors deployed in them reveal an acute engagement with the visualisation of internal bodily processes that are otherwise inaccessible.

#### 4. Multimodal Metaphors and Illness Experience

The study of metaphors in non-linguistic domains has led to the analysis of entities that are more depictable (source domain) to describe those that are less depictable (target domain). This scholarship, which combines two or more modalities of human expression, has been labelled as the study of multimodal metaphors. As multimodal metaphors operate by combining images and text, and thereby involve characteristics like spatial configuration, size, clarity, and colour, Forceville and Eduardo argue that they are “more noticeable in visual discourses than in verbal ones” (2009, p. 13). Although metaphors are generally classified into verbal, visual, and verbo-visual, Forceville (1996, 2002, 2007, 2009) distinguishes between five categories of ‘pictorial metaphors’:

- *Hybrid metaphor*: In hybrid metaphors, both the source and target are partially pictured and joined together into one figure that is perceived as a single, unified object. Carroll’s (1994, 1996) examples of fusion and homospatiality fall under this category.
- *Pictorial simile*: Pictorial similes are characterised by both the source and target being visually depicted in their entirety as two separate figures, but in a way that emphasises their similarity.
- *Contextual metaphor*: In contextual metaphors, only the source or the target is depicted, in a context where normally something else would be expected; the replacement of the anticipated element encourages viewers to interpret one thing in terms of another.
- *Integrated metaphor*: In this type of metaphor, ‘[a] phenomenon that is experienced as a unified object or gestalt is represented in its entirety in such a manner that it resembles another object or gestalt even without contextual cues’ (Forceville, 2012, p. 468).
- *Verbo-pictorial metaphors*: Either the source or the target is not pictured but is implied instead by the verbal message.

Among these categories, only ‘verbo-pictorial metaphors’ are multimodal, as they draw on both the visual and the verbal mode. As such, these metaphors are used in the comics medium, which performs meaning through an interplay of both word and image. For instance, in the verbo-pictorial metaphor below (Figure 1), the source (a bipolar patient at varied angles on a carousel) is conveyed both visually (excited and depressed gestures of the patient) and verbally (handwritten text), while the target (stages of bipolar condition) is not represented exclusively in the image and thus depends heavily upon verbal cues (medical registers of bipolarity).

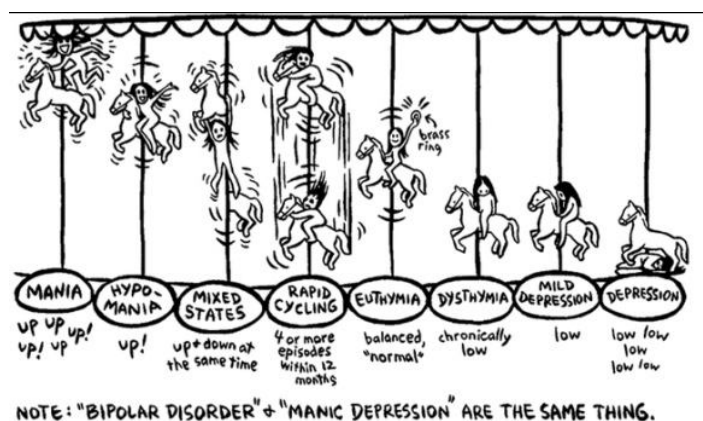


Figure 1: Forney's carousel metaphor from *Marbles*.

El Refaie in her seminal work, *Visual Metaphor and Embodiment in Graphic Illness Narratives* proposes a "tripartite taxonomy of visual metaphor" (2019, p. 81). As such, visual metaphor types are classified into pictorial, spatial and stylistic metaphors. Forceville's categories of metaphors mentioned above will be grouped under pictorial metaphors. When metaphorical meanings emerge from "correlations between the experience of our bodies in space and more abstract concepts," El Refaie categorises it as spatial metaphor (2019, p. 117). Within this category, when spatial relations in the storyworld evoke metaphorical meanings, they constitute diegetic spatial metaphors. When spatial relations of verbal or visual elements on the page or double-page spread evoke metaphorical meanings, they constitute compositional spatial metaphor. When the style of pictures, words, abstract visual elements like pictorial runes or the materiality of the book constitute the source domain of a metaphorical mapping, they are called stylistic metaphors. Within this category, the basic visual attributes that suggest abstract meanings are grouped as isomorphic stylistic metaphors, and other higher-order features of style (such as modes of production, digital techniques, etc) that evoke metaphorical meaning are grouped as indexical stylistic metaphors (p. 117).

Combining the arguments of conceptual metaphor theorists with multimodality, it can be observed that most of the metaphors under discussion draws on "concrete, clearly structured experiences of our bodily actions and perceptions as a way to understand abstract, non-physical domains such as mental states, emotions and social relations" (El Refaie, 2017, p. 153). As such, representation of subjective and abstract experiences like chronic pain and illness necessitates the use of metaphors. Elena Semino has observed that "both in the clinical and the social scientific literature on pain" has recognised sufferers' frequent employment of figurative language in expressing their pain experiences (2010, p. 207). Apart from such biomedical repertoires of disease representations, figurative language, specifically metaphors, abound in autobiographical narratives on illness experience. These narratives of illness experience, specifically graphic pathographies (autobiographical accounts of illness experience in the medium of comics), are considered significant for this study, as they offer a unique language and terms of representation in which the totality of patienthood and illness experience can be reflected upon, integrated into the life of the sufferer, and shared with others. These narratives, in other words, provide a "pedagogy of expressive possibility" (Frank, 2011, p. 182). Inspired by Elaine Scarry, David Biro in his *Language of Pain* qualifies metaphors with a specific clinical value which "has the power to alleviate pain" (2010, p. 145). Describing pain as a metaphoric 'black hole' into which language disappears, Biro underlines his major theoretical argument that both expression and



understanding of pain are dependent on metaphors: “[w]e don’t have a way of understanding and talking about pain without metaphors,” he affirms. “If we are to speak at all, we must use metaphors” (p. 77).

However, metaphors in the context of illness have been contested since Susan Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor*. Sontag (1991) argues that “the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking” (p. 3). Sontag examines metaphors of illness that infiltrate the conceptualisation of disease as “evil, invincible predator” (p. 7). She traces several figurative uses of diseases as a metaphor for monstrosity and destructiveness in nineteenth century literature. Especially in literary discussions and representations of diseases like cancer and TB, the predominant metaphor used was that of war and invasion; to quote Sontag, “[i]n TB, the person is ‘consumed,’ burned up. In cancer, the patient is “invaded” by alien cells” (p. 14). In the revised edition of Sontag’s book, she clarifies how military metaphors “contribute to the stigmatizing of certain illnesses and by extension, of those who are ill” (1991, p. 97). Quite interestingly, originally, the metaphors of TB signified ‘romantic’ ideals of beauty and higher social status. In course of time, the metaphors associated with tuberculosis and insanity started to have parallels of a psychic voyage, which was an extension of the romantic idea of a journey. From these cues, it can be perceived that metaphors evolve through social and cultural prejudices about illness. At the same time, this pattern underscores the pervading *presence* of metaphors in expressions/representations of illness experiences. Sontag herself begins *Illness as Metaphor* with the conceptual metaphorical mapping of illness to journey:

everyone who is born holds a dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. (1991, p. 3)

Though critical of the use of metaphors in the first edition of *Illness as Metaphor*, the above statement undergirds inevitability of metaphors in everyday language and discourses on healthcare. However, Sontag clarified her position regarding her resistance to metaphorical representations of illness in the related 1988 work *AIDS and its Metaphors*. She elucidates her arguments against the use of metaphors of illness in the specific case of war metaphors that tend to stigmatise patients and deprive them of effective means of coping with their illness.

Despite such criticisms, the growing research in metaphorical representations of illness experience no longer categorise metaphor as a ‘figure of speech’ but as a ‘figure of thought’. As Frank observes, “a metaphor is no longer a trope, in the sense of twisting language. Instead, reality is what is twisted, and language is a straightening out process” (2011, p. 193). Moreover, metaphors have been recognised for their multifunctionality. Gibbs has proposed three kinds of hypotheses which describe the function of metaphors:

- The inexpressibility hypothesis: the ability of metaphor to delineate ideas that would be very difficult, even impossible to express using literal language.
- The compactness hypothesis: metaphors provide a compact and condensed way of communicating a complex emotion or experience.
- The vividness hypothesis: metaphors aid in conveying information in a vivid way that verbal mode alone cannot express. (1994, p. 124)

El Refaie and Semino argue that metaphors enable us to comprehend complex and abstract aspects of reality in more concrete, familiar, and easily imaginable terms. Therefore, in the

context of mental illness, metaphors help artists to effectively encapsulate their psychic turmoils in vivid details which often escapes literal expressions. Recognizing the significance of metaphorical expressions of mental illness, a recent initiative by Cardiff University, “Drawing Out Invisible Diseases” encourages people with mental illness to express themselves through visual metaphors through their website [www.drawingout.org](http://www.drawingout.org). The online gallery of drawings by patients serve as an online platform where a community of sufferers “share their thoughts and feelings about their condition” (“DrawingOut”). While metaphors serve social functions in persuading, entertaining, and establishing intimacy between the author and the reader, they could also function as an ideological weapon in its process of mapping structure from a source domain to a target domain, thereby foregrounding specific aspects of a concept while hiding others.

## Conclusion

To conclude, metaphors provide an alternative to the claims that objectivity is the only choice in perceiving the truth about an experience. Labelled as “imaginative rationality” (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p. 193), metaphors unite reason with imagination and validate an experientialist account of perception and comprehension of complex emotions and abstract feelings. The context-based experiential approach to metaphors further bridges the gap between objectivist and subjectivist assumptions about impartial expressions and representations of truth about illness experience. Such an approach enables readers/listeners and analysts of metaphors to perceive truth as relative to one’s conceptual system, which is in a constant state of flux and evolution, shaped by human experiences.

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