

**EMBODIED, “WHOLE”  
CONVERSATION: THOUGHTS  
STIMULATED BY READING  
“SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE:  
‘THE IMPLICIT,’ TRAUMATIC  
LIVING MEMORY, AND THE  
DIALOGUE OF METAPHORS,”  
BY DONNA M. ORANGE**

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Metaphor is a likely place for the meeting of that which is spoken and that which is not. This is so not just because it functions like poetry in its evocation of multiple layers of implication, but also because it is usually embodied speaking. Yet, often the body is forgotten by speaker and listener alike. When speech is understood as embodiment, the bright line between metaphor and ordinary speech fades away.

Keywords: dualism; embodiment; explicit; implicit; Merleau-Ponty; metaphor; Orange; psychoanalysis; trauma

**O**ne experience I have when I read an article by Donna Orange is that it always begs a second reading. In the first reading, I follow along with her carefully constructed theses. The first reading is

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always deceptively simple, as VanDerHeide (2007, p. 279) aptly described Orange's writings.<sup>1</sup> I go back for a second reading to appreciate the "thickness" of her sentences. There is not one wasted word, and each sentence emerges from the dense history of ideas in philosophy and psychoanalysis that she has woven together to form a seamless ground for her crystalline, distilled, plain-spoken ideas.

Her words and sentences serve to exemplify her first argument. There can be no sharp line drawn between what is explicit and what is implied in her writings because reading her words as if what they imply is separable from what they explicitly state would violate the sense she intends to make with her words. Her words are emergent explications that evoke much more than what can be said directly. She artfully demonstrates what is true of all meaningful writing; speech; and, in fact, all meaningful existing.

Her second thesis is about metaphor as a form of communication between patient and therapist together that can evoke richly textured experience in a manner that is non-reductionistic. Like poetry, metaphor opens, rather than forecloses, meanings because, unlike the "knowing" interpretation, metaphor intends to imply much more than can be put into direct, ordinary language.

### PARSING LIVING INTO IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT

In the sometimes radically destabilizing confusion of psychoanalytic dialogue, it makes sense to me that we would try to parse out different dimensions of the process. It helps us to find purchase, a point of focus, even perhaps an idea about a trajectory. We all have our private theories (Sandler and Sandler, 1994, p. 997), and I suspect that in our private theories there reside many polarities and dualities. Perhaps when we are working at our best, they are polarities, dynamic, interweaving continua. When we are tired, stressed, confused, disturbed, or traumatized, they are likely to become oppositional dualities instead.

One of my favorite polarities is that of process and content. At certain moments I sense I am witnessing how someone's speaking also enacts the emotional process from which this speech is emergent. At other moments I sense I am witnessing a manner of speech that seems to contradict the emotional process that gives rise to what is being said. In either case, I am

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<sup>1</sup> VanDerHeide's (2007) words were that Orange writes "in a graceful manner that belies the intricacy of her thinking."

engaged in a process of feeling my way along in the conversation, and these distinctions reflect the sense of wholeness or fracture in my experiential world at the given moment.

That is, I have an experience of a “sense of wholeness” or “sense of fracture,” which are metaphors in themselves. Orange speaks to the analyst’s listening-through-noticing-one’s-emergent-metaphoric-experience in her postscript. I would rather have this idea take more center stage (another metaphor!—metaphoric speech is inescapable) in that I think such listening is inevitable and crucial between patient and therapist if they are going to meet each other in ways that truly matter to the patient. This is especially true as the evocative metaphors become negotiated between therapist and patient. Both people are changed, and understanding becomes more enlivened.

Orange has taken up a conversational thread in which various contemporary analysts are engaged and which is sparked, in no small measure, by our continuing experience that there is something more to therapeutic conversation than the words exchanged in the consulting room; we are finding ways to understand and speak about that “something more” while simultaneously communicating by using words. Orange makes reference to various approaches to understanding that which remains unspoken and yet meaningful in the therapeutic process. Most approaches, whether drawing upon infant research, cognitive neuroscience, or attachment theory, seem to set up categorically different realms of experience—one “implicit” and the other “explicit.” In one way or another, we are trying to address that sphere beyond our words that Freud relegated to unconsciousness. Orange points out, however, that all of our favorite “opposites,” or polarities, when they devolve into dualities (e.g., being described as “irreducibly different in kind”; p. 194), leave us with the same Cartesian conundrum that we are trying to escape by rethinking what we mean by unconscious process in the first place.

Orange has a strong aversion to parsing our lived, experiential worlds. I share that aversion. It seems to do violence to my felt sense of my life, both in its sweep and in its moment-to-moment detail. A notable exception to a sense of the fluidity and wholeness of my experience is when I am in a traumatized state of mind; and, of course, traumatized states of mind have captured our interest greatly these days. States of trauma are noticed to be more ubiquitous than first conceived, and to be an exemplar of the dualistically split sense of consciousness that is now being taken to speak for the nature of consciousness in general (and against which Orange is

arguing). In our endeavor to treat that which Orange refers to as unspeakable, we seem to be trying to develop a general theory of consciousness and awareness that, from my point of view, threatens to conflate traumatized unspeakable states with more ordinary nonverbal or unsymbolized experiential states.<sup>2</sup>

Metaphor is a likely place for the meeting of that which is spoken and that which is not. This is so not just because it functions like poetry in its evocation of multiple layers of implication, but also because it usually is embodied speaking—something that Orange has pointed us toward. I would like to take it further. She refers to the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1999). They make a very strong case for the idea that all metaphor refers us to our bodies, and that our embodiment orients us, which is our starting place for all experience. There is a through-line from Merleau-Ponty's (1992) elegant argumentation for embodiment as the starting point for our experiential worlds, to Lichtenberg's (1989) more directly psychological concept of "lived experience" (p. 103), which can only emerge from a lived body. I could have used many other exemplars besides Merleau-Ponty and Lichtenberg. My point here is that, in parallel with phenomenological philosophers' efforts to transcend some of the limitations of Cartesian-era disembodied knowing that infused enlightenment projects, the theorists whom Orange cited are reaching for metaphors—robots, infants—that can help us to embrace a more embodied, complex sense of meaningfulness that transcends the narrow confines of "insights."

Our embodiment is something that is easily forgotten by all of us; and, in fact, for many of our patients, their embodiment is a grave danger to them. We use our bodies, but mostly they live in a silent (implied) background. We use them all the time, but our focal attention is almost always elsewhere (Leder, 1990). Ordinarily, the metaphors we employ are meant to touch us, to evoke emotional resonance, which means bodily sensation (among other things). Then again, some analysts and patients

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<sup>2</sup> This is my argument with Bromberg's (2001) theory of dissociative process. There seems to be little thought given to differentiating between dissociative organizations of mind brought about by unspeakable horror and the multilayered fluidity of attention that occurs in "multitasking," such as driving while thinking about a problem. The dynamics that organize consciousness in these differing experiential worlds lead to significant differences in fluidity of the so-called dissociative process.

employ metaphors that aim at (or result in) abstracting themselves from their bodies. They may hope to have complex, subtle, nuanced experience without the dangers that a more full-bodied, flesh and blood metaphor would pose.

With this in mind, I prefer to resolve our dichotomies of implicit and explicit, conscious and unconscious, with a notion that Orange pointed to with her link between metaphor and embodied memory. I prefer an idea something like “whole,” or embodied conversation, of which metaphor is one example. Our speaking (including our silences) with each other is relatively, more or less embodied in any given exchange. Our breathing supports, to a greater or lesser degree, the emotional flow. Our movements reflect and accentuate moments of conversation or they deflect and deaden those moments. Our metaphors may vivify our experience, reach to evoke recognition (the shared “knife” metaphor in Orange’s article in this issue), or they may be a step back away from the dangers of embodied emotional experience.

I once had a patient tell me the following story. Her mother, who was extremely controlling and fanatic about cleanliness and order in the household, ordered the patient (as a young girl) to vacuum her bedroom carefully and thoroughly. The patient was meticulous, and vacuumed in such a way as to leave straight lines on the rug that marked her use of the vacuum. Her mother came, saw her lines, and proceeded to vacuum again so as to leave lines running perpendicular to the ones the patient had proudly made.

My patient told me this story as a way to call my attention to the crushing effect of my conversational style with her. I would often rephrase something she had said rather than build on it. After this point, we used her “true story” as “metaphor” at certain points in our therapeutic conversations. This speaks to the point Orange made, quoting Gadamer (1991), about metaphor containing truth that fact cannot convey by itself. So, where is the line here between metaphor and ordinary speech? Again, I think Orange has made the case that any distinctions to be made will be matters of degree rather than a bright line. In any case, in whatever manner of speaking, Orange, others, and I are trying together, in a variety of theoretical and clinical explorations, to find a way to address embodied, or whole, conversation without slipping back into the fractured world of dualisms.

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## TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

La metafora rappresenta un luogo potenziale per l'incontro di ciò che è dicibile e di ciò che non lo è non solo perché essa, come la poesia, è in grado di evocare molteplici livelli di implicazione, ma anche perché è usualmente incarnata nel parlare. Spesso il corpo è tuttora trascurato sia da chi parla come pure da chi ascolta. Quando il parlare è compreso come incarnato, svanisce il chiaro confine tra la metafora e il linguaggio ordinario.

La métaphore est l'espace le plus probable pour la rencontre entre ce qui est dit et ce qui ne l'est pas. Cela est non seulement parce que la métaphore fonctionne comme de la poésie dans son évocation de multiples niveaux de significations. Mais aussi parce qu'elle est habituellement un discours incorporé, qui inclut le corps. Malgré tout, le corps est souvent oublié à la fois par celui qui parle et celui qui écoute. Lorsque le discours est compris comme étant incorporé, la ligne claire qui distingue la métaphore et le discours ordinaire s'estompe.

Die Metapher ist der geeignete Platz für das, was gesagt und das, was nicht gesagt wird. Das ist nicht nur deshalb so, weil die Funktion der Metapher darin liegt, wie die der Poesie, verschiedene Implikationen anzusprechen. Es ist auch deshalb so, weil es sich dabei üblicherweise um eine Redeweise handelt, die den Körper mit einbezieht. Noch dazu wird der Körper vom Sprechenden wie vom Zuhörer oft in gleicher Weise vergessen.

Wenn Sprechen als “Verkörperung” verstanden wird, verblasst die klare Grenzlinie zwischen Metapher und der sonst üblichen Sprechweise.

La metáfora es un lugar probable para el encuentro entre lo que es hablado y lo que no. Y no sólo únicamente porque funciona como la poesía en su evocación de las múltiples capas que están implicadas. También porque la metáfora es habitualmente un lenguaje corporizado. Aunque a menudo el cuerpo pasa desapercibido tanto para el que habla como para el que escucha. Cuando el habla es entendida como algo corporal, la línea precisa entre la metáfora y el lenguaje ordinario se difumina

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