

(2024 February 8) How Metaphors Shape Our Reality- Genta (Aeon)

I'm always glad to be able to pass along ideas from three of my favorite thinkers, Kenneth Burke, Stephen Pepper and George Lakoff, in this case one of Burke's most useful ideas, namely, the method of rhetorical-semantic analysis he called "image cluster analysis" which he published in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941) and employed in all of his works up through *Toward a Symbolic of Motives* (2006). It can, I think, be said without fear of exaggeration that beginning with his study of rhetoric, etymology and philology from Plato to Korzybski, the cluster analysis method underlies all of his work toward an understanding of the potentialities of language.

Later retitled the Cluster Agon method, it was used extensively used and extended in application by authors (usually without reference to Burke) in a wide range of fields, many of which Burke himself had done pioneering work in. Lakoff's influential studies on metaphor in politics (see, esp. *Don't Think of an Elephant*) are among the best known. One far less known, which had a lasting effect on my thinking, is Stephen C. Pepper's *World Hypotheses* (1942) which, like Benjamin Genta's *Aeon* article linked here, focuses on cosmological applications.

<https://aeon.co/essays/how-changing-the-metaphors-we-use-can-change-the-way-we-think>

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15327906mbr1303_2?src=recsys

<https://kbjournal.org/schrader>

<https://thecriticalcomic.com/kenneth-burkes-cluster-agon-reading-strategy/>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Hypotheses

"War metaphors are ubiquitous, which says a lot about our culture. Cancer care, unsurprisingly, is no different: patients are often said to be 'fighting a battle' with cancer and are judged on their 'fighting spirit'. Research, however, suggests that this conceptual metaphor causes real harm to some patients. For example . . . 'opting to refuse futile or harmful treatment options now becomes equivalent to a cowardly retreat from the "battleground" that may be seen as a shameful act by the patient'. In other words, a patient who is already preoccupied with dying from the disease may feel the additional – unnecessary and cruel – shame for not continuing to 'fight'.

An oncologist review article urges nurses and doctors to rethink the usefulness of this militaristic metaphor. The alternative proposed is to use the conceptual metaphor CANCER IS A JOURNEY to frame the patient experience. Reconceptualising it in this way leads to different thoughts: cancer is not a battle to be conquered, but an individual and unique path to navigate; the experience with the disease is not something that ends (as war typically does) but an ongoing neverending process (with periodic hospital visits to monitor any recurrence). . . .

"time and again in the Presocratics and Plato, the nature of cosmological factors, or the relationships between them, are understood in terms of a concrete social or political situation'. From the point of view of conceptual metaphor theory, this makes sense: to understand a new,

abstract and invisible concept (the fundamental substances of the Universe), it is only natural that these thinkers analogised it to phenomena they had direct experience with (their political organisation).

- Benjamin Santos Genta