Dominant Organisational Metaphors do not enable Sustainable Development

"In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it. In all aspects of life, not just in politics or love, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of those metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 158)

"No generation has viewed the problem of the survival of the human species as seriously as we have. Inevitably, we have entered this world of concern through the door of metaphor" (Romaine 1996, p. 192 citing Hardin 1974, p. 568).

1- Introduction

This paper is built around the argument that the machine and organism metaphors that we commonly use in our understanding of organisational phenomena are not enabling of sustainable development (for example see; Audebrand, 2010; Cornelissen et al., 2008; Hatch, 2011; Inns, 2002; Kendall and Kendall, 1993; Oswick et al., 2002; Morgan, 2006). Metaphors impact our perceptions and actions and in turn become self-fulfilling prophecies for how we ascribe the functioning of reality (for example see; Cornelissen, 2002, 2004, 2005; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner, 1987; Morgan, 2012, Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). Consequently when we ascribe the metaphors of machine and organism to organisational phenomena we engage in a double movement. First the dehumanisation of members of the organisation to whom we are ascribing the metaphor, viewing them as component parts whose function is to serve the organisation's requirements rather than viewing them as full human beings whose value is greater than their utility to the organisation. Second we promote the organisation as the locus of concern and confer it with a status of being a separate subject, giving it an "entitative existence" (Thompson, 2011, p. 759) as we, wittingly or unwittingly, engage in ontological drift and reification (Thompson, 2011; Tinker, 1986). In so doing we encourage orgocentrism the defining of issues in relation to an organisation and its continued operation (Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Hatch, 2011; Tinker, 1986) [i]. The

impacts of these two outcomes are that the use of such metaphors moves us away from the whole of humanity story that is inherent in the sustainable development concept. Sustainable development is not about the ongoing survival of organisations, nor is it about the reduction of some humans to functional units that serve an organisation and thus the privileging of one set of individuals over another. Consequently if organisations are to be used as key actors in enabling sustainable development then new metaphors to facilitate their understanding need to be perpetuated, otherwise either wittingly or unwittingly the outcome and focus will continue to be the privileging of organisations above humans and the wider context, rather than it being the whole of humanity within an entwined, interconnected, systemic context.

Given that metaphors provide the defining thread through this paper, the next section outlines some of the basic theory of metaphors. Following this sustainable development is discussed and, perhaps unusually, this discussion uses metaphor to elucidate the concept. Then the limitations of organism and machine metaphors relative to their enabling of sustainable development are brought forward. Following this some results from previous research conducted by one of the authors with the leaders of environmentally focused and or sustainability orientated organisations, as evidenced by their mission statements, is presented. Although this research was not focused on metaphors, the commentary brought forward provides some useful reflection points for the reader in the context of this paper's wider narrative; particularly because it reveals how the research subjects take an innately human view of their organisations and do not privilege the organisation. However it should be noted that the value of these results and the wider value of this paper is not what it proves but rather what is suggests (Fiol, 1989). After revealing these indicative results the paper closes with conclusions and considerations.

Prior to reading the subsequent sections, it should be noted that the argument that metaphors create ideological distortions and new metaphors are required to perpetuate sustainable outcomes has been discussed previously (for example see; Audebrand, 2010; Cummings and Thanem, 2002; Mutch, 2006; Romaine, 1996; Tinker, 1986, Tsoukas, 1993). However the particular contributions of this paper are that it explores sustainable development through a metaphor lens, highlighting humanity's entwinement and that it brings forward some insightful commentary from prior research. Findings which, as highlighted above, indicate how the researched do not engage in orgocentrism and thus point towards new areas and possibilities for the uncovering of a range of "future normal" (XXXXX anonymised to enable blind review) metaphors that enable organisational understanding and are also complicit with enabling sustainable

development - metaphors that promote survival of the fitting (considering but not privileging the institution relative to context) rather than metaphors that promote survival of the fittest (the privileging of the institution relative to context) (Morgan, 2012).

2- Metaphors

A comprehensive review of the literature and theory regarding metaphors is beyond the scope of this paper; however this section elucidates the basics. Metaphors populate and saturate our language (Cornelissen, 2002, 2004, 2005; Morgan, 2006; Oswick et al., 2002; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993) and are principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner, 1989). In this way they are used to enable and enhance our understandings by referring to "something unfamiliar in terms of something familiar" (Inns, 2002, p.325). Some simple every day applications of metaphors include the metaphor of a brain when discussing the processing of information, the metaphor that time is a currency that can be borrowed, spent or saved or the gaming metaphor relative to our honesty when individuals say to each other 'I will lay all my cards on the table' (Morgan, 1986; Romaine, 1996).

The use of metaphors in language has been likened to viruses "which infect different discursive contexts and spread meanings" (Akerman, 2003, p. 432 citing in support Maasen, 1994; Maasen and Weingaart, 1995, 1997). In this regard it has been argued that metaphors "guide our perceptions and interpretations...and help us formulate our visions and goals" (Cornelissen et al., 2008, p.8). Thus they allow us to connect our experiences with our imaginations and vice versa (Cornelissen et al., 2008; Inns, 2002; Morgan, 2012). Consequently metaphors are entwined in the relation between thought, meaning, perception and action (Burr, 2003; Morgan, 2012). As such metaphors are not simply linguistic devices used to transfer understanding, with understanding being a separate category to action, rather metaphors also transfer an implied mode of behaviour (Morgan, 2012; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). A point emphasised by Tsoukas (1991) who outlines that we engage in continual experience and then via language conceptualise our experiences and transmit them to others. Thus "language is both descriptive and constitutive of reality" (Tsoukas, 1991, p. 568) and consequently metaphors are discursive devices that make social reality more "palpable and comprehensible" (Tsoukas, 1991, p.571) but also reflect and influence observations and actions (Burr, 2003; Ford and Ford, 1995; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Morgan, 2012; Porac et al., 2011; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). In short metaphors are a form "cognitive

technology that directly shapes our relations with the world, guiding how we think and act" (Morgan, 2012, p.12).

This influence on observation and action makes the use of metaphors fraught with difficulty. As indicated previously metaphors involve the "transfer of information from a relatively familiar domain (variously referred to as source or base domain, or vehicle) to a new and relatively unknown domain (usually referred to as target domain or topic)" (Tsoukas, 1991, p.568 citing Johnson-Laird, 1989; Ortony, 1975; Vosniadou and Ortony, 1989 in support; also see, von Gyczy, 2003). Thus metaphors allow inferences to be made about those things we may know little about, on the basis of that which we know about something else (Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). Consequently while metaphors can be a short hand towards guiding actions and constituting reality at the same time they can hide, obscure or realise distortions that are not necessarily congruent with our understandings in the movement and application of principles from the base domain to target domain.

Metaphors are commonly used in organisational studies, particularly with regard to the understanding of organisations (for example see; Cornelissen, 2002; 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2008; Cummings and Thanem, 2002; Hutch, 2011; Morgan, 2006). They are viewed as encouraging different ways of thinking that enable individuals to "focus upon, explain and influence different aspects of complex organisational phenomena" (Tsoukas, 1991, p.566 citing Morgan, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1988a, b, 1989 and Weick, 1979 in support). They are one of the primary ways of understanding organisations. However, their core difficulty is that they only offer a partial view and thus they do not enable a complete understanding (Cornelissen et al., 2008; Inns, 2002; Morgan, 2006, 2012; Oswick et al., 2002; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). In the absence of an "olympian high ground from which organisational phenomena… [can]… be observed…our theoretical schemata…are anthropologically condemned to be partial and one sided" (Tsoukas, 1993, p.335) and as such there is little anyone can do to counter the partiality. Thus while the understanding that there is an absence of any ground from which to observe is the condemned fate of those who have moved beyond modernistic understandings the charge still falls that if we use metaphors to facilitate organisational understanding then we need to be clear of the potential advantages and disadvantages of such metaphors. For example while we may use the metaphors of organism and machine because of their conceptual simplicity. The simplicity carries with it dangers, dangers that we wittingly or unwittingly perpetuate a notion that some of our fellow humans are merely functional components that are useful in so much as they enable the continued operation (machine) or survival (organism) of the organisation. Further the locus of concern

becomes via the use of such metaphors not humans but the abstract organisation (for example see; Cornelissen and Kofouros, 2008; Cummings and Thanem, 2002; Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Hatch, 2011; McAuley et al., 2007; Morgan, 2006; Shafritz and Ott, 1992; Tsoukas, 1991) [ii]. When reflecting, it is debatable whether few if any of us are ultimately concerned with the 'survival' of an organisation and or wish to view others only as functional units whose utility is limited to the service of an abstract organisation- yet our metaphors constitute this reality. Clearly, somebody presented with this argument might argue that they would never fall into these traps when using metaphors. However to not fall into these traps requires the most self-critical and reflective user who also departs from the accepted theory of metaphors (Morgan, 2012) – as the use of the metaphor perpetuates the reality. Thus via the use of the metaphor(s) a congruent experience is enacted even if the self-critical and reflective user recognises this and adjusts. Given these dangers and a requirement for sustainable development it would be wise to perpetuate metaphors that do not have these hidden hazards.

3- Sustainable Development

Environmental and social degradation has been widely discussed and documented by scholars (for example see: Daly, 1996; Ekins, 2000; Gray et al., 1993; Hawken et al., 2000; Lovelock, 2006; Meadows et al., 2005; Weisacker et al., 1998) as well as agencies and institutions (for example see: The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Living Planet report, 2006; The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report, 2007; the United Nations Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report, 2005 and the Worldwatch Institute, 2004). This literature posits that environmental and social degradation has roots in society and its economic institutions, of which organisations are key actors.

The overarching response to the degradation has been the call for the pursuit [iii] of sustainability [iv] with the aim of sustainable development.   Sustainable development is commonly defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (The World Commission on Environment and Development: The Brundtland Commission 1987, p. 8). In addition to this oft quoted but rather limited definition, sustainable development also contains within it two key concepts regarding needs and limits. To quote "the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs off the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (ibid,

p. 43). Building upon this, the Brundtland Commission's report outlines that "sustainable development requires…extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life…[and it]…requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all can reasonably aspire" (ibid, p.44). Further to achieve sustainable development will require a "change in attitudes and objectives and in institutional arrangements at every level" (ibid, p.62).

While critiques can be levelled at this definition (for example see Banerjee, 2003), discussions made of whether the concept is understood through a weak or strong sustainability lens (for example see Beckerman, 1995), and core ideas drawn from it such as inclusiveness, connectedness, equity, prudence and security (Gladwin et al., 1995). What is evident from the concept as offered by The Brundtland commission and further discussions (for example; Banerjee, 2003; Beckerman, 1995; Byrch et al., 2007; Gladwin et al., 1995) is that no matter how debated, sustainable development is a concept for all humans and concerns our values and aspirations. In this regard the sustainable development concept is a story about all humans for all humans and is a human survival story. However, while being about humans the concept is not anthropocentric in the paradigmatic sense of the word (for example see; Gladwin et al, 1995; Hoffman and Sandelands, 2005) whereby humans are asked to only consider themselves as a separate Cartesian category to the environment which surrounds us. Rather sustainable development is also a systems concept that is asking us to understand and consider how we and the "ecology and economy are …interwoven into a seamless net of causes and effects" (The World Commission on Environment and Development: The Brundtland Commission 1987, p. 5).

This systemic aspect leads to a difficulty with the concept of sustainable development in that it perhaps challenges human ideas of our standing relative to the earth. As where previously we have relied on 'man as figure' and 'nature as ground' understandings (Morgan, 2012). Through the lens of metaphor, sustainable development at the least challenges and at the extreme inverts the "The Great Chain" (Lakoff and Turner 1987, p. 167) [v] metaphor that arguably goes to the root of our modern understandings of our place on the planet. Whereby there are humans and everything else and humans are a special, distinct and separate Cartesian category that is at the top of an apex (Romaine, 1996).   To illustrate, "the Great Chain is a scale of forms of being – human, animal, plant, inanimate object – and consequently a scale of the properties that characterise forms of being – reason, instinctual behaviour, biological function, physical attributes, and so on" (Lakoff and Turner 1987, p. 167). In this regard the Great Chain metaphor

implies dominance by humans, whereas sustainable development manipulates and at the extreme inverts [vi] this dominance and outlines "the dependence of all forms of living beings on the physical environment and our dependence on the food chain and on the existence of biological diversity" (Lakoff and Turner 1987, p. 212). This manipulation of the Great Chain metaphor brings forward other metaphors regarding how we consider the earth and our place relative to it. For example, rather than the earth being an object that we dominate we are now moved to view the earth as a life support system or as a spaceship (for example see; Audebrand, 2010; Romaine, 1996) of which we are a constituent part. In so doing where we were once dominators, who privileged ourselves over context, we are now moved towards viewing ourselves within context and adopting notions of stewardship. Thus our elevated position of domination and the special status we allow ourselves with that elevated and hierarchical position is humbled.

In viewing the earth as a life support system and taking on the role of stewards what is reinforced is our entwinement rather than separateness with all that surrounds us, as such we are manoeuvred into taking on an imperative of responsibility (for example see; Blewitt, 2008; Dunlap and Van Liere, 2008; Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Gladwin et al., 1995; Jonas, 1984). Further if we don't take on this responsibility and we continue to consider ourselves as separate and the only factor of consideration, we are likely to undermine ourselves given the entwinement and interconnectedness of all the earth's constituents. This recognition of entwinement and responsibility moves us towards an expanded notion of self interest and thus sustainable development manoeuvres us into re-patterning our understandings away from linearity and human dominated hierarchies towards understandings of us being stewards who are entwined in a system that we are both part of but also responsible for. In short it asks that we have a double handedness we maintain ourselves and the context, we do not promote one above the other and as such our conventional notions of boundaries between entities are dissolved.

To explain further and without wishing to stretch the use of metaphors the sustainable development concept puts humans in the role of doctor, patient and disease all at the same time. For example, with regard to climate change we are implicated as the protagonists that have caused the issue with our requirements for energy (disease), we have implicated ourselves as trying to resolve the issue (we are the doctors of ourselves) and we have to accept the challenge of moving away from fossil fuels to new energy supplies (we are the patients on whom we prescribe our cures). Thus we are charged with; prescribing cures (doctor), accepting those cures (patient) and perhaps resisting those cures (disease) but ultimately reproaching ourselves without reversion, a difficult task given the multiplicity of roles, the entwinement and the lack of separation. While

this caricature reinforces that sustainable development is a multidimensional concept that is difficult to access directly (Audebrand, 2010), not least because it does not represent, in the manner a modernist theory might a "form of stable phenomena existing outside of [its] representation" (Calas and Smircich, 1999, p.663). What the caricature also reinforces is that we humans are stewards of ourselves and as such if we use metaphors which dehumanise or objectify any of us in our relationships with ourselves and or privilege the abstract (organisations) above ourselves or others we are disenabling ourselves from realising sustainable development.

In sum sustainable development asks that we reconsider our purpose and in turn the purpose of our organisations. It implies that we not privilege a particular set of individual(s) or organisation(s) over others or the wider context as all is entwined. As such it challenges our conventional notions of boundaries, for example humans and or organisations as separate categories to the environment. Thus if it is accepted that sustainable development is a systemic concept for all humans and not a concept that is designed to prioritise an individual or organisation at the expense of the collective or broader context (Gray and Milne, 2004; Morgan, 2012). A concern arises as to what might be appropriate metaphors to apply to understanding organisational phenomena that do not enhance notions of putting the individual organisation ahead of context or promoting "survival of the fittest as opposed to the survival of the fitting" (Morgan, 2012, p.16). As metaphors that privilege the individual organisation result in us dehumanising and objectifying ourselves and in this regard they are not complicit with sustainable development and the all of humanity and entwinement conceptions within that concept [vii].

3 – Machine and Organism Metaphors

While numerous metaphors are evident in the literature for example organisations as: coalitions of individuals contracting with each other (Polanyi, 2001; Shafritz and Ott, 1992 citing Cyert and March, 1959), verbal systems (Kornberger et al., 2006 citing Hazen, 1993), psychic prisons, political systems and instruments of domination (Morgan, 2006), to name a few.   It is argued that organisational theory is dominated by perspectives that view organisations as machines or organisms (for example see: Audebrand, 2010; Cummings and Thanem, 2002; Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Hatch, 2011; Kendall and Kendall, 1993; McAuley et al., 2007; Morgan, 2006, 2012; Oswick et al., 2002; Shafritz and Ott, 1992; Spence and Thomson, 2009). Each of these two metaphors like all metaphors are "the tip of a submerged model" (Cornelissen, 2002, p.

260 citing Black, 1977/1993) that carries with it (metaphorically) a weight of symbolism and associations which as will be highlighted are problematic with regard to sustainable development.

The machine metaphor draws upon 19th century understanding of energetic and classical mechanics and Taylor's formulation of scientific management (Cornelissen and Kafouros, 2008; Hatch, 2011). Its implications are that organisations act in accordance with rational economic principles, have a hierarchy in organisational structure, the goal is to increase wealth, the functions and people within and of organisations are considered as mechanical parts or perhaps human resources to be utilised, the failure of a function is the failure or malfunctioning of a part, the pursuit of efficiency is paramount, the organisation is essentially closed and the external environment is ignored (Cornelissen and Kofouros, 2008; McAuley et al., 2007; Morgan, 2006; Shafritz and Ott, 1992; Tinker, 1986). If it is accepted that metaphors influence both perception and ultimately action (for example see; Burr, 2003; Ford and Ford, 1995; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993), then when using the machine metaphor our thinking and actions are infused with the baggage of machine like associations and as such the perpetuation of othering, dehumanisation and the privileging of the organisation. To explain, first, the metaphor moves us to consider and act as if humans are only functional components whose utility is only extended in so far as they enable the continued operation of the organisation. Thus humans are reduced to operationally efficient or operationally defective parts. Thus the metaphor fails to consider the whole human (beyond their function – the human is a cog in the machine or a form of resource that has capabilities that need to be exploited for the organisation). Second the metaphor in making the user create a focus on the abstract that is the organisation arguably perpetuates a synecdoche where the organisation becomes the focus of concern. Thus the organisation is given "entitative existence" (Thompson, 2011, p. 759) and this reality is enacted. As such rather than even the particular set of individuals who are applying the metaphor being the focus, with their concerns being paramount. Through the application of the metaphor, a double movement occurs. One the synecdoche moves the 'organisation' to being the subject and two the self same users of the metaphor are reduced to functional components. Thus the metaphor perpetuates an orgocentric view of the world where the concern is the continued operation of the organisation. As such via the metaphor we trap ourselves into defining all relative to and privileging the organisation as the subject above both humans and any wider context – a result not complicit with sustainable development.

In short a metaphor that perpetuates a mode where the organisation is the locus of concern and the human members of an organisation are parts facilitates a form of

slipperiness that dehumanises both ourselves (we are now parts) and our social constructions (organisations). It separates us from our organisations and thus detracts from our common definitions of organisations [x] that reinforce how the values and aspirations of humans and thus humans themselves are the central constituents of organisations. Further this slipperiness perpetuates ontological drift (Thompson, 2011) and a misalignment between ontology and epistemology whereby an epistemology that an organisation is separable from both humans and the wider environment is promoted (Gladwin et al., 1995).

Notwithstanding these issues, a positive that could be offered regarding the machine metaphor is that it is simple to convey and its enabling of a focus on efficiency is potentially useful, particularly as eco-efficiency is a key requirement within the pursuit of sustainable development (for example; XXXXX anonymised to enable blind review; Hawken et al, 1999; Weisacker et al., 1998). Nevertheless and notwithstanding the above, a metaphor with 19th century roots and associated 19th century baggage of social class, conflict and consciousness is not a useful metaphor for the 21st century.

Similar to the machine metaphor [viii], the organism metaphor as applied to organisational understanding faces numerous difficulties, not least the organism is often not specified, for example is the organism a rat in a race, a rat in a maze, a person or a single cell amoeba (Tsoukas, 1991) any of which imply different actions and considerations. Notwithstanding this lack of assumptive accuracy, one of the primary difficulties with the organism metaphor is that it implies the organisation is a form of life separate to its human constituents and it needs to be considered alongside other forms of life in terms of life cycles, survival, growth, decay, death, population ecology thinking and Darwinian understandings (Cummings and Thanem, 2002; Hatch, 2011; Morgan, 2012; Tinker, 1986; Tsoukas, 1991). Further even if organism metaphors are not discussed explicitly, i.e. it is not explicitly stated that the organisation be considered as an organism, the implications of the metaphor are pervasive with it often being proffered that the goal of an organisation is to survive (Grant, 2010) or the supply chain and wider business relationships being discussed as the organisation's ecosystem (Iansiti and Levein, 2004).   In this regard while perhaps the core organism metaphor has been lost or not used explicitly what is occurring is the "metaphorical genesis" (Morgan, 2012, p.6) of such terms is lost and as such the biases and limitations in that genesis are "eliminated from view" (ibid, p.6). Thus through the use of such metaphors a reality is constituted whereby the organisation is to survive because it is a separate, living entity within which humans perform functions. With the human constituents merely being facilitators or detractors from the continued 'survival' of the organisation. Furthermore

the wider context only matters in so far as it enables or detracts from the survival of this new subject the organisation (Egri and Pinfield, 1999; McAuley et al., 2007; Morgan, 2006; Shafritz and Ott, 1992). Clearly, when engaged in reflection considering an organisation as a form of life is absurd. However, through the use of such language this reality is constituted and enacted. Thus although reflection may ensure that there is no mix up regarding ontological status, the use of the language enacts ontological drift [ix] (Thompson, 2011). In this regard the utility of the metaphor, in bringing understanding from one domain to facilitate understanding in another domain, also releases a trap. A trap, as indicated previously, only the most reflexive and self-critical of users could ensure is avoided (Morgan, 2012). Consequently similar to the machine metaphor, the organism metaphor causes us to dehumanise our social constructions and simultaneously privilege them and dehumanise ourselves by reducing us to being functional components. Thus with the organism metaphor the narrative becomes about organisations not humans and thus the metaphor does not enable the pursuit of sustainable development.

The organism and machine metaphors result in the objectification of and dehumanisation of both ourselves and our organisations, with the simultaneous raising up of the organisation as a prioritised focus. Consequently not only do these metaphors detract from common definitions of organisation that implicate the human as subject and a collective aim as the focus (for example see; Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Katz and Kahn, 1966; McAuley et al., 2007; Shafritz and Ott, 1992) [x]. They also detract from sustainable development which focuses on all humans not some people some of the time and certainly not the ongoing needs of organisations. Further sustainable development perpetuates the notion of entwinement between humans and the environment it does not perpetuate the separation that is infused within the organism and machine metaphors.

In sum, if metaphors help constitute reality, they have a unique power in guiding action, and as such their application is likely to result in actions that fit the metaphor in order to make experience coherent (Burr, 2003; Ford and Ford, 1995; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Tsoukas, 1991, 1993). Thus organisations behave like machines or organisms because we say they do. We dehumanise the individuals in our organisations and consider them only as functional components because that is what the metaphors of organism and machine imply; and we remove ourselves from and make the organisation the amorphous yet dehumanised subject and locus of concern, because that is what the metaphors 'ask' that we do – none of these results are complicit with perpetuating a whole of humanity and entwinement narrative, the narrative of sustainable development.

4 – Indicative Results from Previous Research

Contrary to the previous discussion on organism and machine metaphors recent research by one of the authors on the views of leaders (for example; founders, chief executives and managing directors) of organisations that were environmentally and or sustainability focused yielded commentary and results that offers potential insights into how the interviewees consider their organisation in a humanising way and do not privilege their organisation above context [xi].   Thus although the research was not focused on metaphors the interviewees' commentaries offers a point of reflection and potential platform for future research and the future identification of metaphors that facilitate organisational understanding and are complicit with sustainable development.

By way of overview, this prior research was conducted between August 2007 and January 2008 and consisted of semi-structured interviews with the 'leaders' (for example, founders, chief executives and managing directors) of twenty three organisations based in the UK and the USA that had environmental missions [xii]. As indicated the research was not focused on metaphors, however as with all interviews the conversations flowed across areas that yields insights into other domains; it is this commentary that is brought forward. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts analysed using the Nvivo software coding tool. This analysis was done relative to a set of research questions that are not related to the content of this paper, the full results of that coding and research can be found in XXXXXX (anonymised to enable blind review).

When reflecting on the commentary of the interviewees it was realised that their discussions about their organisations did not promote dehumanisation or orgocentrism. For example, interviewees stressed the humanity of their organisations, discussing how the organisation was "environmentalists doing business, not a business doing the environment" (Company B, Founder); how the organisation was not a separate reified entity rather it's part of their "whole way of living" (Green Building Store, Co-founder). Further the promotion of any distinctions between any realm was artificial: "I don't see a distinction … economic, social and the environmental, yeah … it seems artificial to me, it's not real" (Company B, Founder).   Taking this further the same interviewee highlighted how with regards to consumers "I prefer to call them customers than consumers. They just sound like stupid bovine grazers when you call them consumers don't they?" (Company B, Founder). While another outlined that the challenge their organisation faced was "How do we design, how can we design every moment for one

hundred percent of the wellbeing of all humanity?" (seventh GENERATION, Director of Corporate Consciousness).

When describing their organisations, the interviewees discussed how their organisations were simply tools, whereby it is a "tool to deliver on social and environmental change" (Triodos Bank, Managing Director). This notion of the organisation being a tool intrigues as it is compatible with common definitions of organisations [x]. Also the interviewees revealed an ambivalence regarding the ongoing operation of their organisation provided wider societal and environmental changes are realised. To explain they viewed their organisations within a context of relevance regarding wider societal and environmental changes that realised a more sustainable society. In this regard their considerations regarding their organisations was summarised via an aphorism of "altruistically selfish and selfishly altruistic" (XXXXX anonymised to enable blind review) - a biological concept that outlines how an individual and herd operate with neither being promoted over the other. Similarly the notion was applied to the researched organisations to indicate how they did not express views that privilege or promote their individual firm above a context of wider sustainable outcomes for society and the environment. They pursued fitting not fittest (Morgan, 2012).

While only indicative, the commentary and results indicates that there are organisations and in turn organisational participants that are potentially very useful sites for investigating and exploring metaphors which do not dehumanise and or promote the organisation above context and are thus complicit with sustainable development. When reflecting upon the earlier discussion of sustainable development, an inference from the research is that perhaps in prioritising sustainability within their mission statements those same organisations may also have either implicitly or explicitly understood that sustainable development is not about organisations rather it is a narrative about entwinement for all humans.

5- Discussion and Way Forward

Organisations cannot be grasped like a physical object and thus our reliance on metaphors to "make organisations compact, intelligible and understood" (Cornelissen et al. 2008, p. 8) is to be expected. The typical definition(s) of the term organisation highlights how organisations are defined in terms that reinforce their social construction and reliance upon humans, in that organisations are collectives of individuals pursuing common purposes (for example see; Egri and Pinfield, 1999; Katz and Kahn, 1966;

McAuley et al., 2007; Shafritz and Ott, 1992). Thus the definitions remind us that our organisations are tools that we use "to shape the future according to [our] individual and/or collective imagination" (Sarasvasthy, 2004, p. 522) [xiii]. This understanding reinforces that organisations are rarely established as ends in themselves rather they emerge from the interaction of individuals and their conceptions (Katz and Gartner, 1988; McAuley et al., 2007; Sarasvasthy, 2001, 2004).

Invoking the etymology of the word organisation and its derivation from the Greek word organon, meaning tool or instrument (Hatch, 2011, Morgan, 2006) [xiv] further reinforces that organisations are tools that are a means for our ends. In this regard we face a challenge as to what metaphors to use to facilitate our understanding of how organisations operate. As given that organisations are not separate to us, we both form them and constitute them, the metaphors we use to understand them are metaphors we in effect apply to ourselves and thus we perpetuate a particular future for ourselves that is aligned to that metaphor (Sarasvasthy, 2004). This brings forward the challenge in this paper; in that when we use the machine and organism metaphors we are perpetuating a story that creates a movement, an ontological drift, which dehumanises and de-prioritises us at the expense of the organisation (the abstract) which in turn becomes a prioritised subject. This is a result that is not consistent with the concept of sustainable development. The movement is encapsulated in our understanding of what a tool is relative to a machine. Whereby "the notion of the tool has come to be reserved for that aspect of a device that is activated by human agency" (Ingold, 2011, p. 300); whereas as machine "commonly denotes an instrument in its human independence, or at least that aspect of the device which is not dependent on man (sic)" (ibid, p.300 citation Mitcham, 1978, p. 236). Thus the tool maintains human agency, the machine (likewise the organism) is removed from human agency and can thus be considered a separate entity. However, organisations are inherently dependent on human agency, they are of humans and if we perpetuate metaphors that promote the "entitative existence" (Thompson, 2011, p. 759) of organisations we will result in a world of prioritised organisations.

However, that organisational understanding is intimately linked to the use of metaphor gives us a plasticity that also allows us to use metaphors to de-ossify thought (Inns, 2002) and "catalyse our thinking [to help enable us to] approach the phenomenon of organisations in a novel way" (Cornelissen and Kafouros 2008, p. 960). Thus invoking new metaphors may open the door for individuals to consider organisations in a new manner (Kendall and Kendall, 1993), a manner that is complicit with sustainable development. A call for new metaphors that facilitate or enhance a move towards

14

sustainable development has been made by other authors, for example see; Audebrand (2010), Inns (2002), Mutch (2006), Reiter (1997) and von Ghyczy (2003). In particular Audebrand (2010) argues that if the language associated with the teaching of strategy moved away from war metaphors towards caring metaphors "alternative social realities" (ibid, p.424) that are more complicit with sustainable development might be generated.

In this regard the indicative results presented previously offer interesting possibilities. As highlighted the commentary about the organisation was humanising and did not reduce or objectify participants and did not prioritise or reify organisations. Ontological drift (Thompson, 2011), the promotion of man as figure, nature as ground and the organisation above context – survival of the fittest versus survival of the fitting (Morgan, 2012) – did not appear to be occurring. The quote "how do we design, how can we design every moment for one hundred percent of the wellbeing of all humanity?" (seventh GENERATION, Director of Corporate Consciousness) encapsulates how the interviewees indicate that they have an understanding of the entwinement between humans, the organisation and wider context. Thus it appears organisations (such as those researched) may be useful sites for the investigation of metaphors that do not dehumanise and de-prioritise ourselves while simultaneously prioritising the abstract organisation. In short organisations they may be useful research sites for the uncovering of a range of "future normal" (XXXXX anonymised to enable blind review) metaphors to use for organisational understanding that are also complicit with enabling sustainable development.

Prior to concluding this paper in trying to perpetuate the operationalisation of sustainable development through the use of metaphors, there is a useful, almost, apocryphal commentary by Akerman (2003) to consider. Akerman (2003) discusses the term 'natural capital' and the metaphorical baggage and implications of it. He highlights how the introduction of the concept of natural capital is a success particularly because of the properties of the term as a metaphor, as it invites "the audience to approach the relationship between nature and economy in a new way with familiar economic terms" (ibid, p. 436). Further Akerman (2003) highlights that the term natural capital moves nature from being considered as a passive store towards an understanding that it is an asset to be actively managed. This movement from asset to store, Akerman (2003) argues, facilitates an operationalisation of sustainable development policy goals, as sustainable development can be developed through asset management principles. However Akerman also outlines that this operationalisation carries with it a concurrent danger of creating a mode of thinking of the natural environment in ahistorical, decontextual and economic terms only and in so doing reinforces a notion of humans as

being economically rational calculative agents, albeit within the context of natural capital that rational agent can be considered an economically rational green consumer (Akerman, 2003). In this regard what becomes apparent is that the term 'natural capital' perpetuates a notion that humans and nature are separate, not intermingled and entwined. Thus while it might be argued that 'natural capital' is a term that has enabled discussions of sustainable development that may not previously have taken place; concurrently the term carries with it potential distortions. Distortions that only the most self-critical and reflective user is likely to be able to avoid (Morgan, 2012).

"...history has involved a progressive objectification and externalisation of the productive forces, reaching its apotheosis in the industrial automaton. As the outcome of this process, machines have not so much made as been made by history, one in which human beings, to an ever increasing extent, have become the authors of their own dehumanisation"
(Ingold, 2011, p. 311)

End Notes

[i] In practical terms this is reification of a particular set of relations over others (i.e. the owners of a business over the non owners) and viewing those others as non problematic. However while this may be what is happening in practice, what is also happening is a form synecdoche, whereby the whole organisation is invoked to mask this power differential (Spence and Thomson, 2009). Consequently, the organisation is brought forward as subject and separate entity, albeit an organisation is nothing more than a group of individuals working together as per standard definitions of organisations (see end note [x] below).

[ii] Although not developed in this paper, Bakan (2004) and Beets (2011) outline how within the law of the United States of America, corporations are now being accepted as a form of person and as such corporations have equal access with individuals to numerous clauses within the United States bill of rights.

[iii] Please note that in using terms such as "pursuit" the tone of the sentence and this paper is that humans are currently on a journey towards sustainable development. The journey metaphor as it applies to sustainable development has been widely discussed by Milne, et al., (2006). Also, Lakoff and Turner (1987) discuss how the baggage with sustainable development is that it encourages us to "speak of the growth and development of nations" (ibid, p. 204) as if nations had lifecycles, when plainly they do not as nations are not a form of life.

[iv] Sustainability as used here is intended as the opposite of an unsustainable activity. Where an unsustainable activity can be defined as follows: "an environmentally unsustainable activity [can be] simply taken to be one which cannot be projected to continue into the future, because of its negative effect either upon the environment or on the human condition of which it is part" (Ekins 2000, p. 6).

[v] Lakoff and Turner (1987) outline that there are two forms of the Great Chain metaphor, basic and extended. The basic metaphor concerns the relationship between humans and animals as utilised in this paper, whereas the extended concerns humans' relationship to god and the universe and society.

[vi] An extreme could be portrayed by ecocentric paradigms which view the earth as subject and humans as mere objects (Hoffman and Sandelands, 2005; Gladwin, et al., 1995).

[vii] These challenges and implications are particularly difficult for organisational studies in that the subject relies on the separating out of the organisation as a discrete entity for research and as such carries with it some requirement for privileging.

[viii] Cummings and Thanem (2002) argue that while the organism metaphor appears different it is in fact a modern application of the machine metaphor and faces many of the same difficulties.

[ix] This is perhaps a process of 'enhanced' reification moving from a non-living to living categorisation.

[x] Numerous definitions of an organisation are offered in the literature including: "special purpose social collectives whose activities are informed by the interests of organisational participants" (Egri and Pinfield, 1999, p. 225); "a social device for efficiently accomplishing through group means some stated purpose" (Katz and Kahn, 1966, p. 16); "a social unit with some particular purposes" (Shafritz and Ott, 1992, p. 1); "collectives of people whose activities are consciously designed, coordinated and directed by their members in order to pursue explicit purposes and attain particular common objectives or goals" (McAuley, et al. 2007, p. 12); "the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal" (McAuley, et al. 2007, p. 12 citing Schien 1970, p. 9); "the arrangement of personnel for facilitating the accomplishment of some agreed purpose through the allocation of functions and responsibilities" (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. 152 citing Gaus 1936, p. 66) and an organisation is "a system of consciously co-ordinated activities or forces of two or more persons" (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. 152 citing Barnard 1938, p. 73).

[xi] A full exposition of the research and its findings can be found by referring to XXXXX anonymised to enable blind review.

[xii] For an overview of the organisations interviewed see Appendix, Table I.

[xiii] Also see, Morgan (2006) and Sarasvathy (2001) for further support.

[xiv] It could be argued that dehumanisation is facilitated by the consideration of an organisation as tool as per the etymology of the word organisation. However the metaphor of tool cannot be elevated in this way, rather the metaphor of a tool is essentially a dead metaphor (Tsoukas, 1991). In that the use of the term tool and its associated metaphor has "become so familiar and so habitual that we have ceased to be aware of [the] metaphorical nature and use [it] as [a] literal term[s]" (Tsoukas 1991, p. 569). Consequently while dead metaphors "prefigure the ground to be studied they cannot provide significant insights regarding the study of specific phenomena" (Tsoukas 1991, p. 569), a situation that is not the case with regard to organism and machine metaphors, which are live metaphors in that they are used to facilitate and enhance understanding. Nevertheless if a position is maintained that considering an organisation as a tool is dehumanising, the reinforcement that an organisation is a tool rather than a unit of survival would likely realise a result that orgocentrism cannot be pursued, as few would prioritise tools over humanity - albeit that hypothesis requires further testing.

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Appendix

Table I: Organisations Interviewed

Organisation Name/Code	Organisation Name/Code
1. Pillars of Hercules (Organic food producer and retailer)	2. TerraCycle (Producer of plant fertilisers from waste)
3. biome lifestyle (Online retailer of home wares)	4. Company A (Producer of Fast Moving Consumer Goods)
5. Beyond Skin (Online retailer of shoes)	6. howies (Producer/Retailer of clothes)
7. Company B (Producer and retailer of business and consumer services)	8. Green Stationery Company (Producer/Retailer of consumer and business Stationery)
9. Recycline (Producer and Retailer of Consumer Durables)	10. revolve (Producer/Retailer of consumer and business stationery and gifts)
11. Green Building Store (Producer/retailer of Building Goods/Services)	12. Terra Plana (Producer/Retailer of shoes)
13. seventh GENERATION (Producer of Business and Consumer Cleaning Products)	14. By Nature (Online retailer of natural products and services)
15. Ecover (Producer of Business and Consumer Cleaning Products)	16. belu (Producer of bottled water)
17. Company C (Producer/Retailer of Business and Consumer Cleaning Products)	18. Company D (Producer/Retailer of Financial Products)
19. People Tree (Producer of Clothes)	20. BioRegional (Sustainability focused charity and creator of spin-off companies)
21. Triodos Bank (Financial Services to Businesses and Consumers)	22. Suma (Producer/Wholesales of Food)
23. Company E (Producer/retailer of wood products)	