Life’s a Circus: A Case Study of the Branding of Camper Shoes

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Abstract: Branding relies on coherence, which is in turn based on conceptual agreement. The various elements that make up a brand must work together, as must the brand respond satisfactorily to the expectations of its addressees. This article examines the case of Camper shoes, considering it a positive example of how a brand, when structured by metaphorical mappings within an adequate source domain, meets the expectations of its addressees and ensures the desired coherence in brand communication. Camper’s communication strategy is influenced by two conceptual metaphors—LIFE IS PLAY and THE WORLD IS A STAGE—mapped within one of the dominant metaphors in this market segment: CLOTHING IS SPORTS. Though many clothing brands are guided by the super-ordinate metaphor of sports, the sub-domains vary: tennis in the case of Lacoste, sailing for Gant, aerobics for Uniqlo, chess for G Star Raw and horse riding for Barbour. Camper is related to circus acrobats and performing clowns. Hence, the conceptual domain of CIRCUS is systematically mapped onto that of CAMPER, and the metaphorical entailment of the source domain CIRCUS constructs the target domain CAMPER. This study analyses the lexical, visual and spatial metaphorical entailments employed by Camper in order to demonstrate how these create a consistent chain that tightly binds its entire discourse and makes the brand discourse coherent.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, mappings, coherence, brand strategy, footwear

Introduction

Cognition has long been approached as a sequential phenomenon, with our actions the result of prior mental activities and decisions. Today, thanks to the work of theorists and neuroscientists such as António Damásio (e.g., 1994, 1999), cognition has come to be understood...
as “embodied”. Thus, our perspective of the mind-body relationship has gone from one giving primacy to the mind, to being understood as bidirectional. It is widely recognized that the body exerts a strong influence on the mind. Hence, after many years of a “disembodied” perspective of cognition, body and mind have come to be seen as a single, integrated and articulated system, with psychological and social notions intersecting with the body. Put another way, as the mind is embodied, many abstract concepts derive their meaning through physical motor and sensory experience. The old Cartesian dualism that opposed body and mind has given way to a synthesized and blended whole. Today we understand that abstract notions are often shaped by the concrete terms of the body. It is therefore now recognized that thinking is, fundamentally, an act of conceptual blending (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) and that metaphors, in particular, play a major role in abstract reasoning (Lakoff and Johnson 2003; Kövecses 2005). Thought is seen as a crossing of different domains, and metaphors are considered as figures of cognition. In the words of Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron (1999: 161–162), “metaphor can no longer be viewed as verbal ornamentation. On the contrary, it is the sum and substance of abstract thinking.”

As cognition is metaphorical, this article argues that it is important to understand branding through the prism of metaphor, to develop brands as “brand metaphors”, to conceive the experiences of a brand as an experiential gestalt and to achieve the communication that advertisers desire through metaphor. As human thought is now viewed as fundamentally metaphorical and as the meaning of goods and situations is dependent on how people physically interact with a brand, then brands need to be developed as “brand metaphors”. Branding needs to go beyond a verbal-centric perspective and the mainstream understanding of brands as merely semantic networks. Our approach to brand development needs to overcome verbal-centrism in order to understand brands as affordances, inscribed in design, form, interaction and all other perceptual features. Furthermore, as cognition is now understood as a crossing between different domains, brands need to be developed as a specific crossing between fields in order to guarantee intelligibility. Put another way, as metaphors are the fundamental schema through which people conceptualize their experiences and the outside world, and as humans are metaphorical creatures, brands should be constructed with reference to metaphorical approaches and metaphorical understanding.

This paper argues that the logic of branding depends on the “illogic” of metaphor and, as such, defends the importance of conceiving brands,
fundamentally, as a mapping across different fields. If metaphor is generally understood to be based on the formula \( x \text{ is } y \), then the act of mapping and claiming the “illogical” is a practice that should be part of branding. Whether for creating a name, understanding product categories, cultural codes, corporate cultures, objects, shops, a sector’s discourse, developing communication diagnostics or communication strategies, brands are best created and understood through metaphor. They should be structured by the mappings of their main metaphor and be communicated coherently through frequent expressions of that metaphor over time.

Specifically, this article invites readers to understand the metaphorical approach as a specific and rich method of generating an isotope for a brand. In the words of Jean-Marie Floch (2000: 15), “an ‘isotope’ is a recurrence of one or more semantic units which ensure the homogeneity of a discourse. It is, in a way, the common denominator which progressively takes hold in the unfolding of a text (or a picture) and finally ensures the coherence of its contents.” The relationship between a brand metaphor and an “isotopic” brand is one of equivalence because building a brand through the metaphorical approach guarantees an “isotopy” for that brand in at least two ways:

1) by involving the use of recurrent semantic units and textual pathways that contain the same elements and contents.

2) and by developing discourse through repetition, redundancy and cultural echo (meeting the expectations of addressees).

As cultural models are also metaphors, there are large-scale conceptual metaphors that organize much cultural experience. For example, the Camper footwear brand metaphor under-consideration in this paper is a sub-case of a very productive metaphor in American culture: LIFE IS A SHOW. This is a central metaphor of high linguistic productivity. There are numerous idiomatic expressions in the English language that are instances of the LIFE IS A SHOW metaphor, such as: “That kid stole the show”; “What’s your part in this?”; “That’s not in the script”; “You missed your cue”; “He blew his line”; “He saved the show”; “He always plays the fool”; “Take a bow”; “You deserve a standing ovation”; “He plays an important role in the process”; and “It’s showtime”. This productivity indicates that, in North American culture, life is often lived in terms of a show. That is, in this culture, the experience is partially structured, commented on and experienced using the domain of the show. From the perspective of a brand such as Camper, whose metaphor is a sub-case of such a produc-
tive metaphor, we can assume that its metaphor will resonate with people who share this cultural model.

These ingredients ensure the homogeneity of the brand discourse and create patterns of coherence, clarity and congruence over time. The metaphor, just like an isotope, functions as a key to interpretation across all manifestations of the brand. As such, we can describe this process of creating coherence as coming from a common denominator, “isotope” or, alternatively, a “main metaphor”.

**Brand Metaphors**

There are many brands that structure their meaning through metaphor. In this section I offer a number of potential examples from a range of brands and product categories to demonstrate. First consider *Nespresso*.

*Nespresso* sells coffee but not strictly in the terms of coffee per se. When presenting its products, the brand operates on the basis of the implicit metaphor *NESPRESSO IS CHOCOLATE*, using the following resemblances to the domain CHOCOLATE. This can be noted in that the shape of the capsules is similar to those of individually wrapped boxed chocolates as are the metallic colors of the different flavors of coffee. Company advertisements feature images in which a *Nespresso* capsule appears on top of the saucer and next to a steaming cup (standing in for a wrapped chocolate or cinnamon stick). The product is also sold in a square black box filled with different capsules that are presented in a very similar way to a box of chocolates. Finally, we may note marked deviations in *Nespresso* advertising that suggest related associations, such as a commercial in which George Clooney is unexpectedly ignored by women, who instead focus on the chocolate (i.e., coffee pod).

Next consider *Absolut Vodka*, a brand that references the medical domain in its product presentation. The blue color of its typography, the shape of its bottle and the design of the lid suggest bottles of serum or medicine, thus mapping onto the domain of hospitals or medicine more generally.

Elsewhere, brands in the chocolate snacks category—particularly including the likes of *KitKat, Crunch, Lion, Toffee Crisp, Crispy Crunch* and *Crunchie*—often sell noise to sell chocolate. This is a synesthetic category, based on the metaphor NOISY IS TASTY. Not only do such brands have onomatopoeic names (*Crunch, Toffee Crisp* and *Crunchie*), they may also feature ‘noisy’ motifs like the roaring lion on the *Lion*’s chocolate packaging. Further prominence is given in advertisements
to noise-oriented metonymy, such as the act of breaking chocolate; and there is visual “noise”, with salient typography, foreshortened graphic elements, strong chromatic contrasts and visual fragmentation. As such, the chocolate snacks category is a metaphorical domain often infused with the idea of noise. The invitation is to “make noise while you eat” and this invitation to noisy eating departs from cultural norms that stipulate we eat in a contained and silent way. As such, this category, based on the metaphor NOISY IS TASTY is also implicitly deviant from, and disobedient to, cultural norms.

Finally, consider Red Bull, a brand that sells its beverages referencing the mechanical and automotive field, or RED BULL IS FUEL. By sponsoring motor sports events, promising unceasing energy, adopting non-food colors such as blue and silver, featuring straight lines on their packaging and generally using markers that contrast sharply with expected markers of the organic, this beverage brand presents its product within the broader cultural metaphor FOOD IS FUEL.

In short, just as human cognition is made up of crossings between different domains, the discourse of many brands also uses cross-domain mappings to communicate their respective brand messages. These brands are primarily based on metaphors and are noteworthy examples of coherent discourse produced through systematic mappings.

**Metaphors and Brand Coherence**

This article explores metaphor as a key device in creating brand coherence. Among the many benefits of brand building through metaphor is its potential as a device to create coherence. To enhance the coherence of messages, it is necessary to pay attention to two dimensions:

1) Coherence depends on the inter-compatibility of the constituent elements of the brand.

2) Coherence depends on compatibility with the expectations of addressees.

In terms of Dimension 1, the inter-compatibility of the constituent elements of the brand, brand coherence is usually achieved through the repetition and reiteration of the same elements in all manifestations of the brand. In addition to repetition and reiteration, the coherence of a brand also depends on the complementarity of its elements. Each element of the brand is seen as having a task that is limited in scope and which, once integrated with the other elements and their respective tasks, builds
an identity. The metaphorical approach, through its domain mappings, ensures the necessary inter-compatibility of the constituent elements of the brand. Mappings deliver the correspondences implied in the metaphor and these correspondences are systemic, articulate, and, as an experiential gestalt, interpenetrate all parts of the whole.

For example, when a metaphor crosses two domains, such as the LOVE domain and the TRAVEL domain, systematic matches are established between the two fields. Table 1 illustrates the main interpenetrated fields that emerge from the cultural metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 44–45), as illustrated in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target (Journey)</th>
<th>Source (Love)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travelers</td>
<td>Lovers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>Loving relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination</td>
<td>Purpose of relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance travelled</td>
<td>Progress achieved in relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles in the way</td>
<td>Difficulties in the relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Conceptual Metaphor COS IS ARCHITECTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target (COS)</th>
<th>Source (Architecture)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pieces of clothing</td>
<td>Buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creases and folds as salient</td>
<td>Achromatism, plain surfaces, rigidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS models</td>
<td>Emblematic buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act of dressing</td>
<td>Encasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS catalogues</td>
<td>Architecture and decor magazines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table 2 mapping reveals how COS fashion is mainly structured by architecture. That is, the articles of clothing have salient characteristics of volumetry, smoothness, simplicity, the ability to close and shape bodies, as well as to shelter, protect and cushion from external forces. All the features of COS clothing that are similar to building features, such as creases, the hardness of fabric, the ability to cover the body, achromatism and the ability to protect us from outside forces are hallmark features of the brand. With the field of Architecture, the COS brand gains the connotations of
simplicity, discretion, timelessness and status as the “choice of architects”, simultaneously downplaying ideas of “ephemeral purchases” and “elegance depending on the gracefulness of the body”. Experiencing this conceptual fusion, COS customers thus understand the brand through the idea of modern architecture.

As such, by virtue of the system generated by its mappings, and due to the scope of this fusional definition, the metaphorical approach to brands is capable of generating the necessary integration of each element and, as such, offers a reliable method of creating brand coherence.

The metaphorical approach also fulfils the second condition outlined above in regards to the need for compatibility with the expectation of addressees in creating brand coherence (see dimension 2, above). Metaphors are cultural models, and it is cultures that shape, elaborate and construct new conceptual fusions. In the example of the metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY, this mapping indicates that, in a culture where this metaphor is active, love relationships are structured by travel. That is, intimate relationships are partially structured, understood, undertaken and commented on in terms of travel. The concept of “love” is structured metaphorically; the activity of romantic relationships is structured metaphorically; and, consequently, the related language itself is structured metaphorically. As such, and because it is culture that shapes, elaborates and constructs these blends, people who share this culture will experience this conceptual fusion; and a brand that communicates the idea of “love” will, when first analyzing the fields offered by a culture, be able to, or “invited” to, structure itself around the idea of a journey.

In the example of the cultural metaphor FOOD IS FUEL, this mapping indicates that, in a culture where this metaphor is active, food and drinks are understood in the terms of fuel. Therefore, the acts of eating and drinking are partially blended, understood, shared and experimented with in the terms of energy, movement and speed. A brand like Red Bull, structured by the metaphor RED BULL IS FUEL, is a sub-case of this metaphorical entailment and the results of this brand are superior in Anglo-Saxon cultures where the metaphor FOOD IS FUEL is productive. In contrast, in Southern European markets such as Portugal and Italy the brand’s results are clearly inferior because in these markets the conceptual fusion between gasoline and food is not shared by most people, and the practice of eating and drinking is mostly sedentary and not “on the go”.

In light of the preceding examples and discussion, this article puts forward the following arguments for approaching brands as “brand metaphors”:
a) Since our ways of thinking, understanding and acting are largely metaphorical, brands must be created, developed and improved with an understanding of metaphor.

b) Developing brands as “brand metaphors” requires an analysis of culture, the category of the brand and the possibilities for the brand in using a metaphorical approach. The technical integration and versatility of this approach generate understanding of the connotations of a brand, its unique qualities, relevance, intelligibility and, above all, coherence.

c) A brand must be developed as a crossing between two different domains in order to enhance the richness of its connotations, intelligibility, corporeality and, fundamentally, coherence. As stated by Kövecses (2005: 8), “metaphor is linguistic, conceptual, social-cultural, neural, bodily phenomenon, [which] exists on all of these different levels at the same time”.

The next section briefly explains how metaphors are a way of uncovering the culture and category of “fashion” and specifically how metaphors structure the discourse of the Camper brand and how this metaphorical foundation generates coherence and cultural “echo” for Camper’s discourse, a brand which addresses the “expectations” of its addressees in an original way.

**Cultural and Category Metaphors**

As a first step, developing brands as “metaphors” requires an analysis of culture and the category to which a brand belongs. The task of choosing a brand metaphor involves a selection from the repertoire of cultural metaphors. Thus, the metaphorical approach to developing brand communication begins with an understanding and selection of fields that can be used as source domains on which to base metaphorical mappings. The analysis of current expressions, idioms, proverbs and salient verbs provide a first sample for cultural analysis which then delivers the possible blends and domain crossings within a given culture. These domains are the fields offered by the culture and are the available possibilities to communicate the desired brand values. The metaphorical approach gives insight into which fields are crossed within a culture (through, for example, analysis of everyday language, advertising and retail spaces), and this type of analysis generates cultural results which enable semioticians to evaluate whether a “brand metaphor” will attain the desired cultural
echo, be comprehensible and intelligible, be overly conventional or clichéd, or, on the contrary, challenging. In short, it is the cultural scope of the metaphorical approach that allows analysts to create coherence in brand messaging, coherence understood here as compatibility with the expectations of addressees.

While cultural analysis presents culturally intelligible possibilities and options, category analysis delivers the range of available options left unused by competing brands. For example, in the example of fashion labels, one of the most productive cultural metaphors is: LIFE IS TEXTILE. This is a productive cultural metaphor, which crosses the idea of existence with the field of textile material or fabric, representing society as a “social fabric”, social classes as cloth types, plots as entanglements, and time and evolution as threads. The metaphor LIFE IS TEXTILE is part of a system of metaphors, which includes the following:

PEOPLE ARE THREADS

COHESION IS FABRIC

COMMITMENTS ARE KNOTS

These metaphors have a set of common mappings, including the relationships illustrated in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Conceptual Metaphor LIFE IS TEXTILE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target (Life)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social cohesion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this conceptual scheme, ideas related to the social sphere are crossed with the domains of fabric and textile materials. Problems of social integration are thus described as “fraying”, divorces are configured as the “untying of a knot” and a social group is understood as a fabric that is either “loose” or “tight-knit”.

Thanks to this family of cultural metaphors, brands in the textile sector are able to cross their brand discourse with the domain of human relations and can easily raise flags of a social and collective nature. Benetton is a famous example of the crossing between the field of clothing and the field of human relations, with the brand having chosen to bridge
interracial, religious and other social divisions for several years. Likewise, Levi’s structures its communication through the metaphor LIFE IS TEXTILE. When selling jeans, Levi’s utilizes the structure of human relations with statements such as “Cling fits”, “Stuck on you” and “They fit your body, they also fit your life”. At other times, Levi’s prefers the metaphor PERSONALITY IS TEXTILE and launches slogans such as “Live unbuttoned” and “Fit for anything”. Both brands have achieved intelligibility thanks to the cultural crossing provided by the conceptual fusion between the domains of textiles and social relations.

While brands such as Benetton and Levi’s base their brand communication on metaphors that cross society and personality with fabrics and textiles, as already mentioned, clothing brand COS crosses its clothes with architecture and structures its stores, products and communications on the metaphor COS IS ARCHITECTURE: their product items are presented as buildings with edge-like creases; the unique clothing ensembles worn by their models are almost like building encasings; the brand’s magazine and collection photographs give a central visual role to spatial contexts and to modern systems of furniture. While COS is a fashion brand, to a large extent it communicates its brand by crossing with the fields of furniture and architecture.

**Fashion Is Sports**

While COS intersects with modern architecture and brands such as Levi’s and Benetton intersect with the fields of personality and social cohesion, many other fashion brands cross their discourse with the field of sport. One extremely common metaphor in the fashion market is FASHION IS SPORTS and several brands cross their field with one or more sports. A prominent example is the Lacoste brand, which communicates through the metaphor LACOSTE IS TENNIS. The logic of the metaphor is based on the fact the brand’s founder was the tennis player and entrepreneur René Lacoste. In a consistent and coherent way over many decades, the brand continues to communicate the quality of its products in the terms of tennis, both through the salience of its emblematic polo shirts, the isotope of the “jump” (a trait of the tennis player René Lacoste) and in other thematic elements of the brand’s communication.

Another example of a fashion brand structuring their communication through sports is the GANT brand, which uses various sports associated with the upper classes to provide the themes for their communication,
including GANT IS SAILING and GANT IS CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING. Barbour is a brand that references horse riding in both its communication and in its products. Hurley is a brand based on the metaphor HURLEY IS SKATING. Important domains for Uniqlo include aerobics and jogging. Tommy Hilfiger often uses sailing and American football. G-Star Raw uses the fields of chess and dance to communicate its brand difference.

The field of sports is clearly an important metaphor in the clothing and footwear sector overall and many brands present sporting contexts in their advertising and shops to give prominence to pieces of clothing specific to each sport: Lacoste makes the polo shirt its emblematic item, while Uniqlo gives prominence to its leggings, Barbour to its riding jacket and Gant to its sailing jacket.

Sports overlaps with the clothing category, explaining and structuring the concept of fashion and “priming” characteristics of sports such as gracefulness, elegance, fitness and elasticity. That is, several fashion brands leverage representations of sports and recruit elements of the “sports” domain to communicate their world view.

Not only does sports communicate the values of different brands, it also expresses their social value. The social value of clothing tends to be understood through the class value of different sports, with high-class sports articulated with the most expensive brands, while more accessible brands cross with less emblematic sports, such as skating, jogging or aerobics.

The sporting metaphor does not create and maintain the coherence of all these brands. Not all fashion brands are coherent, nor do all form a single image across the brand. Many are nevertheless consistent in that they share “a major common entailment” by virtue of being subcategories of a major category (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 44). The metaphor FASHION IS SPORTS is thus a metaphorical entailment that provides links, connections and generates a single metaphorical concept to be shared by different fashion brands.

The Metaphors of Camper

Camper is a footwear brand originally from the island of Mallorca in Spain. The company was founded in 1975 and presents itself as a “family” brand, guided by the values of comfort, design and freedom. Many of its models eschew conventions in favor of malleability, rounded shapes, colorful laces, thick, protruding soles and oversized stitching.
Camper is a metaphorical brand within a clothing and footwear market that includes both metonymic brands and metaphorical brands. Logical or syntagmatic brands emphasize the origin of their shoes, the colors of their fabrics, the characteristics of comfort or malleability and the contexts or spaces of their use, such as catwalks.

The Camper brand is partially structured by two general metaphors: LIFE IS A GAME and THE WORLD IS A STAGE and, like other fashion brands, Camper uses an instantiation of the metaphor FASHION IS SPORTS. Contrary to other brands, Camper does not use sports such as riding, sailing or tennis, preferring the notion of sports as a spectacle and performance. The brand structures its discourse around the metaphor CAMPER IS THE CIRCUS. The brand crosses with circus sports such as acrobatics and juggling, more serious modes of this domain such as acting, and more fun modes such as the performances of clowns.

The two general metaphors, LIFE IS A GAME and THE WORLD IS A STAGE, act as “basic conceptual metaphors” that articulate the sub-conceptual metaphor CAMPER IS THE CIRCUS, which then, together, form a hierarchical entailment system. The three metaphors help to construct a unified and coherent discourse. Such a conceptual framework is commonplace in the use of metaphors, functioning like genealogical trees in which “ancestors” are high-level systematic metaphors and “descendants” are the most basic metaphors, all bound by the same kinship bond.

As illustrated in Table 4, the conceptual domain of CIRCUS is systematically mapped onto that of CAMPER, and the metaphorical entailments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source (Circus)</th>
<th>Target (Camper)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomadic lifestyle</td>
<td>An itinerate “camper”, with a slow, ambulant lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus Tent</td>
<td>Oversize in-store lamps and brand symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clowns shoes</td>
<td>Peu model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrobat shoes</td>
<td>Right model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatched clown makeup</td>
<td>Twins model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus acrobat cycles</td>
<td>Bicycles (inside the store)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus wagons</td>
<td>Shop benches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striped decor</td>
<td>Striped designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter as an effect of the circus</td>
<td>Laughter as an effect of wearing Camper shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent use of canvas tents</td>
<td>Frequent use of canvas uppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red and white decor</td>
<td>Red and white branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling</td>
<td>Advertising showing shoes suspended in the air</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the source domain CIRCUS construct the target domain CAMPER. The metaphor CAMPER IS THE CIRCUS acts as a frame for the brand, its shoes, stores and advertising. The brand relies on a cohesive lexical, visual and spatial chain which connects the discourse tightly and makes the brand discourse coherent. The mappings between source domain and brand produce interaction between the different conceptual domains, thus creating discursive coherence.

This is a brand that stands out because it challenges the conventions that define the norm. The product is colorful, expressive, non-uniform, dissymmetrical and sometimes discordant with anatomical logic. It is a brand that follows its own codes. It defies the norm of a sedentary lifestyle and presents a nomadic one in its place, challenging conventions and presenting a daily spectacle. It draws attention to itself and is a case of extra-coding (Eco 1976) in that it uses some unusual signifiers, like the rounded front shape and the Camper Twins model, which feature non-identical pairs. The use of such unusual signifiers alongside the circus metaphor emphasize Camper’s rebellion from the norm of social expectations. By referencing the circus field, the brand emphasizes a domain on the cultural fringe, away from the center, the stable and commonly accepted “norm”. The lifestyle the brand promotes and makes accessible to the majority is a sub-culture, associated with “another way of life”, the nomadic life of a small minority. In the words of Paul Bouissac,

in the midst of millennia-old sedentary cultures, the circus is a vivid reminder of another way of life that characterised the mode of existence and prehistoric populations and which still survives among some hunter-gatherer and pastoralist tribes. Nowadays a literary tradition and a strong promotional narrative construe circus life as an existential choice that embodies a dream-like freedom for city dwellers caught in the shackles of their daily routines. (2010: 12)

To make a metaphor possible, there must be some similarity between the target and the source. In the case of CAMPER IS THE CIRCUS, the similarity is generated by the saliency of the item “shoes”. In other words, shoes are the metonymy that enables this metaphor. For both the circus and the Camper brand, shoes are a salient, expressive and central element. Of all the instantiations of the brand metaphor, Camper’s Peu model shoes and Camper’s Twin model shoes are perhaps the examples where the crossing with the circus field is most salient. The former model features rounded shapes that evoke clown shoes, and the latter consist of
pairs of shoes that feature differing right-foot left-foot designs, quoting the “dissymmetry” (Bouissac 2010: 108) of clown makeup.

Other Camper models make reference to footwear used by circus acrobats, providing an example of Thomas Van Rompay’s (2005) concept of an “integrated metaphor” (cited in Forceville 2007: 5). Van Rompay emphasizes that “products are not just ‘practical’ or ‘convenient’ objects, but also a source of pleasurable or meaningful experience” (Van Rompay 2005: 16). As in other metaphors, the case of Camper is a conceptual fusion between the fields of footwear and the circus. For this reason, target and source are perceived in a single gestalt [. . .] but without the ‘noncompossible’ conflation typical of the latter. The target has been designed or manipulated in a way that strongly evokes perceivers (or in some perceivers) the experience of something else, but there is no sense of the target’s identity having been violated. (Forceville 2007: 5)

Camper brand’s metaphor is clearly effective. Generally, the overlap of the circus domain on the structure of the brand invites addressees to understand the Camper brand in terms of the Circus, with the metaphor emphasizing some aspects of the domain while obscuring others. In the words of Paul Bouissac,

as a semiotic industry that catered to urban societies hungry for dreams and fantasy of otherness, the circus was and remains competitive as its selling arguments are authenticity, truth, and genuine risk and the form of its performances straddles ritual and entertainment. (2010: 71)

Domain elements that are emphasized include joy, fun, relaxation, suspension of social norms and exuberance, while domain elements that are suppressed include seriousness, formality, rules, work, sobriety and discretion. Thus, the source CIRCUS is used by Camper to highlight the joy, relaxation, extroversion and rebelliousness (that is, the positive aspects) of Camper shoes. This metaphor results in a blend (as opposed to a simple transfer). This blended, fusional space replaces the shoes of clowns and acrobats with Campers. The former use shoes to trigger laughter and the latter to perform risky tricks. By wearing disproportionate, colorful shoes, a clown cannot be taken seriously; by wearing malleable shoes, an acrobat can face the dangers of the tight-rope and the human pyramid. Camper shoes’ practices of quoting the circus serve to blend the clown’s humor as well as the acrobat’s mastery and courage with the Camper brand in a fusional way, strengthening the brand’s creativity and the originality of its shoes. Its meaning relies on a process of cognitive
compression (a la Fauconnier and Turner 2002), and is therefore a new idea—new conceptual material both for the source and for the target, providing originality and uniqueness for the brand.

In presenting models like Peu and Right, Camper gives consumers the opportunity to “walk in the shoes” of clowns or gymnasts in an everyday context. And yet, we may well question the relevance of this brand discourse. Do these unexpected invitations meet the expectations of addressees? Is this blend, this new idea, something risky or a pertinent and differentiating option?

Adopting the perspective of Susan B. Kaiser and Karyl Ketchum (2005), Camper’s product may be understood as something relevant and desirable. Many fashion brands constitute “mixed metaphors” (2005: 123), with their ambiguity allowing consumers to enter into dialogue with cultural anxieties. As Kaiser and Ketchum write, “There is an unquietness to fashion. [...] in some ways, then, fashion offers some ambiguous content to subjectivity as it plays with cultural anxieties. It makes anxieties material; it embodies them through the interplay of diverse ideas and possible moods” (2005: 134).

What are the “different ideas” embodied by Camper? Its references to street entertainers, nomadism and “show business”. From such references the brand gains the ability to overcome at least two key tensions:

1) the tension between sedentary belonging and freedom, resolved by the intermediate position of nomadic belonging

2) the tension between routine work and fun, resolved by the mediator of work in the entertainment sector.

With these two overlapping resolutions, the brand gains cultural echo and relevance. It offers the opportunity to surpass the normative model of a sedentary lifestyle through the acquisition of shoes which represent the freedom and joy people long for. Specifically, Camper’s deviation and hybridity seem to be precious commodities within the fashion industry; as Kaiser and Ketchum elaborate:

This figuration enables a deeper understanding of the hybrid identities or inner articulations—the idea of working the ‘in-between spaces’, the vague boundaries, and the overlapping nature of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, along with various lifestyle choices—that become represented in and through appearance style. (2005: 131)
**Conclusion**

The *Camper* brand, as Bal (2009) puts it, is a “systematised metaphor” in the sense that its discourse is “one large metaphor” (2009: 47): “The elements of the comparison and those of the compared objects are systematically related to one another” (2009: 47). The brand’s shoes, stores, name, merchandising and advertising reflect the metaphorical entailments of the source domain (CIRCUS) and consumers are invited to understand the target domain (*CAMPER*) woven coherently and systematically in the terms of the source domain. The brand metaphor functions as a chain, and allows the different expressions of *Camper* to achieve an echo effect. Thus, the fact that the brand is based in metaphor intensifies and elaborates the brand.

The *Camper* brand is also a good example of how the metaphorical approach is capable of ensuring consistency in brand communication, capable of providing compatibility between different manifestations of a brand and between brands and the expectations of addressees while traversing and diagnosing the culture, category and brand idea.

Finally, the metaphorical approach is able to organize the experiences of a brand into structured wholes, something frequently referred to as an “experiential gestalt”. In *Camper*’s case, its metaphor is not just something related to discourse; rather, *CAMPER IS THE CIRCUS* is able to structure the experience of wearing *Camper* shoes. One activity, walking in *Camper* shoes, is understood in terms of another, “circus-like play”. In this way, the brand’s communication invites consumers to walk in the ludic performative manner of clowns, or in the elastic manner of acrobats. Clients can experience walking as a circus act when the CIRCUS gestalt fits their perceptions and performance of the act of walking.

This dimension reveals the ability of metaphors to generate a multidimensional structure for a brand. It also reveals the way the metaphorical approach can promote brand coherence in terms of the dimensions of experience, something that should be addressed and considered in other research projects.

In closing, this article argues that brands should be approached and developed as brand metaphors and, as such, a brand strategy should rely on the metaphorical approach to achieve coherence in the brand’s discourse and in the experience of that brand. As our ways of thinking, understanding and acting are largely metaphorical, so brands must be created, developed and improved with an understanding of metaphor. A brand endowed with an isotopic metaphor is able to obtain coherence
in its different manifestations, and is also capable of achieving coherence in the experience of its use, as “structuring our experience in terms of such multidimensional gestalts is what makes our experience coherent” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 81).

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